

Written Response by the Welsh Government to the report of the Local Government and Housing Committee Report on Provision of Sites for Gypsy, Roma and Travellers

I would like to thank the members of the Local Government and Housing Committee for their report on the provision of sites for Gypsy Roma and Travellers in Wales. I am particularly pleased to see the Committee's recommendations are in line with our current and future plans. I have set out my response to the Report's individual recommendations below.

Detailed Responses to the report's recommendations are set out below:

Recommendation 1

The Committee recommends that:

"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."

Response: Accept

The recommendation reflects the policy intention set out in the Anti-Racist Wales Action Plan Homes and Places Goal 5 (Gypsy and Traveller accommodation): *"To recognise that safe, culturally appropriate accommodation is necessary in order for individuals to flourish in other parts of their lives and to address the lack of site provision and poor quality of Gypsy and Traveller accommodation in Wales"* and the actions under this goal.

The actions under this goal include work on funding, transit sites, updates to guidance and training for local authorities.

Financial Implications – None.

Recommendation 2

The Committee recommends that:

"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."

Response: Accept

The certification of a national network of transit provision to facilitate travelling life, with consideration for negotiated stopping, as appropriate, is one of the specific actions not being taken forward under the Anti-Racist Wales Action Plan.

Financial Implications – None.

Recommendation 3

The Committee recommends that:

“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.”

Response: Accept

Developing this service is specific action in the Anti-Racist Wales Action Plan under the following Goal: *“To ensure we engage with Black Asian Ethnic Minority communities and our services are delivered in a culturally competent and appropriate way.”*

In line with the specific action in the Action Plan, we intend to procure a service reflecting these requirements. This will be progressed over the next three months.

Financial Implications – There is an existing contract in place and the ongoing costs can be met from existing budgets within the Equality, Inclusion and Human Rights BEL.

Recommendation 4

The Committee recommends that:

“The Welsh Government should work with local authorities to ensure that they have the necessary resources to fulfil their duties under the Housing (Wales) Act 2014.”

Response - Accept

The Welsh Government continues to work very closely with Local Authorities to support them in fulfilling their duties.

Financial Implications – None.

Recommendation 5

The Committee recommends that:

“The Welsh Government must ensure that the Housing (Wales) Act 2014 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.”

Response: Accept

The Gypsy Traveller Accommodation Assessment (“GTAA”) process provides a key mechanism for ensuring the Housing Act is being implemented in a such a way to generate suitable sites.

We will consider how monitoring could be further strengthened following the completion of the current GTAA process taking the opportunity to reflect on the learning from this latest round of assessments.

Financial Implications – Additional monitoring may result in additional staff time but that costs can be met from existing budgets within the Equality, Inclusion and Human Rights BEL

Recommendation 6

The Committee recommends that:

“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 (Wales) Act 2014.”

Response: Accept

The intention is to work co-operatively with Local Authorities in relation to their GTAAs and to support the development of robust plans that meet the needs of Gypsy, Roma and Travellers.

As part of the Welsh Minister’s role in considering the current GTAAs, we will reflect on whether further action is required, this will include consideration of the use of powers of Direction, where relevant, and in line with the approach set out in the legislation and associated guidance.

Financial Implications – None.

Recommendation 7

The Committee recommends that:

“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.”

Response: Accept

Welsh Government intends to publish an annual update on progress in implementing the Anti-Racist Wales Action Plan. We are also developing the Strategic Progress Measurement Framework to provide transparent measurement of progress on the goals and towards the vision set out in the Action Plan.

Financial Implications – None.

Recommendation 8

The Committee recommends that:

“The Welsh Government should provide an update on the timescales for the actions in the Anti-racist Wales Action Plan which are already underway.”

Response: Accept

The Welsh Government continues to work towards the timescales set out in the Anti-Racist Wales Action Plan. An update on progress which be presented to the Anti-Racist Action Plan Accountability Group at its first meeting in the Autumn term and we will ensure that progress on actions relevant to its remit is shared with the Committee.

Financial Implications – None.

Recommendation 9

The Committee recommends that:

“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.”

Response: Accept

The Anti-Racist Wales Action Plan values are - openness and transparency, putting people's lived experiences at the heart of the work we do, and adopting a rights-based approach. In line with these values the involvement

of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller people shaping any relevant policy or guidance will be central to their development.

Financial Implications – None.

Recommendation 10

The Committee recommends that:

“The Welsh Government should conduct a review of all guidance relating to the provision of sites for Gypsy, Roma and Travellers.”

Response: Accept

The Anti-Racist Wales Action Plan already contains actions to review key guidance including the sites guidance.

Financial Implications – The costs are associated with staff time and will form part of the forward work programme of the relevant team..

Recommendation 11

The Committee recommends that:

“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.”

