

TRAVELLERS UNAUTHORISED ENCAMPMENTS PROTOCOL REVIEW

1 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 In May 2010 LBM and Merton Borough Police signed a joint protocol agreement regarding the policy and operational response to unlawful encampments within the Borough. The increasing frequency of encampments since 2010 and practical experience of applying the protocol requires the protocol to be reviewed.
- 1.2 The Continuous Improvement Team (CIT) recommends simplifying the process. In particular, the revised protocol should minimise the resources Merton Council and Police have to deploy.
- 1.3 Likewise, the revised protocol should also clarify which team is responsible for each assessment. It should also define the required level of detail of the assessments.
- 1.4 The protocol should include a procedure in case travellers disregard a court order.

2 BACKGROUND

- 2.1 In May 2010 LBM and Merton Borough Police signed a joint protocol agreement regarding unauthorised encampments and the powers and responsibilities of the police and local authority under the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act, 1994 and other legislation. This document contains the policy and operational response to unlawful Traveller encampments within the LBM.
- 2.2 This review aims to improve effectiveness and efficiency of the joint policy whilst continuing to safeguard the wellbeing of the travellers.
- 2.3 A Business Improvement Advisor (BIA) was asked to facilitate the engagement of all institutional stakeholders in producing 'as is' and 'to be' process maps. Governance and approval of the new process were not in scope.

3 METHODOLOGY

- 3.1 The BIA engaged with the Property Team to ascertain the nature of the work and map out the existing process.
- 3.2 The BIA and the Property Manager involved the key stakeholders in discussions about the limitations of the existing protocol and options for improvement, including looking at protocols of other London Boroughs.

- 3.3 The discussions involved the Director of Public Health and the Managers for Legal Services - Litigation and Planning Team, Housing Options, Education Inclusion, and MASH.

4 FINDINGS

- 4.1 The other London Boroughs looked at have a process in place that is substantially leaner.
- 4.2 At present the Housing Options Team visit the travellers, and provide them with housing information regarding homelessness and temporary accommodation. The Housing Options Manager agreed that the process could be simplified and they do not need to visit the encampment.
- 4.3 The Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) is involved in the process although it is not mentioned in the protocol as this came into existence after 2010.
- 4.4 The current protocol provides for consultative meetings prior to action being taken however these are seen as impractical, resource intensive, and result in delay . Moreover, the involvement of the public has caused in the past problems of confidentiality and personal safety.
- 4.5 Police reported that they would welcome a more streamlined process, as they feel some of the activities involved are unnecessary or overcomplicated.
- 4.6 Conversely, the Education Inclusion Manager stressed the importance of the meeting as a check to assess all issues at stake.
- 4.7 The Travellers Education Service is active only during school term. Therefore, their required involvement out of school terms could delay the process unnecessarily.
- 4.8 The responsibility of the health assessment is unclear, due to the transfer of the Public Health function to local authorities since 2010. The Director of Public Health is investigating the issue further.
- 4.9 Clarity is required regarding the action to be taken if travellers disregard a court order and remain on the site.

5 RECOMMENDATIONS AND NEXT STEPS

Principles

- 5.1 The revised process should continue to ensure travellers' wellbeing whilst reducing Council and Police resources, in particular , the number of staff visiting the encampment should be kept at a minimum.
- 5.2 The Protocol should include the revised Guidance on Unauthorised Encampments developed by the Association of Chief Police Officers of England, Wales & Northern Ireland.
- 5.3 Whenever possible, the officers first visiting the encampment should collect all the evidence and assess welfare needs and concerns. Other teams should be involved only if concerns are raised.

First visit

- 5.4 The officers first visiting the encampment should investigate the travellers' housing needs via a questionnaire. Officers should also distribute an information leaflet. Both questionnaire and leaflet should be prepared by Housing Options team. Housing Options should no longer be required to visit the encampment.
- 5.5 The officers first visiting the encampment should gather all available information on health and wellbeing of the travellers and submit it to the MASH and the Health Authority.
- 5.6 The MASH and the Health Authority should then organise the appropriate welfare assessments and visit the travellers within the agreed time (see 5.10).
- 5.7 For the purpose of the protocol, the assessments should merely inform if there are any welfare issues that might cause the action for removal to be delayed.

Responsibility for the different assessments

- 5.8 The Community & Housing Directorate should clarify which team or role is responsible for the health and older people assessments.
- 5.9 MASH should become the single point of entry for education and younger people assessments.

