

Local Government and Housing Committee Inquiry: Provision of sites for Gypsy, Roma and Travellers

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Naomi Alleyne - Deputy Chief Executive & Corporate Director Policy

Welsh Local Government Association - The Voice of Welsh Councils

The Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA) is a politically led cross party organisation that seeks to give local government a strong voice at a national level.

We represent the interests of local government and promote local democracy in Wales.

The 22 councils in Wales are our members and the 3 fire and rescue authorities and 3 national park authorities are associate members.

We believe that the ideas that change people's lives, happen locally.

Communities are at their best when they feel connected to their council through local democracy. By championing, facilitating, and achieving these connections, we can build a vibrant local democracy that allows communities to thrive.

Our ultimate goal is to promote, protect, support and develop democratic local government and the interests of councils in Wales.

We'll achieve our vision by:

- Promoting the role and prominence of councillors and council leaders
- Ensuring maximum local discretion in legislation or statutory guidance
- Championing and securing long-term and sustainable funding for councils
- Promoting sector-led improvement
- Encouraging a vibrant local democracy, promoting greater diversity
- Supporting councils to effectively manage their workforce



This paper responds to the request for views on progress made in implementing the recommendations from the Local Government and Housing Committee's report into the Provision of sites for Roma, Gypsy and Travellers published in August 2022.

While the majority of recommendations in the report are directed towards the Welsh Government there are wider implications for the public sector, especially Councils.

The recommendations from the Committee's report are grouped by theme below and are followed by the WLGA's understanding of progress made on implementation.

- 1. The Welsh Government should set out how it intends to support local authorities in the provision of sites that are appropriate for the Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities, including how it will work with local authorities and communities to mitigate the challenges of finding suitable land for Gypsy, Roma and Traveller site accommodation.**
- 2. The Welsh Government should set out how it intends to support Corporate Joint Committees and individual local authorities to develop a network of transitory provision, and how it will monitor and ensure progress.**

WLGA welcomes the recent increase in staffing capacity that Welsh Government have established in this policy area. This has allowed Welsh Government to respond to the most recent cycle of GTAA submissions from each local authority, and is supporting the establishment of a regular cycle of meetings with each authority aimed at monitoring progress, building effective relationships, and collaboratively identifying and overcoming barriers to meeting accommodation needs and improving the standard of current provision, etc.

However, the establishment of additional capacity within Welsh Government is not reflected in the position within many Councils, where finance, resource and capacity constraints across a number of service areas are likely to be one of the barriers to delivery at pace which will need to be addressed.

At a recent meeting with WLGA officers Welsh Government colleagues confirmed the intention to commission additional research to make recommendations in relation to transit provision. Officials confirmed that current GTAAs from individual Councils do not provide a sufficient evidence base to support recommendations for the establishment of an effective network of transit sites provision.

- 3. The Welsh Government should provide an update on arrangements for an independent and trusted advice service for the Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities, including funding, resource and skills requirement.**



Our understanding is that Welsh Government have commenced the re-procurement of this service for a further 3 years.

- 4. The Welsh Government should work with local authorities to ensure that they have the necessary resources to fulfil their duties under the Housing Act.**
- 5. The Welsh Government must ensure that the Housing Act is effective in providing suitable sites for Gypsies, Roma and Travellers. It should therefore set out how it intends to tighten its monitoring of the implementation of the Act.**
- 6. The Welsh Government should provide further information about how and when it will use its powers to ensure that local authorities deliver on their duties under the Housing Act.**

The challenges around staffing and resources across a range of local authority functions (including Housing, Planning, Legal Services and others) are likely to be a focus of the regular cycle of meetings being established between individual Councils and Welsh Government colleagues. A collaborative approach to identifying, understanding and overcoming any barriers to meeting the duties on local authorities set out in the Housing Act (Wales) 2014 is likely to be most effective.

- 7. The Welsh Government should set out its plans, including timescales, for evaluating the effectiveness of the Anti-racist Wales Action Plan in helping to provide sites for Gypsies, Roma and Travellers.**
- 8. The Welsh Government should provide an update on the timescales for the actions in the Anti-racist Wales Action Plan which are already underway.**

As part of the updated arrangements around ARWAP implementation, a number of specific actions related to Gypsy, Roma and Traveller accommodation provision will now be included within the range of actions being monitored by the Welsh Government's Housing & Regeneration ARWAP Stakeholder Group. Bringing this range of related and complementary actions together is a positive development, from WLGA's perspective.

