

Select Committee on Children's Services – 15th September 2011

Report of the Acting Director of Children's Services

Gypsy Roma Traveller Service

Purpose of Report

1. To update members on the work undertaken on behalf of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller children.

Background

Local Context

2. Dudley has a significant and diverse Gypsy, Roma and Traveller population predominantly made up of Romany Gypsies, Travellers of Irish Heritage, Roma from Eastern and Central Europe and Showmen (fairground families).
3. Romany Gypsies, Roma, Travellers of Irish Heritage and Scottish Gypsy/ Travellers are all protected by Race Relations legislation which places a statutory duty on public bodies to promote race equality. Other Traveller groups are not protected by the legislation but it is recognised that they have their own distinct histories, lifestyles and cultures. Therefore, the Department for Education expects that they are included in work undertaken by the Gypsy, Roma and Traveller Service and any data gathered and reported on.
4. Travelling patterns have changed significantly over the last few decades with many families opting to settle. Dudley's Gypsy, Roma and Traveller population reflects this trend with many families rarely travelling or travelling for shorter periods linked to cultural/ family events and work opportunities. However, highly mobile families still pass through the Borough. Reasons for travelling to/ through Dudley include; homelessness, visits to family/ cultural events, work opportunities and to provide entertainment such as fairs and circuses. Many of these families have no legal stopping place and will 'camp on the roadside', officially known as unauthorised encampments. While fairs and circuses will have prearranged venues on public and private land.
5. Also, over the past few years, there has been a number of Roma from new EU partner countries entering the UK; some settling in Dudley.
6. Gypsy, Roma and Traveller families live in a variety of accommodation across the Borough. The majority live in Council and privately rented homes. A small number of families are home owners. The remainder live on Local Authority owned or privately owned sites or yards.

The Gypsy, Roma and Traveller Service

7. Since 1st September 2008, the Gypsy, Roma and Traveller team has comprised of 2 Gypsy, Roma and Traveller Consultants. The nature of the Gypsy, Roma and Traveller Consultants work is wide ranging at both a strategic and operational level. Duties include: teaching, mentoring, home-school liaison, home visits, supporting new children into school, working with teachers and senior leaders to raise achievement, delivering training, signposting and assessing and reporting safeguarding and child protection issues. The Service is education focussed, undertaking both universal and targeted work across the age range 0 – 19 years. Universal work includes school improvement, training and advice/ guidance offered to schools and other agencies. Targeted work is focussed on the most vulnerable Gypsy, Roma and Traveller children and young people. Indicators of vulnerability include; mobility, deprivation, children not accessing education, late entrance to school, non-attendance at school, significant under-achievement, transition, victims of racism/ bullying, special educational needs/ learning difficulties, behavioural problems, exclusion, offending, English as an Additional Language, children educated at home and children in need/child protection cases. Monthly Gypsy, Roma and Traveller Casework meetings are held to discuss targeted cases, through partnership with: the Education Welfare Service, Children Missing Education, Home Education, Ethnic Minority Achievement Service and Connexions.

Gypsy, Roma and Traveller Database

8. The Gypsy, Roma and Traveller database is maintained by the Gypsy, Roma and Traveller Service. There are currently 311 children registered:
- 113 children attend 25 primary and 3 special schools;
 - 55 children attend 16 secondary and 1 short stay school;
 - 30 children are home educated;
 - 45 children are pre-school;
 - 62 young people are 16 – 19 years;
 - 6 children are missing education (i.e. not on a school roll). Officers are working with these families.
9. Information is gathered from School Census data and knowledge of families. The numbers are likely to be much higher. Of the 168 children on roll at primary and secondary schools, 42% have been identified as having special needs (7 children have Statements). 18% have received fixed term exclusions. 39% are entitled to free school meals. Out of the 311 children registered, 7 are Looked after Children.

Gypsy, Roma and Traveller Achievement

10. Gypsy, Roma and Traveller children and young people have a long history of underachievement. Whilst attainment trends demonstrate that attainment levels for most groups have improved, for Gypsy, Roma and Traveller pupils these levels have deteriorated. Attainment data for Dudley for the last 3 academic years mirrors the national picture. The Gypsy, Roma and Traveller Service's response to this is to offer training to schools. Unfortunately take-up of training by schools has been poor. The National Strategies (DCSF

2009) guidance: 'Moving forward together: Raising Gypsy, Roma and Traveller Achievement' forms the basis for school improvement work, but again with numbers being small and pupils spread across 45 schools, it is difficult to encourage schools to engage in central training.

