

H A R I N G E Y

Fairness Commission

What We've Heard: Meeting with Irish Travellers

A summary of the Haringey Fairness Commission's meeting
with Irish Travellers based in Haringey, arranged by London
Gypsies and Travellers

3rd October 2018

Selby Centre, Tottenham

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Representatives of the Fairness Commission including the Co-Chair attended a meeting with five members of the Irish Traveller Community in Haringey on 4th October 2018.

The group talked about their experiences of living and growing up in Haringey, and the ways in which they think life for the traveller community could and should be improved.

The issues that were raised fell into the following broad areas:

- Absence of a contact point at Haringey Council;
- Lack of appropriate housing for travellers;
- Lack of an allocation policy for traveller sites in Haringey;
- Impact of living situation on support networks and mental health;
- Bullying and discrimination in schools;
- Discrimination more widely.

More information about the discussion in each area is below.

ABSENCE OF A CONTACT POINT AT HARINGEY COUNCIL

In the past there were two officers at Haringey Council who specialised in providing support to the traveller community. They were the main contact point for the community, which made interactions easier because they had a good understanding of the issues the community faces and were well placed to help them through any Council-related issues they faced. One representative from London Gypsies and Travellers also raised the issue that there is no central contract within the Council for handling repairs or other issues on the sites.

Because no contact point within the Council exists anymore, when someone from the group has a problem relating to the Council it feels more difficult to find out who they need to speak to and what they can do about it. The group wanted to see a return to the original model.

LACK OF APPROPRIATE HOUSING FOR TRAVELLERS

Although participants were receiving housing support from the Council, they felt that this was not an appropriate solution for them. Members of the group felt the fact they had to live in a house and not on a pitch went against their culture. The fact that they were all housed in different parts of the borough

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was also difficult for them and seemed to make being in housing even worse, as it means they are cut them off from their community and support network.

All participants wanted to live on a traveller's site in a mobile home, but as there are not enough pitches in the borough, they would like the Council to invest in more sites.

LACK OF AN ALLOCATION POLICY FOR TRAVELLER SITES IN HARINGEY

Although Haringey currently has two traveller sites (around 10 pitches in total), there is no known allocation policy for these sites. This was a source of discontent amongst participants.

In reality, pitches on the existing sites in Haringey tend to be allocated within families rather than by a waiting list.

IMPACT OF LIVING SITUATION ON SUPPORT NETWORKS AND MENTAL HEALTH

Participants openly disclosed a cross-community struggle with mental health, particularly depression and panic attacks. Participants linked these struggles largely to their housing situation and their inability to live on a site where they would have access to a close-knit support network.

BULLYING AND DISCRIMINATION IN SCHOOLS

The younger members of the group said that at secondary school it is common for children from their community to experience discrimination and bullying. Participants described this as 'racial discrimination' and stated that schools and teachers did not take the situation seriously. There was also the suggestion that pre-conceived stereotypes about the Irish Traveller community i.e. that they are violent or disruptive contributed to schools' and teachers' negative attitudes to Irish Traveller children.

One member of the group wanted Irish Traveller children to be 'positively welcomed' by schools, through for example cultural celebrations similar to Black History month. They also thought that moving onto sites could have a positive impact on educational attainment, as there would be a group of Irish Traveller children at the same schools, enabling the children to access

peer support and also enabling schools to better understand and be able to respond to the children's needs.

DISCRIMINATION MORE WIDELY

In addition to the education system, participants had experienced discrimination in different ways in the community. One member of the group said that she had been discriminated against by her landlord when he found out she was a traveller, and others stated that there was discrimination against travellers when applying for jobs.

Conversely, participants said that there was not any overt discrimination in accessing health services, and were engaged with secondary health services particularly around mental health.

The Fairness Commission would like to thank the travellers who attended this session and shared their experiences with us.