

## **London Gypsy and Traveller Forum Minutes**

**2nd October 2018**

**Committee Room 4, City Hall**

### **Attending:**

Debby Kennett -LGT; Ilinca Diaconescu – LGT; Mena Mongan – LGT; Tracie Giles - LGT; Ellen Storrar-GLA Housing; Betsy Mobey -LGT; Rachel Mobey – Sussex; Brenda Downes – Lewisham Irish Community Centre; Susie Dye – Trust for London; Gemma Egan-Perkins – Traveller Movement; Ray Smith; Alison Pearce – GLA; Sylvia Parks – Westway Trust; Richard Bennett – LGT Trustee; Eileen Maughan – Haringey; Marian Mahoney – Tower Hamlets; Tyler Hatwell – LGT; Kate Griffiths – Thrive LDN/GLA; John Wilson – Peabody; Christina Maughan – Hackney; Ollie Richer – Revealing Reality; Grantley Bispham – LB Tower Hamlets; Anna Hoare – LGT; Emma Bailey – Centre for Mental Health; Ellie Cooke – RB Kingston; Mark Penfold – One Call Away; Anna Kasmir – Young Minds; Mikyla Smith – LB Newham; Rose Palmer – RB Kensington and Chelsea

**Chair: Tracie Giles**

- 1. Welcome and introductions**
- 2. Minutes from last meeting** were agreed
- 3. Mental health in the Gypsy and Traveller community**

Tracie gave an overview of the challenges facing Gypsies and Travellers in terms of work, accommodation and discrimination and how these affect mental health.

Kate Griffiths gave a presentation about Thrive London, the mental health initiative supported by the Mayor and a research project they were doing on how the discrimination people face due to their identity affects their mental health and wellbeing. This would inform some further work with different community groups across London. The slides can be found at <http://www.londongypsiesandtravellers.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/Thrive-LDN-presentation-London-Gypsy-and-Travellers-Forum.pdf>

General comments:

- Difficult to talk about mental health in Traveller and Showmen communities; there is a fear of authorities, social services, police; need to use language that people relate to e.g. 'bad nerves'.

- Important to listen to people, build confidence as a starting point. Mark talked about the One Call Away support line he started with his sister to support Gypsies and Travellers around mental health and suicide.
- In Tower Hamlets there is a service providing support with mental health. Some of the site residents have attended meetings to find out more about it; slow to build relationships and trust, takes time to do outreach and particularly to get men involved
- Alarmed by rise in suicides in the community
- Mental health is made worse by a lot of changes to the way of life: being moved constantly, being pushed into housing, not being able to make a living, not being understood.

### **Discussion on Right to Thrive research questions:**

*For Gypsies and Travellers, is London a fair place to live?*

- No pitches being built in London leads to overcrowding and poor conditions, being isolated, away from family and facing depression; housing options separate people from their community
- Loss of Traveller education services had a big impact; current system doesn't always suit Travellers
- Accommodation and planning policies in London are not fair – some sites lost or under threat to be replaced by housing
- Some services want to help and be involved but don't have the right understanding

*As a Gypsy or Traveller, have you felt discriminated or treated unfairly?*

- Everyday discrimination – not allowed in shops, refused services
- Acceptable racism in services, media, from politicians and public figures
- no cultural awareness for people in power; Gypsies and Travellers contribute to British society, history and heritage yet they are not recognised; Gypsy Roma Traveller History Month not acknowledged and celebrated everywhere
- definitions created by law (e.g Travelling only for work; psychological aversion to housing) are very problematic
- institutions don't build bridges with communities; difficult to challenge institutional discrimination

*How do unfairness and discrimination affect Gypsies and Travellers communities?*

- Have to hide ethnicity and identity
- Fight for approval
- Can't continue family trades and way of life
- Ethnic cleansing – forced into housing
- Play big role in worsening mental health and increased suicides

#### **4. Update on the London Plan examination**

Rachel Smalley gave a brief update on the London Plan examination process and explained the changes made to the plan as a result of the consultation. Ilinca introduced the questions proposed by the inspectors examining the plan. There was a brief discussion on this:

- Transit sites and meanwhile uses are missing from the Plan
- Lack of clarity around policy for site audits
- Showmen's needs are not included in the Table with Gypsy and Traveller accommodation needs assessment figures
- Concern about the differential approach to housing – issue of equality
- Gypsy and Traveller needs assessments - strategic issue that needs to be addressed by the GLA

#### **5. Questions and answers with James Murray, Deputy Mayor for Housing**

Deputy Mayor for Housing James Murray gave a brief overview of the Mayor's support to Gypsy and Traveller accommodation – the new planning definition in the London Plan; funding LGT for research on negotiated stopping in London; Affordable Homes Fund made very clear that it should also be used for delivering new pitches; so far Southwark has secured funding to refurbish their 37 pitches.

Discussion

- Capacity of GLA land for new sites is limited – but some conversations with Transport for London about this
- Not too much money should be spent on refurbishment. Councils gave back money because they couldn't find land (e.g. Camden). Funding should support with building new sites
- Through research on negotiated stopping will work out details on how this would happen on private land or with housing associations
- Need positive communications and strong messages of support from the GLA for Gypsies and Travellers – GLA shows support by coming to meetings
- Prefer approach of showing good examples from councils to encourage others to follow; rather than Mayor to direct boroughs what to do about building sites or shaming those who don't deliver. However with housing the Mayor is putting pressure on more delivery with targets, monitoring etc.
- GLA housing team to give updates about the timeline for funding in Southwark
- Need stronger line on protecting existing sites