

Travelling Ahead: All Wales Advice and Advocacy Service for Gypsies, Roma and Travellers

Response to Welsh Government Planning Circular - Planning for Gypsy, Traveller and Show people Sites 2017

Travelling Ahead is a project hosted by Tros Gynnal Plant working across Wales with Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities. Previously based with Save the Children from 2009 Travelling Ahead worked with young people supporting their rights and participation and as of March 2017 is now developing the new Welsh Government funded All Wales Advice and Advocacy Service for Gypsies, Roma and Travellers – for more details please see here www.travellingahead.org.uk/rights-advice/wales-advice-advocacy-service

We very much welcome this draft circular which brings together the most recent legislation, policy and good practice in a clear and well set out way - we offer a number of general comments about the proposed new circular.

Definition of Gypsies and Travellers

We are pleased to see that the new definition is in line with that under the Housing Act (Wales) 2014 and welcome its broad reach.

Consultation and engagement with Gypsies and Travellers

We welcome the expectation that local authorities will discuss accommodation needs directly with community members (and representative groups) and aware that the GTAA process under the Housing Act has laid some stronger foundations and practices in local authorities to do this going forward. However there are still in our experience, a number of local authorities who remain ill-equipped and sometimes reluctant to carry out meaningful consultations with Gypsies and Travellers particularly in the context of wider consultations such as in the development of Local Development Plans, I'm not aware of any local authority who has 'pro-actively' set out to do this in recent times. We therefore strongly support this being an explicit expectation in the new Circular and the links in the appendix to organisations who may be able to help facilitate this process.

Unauthorised encampments

We welcome the inclusion of the need to both monitor and respond to any unauthorised encampments and how this will inform the need for more permanent provision (transit or other) – we note though from the experience of families with whom we work that the practice of providing for temporary stopping places through managing unauthorised encampments with the provision of 'waste disposal, water supply and sanitation as a minimum' remains

extremely patchy. If the Circular can more strongly emphasise local authorities duties under the Managing Unauthorised Encampment Guidance we would welcome this.

Advice and assistance from local authorities on planning issues

We note that in point 61 'To encourage private site provision, local planning authorities should offer advice and practical help with planning procedures to Gypsies and Travellers who wish to acquire their own land for development. Gypsies and Travellers should always consult local planning authorities on planning matters before buying land on which they intend to establish any caravan site, for which planning permission will almost always be required....'

We think this should be strengthened and resourced – in our experience local authority planning departments' 'advice and assistance' generally is no more than would be given to any other planning applicant e.g. advice on which form to be filled in and what the criteria is. As Welsh Government are aware many Gypsies and Travellers, especially older people, may not have good literacy skills and may not have the resources to access skilled planning consultants at an early enough stage to assist in their application. Its one thing to say that Gypsy and Traveller people must consult local planning authorities prior to purchasing land but I am not aware that any of the Welsh local authorities have pro-actively offered information e.g. open days, outreach work to build up trust and relationships and ensure that Gypsy and Traveller communities are fully aware of planning requirements or the assistance to which they 'should' be entitled. This is an example of where the Circular is to be commended for including this but unless its resourced though targeted information campaigns/outreach and accompanying training for Council Officers (and Members who are of course often under pressure from other constituents to oppose any such developments not encourage them!) it is unlikely to happen.

Equality and Human Rights

Again we really welcome the focus on the duties of local authorities that are outlined in Points 74 and 75 under the Equality Act but also feel strongly that often there is little evidence that those involved in the planning process have a confident working knowledge of how to implement these duties in any meaningful and constructive way – this is on the most part due to lack of awareness and training which is really essential if local authorities are to meet their responsibilities under the Act. This training should in particular be delivered to Members some of whose comments regularly evidence their lack of understanding. We therefore would welcome a training programme which accompanies the Circular when it is published.

Annexes

Annex A provides a useful list of organisations and we are pleased to see the Travelling Ahead project included – however please note that our contact details have now changed and are as follows:

Tros Gyngnal Plant helped 3,477 children & young people, 939 families & 1,012 parents & carers last year. Y llynedd helpodd Tros Gyngnal Plant 3,477 o blant a phobl ifanc, 939 o deuluoedd a 1,012 o rieni a gofawyr. Head Office: 12 Ffordd y Gogledd /12 North Road • Caerdydd/Cardiff • CF10 3DY

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travellingahead@trosgynnalplant.org.uk

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Please also note that unfortunately the Unity Project is no longer in existence and that you might also want to add in the Gwent Gypsy and Traveller Advice Service:

‘Help with finding a home, settling in a home, benefits, debt, bills, looking for a job, and education.

Client group: Gypsies and Travellers Area served: Newport, Torfaen, Blaenau Gwent.

Main contact: Bex Preston 07773 250 015 / 01633 833 540

gtrferrals@gwalia.com’

For further information from Travelling Ahead please contact:

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