

Appendix B

This Appendix details extracts / a summary of a Welsh Letter advice in relation to COVID.

To: Welsh Government Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Forum
Local Authority Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Assessment (GTAA) leads
Local Authority Community Cohesion Coordinators
Caravan Count users
The four Welsh police forces

CC: Tros Gynnal Plant- The Travelling Ahead Project
The Romani Cultural and Arts Company
Gypsies and Travellers Wales
The Association of Gypsies and Travellers
26 March 2020

Dear Colleagues

In these uncertain and unprecedented times, I want to thank you for all you are doing to address the challenges we are facing in halting the spread of Covid 19. I am writing to you in relation to your work with Gypsy and Traveller communities across Wales. The information below relates to both direct work with Gypsy and Traveller communities and planning work around accommodation needs.

Gypsies and Travellers generally experience worse health outcomes, including more prevalent respiratory issues than the settled community. They are more likely to be disengaged from public authorities, more likely to be in self-employment, typically live in close proximity; and have higher rates of long-term illness, health problems or disabilities. It is, therefore, imperative that public services consider this communities needs as they undertake resilience planning and provision around Covid 19 in their local area.

The Welsh Government advises that:

- In the interests of public health, local authorities, Police forces and other landowners should not evict unauthorised encampments, unless there are immediate and substantial risks to public safety arising from continued occupation. It is vital that welfare assessments are undertaken before any possession action is taken.
- Encampment occupiers should be provided with sanitation facilities and public health messaging regarding how to limit the spread of Covid-19.
- Where people live permanently in caravan parks or are staying in caravan parks whilst their primary residence is not available, they may continue to do so. The closure of caravan parks does not include Gypsy and Traveller sites. Guidance around the closure of caravan parks can be found here: <https://gov.wales/coronavirus-covid-19-guidance-caravan-holiday-park-owners-and-operators>

- We expect that some Gypsies and Traveller community members will have been living on holiday caravan sites which will now be closed. There is unlikely to be any spare capacity at local authority or private residential sites and a risk that there will be some Gypsy and Traveller households left with nowhere to legally station their caravan. It is vital that landowners take this into account when deciding how to respond to encampments.

The charity Friends, Families and Travellers have issued guidance which provides further useful advice on this matter.

<https://www.gypsy-traveller.org/news/covid-19-guidance-for-supporting-people-living-on-traveller-sites-unauthorised-encampments-and-canal-boats/>

They have also issued guidance directly aimed at Gypsy, Roma and Travellers. It is vitally important that information and advice on effective self-isolation for those living in Gypsy and Traveller sites is accessible by the community. The guidance is also available in audio.

<https://www.gypsy-traveller.org/advice-section/guidance-for-gypsy-traveller-and-liveaboard-boater-communities-on-coronavirus/>

The Welsh Government will also work with Public Health Wales to consider how we can provide additional Covid-19 advice to Gypsy and Travellers living on authorised sites, roadside and unauthorised sites.

I'm aware that many Local Housing Authorities are planning the next cycle of Gypsy Traveller Accommodation Assessments. It is important to be clear that no fieldwork on these assessments should be undertaken whilst Covid-19 movement and contact restrictions are in place.

You may be aware that we fund Community Cohesion teams in all parts of Wales to ensure that public bodies can monitor tensions in their communities and provide inclusive policy responses. This work will not stop in the midst of this outbreak. It is vital that local authorities make use of Community Cohesion Coordinators to ensure Covid-19 response measures are inclusive of local marginalised communities and I strongly encourage you to do so. The contacts are listed at the bottom of this letter.

The Welsh Government is taking all possible steps to prepare Wales for Covid 19 – we are working with the three other Government administrations across the UK, with public services, private and third sectors across Wales, to plan the response and support around its impact. The NHS in Wales is working hard and preparing to look after and treat people who become seriously unwell as a result of this virus.

For latest advice and guidance, please refer to the Public Health Wales website <https://phw.nhs.wales/topics/latest-information-on-novel-coronavirus-covid-19/>;

To be kept informed of Welsh Government developments and advice you can visit our dedicated webpage at <https://gov.wales/coronavirus>.

For anyone wishing to volunteer to offer any support in any capacity during this time, they could either contact their local Community Voluntary Council or register on the Volunteering Wales portal - <https://volunteering-wales.net> (this site now includes a category for Covid-19 (Coronavirus) and search term which people can use).

If individuals need additional support, from volunteering services, for themselves, they can contact the Volunteer Centres in their area directly. Contact details are at: <https://thirdsectorsupport.wales/contact/>

No person should have to tolerate prejudice or hate crime and, sadly, we hearing of incidents being on the increase in recent weeks. We are encouraging people to report any incidents. If anyone witnesses, or are made aware of, any threatening behaviour or hate crime incidents, they can report these by contacting the police or the National Hate Crime Report and Support Centre run by Victim Support.

Victim Support has specially trained staff and volunteers who can provide tailored support for people who have experienced incidence of hate. They can be contacted by phone or by e-mail. The service is free, confidential and available 24 hours a day, 365 days a year.

The service can be contacted by phone: 0300 3031 982 or by e-mail: Hate.CrimeWales@victimsupport.org.uk. Or <https://www.reporthate.victimsupport.org.uk/>

We must not leave minority communities behind when we put in place measures to limit this outbreak and my team is committed to strengthening resilience where required. We are currently considering a number of options through which we can support Gypsy and Traveller Communities in Wales and we welcome any feedback or ideas on how we can do this most effectively.

If you have any queries, or information which can inform decisions and appropriate responses in relation to Covid 19 and the impact on your teams and the Gypsy, Roma and Traveller Communities in Wales, please do contact myself and my team via the Equality Branch mailbox - equalitybranch@gov.wales

Yours sincerely,

Emma Bennett

Head of Equalities
Welsh Government