

Appendix C

This Appendix details extracts / a summary of Welsh Government advice in relation to COVID. This extract was provided to Hayston from 'Travelling Ahead – TGP Cymru' via email. It should also be noted that the Welsh Government intend to issue further race relations advice in this respect for LPA's.

Summary

To outline the key considerations to be made when providing support to Gypsies and Travellers living on public and private sites and on unauthorised encampments. Local authorities, police services and health boards are engaged in providing on-the ground support to local communities, including groups known to be particularly vulnerable, in order to protect lives and wellbeing. The intention of the document is to support and supplement these efforts and provide practical guidance on the particular circumstances of these communities and to mitigate the additional risks they face.

It is not intended to be directive, exhaustive or run counter to the advice of local resilience planning, local health advice, Public Health Wales guidance or Welsh Government advice, particularly at a time when circumstances are still developing. Transmission of COVID-19 is expected to continue until a vaccine is available or there is enough acquired immunity amongst our population for it to stop spreading. The lockdown restrictions have had a profound effect on the lives of all of us across Wales, they have also helped contribute to falling levels of infection. The virus remains a very serious threat to us all and so we must chart a course that helps avoid the risk of a second significant wave of infection.

Managing COVID-19 incidents on Gypsy and Traveller sites, whether authorised or on the roadside should involve consideration of the specific needs and circumstances of Gypsies and Travellers, clear communication, building trust and taking time to ask what support is needed. Outcomes can be further improved when this work is undertaken in advance of any potential outbreak or incident. Detailed information on the responsibilities and roles for bodies in the prevention, planning and response to incidents and outbreaks is contained in the Coronavirus Control Plan for Wales (2020).

This guidance draws on Enabling Gypsies, Roma and Travellers (2018) – the Welsh Government action plan to improve outcomes for these communities and on Managing Unauthorised Camping (2013) – our guidance to Local Authorities on resolving unauthorised encampments. This document summarises existing guidance and places it within the context of the COVID-19 outbreak.

Increased risks and support needs faced by Gypsies and Travellers

Gypsies and Travellers are likely to face some specific risks and vulnerabilities during the COVID-19 crisis. These include:

- Overcrowding in trailers, trailers being too close together, and (for those on sites) – sharing of toilets, washing and kitchen facilities*
- Limited or no access to additional trailers for the purpose of self-isolation*

- *For those living roadside, reliance on toilet/washing facilities, for example in leisure centres and retail parks, some of which may still be closed*
- *Hostile attitudes from settled communities towards encampments, causing people to move from place to place*
- *Difficulties keeping up to date on changing public health messages, due to literacy or digital exclusion issues as well as fear of engagement with authorities and challenges in registering with GPs*
- *A higher number of underlying health conditions, potentially resulting in more serious illness.*
- *Members of the community may also face additional risks and vulnerabilities including racism and discrimination, poverty and barriers to accessing mainstream services. Community members are:*
 - *More often self-employed workers, often in lower paid trades. They therefore face significant financial insecurity and risks as a result of loss of income if unable to work. They may also have less experience in claiming benefits*
 - *Understood to have higher risks of poor mental health and suicide*
 - *More likely to face exclusion from educational services and support, for example if children have been inconsistently attending school and/or if they lack digital access on sites*
 - *More likely to not use the services of a bank and therefore be reliant on cash, which some shops are moving away from*
 - *Less likely to have food storage facilities – or the financial resources - to be able to stock up and are therefore potentially more vulnerable, should they need to self isolate*
 - *Much more likely to experience fuel poverty and be in need of regular card top ups or access to gas or liquid fuel.*

The combined impact of all of these factors is a risk of poverty, which will be exacerbated by the need to self-isolate and/or socially distance. People living on public sector sites will often (but not universally) be connected to support via their Gypsy and Traveller Liaison Officers, site managers or other local authority or health and social care officers. This may not, however, be the case for those living on private sites, for those living roadside or in houses. There may be third-sector agencies providing support to some within the community, but we know coverage is far from universal. We know many Gypsies and Travellers may not know how to access support. They therefore may struggle to access benefits, including Universal Credit, as well as wider services which identify and assist vulnerable groups.

