

Scrutiny Committee – 28th February 2012

8. Park Home Site Management

<i>Executive Portfolio Holder:</i>	<i>Cllr Ric Pallister, Leader of the Council, Strategy and Policy</i>
<i>Assistant Director</i>	<i>Steve Joel, Assistant Director (Health and Well-Being)</i>
<i>Service Manager:</i>	<i>Fiona Johnson, Acting Housing and Welfare Manager</i>
<i>Lead Officer:</i>	<i>Jon Batty, Housing Policy and Performance Officer</i>
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Purpose of the Report

This report seeks to keep members up to date with the site management arrangements for the Council's Gypsy Sites.

Action Required

That Members note the site management arrangements.

Background

In 2002 the District Council took over direct responsibility for the two existing Gypsy and Traveller sites within South Somerset from the County Council located at Chubbards Cross Ilton and Marsh Lane Tintinhull. In order to bring the sites up to a 21st century standard, the Council successfully submitted innovative bids in 2007/8 and 2008/9 to central government, securing £1,912,000.

On the 3rd September 2009 the District Executive approved the purchase of up to 18 park homes and associated site refurbishment works for the families residing at the sites following the receipt of the funding from central government.

The Scrutiny Committee requested annual updates, and last considered the site management arrangements in February 2011.

Areas of Scrutiny

15 areas have been identified by members of the Scrutiny Committee to inform the preparation of this report. The position on each area is set out below:

Management Issue	Position
(1) Have all tenants signed their tenancy agreements?	Yes. All residents signed new agreements before occupation of their new Park Homes or Pitches. As a result of amendments to the Mobile Homes Act, agreements were reviewed and enhanced, and the duties and responsibilities of both the Council and residents revised, prior to first issue in May 2011.
(2) Are rent charges still in-line with Local Housing Allowance rates?	Yes, and rent charges are reviewed annually in February, with changes applying from 1 st April.
(3) Are the tenants paying their rent liability?	Yes all residents have paid rent in full. No payments are outstanding.

(4) Are the tenants continuing to pay their water and services charges, previously the water charges were being collected by an officer, is this still the case?	In accordance with their tenancy agreement, tenants continue to be responsible for payment of water charges. The housing team monitors usage and residents are invoiced accordingly.
(5) Have the utility charges been reviewed?	Water charges are dependent on the amount of water used by individual tenants. All tenants are aware that their water is metered and have been given practical advice by the Gypsy Site Officer on the economic use of water. Residents procure and pay suppliers directly for electricity and gas supplies.
(6) Are the sites fully occupied?	Yes
(7) Are there any measures in place to prevent over occupancy?	Yes. There are two important occupation areas which are controlled: (1) Over occupation of the pitch. In recognition of the fact that several residents travel in the summer months the tenancy agreement allows residents to have an additional caravan on their pitch. However, they must seek written permission to have additional caravans. Failure to apply to have, or remove, a caravan is a breach of the tenancy agreement and notice to leave can be served. (2) Over occupation of the Park Home. The tenancy agreement includes a "permitted occupants" section. Any omission of occupants is a breach of the tenancy agreement and notice to leave can be served.
(8) Is the possibility of transferring the management of the sites to a Registered Social Landlord still being explored?	No this not being considered at this stage.
(9) Previously it was reported that there were good relationships with the PCSO is this still the case?	Yes, whilst the PCSO in post at the start of the Park Homes project has now moved on from the Police service, the new PCSO is attending site management meetings and is working closely with the Council in the day to day management of our sites. The PCSO has also assisted the Council in the recent district-wide Gypsy and Traveller caravan count. Acknowledging the importance of this role, and demonstrating a good working relationship with the Police, the Council's Gypsy Site Officer sat on the recruitment panel.

<p>(10) What have the total maintenance costs been, has this been met within the agreed budget?</p>	<p>Maintenance costs year to date amount to £16,619, against an annual budget of £21,850. Costs cover routine water pump maintenance, electrical and gas safety checks, water tests, green space maintenance, drain maintenance, and Landlord Park Home/Utility Block repairs.</p>
<p>(11) Are there any on-going costs to the Council? If there are please detail these.</p>	<p>Yes, there is a need for the Council to plan for the future replacement of the Park Homes. To achieve this the service transfers a sum of £27,734 from rent charges into a specific Gypsy Site Reserve. This sum transferred is adjusted in take account of inflation and condition assessments.</p>
<p>(12) What is the current condition of the sites? Are there any issues with vandalism or Anti-social behaviour?</p>	<p>Both sites are in good condition. There has been one minor episode of vandalism at Ilton in November 2011. All residents were contacted about the vandalism. There have been no recent incidents of antisocial behaviour.</p> <p>Members should be assured that the site management team employs a range of tools and approaches to ensure our residents have a safe and pleasant place to live, and that authorised visitors have easy and safe access at all times. These include:</p> <p>(1) Acceptable Behaviour Contracts. We have successfully used an ABC to prevent further antisocial behaviour caused by one family.</p> <p>(2) Regular site visits by the Gypsy Site Officer and by the Police.</p> <p>(3) Good working relationships with our partner agencies including RSPCA and agencies providing floating support.</p> <p>(4) Providing positive feedback to residents. The site management team is mindful of the importance of acknowledging and encouraging good behaviour on our sites. Since the last report to Scrutiny, we have written to two residents recognising their contribution to the appearance of the site.</p> <p>(5) Residents' Handbook. Tailored to the individual sites, the handbooks contain useful practical information about site</p>

	safety, repairs and the importance of the tenancy agreement. The handbooks, along with a blank copy of the tenancy agreement, will also be sent to prospective applicants to ensure they are aware of what the Council expects from them as tenants.
(13) What is the current condition of the Park Homes are they still expected to meet the original projected life expectancy?	The Park Homes properties are in good condition and are expected to meet the original 30 yr projected life expectancy.
(14) There have been some reports that a site is in breach of the terms of planning permission; there are personal caravans on site. Please can you update the committee what arrangements are in place to stop this, if this is the case?	The site management team is not aware of any breach of planning regulations or breach of any related condition of tenancy.
(15) As above, residents are permitted to have their own caravans on their pitches.	We do not provide Park Homes accommodation on the recently developed extension to the Ilton site – residents have to provide their own caravans.

In conclusion, members can be re-assured that the sites are being managed well. Key risks and issues are monitored frequently and are under control.

Other Implications

None.

Background Papers: *SSDC Gypsy and Traveller Sites Brief
DX Report - The purchase of Park Homes for Gypsy families residing on the sites at Chubbards Cross, Ilton and Marsh Lane, Tintinhull – 3rd September 2009
DX Report – Park Home Progress Report – April 2010*