- 9. In reviewing the sites guidance, the Welsh Government should explain how it intends to engage with the Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities to ensure that design and location needs of communities are better reflected in the guidance.**
- 10. The Welsh Government should conduct a review of all guidance relating to the provision of sites for Gypsy, Roma and Travellers.**



The work that has already been undertaken by Welsh Government colleagues to review, update and clarify some aspects of the capital grant funding guidance has already had the positive effect of supporting a significant increase in the number of applications from Councils during the current financial year. We would anticipate that this increased level of applications can be further supported by the establishment of the regular cycle of meetings between Councils and Welsh Government officials.

- 11. The Welsh Government should provide further details on the learning and development support that will be provided to local authority elected members on Gypsy and Traveller communities' culture, needs and strengths. This should include details on: who will receive the training; timescales; how it will be resourced and delivered; and whether it will be a statutory requirement to undertake the training.**
- 12. The Welsh Government should set out how it intends to evaluate the impact of the training for local authority elected members on Gypsy and Traveller communities' culture, needs and strengths.**
- 13. The Welsh Government should include community councillors in the commitment in the Anti-racist Wales Action Plan to provide training for local authority elected members on Gypsy and Traveller communities' culture, needs and strengths.**

WLGA are not aware of this specific training yet being delivered for local authority elected members, but would be keen to work with Welsh Government to ensure that effective and appropriate arrangements can be put in place. The regular meeting between the Cabinet Secretary and the WLGA network of Cabinet Members with responsibility for Equalities can provide an opportunity for further discussion to progress these actions.

During the 23/24 financial year the WLGA was able to make a proactive offer, via the Improvement Grant, to offer councils/councillors specific sessions on anti-racism. This was informed by the publication of the plan and was delivered by third sector training provider, NoBoundaries. The sessions focused on the broad principles of anti-racism, and the role of elected members in championing anti-racism. While these principles are relevant to GRT communities, the training did not explicitly focus on any one community.

Overall 24 sessions were delivered across 16 councils, with a further 3 sessions being aimed at all Cabinet Leads (via Equality Cabinet network), and all LA Equality Officers.

Following budget pressures within the grant in 24/25, the WLGA has not been able to sustain this offer, and would therefore welcome greater Welsh Government support for elected members in this area.



- 14. The Welsh Government should set out what steps, other than those in the Anti-racist Action Plan, it will take to improve knowledge and understanding of the culture, needs and strengths of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities among the wider community.**
- 15. The Welsh Government should review whether the existing Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Assessments process is the most appropriate and effective way of assessing the accommodation needs of Gypsies, Roma and Travellers.**
- 16. The Welsh Government should work with local authorities to review how engagement and consultation with the Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities during the accommodation assessment process can be improved, including the extent to which the measures and actions within the Anti-racist Action Plan have made a difference.**

The regular cycle of meetings between officers from each Council and Welsh Government officials will give positive opportunities for improvements to future processes and arrangements for GTAAs to be explored, including any opportunities for better engagement and consultation with Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities.

- 17. The Welsh Government should clarify what process is in place to monitor the Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Assessments on an all-Wales basis in order to gain an understanding of accommodation needs at a national as well as a local level.**

As reflected previously, it is our understanding that Welsh Government has concluded that the existing individual GTAAs do not provide a sufficient evidence base, and are in the process of procuring further research.

- 18. The Welsh Government should conduct a broader review of how the funding for the development of sites relates to the requirements in terms of the standards of sites.**
- 19. The Welsh Government should explore all possible options for funding Gypsy, Roma and Traveller accommodation, including whether the criteria for the Capital Sites Grant should be broadened to allow local authorities to purchase land for the development of new sites and how funding could be used to support the development of private sites.**

Welsh Government have already reviewed and implemented some changes, including greater flexibility, in the guidance for capital grant funding. However, WLGA



would be happy to work with Welsh Government in any further reviews of funding, guidance, etc.

20. The Welsh Government should provide an update on the work undertaken to provide transit pitches across Wales before the Senedd's summer recess in 2023.

21. The Welsh Government should set out how it intends to work with the police and partner organisations to communicate to the Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities any anticipated changes to plans for enforcing the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act 2022 in Wales.

WLGA are aware of the development of protocols related to unauthorised encampments, and are working with partners in the discussion and development of these protocols before further engagement with individual Councils and other partners.

Cleared by: Cllr Andrea Lewis, Housing Spokesperson

Authors: Jim McKirdle, Policy Officer (Housing)
Joseph Lewis, Policy Officer