

London Gypsy and Traveller Forum

9 February 2017

London City Hall, Committee Room 5

MINUTES

Attending: Billy Smith-Newham; BrendaDownes -Lewisham Irish; Brian Hanley- Mind Yourself; Cllr Christopher Kennedy - LB Hackney; Clemmie James- LGTU; Cynthia Egweh-Hounslow; Debby Kennett - LGTU; Emily Humphreys - GLA Health; Farah Elahi - Runnymede Trust; HarrietBalance- Southwark Travellers Action Group; Ilinca Diaconescu – LGTU; Jamie Morris - City and Hackney CCG; Jenni Berlin - Traveller Movement; John Wilson – Peabody; Kye Lockwood - Social Action for Health; Laura Tyrell - Thrive London; Marian Mahoney – Tower Hamlets; Martin Kovats -LB Southwark; Matt Creamer- GLA; Nicola Lang - LB Sutton Public Health; Peter Fletcher – GLA; Rachel Smalley -GLA planning; Rose Palmer-RBKC; Samir Jeraj- Race Equality Foundation; Sue Mutter; Tracie Giles – LGTU; Will Marks –UCL; Paul Mowat – RBKC; Richard Reddie - GLA Community relations; Marta Rossi – UCL; Heidi Bancroft – GLA; Lisa Smith- LGTU; Kathleen McInerney – Greenwich

Apologies:

Chair: Tracie Giles

1. Welcome and introductions

2. Minutes from last meeting – DK

The minutes from the October 2016 meeting were agreed.

3. Follow up from last meeting: Mayor’s Question Time; Equality Framework; Event in the London Living Room –ID

A summary of action points were taken forward by Tom Copley AM since October 2016:

- write to Mayor of Newham regarding the accommodation needs assessment
- write to the Equalities and Human Rights Commission in relation to the Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Needs Assessment/ Strategic Housing Market Assessment
- seek commitment from Mayor to protect existing sites, in line with commitments for other tenants in regeneration areas
- arrange to book the London Living Room for a Gypsy and Traveller event

The event in the London Living Room will take place on 31st March 2017 and will mark the launch of an LGTU campaign to challenge prejudice against the Gypsy and Traveller community.

The GLA Equality Framework was also raised as follow up from the previous meeting. This is expected to be published for consultation sometime in March 2017.

4. Pressing opportunity to make a difference on the Mayor's Health Inequalities Strategy

ID introduced the main topic for discussion, the Mayor's Health Inequalities Strategy and summarised how health inequalities are measured, what they mean for the Gypsy and Traveller community and what the root causes are. The slides can be found here.

Questions and comments

- Evidence has been around for decades, now it's the time for positive action
- Debate on whether mainstream services are more appropriate than targeted services; aspiration to have services accessible to all, but also can't approach all communities in the same way. For example the mainstream approach to push breastfeeding does not work in the Gypsy and Traveller community
- Critical role for community and voluntary sector to provide services and bridge gap. Good examples from Black mental health organisations. There is a vision to support community groups and connect them to NHS. But also pressures on community and voluntary sector to deliver and very little infrastructure for Gypsies and Travellers
- Impact of NHS cuts
- Services and interventions from local authorities have stopped in recent years e.g. action on rogue landlords, environmental health services cut
- People who already live in the worst conditions will continue to suffer
- Experiences in the community of lack of support for people with disabilities, mental health, occupational therapy; prejudice from health care professionals. Used to have health visitors but they are now gone. Many younger people in the community rely on mothers and grandmothers for information and support.
- NHS doesn't monitor Gypsies and Travellers
- Important to link up with other services, but still have big gaps between the chronic problems people suffer day to day and high level discussions; huge gap in inclusion and provision despite bad statistics; need leadership from Mayor of London
- Maybe Mayor can link up with Public Health Directors and MOPAC

Health Inequalities Strategy – Emily Humphreys, Director of Health Team GLA

- Consultation on the Health Inequalities Strategy expected in June, but no certainty at the moment
- Very useful to hear what people have to say
- Mayor's responsibility just to produce strategy, but no powers of NHS, Public Health, social care
- He can influence the system; send signals about priorities; invite boroughs and NHS to discuss how to coordinate across London on a number of critical issues
- However he has direct power over other strategies e.g. Housing, Environment, London Plan. Can set rules not just about health but other determinants: air quality, housing etc
- Very limited resources at the moment, need to focus on a few things that will make the biggest difference to meet his manifesto commitments (e.g HIV, child obesity)
- Set of broad priorities: mental health, supporting children to have better start in life

Thrive London – Laura Tyrrell

- Aim to improve mental health and wellbeing of all Londoners
- Bring public services together to discuss current challenges
- Address stigma and discrimination
- Key principles: prevention, pragmatism, participation

5. Small group discussions

Housing and health

Housing and accommodation impacts the mental health and wellbeing of Gypsies and Travellers specifically and disproportionately in comparison to wider society. There is a suggestion to train and educate local council workers in the cultural and health-specific needs of gypsies and travellers, and other minority groups. Training and local consultation are key in gaining community trust and allowing communities to come forward.

JSNAs - need to be encouraged by the Mayor for each borough given their focus on specific health needs at a local level. Currently lack these in most boroughs and many current definitions mean Gypsies and Travellers are hidden within local planning and policy considerations. Can be related to the training and education of health professionals and social workers - encourage shared practice with officers and community groups and across boroughs and communities.

Accommodation - precarious and insecure pitches + intensifying development going up around gypsies and travellers sites, leading to mental health concerns. With the

aversion to bricks and mortar, councils/GLA must realise the need to provide healthcare and accommodation in culturally specific ways. Stress and worry over encroaching developments and the permanence of their sites. Other accommodation issues include overcrowding, insecure tenure, mental health - clear interlinkages between health and housing for gypsies and travellers.

Work and health

The problem was evidenced at two levels: self-employment and mainstream works. As for the former, many traditional activities (especially males engaged in scrap metal collection, but also the female selling at travellers fairs) are now disappearing because of new repressive legislation, consequently pushing many travellers to illegal actions such as theft in order to make a living.

It was suggested that the Mayor should encourage these traditional entrepreneurial activities. As for mainstream work sector, on the one hand many G&Ts tend to avoid permanent jobs because of their culturally unsuitable conditions (e.g. employed state, indoor spaces); on the other hand, those who do try to get a mainstream job usually experience discrimination and are forced to hide their identity, with negative impacts on their mental health.

Negative prejudice begins in schools though, discouraging children attendance and acquisition of skills, pushing them to the aforementioned self-employment activities. The situation is particularly complex for women, who tend to face pressures of taking care of the family and the outer discrimination experienced when trying to undertake a mainstream job. In general, the lack of employment opportunities deeply impact on the mental health and wellbeing of G&Ts, that formerly used to conduct a very active life made of travel and informal work.

A connection of Economic and Health Strategies by the Mayor was advocated, and some possible actions to contrast the situation were proposed: -training skills for young G&T (with more flexibility regarding the age of participants) -microcredit projects -financial advisors -more rights to have a land for G&Ts (to use it for non-mainstream activities) -anonymisation of job applications and addresses (that nowadays are reason of discrimination)