

London Gypsy and Traveller Forum Minutes

17th July 2018

City Hall, Committee Room 2

Attending:

Debby Kennett -LGT; Geraldine Lindsay-LGT; Ilinca Diaconescu – LGT; Lindsey Chatralia -Hounslow Traveller Education; Mena Mongan – LGT; Sherrie Smith- Herts GATE; Tracie Giles -LGT; Anna Hoare -LGT; Claire Rice - GATE Herts; Ellen Storrar-GLA Housing; Betsy Mobey -LGT; Jack Weaver -National Housing Federation; Nancy Prentice- Prison Radio Association; Michaela Des Forges-Homeless Link; Jaqueline Maughan- Hackney Traveller community; Lee Craddock- ORS; Barbara Perry – Kingston Council; Amanda Smith – GATE Herts; Siobhan Delaney – Kingston Council; Charlotte Maughan – Hackney Traveller community; Brenda Downes – Lewisham Irish Community Centre; Sherece Walker – Hackney Council; Angie Emmerson – Hackney Council

1. **Welcome and introductions**
2. **Minutes from last meeting** were agreed
3. **Gypsies and Travellers in temporary accommodation** - presentation from LGT Accommodation Advice Team

Geraldine gave a presentation on the challenges facing Gypsies and Travellers in temporary accommodation and the impacts of insecurity, isolation, unsuitability, prejudice on their health and wellbeing, culture, identity, family and community relationships. The slides can be downloaded at <http://www.londongypsiesandtravellers.org.uk/london-travellers-forum/>

4. **Community members' experiences and concerns**

Community members talked about their experiences of going through the local authority homelessness route, ending up in temporary and emergency accommodation for a long time. Many are young people who grew up on sites but become homeless because of the lack of site provision, and not being allowed to stay on their parents' pitches while bidding for a council property. Those who presented their experiences had been placed in hostels facing overcrowding, mould, mice, lack of safety and security, lack of accessibility – unsuitable conditions during pregnancy and for living with small children or mental health issues. Some of the common issues they faced were isolation from family and support networks, being moved out of their borough and discrimination from council officers.

5. **Discussion**

- Prejudice and discrimination need to be reported. Council officers offered to raise the concerns with the local authority. Councils have an equality duty and need to be held to account
- Councils should consider the impacts for Gypsies and Travellers of being placed in a type of accommodation they are not used to and isolated from their families; they should seek to place Travellers in housing near the community
- Hillingdon council has been sued by Travellers because of the disadvantage and discrimination their allocations policy caused in applying for permanent accommodation.

- A few years ago, it was possible to be 'homeless at home', for example a young couple could remain on the site with their parents while waiting for a council property; this could be a solution and address the impacts on the family.
- In Kingston there is a homelessness prevention scheme; people get a special homelessness band if they have an agreement with someone e.g. parents to keep them in their accommodation. They never go into temporary accommodation, however there is a risk if relationships break down.
- In terms of temporary accommodation, the Mayor is working with boroughs to get together and buy accommodation for people who need it; they are also looking at better use of vacant sites for temporary housing for 5-10 years.
- There have been so many Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Needs Assessments done but nothing has changed. Many Gypsies and Travellers are in a worse situation than 20 years ago, especially as young families are growing up and there's nowhere to go
- In Lewisham there isn't a Traveller site and almost everyone from the Traveller community is in temporary accommodation. Previous generations had secure council housing. There is now an opportunity to get a site built, but all Travellers are displaced and it's very difficult to get together to campaign for this
- Data should be collected when Gypsies and Travellers go into temporary accommodation about what needs they actually have and used as evidence for more site provision
- The Mayor should issue a code of conduct for local authorities regarding how they treat Gypsies and Travellers
- The London Assembly Housing Committee has published a report 'Hidden Homelessness' with recommendations to the Mayor, including for better data collection on equality groups. The Mayor's response to this report will be shared

6. Addressing hate crime through Report Racism Gypsy Roma Traveller - presentation from Gypsy and Traveller Empowerment Hertfordshire

Claire gave a presentation of the Report Racism Gypsy Roma Traveller project – a website where community members can report hate crime incidents. The reporting has increased over the year since the website was launched, however there are still many factors that prevent people from reporting. All complaints made through the website are pursued and shared with the relevant authorities. Some of the most common incidents are social media abuse, media incitement in local papers, discrimination in using services and private businesses, bullying at school and work.

The website is <http://reportracismgrt.com/> There is a dedicated phone line for those who prefer to ring 0800 81 01 800

7. Update on the London Plan

All comments from the consultation were expected to be published in the summer, with the inspectors' initial questions issued in the autumn. Examination hearings would take place starting from January 2019