

Brandon Lewis MP  
Minister of State for Housing and Planning  
2 Marsham Street  
London  
SW1P 4DF

Date: 15 December 2015

Dear Minister,

I am writing as Chair of the London Assembly Housing Committee about the likely effect on the provision of Gypsy and Traveller sites in London of proposed changes to legislation in the Housing and Planning Bill (2015-16). This letter reflects the view of a majority of the Committee with the dissent of the GLA Conservatives.<sup>1</sup>

In January 2015 the Committee wrote to the Mayor of London to make a series of recommendations on improving Gypsy and Traveller site provision in London.<sup>2</sup> These recommendations covered five areas:

- accurate London-wide data on the Gypsy and Traveller population;
- the shortfall in site provision;
- Traveller Pitch Funding;
- good practice from elsewhere; and
- the duty to cooperate.

I am now concerned that our recommendations may be undermined by the proposed legislation in Section 84 of the Housing and Planning Bill (2015-16), which would replace the duty to provide an assessment of need (and a strategy to meet that need) for Gypsy and Traveller sites with a duty to consider the need for caravan sites and moorings for houseboats.

Our first recommendation to the Mayor concerns the need for accurate London-wide data on the Gypsy and Traveller population. A majority of the Committee considers that the Gypsy and Traveller community could be further marginalised by the proposed removal of the requirement for a specific assessment of their needs. As noted in our letter to the Mayor, a majority of the

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<sup>1</sup> The following Housing Committee Assembly Members are in agreement with this letter: Tom Copley AM, Darren Johnson AM, Nicky Gavron AM, Cllr Stephen Knight AM and Fiona Twycross AM. The following Members dissent from this letter: Andrew Boff AM and Steve O'Connell AM.

<sup>2</sup> London Assembly Housing Committee, 2015, '[Letter to the Mayor on gypsy and traveller sites](#)'

Committee is concerned that a lack of data on the Gypsy and Traveller community is already hindering the London boroughs from making informed planning decisions about new site provision. To help facilitate the development of new sites, we have urged the Mayor to provide an update to the 2008 Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Needs Assessment (GTANA). The new Bill's proposals would remove the legislative requirement for both strategic and borough assessments of the needs of Gypsies and Travellers, potentially diluting the empirical basis on which new site decisions are made.

The Committee further recommended that the Mayor should promote the delivery of 'toleration sites' in London, following a successful trial by Leeds City Council. A majority of the Committee are concerned that removing the requirement for assessments will reduce the incentive to pilot innovative ideas, such as 'toleration sites'. This would be to the detriment not only of Gypsies and Travellers themselves, but also to other settled Londoners, who may otherwise have benefited from fewer unauthorised encampments.<sup>3</sup>

Our Recommendations Two and Three concerned the release of public land to support new site development and the reintroduction of pitch targets to the London Plan. A majority of the Committee is concerned that in London, the cost of providing sites and the pressure to increase density already represent substantial barriers to the delivery of new sites. This is further exacerbated by a lack of cooperation across borough boundaries. I am concerned that any change to legislation which might water down the boroughs' obligations on new provision would act as a further disincentive to address what can be an acute need for more living space.

A majority of the London Assembly Housing Committee would therefore urge you to reconsider your proposed changes to legislation on Gypsies and Travellers in the Housing and Planning Bill (2015-16).

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Tom Copley', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Tom Copley AM

**Chair of the London Assembly Housing Committee**

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<sup>3</sup> Rob McCartney, Head of Housing Support, Leeds City Council, [Housing Committee Transcript](#), October 2014