

MAYOR OF LONDON

Debby Kennett

Chief Executive
London Gypsies and Travellers

Date: 14 August 2020

Dear Debby,

I am writing regarding the Government's definition of Gypsies and Travellers, outlined in the Planning Policy for Traveller Sites (PPTS).

I believe that London's greatest strength is its diversity, and this includes the Gypsy and Traveller community. Sadly, discrimination and prejudice continue to affect this community in almost every aspect of their lives. Estimates show there are around 30,000 Gypsies and Travellers in London. Their culture and traditions have developed through a nomadic way of life over centuries, and although many Gypsies and Travellers try to maintain this, the lack of pitches on local authority sites often presents a barrier to this. Around 85 per cent of Gypsy and Traveller families in London have been forced to live in housing, or on roadside encampments, due to a lack of available pitches. The lack of access to secure accommodation and suitable living environments has far-reaching implications for their physical and mental health, welfare, education, employment and access to the wider opportunities London has to offer.

As you know, there are concerns amongst those in the Gypsy and Traveller community and others that the existing Government planning definition does not recognise many Gypsies and Travellers, such as those who have ceased to travel permanently due to a lack of available permanent pitches, transit sites or stopping places; those who live in (bricks and mortar) housing due to the lack of sufficient, affordable and good quality caravan site provision or due to their own or their family's or dependants' educational or health needs or old age.

For these groups, it is often very difficult, or impossible to demonstrate that they would have immediate plans to travel for work in the future because there are no viable options or because doing so would have a significant impact on their health, wellbeing and security of income. This often results in Gypsies and Travellers not being recognised or counted in needs assessments, with many needs assessments identifying zero need. This has a direct impact on the accommodation options available to Gypsies and Travellers and their ability to retain their cultural status and identity, which can lead to greater inequalities in terms of access to safe and secure accommodation, health care and education.

For this reason, my Intend to Publish London Plan sought to include a new, wider definition of Gypsies and Travellers within policy H14B as attached at Appendix 1.

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This policy proposal was supported by an evidence base¹² which noted concerns with the narrower PPTS definition. I believe boroughs should be able to use this wider definition to assess accommodation need for this community. However, on 13 March 2020, the Secretary of State used his powers of direction under section 337 of the Greater London Authority Act 1999 to direct me to remove the London Plan definition of a Traveller for planning purposes and revert back to the PPTS definition, stating:

“The policy is inconsistent with national policy set out in the Planning Policy for Traveller Sites (PPTS) (August 2015). The policy gives a wider definition of “gypsies and travellers” compared to that in Annex 1 of the PPTS including those who have permanently settled.”

I believe that the Government should review its PPTS definition and reverse the changes made to remove the wording ‘persons...who have ceased to travel permanently’ in favour of adopting a more inclusive definition which addresses the real needs of this community similar to that as proposed within the Intend to Publish London Plan.

The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the pre-existing, stark housing inequalities faced by many Londoners and given us new resolve to tackle them. The current PPTS definition does not accurately reflect the needs of the Gypsy and Traveller community, and I am concerned that without change it risks further entrenching the multiple, cross cutting inequalities they face. We must ensure that our drive to stamp out systemic racism and inequality extends to all Londoners, regardless of ethnic group or way of life, and I will continue to speak up for the Gypsy and Traveller community until Government acts on their concerns.

Yours sincerely,



Sadiq Khan
Mayor of London

Cc: Chris Johnson, Community Law Partnership

¹ Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Topic Paper 2017, Greater London Authority. Found at: https://www.london.gov.uk/sites/default/files/gla_topic_paper_gypsy_and_traveller_accommodation.pdf

² M21 Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation, Greater London Authority. Found at: https://www.london.gov.uk/sites/default/files/mayor_of_london_-_m21_gypsy_and_traveller_accommodation.pdf

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Appendix 1. Intend to Publish London Plan December 2019 Policy H14-B

As of the start of this Plan period, boroughs should use the following definition of 'Gypsies and Travellers' as a basis for assessing need:

People with a cultural tradition of nomadism, a nomadic habit of life, or living in a caravan, whatever their race or origin, including:

- 1) those who are currently travelling or living in a caravan
- 2) those who currently live in bricks and mortar dwelling households whose existing accommodation is unsuitable for them by virtue of their cultural preference not to live in bricks and mortar accommodation
- 3) those who, on grounds of their own or their family's or dependants' educational or health needs or old age, have ceased to travel temporarily or permanently.