

Irish Traveller Movement in Britain Conference Report 2007

The Irish Travellers Movement in Britain (ITMB) is a policy and voice group that seeks to raise the profile of Irish Travellers in Britain and challenge exclusion and discrimination. The (ITMB) Conference was held on the 30/11/2007 in London. The conference was a great success 220 delegates attended.

Message from the Irish Traveller Movement in Britain Advisory Group

For many of the advisory group it was our first conference, we found the day extremely useful and felt many important issues of concern to Travellers were raised. The advisory group feels that it is of vital importance that Travellers engage in debate with service providers and hope that at the forthcoming conference on the 19th November 2008 that there are even more Travellers present and leading the debates and discussions. Candy Sheridan expressed the sentiments of many on the advisory group when she said:

“This was a much better conference than most because of the simple fact that there were a high number of actual Travellers there! Travellers are becoming tired of the lack of voice that we as a community should be given. So many non-Travellers are deciding where we should live, how the site is designed, why our children must finish school. This conference gave a real voice to the many Travellers that were there and next time let Travellers take all the workshops! Travellers know their children need to attend secondary school, we all know that the times have changed and as a community we want to be part of this change!”

The ITMB conference report gives a summary of key recommendations.

Keynote Speakers in the morning included - Lord Avebury, Julie Morgan MP, Gerry Kelly DION, Helena Kiely ITMB, Claire Cooper (Communities and Local Government), Beverley Thompson OBE (Ministry of Justice). **Lord Avebury** veteran campaigner for Travellers stated:

“At the end of this year, local authorities are supposed to have completed their accommodation needs assessments and the next stage, of identifying land for new Traveller sites begins in earnest. When every local authority sees that others have to find their allocated number of pitches, they should all move forward together, and the next stage begins, with families developing sites where they can afford it, and social landlords providing rented sites”.

See Irish Post report <http://www.irishpost.co.uk/news/story/?trs=gbgbsncw&cat=news>

Workshop Sessions

Participation of Gypsies, Roma and Travellers in Education - Considered how Travellers can become more involved in decision making processes in the field of education. This was felt to be a key issue given that increased participation in decision making processes and schools is an important factor in reversing exclusion.

Key Recommendations

- The ITMB's work on education should develop a national focus
- A major national drive is needed to encourage the employment of Travellers in education settings through addressing barriers within employment procedures (where appropriate through positive action).

- Look at ways in which good educational and training practice at grass roots level can be disseminated locally and nationally.
- ITMB to highlight with Basildon Council the impact on the education of the Dale Farm children of the impending eviction.
- Work is needed to ensure the continuity of education for Traveller children (e.g. tackling racism and bullying which leads to children leaving school) and ensure that records or information on special needs or statements are transferred whenever a child moves school.
- Work towards accessing flexible funding for adult education for Travellers to tailor courses to meet needs and wants.
- Work to encourage greater flexibility of training and learning for Travellers throughout the entire education system, including Elective Home Learning.

Update. The ITMB has:

1. Developed a national policy paper on education (see website)
2. Met with the Department for Children, Schools and Families and called upon them to establish a national forum to meet with and consult Travellers.
3. Has supported initiatives to assist Dale Farm and avert a forced eviction.

Traveller Law Reform - Considered the Government's new policies for Traveller accommodation (Housing Act 2004) and Planning Circular 1/2006) under which councils need to conduct Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Needs Assessments (GTANA) and identify land for site development by 2011.

Key Recommendations

- A need for more uniform guidance on GTANA and greater monitoring of the biannual Gypsy and Traveller count to ensure against under counting, given the use of such data in the assessment process.
- Planning authorities should be required to report bi-annually to the DCLG, for them to publish, details of all applications for sites, the outcome of those applications together with details of planning appeals, enforcement appeals and their outcomes.
- Regularly check the TLRP website (www.travellerslaw.org.uk) for news about Bills and other legal matters affecting Gypsies and Travellers

Update:

1. The Government has agreed to act upon security of tenure in the Housing and Regeneration Bill but Travellers are concerned about how vacant pitches may be filled.
2. The ITMB submitted a response to the East of England Single Issue Review. The East of England GTANA is the first region to set pitch allocations.

