

# Equality Of Opportunity Committee

**EOC(2)-01-07(p4)**

**Date: 24 January 2007**

**Venue: Committee Room 3, Senedd**

**Title: Review of Service Provision for Gypsies and Travellers**

## **Purpose**

This paper provides an update on progress made by the Welsh Assembly Government with implementing recommendations contained in the Equality of Opportunity Committee's Review of Service Provision for Gypsies and Travellers in Wales. It also includes the latest position on Pat Niner's research study into accommodation needs in Wales.

## **Action**

The Committee is invited to comment on the progress made against the recommendations.

## **Background**

The Equality of Opportunity Committee decided to conduct the above review at its meeting on 31<sup>st</sup> October 2001, following consideration of two papers setting out the background to the Assembly's policies relating to Gypsies and Travellers. Particular consideration was given to the following issues:

- Education, health, accommodation, employment and the role of local authorities;
- whether the Assembly should have specific policies and services for Gypsies & Travellers in relation to education, social services, local government, housing, health, environment, planning and equality;
- whether the Assembly Government should have a lead contact responsible for issues relating to Gypsies & Travellers; and
- whether sufficient statistical information is available to facilitate service planning.

The last update from the Welsh Assembly Government detailing progress with implementing the recommendations from the Review of Service Provision for Gypsies and Travellers in Wales was provided to the Committee on 24<sup>th</sup> November 2005. Prior to this, an update was provided on 21<sup>st</sup> October 2004.

In December 2004, the Welsh Assembly Government commissioned an independent study to establish current and future requirements for the accommodation needs of Gypsies & Travellers in Wales.

Accommodation Needs of Gypsy-Travellers in Wales was conducted by Pat Niner, a Senior Lecturer in the Centre for Urban & Regional Studies at the University of Birmingham. Specifically, its purpose was to inform the development of the Welsh Assembly Government's policy on Gypsies & Travellers by providing information on the number, location and condition of Gypsy & Traveller sites in Wales. It also provides an indication of the need for new site provision, as well as estimated costs of refurbishing existing sites.

The study contained a number of conclusions and 28 recommendations for the Welsh Assembly Government and Local Authorities to take forward. An update for the Committee on progress with implementing recommendations from this research is included as part of this paper.

## **Progress Made**

- Full lists of progress against the recommendations can be found at Annex A (Review of Service Provision for Gypsies & Travellers in Wales) & B (Accommodation Needs of Gypsy-Travellers in Wales). A summary of progress made is covered from paragraph 11 onwards.
- In addition, the summary report of the launch of Accommodation Needs of Gypsy-Travellers in Wales in Llandrindod Wells on 25<sup>th</sup> September 2006 is included at Annex C.
- A Statistical Release showing the results of the re-introduced Gypsy & Traveller Caravan Count is included at Annex D.

## **Review of Service Provision for Gypsies & Travellers in Wales**

### **Co-ordination of Welsh Assembly Government Policy on Gypsies & Travellers**

[Rec. 4] The Welsh Assembly Government is currently recruiting for staff for a dedicated Gypsy & Traveller unit, to be established within the Social Justice & Regeneration Department. The unit will be able to provide advice, assistance and information on best practice regarding engagement with the Gypsy & Traveller community and will co-ordinate future policy. It is hoped that the unit will be staffed by February 2007. (Also takes forward recommendation 5 from Accommodation Needs of Gypsy-Travellers in Wales).

[Rec. 50] The Gypsy & Traveller Officials Working Group has been restructured to ensure a more strategic, co-ordinated and effective approach to policy development and delivery in this area. The group will be used to promote and facilitate cross-departmental working, providing a forum for the exchange of ideas, identifying good practice and disseminating information to colleagues across departments. It will also identify and establish a pool of expertise across departments which can be used to help the group and the unit in taking forward work. The restructured group is chaired by the Director of the Social Justice and Regeneration Department and will report regularly to Ministers.

(Also takes forward recommendation 5 from Accommodation Needs of Gypsy-Travellers in Wales).

## **Improving the Evidence Base**

[Rec. 3] The bi-annual Gypsy & Traveller Caravan Count was re-introduced in July 2006 with first results published in November 2006. The count was co-ordinated by the Department for Communities & Local Government (DCLG) and undertaken by nominated Local Authority officers. The first count went well where only 2 authorities did not provide a return. The next count will take place during January 2007 with results available in May 2007. (Also takes forward recommendation 2 from Accommodation Needs of Gypsy-Travellers in Wales).

