



### **Senedd Local Government and Housing Committee**

#### **Follow up on Inquiry into the provision of sites for Gypsies and Travellers October 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2024 Written evidence: Allison Hulmes (Welsh Gypsy) – Romani & Traveller Social Work Association**

1. It is progress to have the policy lead for Race, Faith, Belief and Gypsy, Roma and Traveller Policy in place. This role encompasses a wide range of key areas, and the new lead will need to ensure that focus on the needs of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller people and communities, is not diminished or diluted in such a wide portfolio. This new team has much work to do to establish, trust, deep knowledge of the priorities and in how to properly listen and hear the wide range of Gypsy, Traveller and Roma voices in Wales, as continuity of staffing in this key priority area has been absent.
2. We are pleased to see the role of Capital Sites Grants Officer to support local authorities in bid applications to the capital sites grant, along with revised grant guidance which includes the right to use the grant to buy land with greater scrutiny of the use of the grant, by community member beneficiaries. There remains however, the issue of community applicants missing the available funding windows this year due to the amount of work needed to be able to make a bid under the grant.

3. The significant issue of urgent repairs and refurbishment so eloquently presented by community members to the inquiry in 2022, have yet to be satisfactorily addressed. It is not acceptable and, in our view, inconsistent with human rights and the ambitions of an anti-racist Wales by 2023 that families, including children, elders and those with a disability, continue to live in unsuitable and unhealthy accommodation/sites. Whilst some of the work to repair refurbish accommodation/sites may fall under the grant, the timescales to achieve these is inconsistent with the needs/human rights of community members living under these conditions.
4. Whilst some useful initiatives to alleviate some of the disproportionate levels of fuel poverty experienced by community members living on Gypsy and Traveller sites, these are short term measures. A clear and fully costed plan is needed to direct a programme of improvements for all the accommodation across Wales.
5. How the Welsh Government will scrutinize and hold accountable local authorities for implementing the recommendations of the 2022 Senedd Inquiry, is yet to be revealed. Most actions within the Anti Racist Wales Action Plan (ARWAP) which the Welsh Government regards as the key driver for achieving the recommendations, have not been progressed.
6. A refresh of the ARWAP is being undertaken and officials held a meeting with various 'stakeholders' during the summer. These 'stakeholder' consultations seem to have taken place without a transparent process to ensure that the 'stakeholders' are the right ones. How will the Welsh Government ensure that the new iteration is authentically informed and driven by Gypsy and Traveller voices and when will details about changes, timescales and resource allocation be made public?
7. It is a relief to see that a new advocacy and advice service has at last been commissioned. We are concerned however, that the wide-ranging ambitions the Minister has detailed in her recent letter, seems to be vested in one organization and is not supported by equally ambitious funding to enable this work. The Welsh Government must address the funding gap, and the range of organisations needed to progress the other actions in the ARWAP.

8. The Public Ombudsman, in its Public Interest report in 2024 found that Welsh Government has failed in its duties to properly monitor local authorities across Wales in the (timely) provision of suitable sites. This is the first time that such a report had been published about the failures of the Welsh Government. How does the Welsh Government intend to ensure that robust accountability measures (including enforcement/penalties) are in place to prevent local authorities from breaching statutory duties under Part 3 of the Housing (Wales) Act 2014? [Welsh Government fails to ensure local authorities are providing sufficient accommodation for Gypsies and Travellers - Public Services Ombudsman for Wales](#)
9. There has been huge delay in the signing off, of the 2021 Gypsy, Traveller Accommodation Assessments (GTAA's) and questions must be raised about their continued accuracy. There must be mechanisms to prevent such delays, and a review the suitability of those commissioned to undertake the GTAA's to ensure they are meaningful and fit for purpose.
10. There has been no progress to date on the provision of transit sites meaning that families are still at risk of being criminalised under the Part 4 of the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act 2022. A range of provision is clearly needed which could include 'negotiated' stopping places. This must be actioned by Welsh Government as a matter of urgency.
11. Welsh government needs to ensure that statutory guidance on managing unauthorized encampments in Wales, is welfare oriented and rights based. The Romany and Traveller Social Work Association has developed such guidance.

Allison Hulmes

26/09/2024