

Jane Hutt AS/MS
Ysgrifennydd y Cabinet dros Ddiwylliant a Chyfiawnder
Cymdeithasol, y Trefnydd a'r Prif Chwip
Cabinet Secretary for Culture and Social Justice, Trefnydd and
Chief Whip



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

Eich cyf/Your ref
Ein cyf/Our ref

John Griffiths MS
Chair, Local Government and Housing Committee
Welsh Parliament
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14th August 2024

Dear John,

Thank you for your letter of 20 October following my appearance at the Local Government and Housing Committee on 5 October. I responded to you in November 2023, addressing your questions concerning housing Ukrainian refugees. You had also asked for an update in relation to the provision of Gypsy Roma and Traveller sites.

Please accept my apologies. Although a response was agreed as a result of the following cabinet changes this was not sent to you. Please accept this response as an update in advance of my appearance before the Local Government and Housing Committee on 3 October 2024.

The Anti-racist Wales Action Plan (ArWAP) commitment to pilot independent trusted advice service to those seeking to develop private sites.

Gypsy Roma and Traveller people continue to be amongst our most vulnerable ethnic minority groups. The Welsh Government funds the Travelling Ahead project at Tros Gynnal Plant (TGP Cymru) to deliver advice and advocacy support to Gypsy Roma and Traveller communities. The Advocacy and Advice contract 2017 - 2024 seeks to have a positive impact on people's lives through supporting community members to ensure accommodation security, access services and benefits, and engage with decision makers and public services.

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Rydym yn croesawu derbyn gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg. Byddwn yn ateb gohebiaeth a dderbynnir yn Gymraeg yn Gymraeg ac ni fydd gohebu yn Gymraeg yn arwain at oedi.

We welcome receiving correspondence in Welsh. Any correspondence received in Welsh will be answered in Welsh and corresponding in Welsh will not lead to a delay in responding.

The objectives of the service are to:

- Facilitate equality of opportunity for Gypsies, Roma and Travellers within Welsh society.
- Provide support and connect with expert advice services to help community members integrate effectively into Welsh society, including advocating changes to public processes where necessary.
- Support community cohesion through challenging negative stereotypes and fostering good relations between groups.
- Empower communities and individuals to have a voice and make representations on their own behalf on policy development and any other issues raised.
- Support the Welsh Government to eliminate discrimination and advance equality of opportunity.

We are keen to ensure continuity of this support and have therefore been procuring the new advocacy contract, for the next 3 years, up to the value of £700,000. The contract will be awarded in August 2024 and a new Advocacy and Advice contract will be operational from September 2024.

The ArWAP has been undergoing a refresh and as part of this officials have been working with Gypsy Roma Traveller stakeholders and community members to discuss the revised actions and plans to deliver them.

For 2024-25, there is a budget of £3.44 million for a Gypsy Traveller Sites Capital Grant, the purpose of which is to support site development. It can be used to fund either residential sites or transit sites, refurbish existing accommodation, construct new pitches and improve the sustainability of sites for residents and – new this year – can be used to purchase land for sites. Guidance for Welsh Government Sites Capital Grant for 2024-25 was issued to local authorities in April. 12 bids have been received to date from local authorities, and a further round of bids is expected. We hope to disburse close to 100% of this grant this year.

Discussion with the Minister for Climate Change to include the bias that local authority planners and planning inspectors have against Gypsy Roma and Traveller applications for private sites.

Gypsy Roma and Traveller people experience enormous difficulties with progressing planning applications for private sites.

Gypsy Traveller Accommodation Assessments (GTAAAs) place a duty on local authorities, under the Housing (Wales) Act 2014 to identify and address need to support their local Gypsy Roma and Traveller communities. Officials have been working with Local authorities and all Cycle 2 GTAAAs have been approved – officials have encouraged local authorities to apply to the Gypsy Traveller Sites Capital Grant for financial support to enable the GTAA implementation, where appropriate to do so.

The advocacy service we support – currently implemented by Travelling Ahead, with future years under procurement - can provide support to Gypsy Roma and Traveller clients in relation to planning applications. Officials can work with Travelling Ahead to explore stalled or complex planning applications and raising them with relevant bits of Welsh Government, although final planning decisions remain with the Local Authority.

One of the actions in the Anti-racist Wales Action Plan is to commission a three-year pilot programme to provide independent, trusted advice to those seeking to develop private sites. Officials will be working with Gypsy Roma Traveller stakeholders and community members to scope out the specifics of this pilot to provide the most effective independent planning

advice. This work will include engaging with the a with the Cabinet Secretary with portfolio responsibility for planning.

Gypsy Traveller Accommodation Assessments (GTAA's)

All outstanding GTAA's have been submitted to Welsh Government for the latest GTAA cycle (2016 - 2022), have been approved and local authorities notified.

As part of the scrutiny process, officials have visited both private and local authority sites to understand the challenges associated with site development and planning decisions. Officials have also rolled out a monitoring programme to meet with each local authority to receive updates on how they are addressing the lack of site provisions in their area and as identified in the GTAA's with the aim to improve families living conditions.

Transit sites

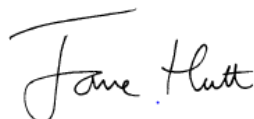
My officials met with all local authorities in January to discuss taking a regional approach to the provision of transit sites and collection of associated data around need to inform decision making. Developing a robust evidence base, in collaboration with relevant regional parties and Gypsy Roma and Traveller people will help to ensure that transit provision is located appropriately and can be accessed by those who need it. Discussions include local authorities, Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA), Corporate Joint Committees (CJCs) and Public Services Boards (PSBs). Most immediately, Local Authorities in South-East Wales are commissioning a study to understand transit need regionally. This will support the evidence base used for each local authority's replacement Local Development Plans and may also be used for the Strategic Development Plan and future GTAA if necessary and appropriate.

Engagement with the Gypsy Roma and Traveller community

I continue to meet regularly with WLGA cabinet equality leads, and intend to continue meeting with advocacy groups including community members with lived experience. My officials are also in the process of setting up a Gypsy Roma Traveller stakeholder group which will include Gypsy Roma Traveller stakeholders and community members and will be instrumental in working with us to deliver the ArWAP actions for Gypsy Roma Traveller communities. Gypsy Roma and Traveller stakeholders are also members of our Wales Race Forum and sit on our ArWAP External Accountability Group. I expect to visit a number of communities in the coming months to hear in situ about their lived experience and see how the works planned under the capital grant will make a difference.

I hope the Committee find this information helpful.

Yours Sincerely



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