

## **COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT**

### **GYPSY TRAVELLER ADVISORY GROUP**

#### **Background**

The Authority recognised that Gypsies and Travellers are a community that has traditionally been very hard to reach. Gypsies and Travellers are often reluctant to report crimes against their community, and due to the myths surrounding them and their way of life, mistrust has developed between them and settled communities and the police.

#### **The Authority adding value**

In response to this problem, a Gypsy Traveller Advisory Group (GTAG) was formed in 2007. Significantly, the GTAG is chaired by a Romany Gypsy, and attended by members of the Gypsy and Traveller communities across the county, and senior officers from Sussex Police.

Recently the GTAG welcomed the attendance of Councillor Susan Knight, Police Authority member from Mid Sussex. Mrs Knight has a particular interest in Gypsies and Travellers having recently written her degree dissertation on Gypsies and Travellers in West Sussex. She remains interested in two sites in Burgess Hill, where she lives. Mrs Knight has an interest in under-represented communities and was instrumental in starting the Crawley Ethnic Minority Partnership, a support organisation for members of minority ethnic groups in Crawley and the surrounding areas, including Gypsies and Travellers.

#### **Outcome**

The Authority donated, through its Safer Neighbourhoods Grants Scheme, over £3,000 to Gypsy Traveller causes. The Authority was first approached by the Group when it was seeking funding during 'Gypsy Roma Traveller History Month' to enable it to screen a film in Hastings showing the traditional lifestyles of Gypsy and Traveller communities. Money was also pledged to support its magazine.

A further grant was made in 2009 by the Authority to facilitate the publication of a 'Myth Busting' leaflet, and poster campaign throughout the county, together with funding for attendance at the Loughton Autumn Show showing Gypsy history and skills. In addition a half-page advertisement was placed in the Gypsy History Month Magazine advertising positive action recruitment in the Force.

Since the formation of GTAG, communication between the Gypsy Traveller communities, the Authority and the Force continue to improve. Following her attendance at the meeting, Mrs Knight has been invited onto the GTAG's membership.

To further the relationship between the Gypsy Traveller community, the Force and the Authority, Superintendent Tony Blaker and GTAG have arranged a training session for all Police Authority members. The invitation will also be extended to Independent Custody Visitors.

The Authority has led the debate across the county to address the issue of the low number of appropriate transit sites in Sussex. This causes considerable distress to Gypsy and Traveller communities, as well as settled communities impacted by unauthorised campsites. The Authority hosts a conference each year with Leaders and Chief Executives from local authorities around Sussex, where this issue has been at the top of the agenda. Since focussing on this issue, facilities in Sussex have been enhanced; one noteworthy improvement is the opening of Bridie's Tan site near Lewes.

"The Gypsy and Traveller community has long been recognised as Britain's most marginalised and misrepresented ethnic group. As such we really do depend on the impartial and proportionate involvement of all public bodies to help us to defend our identity and culture. There is no more important body than the Police to us in this. Over the last few years I've seen first hand how creating dialogue between my community and the policing community has helped reduce community tensions that have persisted for many generations. But it must and has gone all the way from PCSO's to members of the Sussex Police Authority. As a result of the work of GTAG we have all gained a new found respect and enthusiasm for working closely with each other." Jake Bowers, Chair, Gypsy Traveller Advisory Group.

**Reference:**

[Street Intervention Policy](#)

**Contacts:**

Dr Laurie Bush, Chairman, Sussex Police Authority

Superintendent Tony Blaker, Sussex Police Equality Champion for Gypsies and Travellers

Dinah Longden, Policy Officer, Sussex Police Authority