[Rec. 4] To support engagement with Gypsies & Travellers, a Minority Ethnic Communications Toolkit has been produced by the Central Office of Information (COI) and the Welsh Assembly Government's Corporate Publicity Team, available through the Assembly Government. It is intended to support better engagement with and communications about all Minority Ethnic groups, including Gypsies & Travellers. In particular, the toolkit provides some facts and figures on Gypsies & Travellers, and suggested methods of engaging with these communities.

[Rec. 8] In December 2004, the Welsh Assembly Government commissioned an independent study to establish current and future requirements for the accommodation needs of Gypsies & Travellers. The research was published in July 2006 and formally launched by the Minister for Assembly Business, Equalities & Children in Llandrindod Wells on 25<sup>th</sup> September 2006. Results of this research will continue to be fed into policy development where relevant. The research was also used to quality assure the data obtained from the Gypsy & Traveller Caravan Count.

## **Policy Developments**

### **Planning**

[Rec. 12] The Welsh Assembly Government's Planning Division has recently issued a revised Circular – Planning for Gypsy & Traveller Caravan Sites, for public consultation. The consultation is expected to finish at the end of March 2007.

### **Housing**

[Rec. 9] The Welsh Assembly Government is working to enact Sections 225 and 226 of the Housing Act 2004. These will require local authorities to carry out an assessment of the accommodation needs of Gypsies and Travellers as part of the review of housing needs of their area. Proposals to meet identified needs should then be incorporated in their local housing strategy. (Also takes forward recommendation 3 from Accommodation Needs of Gypsy-Travellers in Wales).

[Rec. 18] The Welsh Assembly Government has secured funding for a Gypsy & Traveller Sites Refurbishment grant scheme of ?1million per year during 2007-08 to 2009-10. This was put forward in the draft budget laid before the National Assembly for Wales in October 2006 and was agreed by Plenary in December 2006. It should be made clear that this exceeds the amount recommended by Pat

Niner's research and will go a long way towards improving the quality of existing sites. It will not be used to build new sites. (Also takes forward recommendation 10 from Accommodation Needs of Gypsy-Travellers in Wales).

[Rec. 19] The Welsh Assembly Government has announced it will develop a model site license agreement setting out rights and responsibilities of both the landlord and the licensee in plain and easy-to-understand language. This will be incorporated into Housing Directorate's operational plan for 2007-08. (Also takes forward recommendations 22, 23 and 24 from Accommodation Needs of Gypsy-Travellers in Wales).

## **Health & Social Services**

[Rec. 27] The All-Wales multi-professional, multi-agency Selected Minority Group (SMG) has produced guidance to support Local Health Boards (LHBs) in the Health Needs Assessment process and development of the Health, Social Care & Well Being (HSCWB) Strategies, to take full account of the needs of these vulnerable groups. This incorporates evidence from research commissioned from the University of Wales and examples of good practice into Guidance for LHBs and Trusts. The Guidance was recently disseminated at two workshops in Wrexham and Swansea.

## **Education & Skills**

[Rec. 33] Four key education plans were replaced by the Single Education Plan (SEP) from 1<sup>st</sup> September 2006. The new SEP covers the period 1<sup>st</sup> September 2006 to 31<sup>st</sup> August 2008 when they will be replaced by an integrated Children and Young People Plan covering education and children's services. The new SEP regulations place a requirement on LEAs to include in their plans their strategy for education provision for pupils with additional learning needs with the expectation that this would cover children from Gypsy & Traveller communities.

[Rec. 34] In 2005 the Welsh Assembly Government commissioned the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) to produce a report, Research into the Education of Gypsy Traveller Children in Wales. This was completed in February 2006 and includes the numbers of Gypsies and Travellers attending school, achievement levels and issues around general educational need. The research will help to inform the redrafting of Circular 52/90 'Meeting the Education Needs of Travellers and Displaced Persons'.

[Rec. 34] The Schools Inspectorate – Estyn, produced a report in December 2005, The Education of Gypsy Traveller Learners – A Survey of Provision made by Schools and Local Authorities to Meet the Needs of Gypsy & Traveller Learners as part of its remit to the Welsh Assembly Government. The report contains a number of recommendations for LEAs, schools and the Assembly Government. Both this and the NFER report (mentioned above in paragraph 22) will inform the redrafting of Circular 52/90 'Meeting the Education Needs of Travellers and Displaced Persons'.