People living on public sector sites

Local Authorities should ensure all reasonable and appropriate measures are in place on public sites to support residents during the pandemic. It is prudent to consider how residents on sites would be supported to remain on site and on their pitches should they need to self-isolate. In particular the following should be considered:

- *Where temporary legislation provides for protection from eviction from settled communities in public sector housing, consider carefully whether equivalent protection can be offered to those on public sector sites. This is a recommendation and does not constitute statutory guidance*

- *How residents can obtain utilities tokens (if in use) without having to leave sites or pitches*
- *How residents can obtain an ongoing supply of liquid gas canisters (where needed)*
- *How residents can have the correct information to help them stay safe on their pitches and protect others, including those with limited literacy and internet access*
- *How residents can access Free School Meals support when they may have limited literacy or internet access*
- *How residents can access health and wellness services*
- *How residents can access benefits should they need to self-isolate. On 27 Aug 2020, the UK Department for Health and Social care announced a new scheme for people on low incomes in areas with high rates of COVID-19, who need to self-isolate and cannot work from home. Residents may need targeted support in accessing novel schemes as they are developed.*
- *How vulnerable residents at increased risk are being supported*
- *Measures you may be able to put in place to minimise the spread of infection – such as additional toilets, showers or handwashing facilities, supporting the use of masks and making sure that self-isolating residents can access food, fuel, medicines and cleaning products*
- *If there is a need for additional bins for storage of refuse and more frequent refuse collections, particularly in the event of someone on site with COVID-19*
- *Provision of advice on safe waste disposal where someone is showing COVID-19 symptoms – i.e. double bagging personal waste and waiting 72 hours before putting out for collection.*
- *Provision of accessible cleaning/disinfection products for communal areas and advice on their use e.g. if someone with symptoms using facilities they should be cleaned/disinfected after each use.*
- *How authorities can effectively engage with Gypsies and Travellers – expertise may exist within Local Authorities sites management officers, education officers working within Traveller, minority ethnic or out-of-school (“EOTAS”) education services, local health service providers, local third sector advice and support services for Gypsies and Travellers or national projects such as Travelling Ahead may be able to signpost. You may wish to consider in advance how local authorities might engage sensitively across a range of issues such as visitors to sites, Test Trace Protect, the provision of advice around hygiene and comms requirements in the event of any incident or outbreak. As with any group, understanding residents’ needs is a key element in any public health setting.*

Roadside and unauthorised encampments

In terms of roadside encampments of Gypsies and Travellers.

- *Measures to protect those living in conventional dwellings from eviction have been extended on a number of occasions – from June 25 to August 23 and until Sep 23.*
- *Local authorities should not evict, relocate or disperse unauthorised encampments, unless there are immediate and substantial risks to public safety arising from continued occupation. Consideration of such risks is included in the Managing Unauthorised Camping guidance.*
- *Where eviction is considered necessary, an alternative suitable location should be identified by the local authority where possible. As part of resilience and response*

planning, Local authorities may need to pro-actively identify potential locations. The ePIMS system may be a useful tool in doing so.

- Local authorities should seek to work with private landowners to avoid eviction or harassment if at all possible*
- No-one should be asked to leave a site or camp because someone in the family has fallen ill*
- A welfare check should be attempted on all roadside and unauthorised encampments within the first 24 hours of the local authority being made aware of a new encampment. Managing Unauthorised Camping provides detailed information about this*
- If possible, sanitation in the form of additional toilets and washing facilities should be provided.*
- Provision of rubbish collection should be arranged with sufficient supplies of disposal bags. Advice should be offered on safe disposal where individuals may be exhibiting signs of COVID-19 (i.e. double-bagging and waiting 72 hours before putting out for collection)*
- A check that there is a gap of 6 metres between trailers can help ensure residents are protected from fire risk and socially-distance more easily*
- All roadside and unauthorised encampments should be recorded on the Caravan Count website. Local authorities should check that they have current up-to-date access to the system.*

Toleration and negotiation with campers does not mean that you are condoning or authorising an encampment. It is simply a pragmatic response to mitigate potentially harmful outcomes in unprecedented circumstances.

If local authorities wish to record agreements negotiated with campers, Welsh Government provides an example to record a negotiated Code of Conduct for Tolerated Stopping in Managing Unauthorised Camping. Negotiation with campers can be used to inform them about and secure agreement to comply with key COVID-19 requirements.

People living on private sites

Some private Gypsy and Traveller sites operate on a private rental basis, with different families renting a pitch directly from a private landlord, who may or may not live on the site. Other private sites are occupied by a family group who own the land themselves.

While local authorities will have variable knowledge of/contact with private sites in their area, they should be offering support wherever possible. There are likely to be people at increased risk living on private sites who may be less well connected with the information and services they need to keep themselves safe and well and who may also be less able to cope if they become ill. Local authorities may be able to identify private Gypsy and Traveller sites in their area by checking their most recent Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Assessment, details on the Caravan

Count website or by speaking with their planning department to establish awareness of sites, or to gather information that is readily available on current planning permission.

Partnership working with third-sector bodies can also be effective, particularly where private sites may be reluctant to engage with authorities directly. A useful contact list is provided at the end of the document.

The accommodation and washing facilities on these sites will differ greatly but there may be a need for additional washing facilities to enable people to safely socially distance and where necessary self-isolate. Local authorities should consider whether the offer of additional sanitation should be extended to private sites.

Further contacts:

Travelling Ahead – TGP Cymru

Advice and support for children, young people and adults from Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities across Wales.

0808 802 0025