



Executive
12th February 2007

**Report from the Director of
Housing and Community Care**

For Action

Wards Affected:
Tokyngton/Stonebridge

Proposed increase in Travellers' Site Licence Fee

Forward Plan Ref: H&CC-06/07-33

1.0 Summary

- 1.1 This report seeks approval for an increase in the Travellers' Site licence fee and provides an update on the management of the site.

2.0 Recommendations

- 2.1 a. To increase the Lynton Close Travellers' Site licence fee from £150 per week to £160 effective from Monday 5th March 2007, or the earliest date when four weeks notice could be applied.
- b. To increase licence fees on the Lynton Close site annually in line with inflation.

3.0 Detail

- 3.1 On 8 December 2003 the Council's Executive Committee approved proposals for the future management of the site, which because of the need for substantially increased funding, was agreed subject to growth of £124K being approved by Full Council as part of the 2004/2005 budget process.
- 3.2 The growth bid of £124k was approved by Full Council and a contract with Novas Ouvertures commenced June 2004. It was also agreed that Licence Fees on the site would increase from £98 per week to £150 per week in order to raise the remaining shortfall in funding to pay for the Novas contract with effect from Monday 28 June 2004.

3.3 There is an annual adjustment in the contract price in accordance with RPI but nevertheless, the contract fee payable to Novas has overall decreased over the last 18 months as a result of reduced levels of staffing in line with the terms of the contract. However the licence fees have not increased since June 2004 and it is therefore recommended that they be increased from £150 to £160 per week, effective from Monday 5th March 2007, or the earliest date when four weeks notice could be applied. The proposed licence fee increase is covered by Housing Benefit which is payable on all pitches on the site.

3.4 It is also proposed that the licence fees be increased annually from 2008 in line with the annual rate of inflation which may have to be reviewed when the new site is awarded a management contract is awarded in 2009.

3.5 **Achievements on the Site**

The management contract with Novas Overtures, which is monitored by Brent Housing Partnership, has been successful which is indicated by the following list of achievements:

- Two separate womens' groups have been established on the site.
- Well attended residents' meetings, with good representation of gender and age are held monthly.
- A Project Youth Worker holds three sessions a week which are attended by up to 50 young people. Every Monday, Thursday and Friday during term time young people attend a homework club held on the site. Outreach youth workers from Brent Youth Service provide a session once a week to link with the local community through games, social activities and youth conferences.
- The nursery runs during the afternoons three times a week for pre-school children.
- In the mornings, nursery staff are in local schools assisting the travellers with their education needs, e.g. help with reading.
- There is a mentor now on-site everyday, working with young males. This post is funded by Connexions.
- A Citizens Advice Bureau financial advisor is on-site on Tuesday mornings for residents to discuss benefits and helps maximise income.
- Brent Council Traveller Education Service has employed a Traveller to work in the nursery.
- The local Fire Brigade runs a Life Course. Four young males who had a history of anti-social behaviour participated in this course
- The standard of living accommodation for many of the travellers has improved in the last 6 months due to newer, more spacious caravans being acquired on many of the pitches. Many existing caravans were in a dilapidated condition, and many families had outgrown their caravans with several children being squeezed into one or two bedrooms. The housing benefit regulations allows benefit to be paid directly to the Caravan retailer for the hire of the larger caravans (the old caravan must be proven unfit for purpose) in addition to the benefit which is paid per pitch.

Need for continued management

There have been many successes on the site but there continues to be some serious day to day problems which do appear to have escalated over the last 12 months. Staffing on the site has reduced from 6 full time staff to 4 and in addition a temporary site manager has been in place covering maternity leave. It is likely this has had an impact in the day to day problems which arise, some of which are indicated below:

- a. Anti social behaviour – two interim ASBOs were obtained in the latter part of 2006 against two youths on the site resulting from shoplifting and extremely aggressive behaviour towards the employees of local businesses. One local supermarket has now stopped opening 24hours as a direct result of these two youths which has had an impact on local employment and services for local residents. The case is going back to Court on 8th January and full trial for assault on a supermarket security guard in March/April.
- b. Other youths on the site – increasing levels of anti social behaviour towards residents of the neighbouring estate to such an extent that two families from Metropolitan Housing Trust accommodation have had to be placed in emergency temporary accommodation. A meeting is taking place concerning these issues on 9th January between Brent Housing Partnership, MHT, and the Council's Community Safety Team.
- c. Escalation in dog nuisance – more dogs being brought onto the site particularly dangerous breeds such as pit bull terriers. BHP are insisting that legal action is taken against the families to remove the pit bull dogs from the site with no exceptions due to the danger they pose, particularly to children.
- d. Escalation in fly tipping on and around the site and in nearby vicinity – usually occurring when no site management around at weekends.

The change in staff management over the last 12 months may account for some of the problems which have been occurring but both BHP and Novas are committed to tackling these issues and bringing more improvements onto the Site during 2007 including bidding for a major refurbishment grant to improve the utility blocks which house the kitchens and bathrooms.

4.0 Financial Implications

- 4.1 The proposed increase in licence fee will generate an additional £16,120 thereby reducing the amount payable for the management fee from the general fund.

5.0 Legal Implications

- 5.1 Under the terms of the licence agreement, at least four weeks' notice in writing must be given to the licensee of any increase in the licence fee for the increase to become effective.

6.0 Diversity Implications

- 6.1 None

7.0 Staffing/Accommodation Implications (if appropriate)

- 7.1 None

Background Papers

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