

London Gypsy and Traveller Forum Minutes
26th February 2019
Committee Room 3, City Hall

Attending: Brenda Downes – Lewisham Irish Centre; Daniel Lescure – GLA; Geraldine Lindsey – LGT; Ilinca Diaconescu – LGT; Rose Palmer – RB Kensington and Chelsea; Temitope Moses – GLA; Charlene Williams – LB Sutton; Shannon McDonagh – Tavistock and Portman NHS; Claire Laurence – LB Newham; Mark Penfold – Croydon; Chris Kennedy – LB Hackney; Grantley Bispham – LB Tower Hamlets; Richard Bennett – LGT Trustee; Tracie Giles – LGT; Tyler Hatwell – LGT; Richard Lee – Just Space; Lisa Smith – Newham; Rachel Smalley – GLA; Maddi Joshi - CPS

Chair: Tracie Giles

1. Welcome and introductions

2. Minutes from last meeting were agreed

Updates: Thrive London research on identity, discrimination and mental health – just getting results from first stages of research. Next stage is to gather case studies from individuals and different communities.

Homebuilding Capacity Fund - £10m available for councils to bid for support in terms of delivering housing. Possible to use funds for doing Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Needs Assessments and site audits.

- concerns about the process for bidding for this funding and the lack of transparency. Organisations and community should be involved in assessing applications related to Gypsy and Traveller need. Information requested from the GLA about the allocation of this funding.

3. London Plan examination and next steps

Ilinca gave a brief overview of the London Plan Examination in Public hearing session on the Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Policy. The key issues that were debated at the hearing were:

- the more inclusive definition of Travellers proposed by new policy
- whether the accommodation needs of Gypsies and Travellers should be assessed in a London-wide study or individually by each council;
- the provisions made in the policy for temporary stopping, Traveller Showmen and Bargee Travellers.

The Inspector's report was expected in the summer of 2019.

Putting the London Plan policy in practice will be essential – there's a need to think about the Mayoral elections in May 2020, engaging with candidates and putting forward demands.

4. Borough injunctions and government proposals to increase enforcement powers

There were 10 London Boroughs that secured injunction orders against 'persons unknown' stopping on public land, which clearly target Traveller communities. LGT are involved in the Bromley injunction case, being able to intervene with pro-bono legal representation. The hearing on 15th May can set a precedent for other local authorities.

The Government announced new proposals to consult on introducing increased enforcement powers for the police under the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act and criminalising trespass following 'the Irish model'.

Discussion

- around the country many council sites are being sold off, pushing families on the roadside; would be good to have statistics of how many sites are being lost
- around South East/East of England there is a trend for sites to be handed over to residents to manage them

5. LGT research on negotiated stopping

LGT is working with Professor Jo Richardson at DeMontfort University on a research project commissioned by the GLA to explore the potential for negotiated stopping approaches in London, as an alternative to frequent and costly evictions. This consists of desktop research into current practices of managing roadside camps, a survey of London Boroughs and interviews with local authorities, to explore the opportunities and factors that would enable this alternative approach.

Discussion

- Large-scale fly tipping dominates discussions about encampments – difficult to change conversation. Many examples of other people tipping rubbish next to sites. Council budget cuts mean that it's expensive to dispose of waste legally
- negotiated stopping could provide an alternative for families who are in temporary and emergency accommodation and can't cope with mental health, poor conditions etc
- Clay's Lane in Newham before the Olympic relocation used to have one transit pitch
- need to go to each Borough and discuss about negotiated stopping. Need politicians to be on board
- could look at a model similar to what was discussed at a previous Forum meeting in terms of a cross-borough solution to temporary accommodation where councils are pooling resources
- in Hackney in the past there was negotiated stopping on a piece of land owned by Transport for London who had an officer that met with families; would be good to discuss with other landowners such as TfL and Network Rail
- site in Newham currently has poor site management; one pitch was empty for over a year; council was supposed to look at expanding the site using vacant land on each side.

6. Living with uncertainty - human cost and mental health impacts

Tracie gave a presentation about the impacts that insecure accommodation has on Traveller communities – in housing, on sites and on roadside camps. She spoke about her research into the Olympic Games relocation of sites and the cost on the community in terms of mental health, experiences of oppression and discrimination, sense of belonging and perceptions of authority.

Discussion

- With the transition to Universal Credit there are many cases in which the Department for Work and Pensions doesn't know how to deal with claims from Traveller sites – this gets people very depressed and worried. Important to have organisations that can help build trust
- Could be useful to link up with Pathway and Inclusion Health; look at developing training with mental health professionals around impact of living with uncertainty
- People talked about their experiences of discrimination: among peers in a counselling training course; among other Samaritans volunteers; with local authorities homelessness or housing options officers. Broader examples of everyday discrimination from MPs, other politicians, media coverage
- Gypsies and Travellers are very self-sufficient but changes to the way of life caused by policies or closure of sites and other kinds of displacement have a very big impact on how people can cope; this often results in not wanting to interact very much with others outside the community
- Research in Devon on traditional stopping places – LGT Travellers history mapping project could be useful as well to document long standing presence of communities
- Government should look at permanent long term provision of sites; it's very unsettling having to move around