

London Gypsy and Traveller Forum Minutes

24th April 2018

City Hall, Committee Room 3

Attending:

Brenda Downes -Lewisham Irish Centre; Debby Kennett -LGT; Grantley Bispham - LB Tower Hamlets; Ilinca Diaconescu -LGT; John Wilson – Peabody; Mena Mongan- LGT; Rachel Smalley – GLA; Rose Palmer- RB Kensington and Chelsea; Tracie Giles- LGT; Sophie Bimson -Crown Prosecution Service; Ellen Storrar – GLA; Andrew Bailes - Boaters community; Charlotte Morphet - Waltham Forest; Ian Redding – Southwark Travellers Action Group; Yvonne Evans - Sutton Housing; Betsy Mobey -LGT; Louisa Nightingale -LGT; Tyler Hatwell – LGT; James Salkeld – RB Greenwich; Angela Mahoney – Tower Hamlets; Marian Mahoney – Tower Hamlets; Kathleen McInerney – Greenwich; Winnie Maughan – Hackney; Mary Maughan – Hackney; Varinder Hayre – Crown Prosecution Service; Antonia Marjanov – LB Newham; Tope Moses – GLA

Chair: Tracie Giles

1. Welcome and introductions
2. Minutes from London Gypsy and Traveller Forum meeting on 9th February agreed
3. Getting site audits right
 - Tracie and Ilinca gave a presentation of the draft London Plan policy requiring Boroughs to do audits of existing sites, highlighting issues that should be taken into consideration when assessing overcrowding, the need for repairs and refurbishment and capacity for additional pitches. The slides can be found on the LGT website at <http://www.londongypsiesandtravellers.org.uk/london-travellers-forum/>
 - Contributions from Gypsy and Traveller community members
 - Site in Tower Hamlets: issues with boilers, drains, snagging, quality of build; need a refurbishment plan; the site manager is on site up to 5 days/week to inspect works and repairs
 - One of the sites in Hackney: issues with access for vehicles and ambulance; pitch and chalet should be adapted for disabled access but there is no space; land at the back of the site could be used to expand the site
 - Site in Newham: issues with access, safety, drainage
 - There are issues for private sites as well, for example in West Sussex: people get fined for doubling up; no phone line, problems with electricity; pollution is a huge problem as many sites are located next to sewage or motorways
 - There should be transit sites in most areas with rules and regulations; on Clay's Lane there were transit pitches with water, electricity and flexibility for other families to come in which worked well; providing transit sites or temporary stopping is a way of protecting the nomadic way of life of Gypsies and Travellers

- Overcrowding example: son pulled caravan behind the site on a piece of greenery which is not being used; the council gave a court order for him to move out, but they wouldn't house him because he has a caravan so isn't a homelessness priority; he has been going around hostel accommodation for months
- Need to look at the bigger picture: threats hanging over Traveller sites, housing crisis, no space; sites becoming very desirable; in Newham there is no management of the site, it's near the Olympic Park and very expensive residential development is going up
- Other comments
 - From the perspective of site managers drainage is a very big problem, especially for smaller sites that have been expanded over the years, but the infrastructure hasn't been adapted
 - Contractors need to abide by equality laws. Some charge twice as much for doing work on Traveller sites. Councils should challenge contractors
 - There should be more imaginative ways for Gypsies and Travellers to live in their communities – for example chalets or bungalows for older people. There needs to be consideration for the different needs people have on sites and in housing throughout their lives.
- Discussion - gathering ideas for good practice

How should audits be done?

- In partnership with the council and site residents. It would be useful to map out across London who is managing sites, who are the liaison officers and equality officers in local authorities. Planning officers should also be involved.
- There should be a residents' group/management committee set up by Gypsies and Travellers on their sites
- The consultation should include the wider Traveller community – all family members, not just those living on sites; need to bring in children and young peoples' voices and concerns
- Audits should understand the uniqueness of the Gypsy and Traveller culture
- An independent assessment to look at matters more objectively
- Different perspectives of the same issues: collate views but avoid conflict; ensure all views are represented; need for skilled researchers to capture the views of everyone
- Need to foster a trusting relationship between the residents and the council

How often should site audits be done?

- there could be different categories of audit e.g. every 6-12 months to assess repair and refurbishment needs; every 3-4 years to assess the need for new pitches (overcrowding); every 5 years in line with the Local Plan process to assess the capacity for additional pitches

What else should site audits include?

- A risk assessment including fire safety, electricity, gas
- Health and wellbeing
- Facilities and services in the wider neighbourhood

How to address issues arising from the audit

- management presence from Council and housing officers – e.g. every 6-8 weeks spend half a day and get to know the residents
 - permission for additional trailers to address health and safety issues
 - joint working between different departments in the council
 - use skills from residents (e.g. building)
 - site rents – more transparency on how they are invested back into the site
4. Update on the Mayor's Affordable Homes Fund
- The Affordable Homes Fund consists of over £3bn agreed 2 years ago to build homes until 2021. Half has been allocated so far to build 50,000 new homes
 - There have not been any applications for Traveller sites
 - The government has recently given an additional £1.7bn

Comments

- This has been an ongoing issue for many years. What communications are there between the GLA and councils to encourage them to apply?
 - Kensington and Chelsea had applied but local difficulties prevented them from using the funding. It costs a lot to prepare for the application. What rules are there in place now?
 - The GLA have tried to simplify the process for applying for the funding. Housing and Land directorate officers liaise constantly with councils and housing associations
 - What are the discussions with housing associations? They won't apply to build Traveller sites unless councils say they have a need. Housing associations can cross borough boundaries
5. Government consultation on reviewing powers for dealing with unauthorised encampments
- Ilinca gave a brief overview of the consultation and introduced a briefing paper from Community Law Practice which explained the grounds for a legal challenge. The materials can be found on the LGT website at <http://www.londongypsiesandtravellers.org.uk/london-travellers-forum/>
6. Local elections
- Mena explained about the importance of Local Elections and encouraged community members to vote on 3rd May