

Senedd Local Government and Housing Committee

Follow up on Inquiry into the provision of sites for Gypsies and Travellers October 3 2024

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- 1) As of late 2023, the new Head of Race, Faith, Belief and Gypsy, Roma and Traveller Policy has been in place and a small team was recruited and started in early 2024 working on 'Gypsy, Roma, Traveller' policy issues
This is very welcome and has begun to fill the longstanding gap in capacity which has meant so little progress was previously being made.
They have a huge task, and it will take time for the team to fully develop their knowledge and understanding of the various issues, there has clearly been a gap in continuity and in the organizational memory and the new team will still require time to get up to speed.
- 2) There is now a Capital Sites Grants Officer to liaise with and support local authorities in the development of bids to the capital sites grant, updated grant guidance this year includes positive changes such as the potential to utilize the grant to purchase land in some circumstances, and more emphasis on ensuring that the grants applied for have the support and participation of community members or residents, and that the beneficiaries of these grants are also asked for their views on the works the grant has funded as part of WG monitoring/ managing sign off of the grant spend
We know some grants have been signed off this year, which is really positive, but are also aware of those who will not meet the two funding window this year or who have a significant amount of work to do before they are ready to put in a bid under the grant.
- 3) We know that WG Officers are being as flexible as they can to work with local authorities but there is a huge backlog of unmet need as well as urgent need for refurbishment, repairs and upgrading sites so they are affordable, sustainable, healthy and quality places for families to live, all of which may fall under this grant but will take years to complete. Some of the upgrades necessary e.g. to old sites where residents do not have access to their own utility supplies (and therefore cannot choose their supplier and access fuel poverty support) have huge cost implications over and above what the capital sites grant has in its budget.
We know that urgent refurbishment and repairs needed presented by community members to the original committee inquiry have yet to be addressed in the main
- 4) Additional fuel poverty support in the form of a winter fuel support grant for local authorities to distribute, and a dedicated fund to the Fuel Bank Foundation are welcome, but are short term 'sticking plaster' measures which do not address the longstanding high living costs, systemic poor quality and inequalities disproportionately experienced by tenants on Gypsy and Travellers sites – what is needed is an overall plan and programme of improvements, costed, for all of the accommodation across Wales.
- 5) Whilst there has been some progress on specific actions it is not clear to us externally if the WG has yet set out 'HOW' it intends to support (and monitor) local authorities; there remains no stakeholder group or specific group for local authorities and whilst the ARWAP

is a key driver with some specific actions, there is now no over-arching strategy (such as the Enabling Gypsy, Roma, Traveller Plan for example) which brings together the various elements that are reflected in the Inquiry recommendations.

- 6) The majority of the actions in the ARWAP have yet to be progressed. No guidance has yet been updated with the exception of the capital sites grant guidance mentioned earlier; officials are undertaking a refresh of the ARWAP and held a meeting with various ‘stakeholders’ in the summer to consult on this but the new iteration, with further detail, new timescales and resources has not yet been made public as far as we are aware. Many of those actions require the collaboration or a lead from other departments/divisions in the Welsh Government.
- 7) The commissioning of a new advocacy and advice service is one of the ARWAP actions which have now been completed. Whilst at Travelling Ahead we are delighted to have secured ongoing funding for a more sustainable period of time (to 2027/8) and to be able to continue our work alongside Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities across Wales you will note from the Ministers letter to the Committee that the objectives are wide-ranging and ambitious. The funding still only supports a small number of staff to work across all of Wales, with multiple communities, and it’s crucial that resources and progress in all the other actions in the ARWAP are urgently progressed as an advocacy service cannot do this alone without wider systemic changes being made by those with the responsibility (and resources) to do so
- 8) Commissioning of a specialist trusted planning advocacy service;
Whilst at Travelling Ahead we are able to offer some support and advocacy through the various stages of the planning process in Wales, and have done so over the last few years with some significant outcomes - helping secure long term residential provision after years of uncertainty for some families – we have limited capacity to both provide this individual support for all those who might need it, or to make the more systemic changes; planning policy, training and working with 22 local authorities to promote new approaches ; our work to date only evidences the need for this additional planning advocacy service to be in place as soon as possible
- 9) **Strengthening monitoring of the legal duty under the Housing Act**
 - The Committee will be aware that the Public Ombudsman issued a Public Interest report in 2024 finding that Welsh Government had failed in its duties to properly monitor local authorities across Wales in the (timely) provision of suitable sites. This is the first time that a public interest report had been published about the actions/inactions of the Welsh Government. The complaint was brought by two families who had an assessed need for site provision since the 2016 GTAA’s were undertaken and where no progress had been made - the Ombudsman found that they had suffered as a result of the failure which had impacted significantly on the families.
[Welsh Government fails to ensure local authorities are providing sufficient accommodation for Gypsies and Travellers - Public Services Ombudsman for Wales](#)

- The GTAA guidance is due to be updated – which is welcome – however the failure of the last two rounds of GTAA's to ensure adequate progress was being made speaks to the need for a wider range of monitoring tools
We understand that the 2021 GTAA's have now been signed off– in some cases 3-4 years after they were carried out so are already out of date, it would be useful to see an overview of need that was met in this period and where local authorities have failed to make progress and a broad assessment of unmet need for Wales a whole.
- However as the next round of GTAA's in the five yearly scheme will restart 24/25 – community confidence in the effectiveness of these assessments remains at rock bottom; there is a need to ensure that the assessments are carried out with community members in a meaningful way, and avoiding over use of private consultancies who are not community based.

Community members need to know that failure to adhere to the legislation carries some kind of consequence for local authorities, currently many Gypsy and Traveller families have had to try and use the various methods of administrative complaints open to them to get any kind of redress – they need to see that the legal duties are being implemented and making a practical difference to their everyday lives through the provision of decent, culturally appropriate accommodation

10) Transit provision

- Most of the GTAA's that we are aware of, now signed off, did not find a need for transit provision, many spoke about using the 'negotiated stopping' model as an alternative but without, to date, providing much leadership or commitment to making this a reality – we understand the Minister has made clear in her meetings with LAs that transit provision MUST be developed and provided; and has met with local authorities at the beginning of the year regarding regional approaches and getting better data and understanding on the need for transit provision
- It is not clear to us externally what the plans and timescales, and membership of these regional groups are; and there is an urgent need for community members to be included in these discussions at all stages; and for anti-racist and human rights-based training for those responsible for developing transit provision – and those developing protocols to provide a rights-based approach to managing encampments and supporting the nomadic way of life. Dialogue with nomadic communities is essential to ensure these policies and processes are actually meeting the needs of families and communities for whom travelling remains an intrinsic part of everyday life.
- Some local authorities are keen to be developing more local provision including stopping places through a negotiated model as well as transit provision – many have reached out to us at Travelling Ahead for advice/guidance/training on these issues as this is not currently available elsewhere – it's clear that a range of provision is what is needed rather than a focus on formal transit provision only

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