

Traveller Interagency Forums Project

Progress Report

April 2005 to January 2006

1. BRIEF OVERVIEW

Irish Traveller Interagency Forums are operating in Harrow and Hillingdon. Due to a health and safety issue in Brent, the forum had to be suspended and is due to resume in the near future. In both Harrow and Hillingdon, ITM have facilitated forums on a 6 weekly basis with other smaller meetings and site visits occurring in between the larger forums. In Brent ITM have continued to meet with partners in the borough on a regular basis to discuss issues arising on the site, which is at the centre of the Interagency Forum. Working groups with a view to facilitating forums are underway in Richmond and Ealing, and a decision will be taken in the near future regarding prioritising one of these Boroughs.

ITM is currently considering, resource permitting, the future establishment of forums in Wandsworth, Hounslow and Merton, and has been invited to partake in Sutton Traveller Forum. Links have also been established with Traveller and Gypsy services, which are models of good practice in Surrey County. These have been linked already with Richmond and Hillingdon and options are currently being investigated for future partnership working via a West London Forum. Involvement in individual boroughs is detailed below.

2. HILLINGDON

Interagency Forums are now well established in Hillingdon with the support of the Traveller Education Service and Health Opportunities Promotion & Education teams in Hillingdon. Terms of Reference have been agreed and the Forum now has a rotating Chair and minute taker. This has enabled each participant become actively involved in the forum as well developing a sense of ownership and team spirit. It is envisaged that ITM will be taking a secondary / advisory role in the coming months, to free the development officer to focus on areas requiring more support.

Key outcomes to date include:

- An extensive list of members with a high, sustained level of attendance
- Disbanding of existing Traveller Liaison Group as Forum is seen to be more effective
- Increased awareness of, and access to services at the Bell Farm Christian Centre
- Increased transparency in decisions and budgets relating to the Site
- Increased awareness of policy changes nationally, including Housing Act and licencing
- Increased awareness of the UK Youth Parliament
- Two Refurbishment Grant Applications to the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister
- A profile raising site visit by John Randall MP and John McDonnell MP
- Bins to be replaced by wheelie bins to reduce vermin problem
- More control of dogs on site
- Police surgery to be held on site weekly
- A Health Audit

More recently Residents from the site in Hillingdon (with the support of ITM) established a Residents Committee, which has been involved in the drafting of a second Refurbishment Grant Application to the Office of Deputy Prime Minister. This group has been linked into the borough's Tenancy Support Service as well as receiving support from other relevant professional services. Funding options are currently being investigated to look at improving the skills of the group as well as setting a 'Terms of Reference'. The aim is to expand the group to include 'housed' Travellers and to establish links with other minority ethnic groups. It is envisaged that this group will consult service providers regarding their specific cultural needs in terms of housing and site provision and other boroughs involved in Interagency Forums will use this model.

Traveller Interagency Forums Project

Progress Report

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3. HARROW

Through Interagency work in Harrow, supported by Harrow Primary Care Trust, consultation has taken place for the need to provide services that would meet the needs of Irish Traveller women in the borough.

Foundations have been established to set up a network of Irish Traveller Women's groups, which will help form, ITM's Women's Strategy for improving health and education services as well as addressing the issue of domestic violence within the community. A similar type of partnership work has been achieved with health and education services in Hillingdon and Harrow Interagency will utilise this as a model of good practice. The group's aim is to expand this service to neighbouring boroughs with Irish Traveller Women at the centre of all decision making process.

The vision of the group is to establish an education / health centre in the borough to meet the needs of Traveller communities. This initiative, which is being led by an Irish Traveller woman, is being modelled of a health / education centre in Co. Galway which have established links with this group. Its main focus is to address issues around domestic violence. The group will provide training and services for Irish Travellers Women delivered by Irish Traveller Women. Relevant training options for participating Irish Travellers is a key objective of these groups. Training packages have already been set and applications have been made for appropriate funding.

4. BRENT

Brent Irish Advisory Service (BIAS) has supported the development of the Brent Interagency Forum.

