

HB 32

National Assembly for Wales

Communities, Equality and Local Government Committee

Housing (Wales) Bill: Stage 1

Response from: The Unity Project

The Unity Project
Monkton CP School
Monkton
Pembroke
Pembrokeshire

14th January 2014

Committee Clerk

Communities, Equality & Local Government Committee

National Assembly for Wales

Cardiff Bay

CF99 1NA

Dear Committee Clerk

Re: Consultation on Housing (Wales) Bill

The Unity Project is a lottery funded project set up to work with Gypsy & Travellers in Carmarthenshire, Ceredigion and Pembrokeshire. We work with Gypsy & Traveller communities members to provide advocacy, health and community development support. Please find below our response to your letter dated 28th November 2014 re: Consultation on Housing (Wales) Bill.

1. **General Principles:** The Unity project is in support of the general principles of the Bill and is specifically in support of the proposal to introduce a statutory duty on local authorities to provide Gypsy & Traveller sites where an identified need has been established. We believe that the biggest barrier faced by the Gypsy & Traveller community in Wales is a lack of culturally appropriate accommodation and without such it is very difficult to tackle other issues that the community have. We feel that the Bill will go some way towards addressing the lack of accommodation but we feel that more work needs to be done around raising awareness amongst Assembly Members, county councillors, local authority officers and the general public as to why Gypsy & Traveller sites are needed. We agree with the Welsh Government that the duty will assist in improving the standard of accommodation, enable better access to services, tackling inequality, lead to a reduction in illegal sites and unauthorised encampments, help reduce homelessness, improve community cohesion and see a reduction in hate crime incidence. We are

pleased to see that Bill references and seeks to link in with the "*Travelling to a Better Future*" framework document.

However we do feel that the Bill needs to pay more regard to the desires and aspirations of the Gypsy & Traveller community to build and develop private sites, particularly small scale family sites. We feel that the current planning system, in particular Local Development Plans, do not allow for sufficient private site provision. We would like to see the Bill reflect the fact that some Gypsy & Travellers buy and develop their own private sites and that at present obtaining planning permission for these sites is very difficult for a multitude of reasons including pressure from local resident groups.

2. **Potential Barriers:** We believe that the potential barriers to this Bill, specifically on the duty to provide Gypsy & Traveller sites will be in a lack of understanding around why sites need to be provided. The general public has limited knowledge of the issues that the Gypsy & Traveller community face and the media both printed and on TV generally highlight myths and miss-information about the Gypsy & Traveller community and very rarely publish articles on anything but negative stereotypes. This could lead to pressure being put on ministers to change this duty within the Bill. Therefore we would like to see the Assembly take a lead on promoting positive stories about Gypsy & Travellers and we would also like the Assembly to make sure that all AM's are aware of why this duty is needed. We would also like to see the WLGA do similar awareness raising amongst the 22 local authorities.
3. **Unintended Consequences:** Specifically looking at the duty to provide Gypsy & Traveller sites we believe that this duty is long overdue and we can see no unintended consequences to this section of the Bill being enacted.
4. **Financial Implications:** We feel that the Bill, in particular the duty to provide Gypsy & Traveller sites will have significant financial implications for local authorities and we expect the Welsh Government to have a proper plan in place for the funding of Gypsy & Traveller sites. We would also like to again state the importance of private site provision as this would not carry any significant public funding implications as the sites are built, developed and paid for by private individuals. We would like to see provision within local planning authorities to help those individuals wishing to build a private Gypsy & Traveller site purchase suitable pieces of land. We would also like the Welsh Government to explore the use of housing associations providing socially rented Gypsy & Traveller sites as well.
5. **Appropriateness of Powers:** As far we understand the current legislative powers of the National Assembly for Wales, we believe this Bill falls within the devolved powers of the Assembly.

Yours Sincerely

Bryn Hall
Community Engagement Worker
Unity Project