

EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES COMMITTEE

Date	Wednesday, 31st October 2001
Time:	9.30am
Venue	Committee room 3, National Assembly Building

GYPSY-TRAVELLER POLICY IN WALES: ISSUES PAPER FOR THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY'S EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES COMMITTEE**Purpose**

1. This paper provides an overview of the National Assembly's policies towards Gypsy-Travellers.

Recommendations

2. That the Equal Opportunities Committee:
 - Reviews the National Assembly's policies in relation to Gypsy-Travellers, taking evidence from relevant bodies and individuals and, where necessary, commissioning relevant research;
 - Considers examples of good practice developed in other jurisdictions for their relevance to Wales; and
 - Makes appropriate recommendations to the Assembly's Executive.

Background

3. The National Assembly's policy towards Gypsy-Travellers dates from the days of the former Welsh Office. Policy has developed independently across the different service areas but there has not to date been a co-ordinated approach. In addition, policy in relation to Gypsy-Travellers has not evolved significantly and little attention has been given to evaluating the good practices developed in other areas for their relevance to Wales.

4. The attached paper outlines the National Assembly's current policies towards Gypsy-Travellers, focusing in particular on education, health, the provision of accommodation and policing. It highlights a number of issues in relation to these service areas and draws comparisons with practices elsewhere, particularly in England.

5. The paper proposes that there should be a more integrated approach to Gypsy-Traveller policy across the National Assembly. It asks the Committee to consider whether there is a need for:

- A distinctive approach to Gypsy-Travellers, or whether their needs would be more appropriately catered for by the Assembly's policies towards disadvantaged groups;
- Statistics on the number of Gypsy-Travellers in Wales to facilitate service planning, and how these could be collected;
- Different approaches to meet the education, training and health needs of Gypsy-Travellers and to provide support to Gypsy – Traveller businesses;
- The National Assembly to make available resources to upgrade Gypsy-Travellers' sites in Wales and to increase the provision of accommodation for them;
- A review of whether support for Gypsy-Travellers should be provided to local authorities and other bodies in the form of specific grants to ensure that the money is targeted on Gypsy-Travellers' specific needs and not used for other purposes.

6. The report recommends that the Committee reviews the Assembly's policies in relation to Gypsy-Travellers and takes evidence from relevant bodies and individuals and where necessary commissions research. A list of individuals and organisations that the Committee might consider approaching is at Annex 1 of the report.

Financial Implications

7. It is difficult to estimate the costs to the Committee of undertaking a review of Gypsy-Traveller policy in Wales. The costs of a review would vary depending upon how the review was undertaken. Assuming the Committee agrees to hear oral evidence in 4 or 5 separate locations throughout Wales and undertakes visits to Ireland and Scotland, the costs directly incurred could in the order of £50,000. This would cover the payment of travelling expenses to those attending Committee hearings, the costs of travel and subsistence for Committee members, the hiring of accommodation to hear oral evidence, the provision of translation facilities, the commissioning of relevant research, the appointment of an expert adviser, and the publication of the draft and final reports of the investigation.

Legislation

8. The proposed review into Gypsy-Travellers would be undertaken under Section 33 of the Government of Wales Act 1998 which enables the National Assembly to consider and make appropriate representations about any matter affecting Wales.

9. The National Assembly has responsibility for most of the service areas such as education, health, housing and planning and the provision of Gypsy-Travellers' sites, which will be the subject of this review. It does not have oversight of policing in Wales, which is the responsibility of the Home Office, although the Good Practice Guide on Unauthorised Camping, encourages joint working between the police and local authorities in resolving problems arising from unauthorised encampments.

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