

London Gypsy and Traveller Forum

17 October 2017

City Hall, Committee Room 2

Attending: Rose Palmer – RB Kensington and Chelsea; Cllr Christopher Kennedy – LB Hackney; Jennifer Maughan – Hackney; Margaret Maughan – Hackney; Marian Mahoney – Tower Hamlets; Ellie Cooke – Kingston council; Kate Griffiths – Thrive London; Manon Dolet – LGT volunteer; Harriet Balance – Southwark Travellers Action Group; Rachel Smalley – GLA; Debra Levison – GLA; Azzees Minott – London Assembly research support; Pat O'Donnell – Kensington and Chelsea; Debby Kennett – LGT; Ilinca Diaconescu – LGT; Tracie Giles – LGT; Clemmie James – LGT; Yva Alexandrova – LGT

Chair: Tracie Giles

1. **Introductions**

2. Clemmie introduced the **terms of reference for the Forum**
3. **Minutes from last meeting** – minutes presented by Debby Kennett and approved

4. **London Gypsies and Travellers' accommodation needs – what will the Mayor do in the Housing Strategy and the London Plan?**

- Ilinca Diaconescu introduced the context of the meeting, the campaign led by Gypsies and Travellers in relation to the previous London Plan and showed a short film of the Mayor's Question Time from August 2017 in which Sadiq Khan explains the proposals to address the needs of Gypsies and Travellers
- **Contribution from Debra Levison – Housing team**

Debra gave a presentation on the draft London Housing Strategy policy on Gypsy and Traveller communities: councils will be expected to plan for the needs of Gypsies and Travellers; Mayor's Affordable Homes Fund will be used for new and existing sites; so far in the first round of bidding there haven't been any applications for caravan sites. The GLA will seek to be more active in brokering relationships with councils. The strategy is currently under consultation until 7th December and everyone is encouraged to take part.
- **Contribution from Rachel Smalley – London Plan team**

Rachel explained what the London Plan is and introduced the policy direction in what regards Gypsy and Traveller needs. There will be a proposed new definition of Travellers, which is more inclusive acknowledges that people have stopped travelling due to lack of sites, stopping places and opportunities and recognises the needs of those in housing. The consultation will start on 29th November and run for three months.

4. Community contributions/Discussion

- the effects of the government's planning definition and barriers to site provision

Tracie Giles described the impacts the government's definition of Travellers has had on the community: increase in unauthorised encampments with repercussions for families and children; increasing lack of maintenance and management of council sites and increasing threats from regeneration projects; insecurity for Gypsies and Travellers living on their own private sites as more difficult to get planning permission.

Other comments:

- councils don't know the needs of Gypsies and Travellers; essential to ensure that needs of children and grandchildren are recognised as the London Plan is so long term
- need to look at sites that are overcrowded, Gypsies and Travellers living in housing and their health problems; there need to be regular reviews to record living conditions and standards
- the Kensington and Chelsea needs assessment was well conducted even if it used the government definition it found a need of 10 pitches; the council wants to apply for funding but there are issues related to land ownership, as the council can only get temporary leases from TfL for their caravan site; the process of applying for funding was very difficult and resource intensive under the previous Mayor and should be made more accessible for councils.
- If sites are not permanent such as the example above, there is reluctance to invest any money in repairs and maintenance; land is also increasingly expensive; Travellers are asked to move outside of London but then it's down to outside London councils to plan for their needs which is very unlikely
- Camden council had applied for funding under the previous Mayor but had to give the allocation back because they couldn't find any land. A member of the local Traveller community spent a lot of effort and time looking to identify land but each option was rejected by the council
- Very concerned about the quality of new pitches; the Crossrail and Olympic relocation sites in Tower Hamlets and Newham were built very quickly and already there are major issues with the plumbing, damp, the poor quality of the build. LGT has done two independent audits of the site in Newham which led the council to apply for funding from the Mayor's pitch fund to repair and refurbish the site in 2015 but the work hasn't been up to standard.
- What power does the Mayor have over TfL land? How can his powers help unblock some of the barriers? Are there other opportunities for sites on TfL land? For example in Hackney there is land designated for a Traveller site but while this is not being pushed forward, people are facing a huge housing crisis and many are moved out of the borough
- Which funding stream is open for continuous bidding? Standard and negotiated. Does it need to be through a registered provider?

5. What will really make a difference? – Small group discussion

Think about two questions for the GLA to report back to the Forum to keep track of the progress made in allocating funding for Gypsy and Traveller sites.

Suggestions for monitoring the Affordable Homes Fund

- **What progress has been made on named sites where land is identified for Gypsy and Traveller accommodation?**
- **How many funding applications have been received for refurbishment or new sites?**
- **How many councils has the GLA been in discussion with? Which ones?**
- **Which housing associations and developers has the GLA been in contact with?**
- **For successful bids, please provide an indicative timeline of the delivery, expected capacity (number of pitches) and delivery partners**
- **For unsuccessful bids please provide a justification/assessment of the application. Is there a mitigation strategy? Can the application be improved?**
- **How can LGT and other community organisations support upcoming funding applications?**

Suggestions for London Plan monitoring

- **Which boroughs have not done a needs assessment and why?**
- **Has an audit been carried out of the existing sites in each borough? Is the quality up to standard? Is the site suitable and sustainable?**
- **How many local plans have been checked? How many conform to the London Plan?**

General clarification questions

- **What powers/influence does the Mayor have over Transport for London land?**
- **Why are councils not applying for funding?**
- **How will councils be encouraged to build more sites?**
- **Who ensures boroughs know about funding?**
- **What are the consequences to councils if they don't follow through?**
- **How can the TfL Small Sites scheme include provision of Gypsy and Traveller sites?**
- **How will councils be supported with provision of transit and permanent sites?**

6. Mapping the Pathway to Equality

Ilinca gave a brief presentation of the mapping project which runs in collaboration with Mapping for Change. There are three parts: collating and visualising data on population, housing and employment through existing data sources (e.g. Census, London Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Needs Assessment, local needs assessments etc); a community-led online map providing information on services, facilities and assets but also experiences of using these which is now under development; an online community-led map of the history and heritage of Gypsies and Travellers in London which will start next spring subject to funding.