



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Heather Wheeler
Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Housing and Homelessness

By email

4 July 2019

Dear Minister

We contact you as Co-chairs of the Gypsy, Traveller and Roma APPG, and in light of the recent coverage of comments made by you describing rough sleepers in your constituency as “the traditional type, old tinkers, knife-cutters wandering through”.

Sadly, we are frequently alerted to derogatory language used by parliamentarians to describe Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities and the word ‘tinker’ is deeply offensive to Irish Travellers. It is imperative that politicians are not reinforcing harmful stereotypes and are committed to the Public Sector Equality Duty to foster good relations between communities and to the protections under the Equality Act against discrimination. We are pleased to have seen your apology about your comments.

In a broader context, we would be interested to learn more about how your work as Homelessness Minister covers addressing homelessness of Gypsy and Traveller communities. As you will know Gypsies and Travellers who live in a caravan are statutorily homeless if they do not have somewhere they are permitted to station their caravan. The last MHCLG caravan count listed 2811 caravans without an authorised stopping place, and for those living on unauthorised encampments accessing basic amenities and services such as water, sanitation, healthcare and education is extremely problematic.

Lack of access to services leads to the poor health outcomes Gypsies and Travellers experience, including a life expectancy that’s 10-12 years lower than the national average, higher rates of infant mortality and long-term health conditions. The poorer educational outcomes Gypsy Roma and Traveller pupils experience is also widely

documented, including in the Race Disparity Audit and in the recent Women and Equalities Committee report.

The recent Government announcement proposing the development of a national strategy to address the inequalities experienced by Gypsies and Travellers presents an opportunity to tackle homelessness for these communities and we would welcome the opportunity to meet with you to discuss this and how as Homelessness Minister you are addressing the issue of Gypsy and Traveller homelessness.

We would also be interested to discuss with you the Government's ongoing review of unauthorised encampments and unauthorised developments, particularly the Home Office proposals, which are likely to exacerbate the homelessness that Gypsies and Travellers experience. We had a useful meeting with Lord Bourne on 26th June to discuss some of these issues.

You may be interested to know there is a Gypsy support group based in Derbyshire; [The Derbyshire Gypsy Liaison Group](#) which works on accommodation based issues.

Yours

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Baroness Whitaker' followed by a stylized signature.

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