

“Experts by Experience” Community Engagement Meeting – London 21st July 2015

Present: 23 attendees – unfortunately Darren Johnson, Chairman of the London Assembly’s Housing Committee who had been scheduled to speak at the meeting had been taken ill and was unable to attend

1. Introduction

Following a run through of the report key findings and recommendations of the “Experts by Experience” by Adrian Jones (Policy Officer, NFGLG) Ilinca Diaconescu, Planning Policy, London Gypsy and Traveller Unit spoke on “Accommodation needs and provision– the London picture. The London Assembly Housing Committee investigation into the accommodation needs of Gypsies and Travellers in London, 2014 and the relationship to the “Experts by Experience” recommendations”. This was followed by a group discussion focused on the different recommendations of both reports and aspects of further work as detailed below

2. Comments made

One of the key problems regarding meeting accommodation needs is that of lack of political will. Meetings can be held but lead to nothing. How can the local authorities be persuaded to act?

Land values are a particular problem in London – bricks and mortar developments can be financially more attractive to Councils.

Regarding education, Surrey’s “Gypsy Skills” programme (which has now finished) was discussed. This was shaped by community members and lasted for 4 years. Whilst it lost 25% of its pupils every year (due to parents taking them out of it), 75% still remained with the programme.

The focus on performance statistics in education is working against those less academically gifted.

Regarding employment, at present across the 32 boroughs in London licences can vary between £250-£550 per person for a 3 year licence. Councils, however, are not issuing licences and the Police aren’t enforcing them so the Act has lost its cutting edge.

Initially the Met’s “Operation Tornado” led to people having to change their trade. Also, the need for licences, record-keeping and insurance was impossible to fulfil.

Linking both education and employment is the issue of what employment opportunities are there for young people? How can you persuade young people that they need to stay in education if they can’t see a job at the end of it? Also, how can we look at assets in the community with reference to new trade?

The London Gypsy Traveller Forum is to meet with the mayoral candidates.

3. Taking the recommendations of “Experts by Experience” forward

a) Accommodation:

Leaving provision to councils doesn't work. Pressure from above (in London leadership from the Mayor) is needed. Pressure from the community is also needed.

Alternative ways to provide should be identified and examined. This might include, for example, co-ops. Private provision of sites should be included in discussions (they are not currently referred to). There is a need for London-wide liaison re. the development of private sites.

Two key issues are:

- i) The pressure being put on Councils
- ii) How to work with Councils that are actually working with the GRT communities

b) Education:

There is a need for more vocation-based training and greater value/a more positive image to be given to such training.

GRT parents need to be encouraged to keep their children in education. There is a need to raise awareness in order to change perceptions. There needs to be a conversation with parents and children and this needs to be held in a “safe” place.

Community advocates are needed in order to empower people.

Equalities Impact Assessments (EQIAs) might be a useful tool.

Elective Home Education needs to be sorted out.

c) Employment

The review of the Scrap Metal Dealers Act has been brought forward to 2016 (from 2018). This is a positive step.

GRT organisations need to gather information re. the effects of the Act. One useful strategy might be to look at the cost of fly-tipping clearance before and after the Act, as there is a strong perception that since the Act was introduced the amount of fly-tipping has increased (with a subsequent rise in costs for Councils for clearing this fly-tipping)

4. Conclusions

The “Experts by Experience” and Civil Society monitoring reports are there to be used by the community and by groups working with the community. They can be downloaded from:<http://www.nationalgypsytravellerfederation.org/europe.html>