- Key outcomes to date include:
- Improved Rentokil services leading to reduced vermin problem
- Traveller Education visit to the Westway Traveller Site to learn about nursery provision, now provided from Tuesday to Thursday from 9am to 5pm
- Successful applications to Neighbourhood Renewal Fund, Harlesden and Brent Youth Partnership to fund activities to be held in schools throughout Brent Traveller Culture Month
- Brent cement factory pollution levels being challenged
- Brent Council to fund the cost of the pavement to prevent vehicles being abandoned at the Site entrance
- Vehicle removal to be carried out by the police
- BACES Courses for Adults are currently identifying suitable courses for the ladies on Site
- Textile Workshops attended by twenty (11 to 21 year old) women coordinated by BIAS

Interagency Forum Meetings have been suspended due to health and safety issues. ITM and BIAS met with the Site Management Group in an effort to recommence support, however actions that they were assigned and accepted were not delivered. Correspondence has been received from other agencies asking when they can re-introduce services onto site. ITM is currently arranging a meeting asking for an update on health and safety issues and communication systems.

Traveller Interagency Forums Project

Progress Report

April 2005 to January 2006

5. EALING

ITM are also beginning to work in partnership with Ealing Local Authority and Ealing Homes, to establish an Interagency Forum to deal with issues around nursery provision on a Local Authority run site at Bashley Road.

Ealing Traveller Education Service has submitted a joint bid to fund a referral football scheme to Queens Park Rangers Football Club for excluded boys/ young men as a result of anti-social behaviour. The aim is to encourage team building, and positive role models as well as addressing behaviour that causes participants to be excluded from school. Funding avenues are being sought to expand this programme to include Harrow, Hillingdon and Richmond. This will be used as a model to work towards in other areas of London by involving other football clubs such as Charlton Athletic who have a similar scheme in operation.

Arrangements are also being explored to facilitate a secondment between Traveller Education, Ealing and HOPE in Hillingdon. An Irish Traveller woman who is employed as a support worker with Traveller Education would like to gain more experience in working with women's groups. As Hillingdon are facilitating such a group at Bell Farm Christian Centre. ITM have achieved a verbal agreement to employ this person on a volunteer basis as well to pay her travel expenses and are waiting for this to be finalised in writing. ITM are also looking at training options for this person to become involved with ITM in a potential advisory section of the Board of Trustees.

6. RICHMOND

Links have been established with Education, Housing providers as well as the Police with the view of setting up an Interagency Forum. Its main aim is looking at ways to help build relations between Irish Travellers who live in the borough and the Police. The target date for first meeting is March '06.

7. MERTON

ITM was a key member of a steering group formed to plan an awareness raising conference entitled 'Developing Services for Irish Travellers and Gypsies.' The programme is the first of its kind, tailored around gaps in knowledge identified by Merton Local Authority Officers. ITM has identified the majority of speakers and workshop facilitators. Local Authority representatives have indicated an interest in developing an Interagency Forum following the conference.

8. SURREY COUNTY

Links are established with the Valuations and Estates Department within the County Council with responsibility is to oversee the running of Traveller sites within the county. Interagency / Residents meetings are in place and operating as well as well managed site provisions. The site provision Manager stated that the service delivery on site could be used as a model for good practice. A site visit carried out in December '05 with Steve Weston of Hillingdon Homes as a means of establishing links as well as achieving advice and support with his department's work on Hillingdon's bid for ODPM funding. ITM will attend Interagency meetings as a means of measuring standards has been agreed.

Traveller Interagency Forums Project
Progress Report
April 2005 to January 2006

PUBLICITY

Further to securing 'The Innovation into Action' grant for supporting Traveller participation in accommodation planning, ITM was invited to facilitate a workshop at TPAS; BME Tennant Participation Conference regarding the Traveller Interagency Forums model.

ITM also publicised the work of the Interagency via the 'Neighbourhoods' panel at The Runnymede Trust 'Cohesion, Diversity and Equality' Conference and The Irish in Brent Conference. ITM is due to also present at Health Opportunities Promotion & Education conference in March '06

Noelette Hanley
London Development Officer