Turnaround time of assessments

- 5.10 The new Protocol should maintain the existing turnaround times for the assessments which is a maximum of two working days of notification, but ideally within one.

Consultative meeting

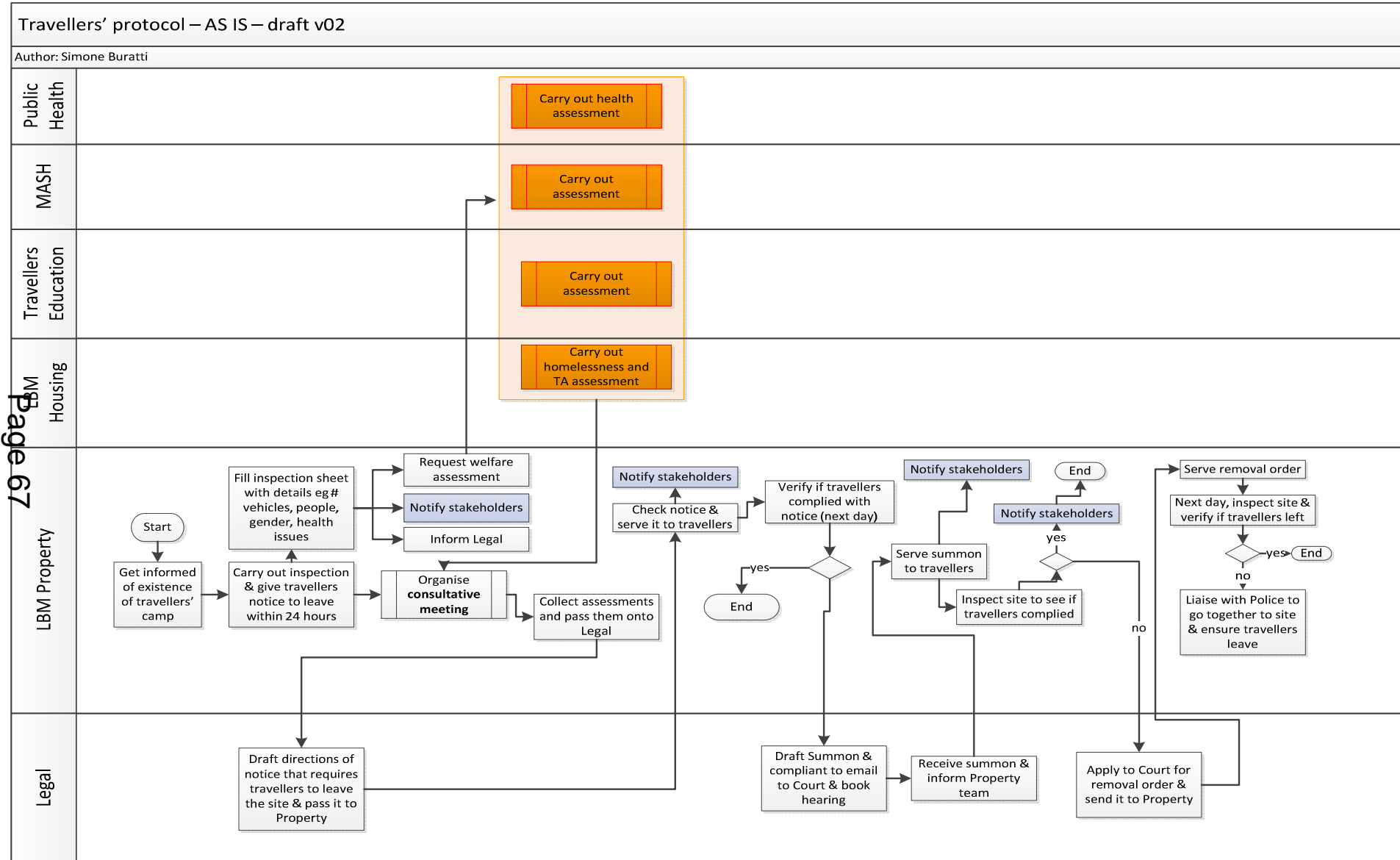
5.11 The consultative meeting should be held only if the welfare assessments identify any concerns.

5.12 The meeting should be a professional's only meeting. Stakeholders may submit in writing any relevant evidence, data, views, and arguments.

Enforcement

5.13 The new protocol should clarify activities and teams involved in case the travellers do not comply with the court order.

Travellers unauthorised encampments protocol review - report
 Appendix 1: travellers protocol as it currently is



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