Ascription

11. Nationally there is a history of racial prejudice and discrimination, many Gypsy, Roma and Traveller families are reluctant to declare their true ethnicity. The Gypsy, Roma and Traveller Service actively encourages families to have the confidence to declare their true identity. However, of the 168 Gypsy, Roma and Traveller children on a school roll in Dudley, only 70 are accurately ascribed.

Attendance / Attainment

12. Gypsy, Roma and Traveller attendance in Dudley schools has improved over recent years, and reflects the national picture, but it remains an ongoing issue. Due to changes in the nature of the Education Welfare Service, schools have started to seek the support of the Gypsy, Roma and Traveller Service to provide early intervention and prevention work around non-attendance issues. Attainment fluctuates year on year and is influenced by the small cohort and specific needs of each group. Current figures can be seen in Appendix 1 of this report.

Interagency Working

13. As well as members of the Casework team, the Gypsy, Roma and Traveller Consultants have developed strong links with teams across Children's Services and other Directorates. Also, there is partnership with healthcare professionals, the police and voluntary organisations. Training delivered to various agencies and settings such as the Youth Service, Youth Offending Service, National Association for the Care and Resettlement of Offenders and some Children's Centres has been well received.
14. The DCSF guidance 'Building Futures: Developing Trust – A focus on provision for children from Gypsy, Roma and Traveller backgrounds in the Early Years Foundation Stage' has formed the basis for extensive Gypsy, Roma and Traveller training across the early year's sector.
15. Also, Dudley has been involved in the Black Country Challenge Young Entrepreneurs Learning Portfolio project which provides funding for Gypsy, Roma and Traveller young people in Key Stage 4 to access culturally relevant vocational training. Young people on a school roll and those home educated have and are still accessing this training.

Safeguarding

16. Central to the ethos and work of the Gypsy, Roma and Traveller Service is safeguarding of highly vulnerable children. Mobility in itself presents many challenges, including: tracking and tracing children coming into and leaving the Borough, access to school places and periods of absence incorrectly authorised as travelling, much of which otherwise goes undetected or unreported.

17. Unauthorised encampments are potentially dangerous environments for children and adults. Access to education and other services requires a high level of support from the Gypsy, Roma and Traveller team.
18. The monitoring of children travelling with fairs and circuses is undertaken by the Gypsy, Roma and Traveller team. Primarily to assist in raising achievement of children out of school by providing teaching on the fairground/ circus site; child protection issues are also paramount.
19. The growing number of Roma from Eastern and Central Europe has brought with it a host of safeguarding issues. Romanian and Bulgarian families have no access to public funds and are therefore often to be found living in abject poverty. Parents and children are often driven to criminal activity such as black market working, begging and theft. These children are often kept hidden. Also, there is the issue of child trafficking where Roma children are brought into the country by organised criminal gangs for the purpose of criminal activity.
20. Access to secondary school places for pupils aged 11-16 is hindered and delayed by the admissions arrangements linked to the Fair Access Panel. Currently discussions are taking place with Heads to improve this process. Incidences of domestic abuse have noticeably increased over the last three years, much of which goes unreported to the police.

21. Challenges

The Directorate is aware of the following challenges:

- Capacity issues.
- Little understanding and awareness of the disparate needs and concerns of the Gypsy, Roma and Traveller community across the authority.
- Potential for safeguarding risks to children a constant concern for staff.
- Lone working policies i.e. when a home visit is considered high risk lack of staff limits ability to respond quickly.
- Loss of communication and partnering support from other authorities reduces information and support available.
- And is working to improve the support to this community.

Finance

22. The Gypsy Roma Team is funded by a Local Authority base budget allocation.

Law

23. The Education Act 1996 (Section 13) places local education authorities under a statutory duty to ensure that education is available for all school age children in their area, appropriate to their age, ability and aptitude, and any special education needs they may have. This duty extends to all children residing in their area, whether permanently or temporarily. It thus embraces in particular Travelling children. (DES Circular 1/81).
24. The Equality Act 2010 places a general duty on public authorities to work towards the elimination of unlawful discrimination and promote equality of opportunity and good relations between persons of different racial groups.

25. Under Section 111 of the Local Government Act 1972 the Council is empowered to do anything which is calculated to facilitate, or is conducive to, or incidental to the discharge of its functions.

Equality Impact

26. This report takes into account the Council's Equal Opportunities Policy.

Recommendations

27. That the report be noted by the Committee.



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