



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Luke Hall

Parliamentary Under Secretary of State (Minister for Local Government and Homelessness)

MHCLG

By email: 30 March 2020

Re: COVID-19 – Gypsy, Traveller and Boater communities

Dear Luke

We write as co-chairs of the All Party Parliamentary Group for Gypsies, Travellers and Roma in relation to the coronavirus outbreak and those living on unauthorised encampments, Traveller sites and boats.

Around 10,000 Gypsy and Traveller people are living roadside on unauthorised encampments at this time, around 70,000 people are living on Gypsy or Traveller sites and around 15,000 people are living on canals and waterways.

Gypsy and Traveller communities are known to face some of the most severe health inequalities and poor life outcomes amongst the UK population. This means that within Gypsy and Traveller communities, there is a disproportionately high representation of people at increased risk of severe illness from coronavirus.

We are deeply concerned that people living on unauthorised encampments, those living on Traveller sites and those living on boats require information and support from MHCLG at this time, but have not received it. On 25 March 2020, we wrote to the Secretary of State highlighting these issues.

On 26 March 2020, you wrote to local leaders with specific guidance and principles on how they can and should safeguard homeless people during the emergency. The principles outlined include the following statements:

- “focus on people who are, or are at risk of, sleeping rough, and those who are in accommodation where it is difficult to self-isolate, such as shelters and assessment centres”
- “make sure that these people have access to the facilities that enable them to adhere to public health guidance on hygiene or isolation, ideally single room facilities”.

The challenges faced by people experiencing street homelessness hold clear parallels with the challenges faced by those living in caravans, chalets, vans and canal boats. Because of the confined and communal nature of nomadic homes, it is difficult to self-isolate, as is the case in shelters and assessment centres. We are particularly concerned that the vast majority of people defined on medical grounds as extremely vulnerable from COVID-19 cannot follow the Government guidance on shielding and protecting.

Similarly to people experiencing street homelessness, Gypsy, Traveller and Boater communities will need support to be enabled to follow public health guidance on hygiene and isolation, since around 3000 families living roadside have limited or no access to water and sanitation and others may rely on communal facilities provided by site managers. However, at a time when this is most needed, people are struggling to access water and sanitary facilities more than ever with the closing of leisure centres and water refill points.

We are pleased to see in your letter to local leaders regarding supporting homeless people at this time, that you have asked every local authority to set up a "local coordination cell to plan and manage your response to COVID and rough sleeping" and also that there is supplementary guidance where a clear triaging protocol is set up for people with symptoms and people who are in the vulnerable group category in terms of accommodation.

There are very clear parallels with the guidance which has been created by the Department on supporting rough sleepers at this time with guidance that needs to be in place for people on sites, on unauthorised encampments and on boats. The Government has set a precedent with rough sleepers. We therefore have the following request - can you work to put in place the same support for nomadic households?

We are copying this letter to the minister for public health.

Yours sincerely



Baroness Janet Whitaker and Kate Green MP
Co-Chairs, All-Party Parliamentary Group for Gypsies Travellers and Roma

Cc Jo Churchill MP, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Prevention, Public Health and Primary Care