[Rec. 35] A consultant has been recruited to update Circular 52/90 'Meeting the Education Needs of Travellers and Displaced Persons', and produce fresh guidance which will go out to consultation following the Assembly elections in 2007.

[Rec. 39] On 4<sup>th</sup> July 2006 the Welsh Assembly Government made new Qualified Teacher Status (QTS) Standards, which all trainee teachers must meet before they are qualified. The new QTS Standards, subject to transitional arrangements, will apply for all trainees on all initial teacher training courses or programs on or after 1<sup>st</sup> September 2007. They aim to deal with the standards which teachers should meet in respect of all pupils. In particular, they will require trainees to provide the best possible education for pupils, whatever their cultural, linguistic, religious and ethnic backgrounds; take account of and support pupils' varying needs so that girls and boys from all ethnic groups can make good progress; establish a purposeful learning environment where diversity is valued and where pupils feel secure and confident; and recognise and respond effectively to social inclusion and equal opportunities issues.

[Rec. 41] The need to ensure that the curriculum is relevant to Gypsy & Traveller pupils will be addressed in the consultation on the Foundation Phase Framework and revised school curriculum which is to take place between 8<sup>th</sup> January 2007 and 30<sup>th</sup> March 2007. Implementation is expected from September 2008. Lesson plans and course materials are the responsibility of schools.

[Rec. 48] The revised guidance circular 3/99 was issued for consultation under the title 'Inclusion and Pupil Support' in April 2005. The consultation received a large number of detailed responses which were used to develop the final circular, issued in November 2006.

## **Accommodation Needs of Gypsy-Travellers in Wales**

Some of the recommendations from Pat Niner's research reinforce the messages contained in the Review of Service Provision for Gypsies & Travellers in Wales. Progress in some areas has therefore already been covered in the information above. The following information represents progress in areas specific to Accommodation Needs of Gypsy-Travellers in Wales that has not been covered elsewhere.

[Rec. 1] The Welsh Assembly Government will develop a national strategy for Gypsy & Traveller accommodation provision. This will be included into Housing Directorate's Operational Plan for 2007-08.

[Rec. 4] On 8<sup>th</sup> September 2006, Local Government Policy Division (LGP) held a workshop with representatives from the Gypsy & Traveller Community to consult with them on the 'Niner' report. To help with this, LGP enlisted the services of Jake Bowers of the Gypsy Media Company. Jake has vast experience of arranging/facilitating events with Gypsy & Traveller communities. LGP are currently considering the results of this workshop and whether more information can be gained by holding further regional workshops/focus groups.

[Rec. 5] At the launch of Accommodation Needs of Gypsy-Travellers in Wales, the Welsh Assembly Government set up a workshop to explore the idea of a Gypsy & Traveller support body. Feedback from attendees at the workshop was as follows:

Need for a unified, democratic voice with a Welsh identify, could be based on local residents

associations;

Need to review and monitor site management systems and contracts – tenure;

Capacity building needed for existing site managers;

Consultation needs to be wider than the usual tick box exercise;

Who will investigate site complaints;

Need for decent site standards;

Independent monitoring of where money is spent;

Site managers should be accountable for their actions;

Suggestion of a joint police / Welsh Assembly Government / Welsh Local Government Association event.

The Welsh Assembly Government will continue to explore this recommendation.

## **Cross-cutting Themes**

The National Assembly for Wales has a statutory duty to ensure that equality of opportunity is embedded in its work. The Assembly Government is committed to promoting equality of opportunity in all aspects of Welsh life including race, language, religion, disability, age, gender and sexual orientation. The Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000 came into effect in April 2001. As a result of this there is a general duty to ensure that in carrying out its functions the Assembly shall have due regard to the need to eliminate unlawful racial discrimination, promote equality of opportunity, and promote good relations between persons of different racial groups.

Gypsies & Irish Travellers are recognised by the courts as two distinct ethnic groups and as such are protected by the Race Relations Act (and its subsequent amendments). In recognition of this, the Welsh Assembly Government has included specific references to these groups where relevant in departmental race equality action plans.

It is the responsibility of individual departments within the Assembly Government to consider what they are doing in line with sustainable development when implementing the recommendations from the Review of Service Provision for Gypsies & Travellers in Wales.

## **Financial Implications**

There are no additional financial implications associated with this paper.

Contact point: Neil Cane, Strategic Equality and Diversity Unit.

Jane Hutt AM

Minister for Assembly Business, Equalities & Children