Response: Accept

The Anti-Racist Wales Action Plan contains a specific action to develop this training. The detailed development of the learning and development programme will take place in 2023 and further information will be provided as the scope is defined.

Work is underway across Welsh Government to connect the range of learning and development requirements for different audiences identified in the Action Plan to ensure this work has the maximum impact.

Financial Implications – The costs are associated with staff time and will form part of the forward work programme of the relevant team..

Recommendation 12

The Committee recommends that:

“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.”

Response: Accept

The proposed evaluation approach for the impact of the training will be set out when it is commissioned.

Financial Implications – Provision has been made as part of agreeing the actions in the Anti-Racist Action Plan and will be drawn from the Equality and Human Rights BEL.

Recommendation 13

The Committee recommends that:

“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.”

Response: Accept

The Welsh Government agrees that extending access to training for local authority elected members on Gypsy and Traveller communities’ culture, needs and strengths to Community Councillors would be helpful. We will look to build this into plans for the training and ensure the delivery model can be scaled without adding significantly to costs.

Financial Implications – Provision for training has been made as part of agreeing the actions in the Anti-Racist Action Plan and the budget is provided in the Equality and Human Rights BEL. The costs of expanding eligibility to attend will be managed through a scalable delivery model.

Recommendation 14

The Committee recommends that:

“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.”

Response: Accept

The Anti Racist Wales Action Plan reflects the key next steps in improving knowledge and understanding of the culture, needs and strengths of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities among the wider community.

There are important actions in relation to education as well as housing. We accept that further action will be required but will evaluate the impact of these initial actions, and engage with Gypsy, Roma and Traveller people, to determine, where further action is best targeted during the second half of this Senedd term.

Financial Implications –The costs are associated with staff time and will form part of the forward work programme of the relevant team.

Recommendation 15

The Committee recommends that:

“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.”

Response: Accept

We will review the effectiveness of the GTAA process and possible ways in which it could be strengthened or what other approaches might be feasible following the conclusion of the current GTAA round.

Financial Implications – The costs are associated with staff time and will form part of the forward work programme of the relevant team

Recommendation 16

The Committee recommends that:

“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.”

Response: Accept

Welsh Government is committed, through the Anti-Racist Wales Action Plan, to putting people’s lived experiences at the heart of the work we do and adopting a rights-based approach. In line with these values, we will involve - Gypsy, Roma and Traveller people in any assessment of the GTAA process,

including consideration of how effectively the engagement and consultation process works.

Financial Implications – The costs are associated with staff time and will form part of the forward work programme of the relevant team.

Recommendation 17

The Committee recommends that:

“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.”

Response: Accept

Welsh Government considers all GTAAs in Wales and the provision they represent.

As part of the learning from this current round of GTAAs, we will develop a national picture accommodation needs and provision across Wales.

Financial Implications – The costs are associated with staff time and will form part of the forward work programme of the relevant team.

Recommendation 18

The Committee recommends that:

“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.”

Response: Accept

The Anti-Racist Wales Action Plan includes a specific action to Review the current funding policy for Gypsy and Traveller sites and assess its effectiveness. We will ensure this review considers how funding can support requirements in terms of standards.

Financial Implications – The costs are associated with staff time and will form part of the forward work programme of the relevant team.

Recommendation 19

The Committee recommends that:

“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.”

Response: Accept

As noted in response to the previous recommendation, the Anti-Racist Wales Action Plan includes a specific action to Review the current funding policy for Gypsy and Traveller sites and assess its effectiveness, with a view to piloting additional or new ways of funding site provision, including support for private sites by 2024.

Financial Implications – The costs are associated with staff time and will form part of the forward work programme of the relevant team.

Recommendation 20

The Committee recommends that:

“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.”

Response: Accept

We will provide an update on progress on provision of transit pitches before summer recess 2023 as requested.

Financial Implications – None.

Recommendation 21

The Committee recommends that:

“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.”

Response: Accept

We are committed to working closely with the police on this issue, however, the Committee will be aware that the governance and administration of the police service ultimately remains the responsibility of the UK Home Office.

Like the Committee I welcome the proportionate ‘engagement first’ approach to enforcement taken by the police. I am reassured the police intend to use new powers in the Act as a last resort and a multi-agency response will continue to be adopted to deal with unauthorised encampments.

I meet monthly with the lead Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) for Wales, currently Jeff Cuthbert, PCC for Gwent. At our last meeting in July we agreed to keep this issue as a regular agenda item when we meet.

The police have confirmed they are happy to brief Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities about their approach to enforcing the Act, to provide reassurance and to ensure that understanding is clear. Officials are liaising with the Police Liaison Unit and will engage with organisations that represent the Gypsy, Roma and Traveller community to work out the best way of facilitating this communication.

The voices of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities should be at the heart of these discussions and assist police in understanding and responding to communities’ concerns.

Financial Implications – None.

Jane Hutt MS, Minister for Social Justice