Criminal Justice and Policing - Considered what brings police and Gypsies and Travellers into contact – engagement, potentially negative (stop and search, unauthorized encampments, arrest) and how it could be ensured that these are positive encounters.

Key Recommendations:

- Both police officers and the community recognised that working with Gypsies and Travellers should be a long-term commitment on a local level. More buy-in from senior officers is required to allow long term and consistent work to take place with acknowledgement being given of the importance of long-term relationships and in improving trust and confidence.

- Training provided to the police and involving community members is important. It should be delivered across the whole police service irrespective of service band or rank. It should be extended to other criminal justice organisations.
- It is acknowledged that there is under reporting of hate and other crimes where Gypsies and Travellers are victims. Because of high numbers of poor outcomes there is a perception from the community that police lack the motivation to act. There was acknowledgement that the police alone are not responsible for outcomes and the wider Criminal Justice System needs to recognise the importance of outcomes and must demonstrate that it is not ignoring Gypsy and Traveller issues.

Update. The ITMB has:

1. Made a formal complaint about the police raid on the Lynton Close Traveller Site
2. Taken part in a number of diversity training events with the police.

Criminal Justice and Prisons - Considered how and when ethnic monitoring is to be achieved and explored the barriers to service delivery within a prison environment.

Key Recommendations

- There is a need for funding and resources to be put into place to address the issues and racism that Travellers and Gypsies face within the prison service.
- Training needs to be provided around cultural awareness with focus on Travellers and Gypsies on all levels of the prison service and the courts. Also, training Travellers and Gypsies themselves to be trainers of cultural awareness programmes to the prison service.
- An effective, safe and culturally sensitive monitoring systems needs to be developed and put into place so Travellers and Gypsies can identify themselves in prison allowing issues to be addressed.

Update. The ITMB has:

1. Established a Gypsy Roma Traveller advisory group in the Ministry of Justice and has called for improved ethnic monitoring.

Traveller Tenant Involvement workshop - Discussed how key service providers can involve Travellers in decision making and planning through effective consultations and partnership work in line with mainstream tenancy participation practice.

Key Recommendations

- A DVD for Travellers to watch explaining how meetings work, benefits of tenant involvement, terminology. Showing process and model of successful Traveller residents group.
- Multi agency working to eliminate politics and territoriality from different agencies. Building capacity of communities and services including setting up resident groups on sites.
- RSLs and Management organisations to include pictures of Travellers as part of the promotional literature of their services.
- Ethnic monitoring – G & T categories and explaining the reasons why it's good to identify.
- Promote a community development approach to getting Travellers involved in tenancy issues in the same way as other groups are targeted.
- Training - teach about rights, health & safety, raise awareness of pathways to involvement, governance structures and supports that are available to residents.
- Have clear task initially such as developing Tenant Participation Compact with LA or consultation around site refurbishment grant.

Update:

1. The ITMB has issued guidance on tenant involvement (see website)
2. The CLG has issued guidance on site design and guidance on management is expected shortly.

Housed Travellers – Discussed the problems experienced by housed Travellers and models of good practice being developed in terms of service provision and empowerment:

Recommendations:

- Need for a greater discussion/policy development in the UK on Traveller group housing as developed in Ireland.
- More research is needed to explore the psychological and health impact of living in conventional housing (aversion to bricks and mortar).
- More initiatives are needed to raise cultural awareness of housed Travellers amongst service providers.
- Need to share good practice for example in the use of supporting people funding.

Update:

1. Shelter has produced its Good Practice Guide: Working with Housed Gypsies and Travellers.
2. The ITMB has contacted Communities and Local Government to clarify the legal situation on group housing and called upon the Housing Corporation to promote wider discussion.

Support Groups for Travellers – discussed how support groups can effectively involve Travellers in their work.

Recommendations:

- ITM and FIS to raise awareness regarding the duty to work with Travellers at Board and staff level, through cultural awareness training.
- Agencies to engage and build relations with Travellers.
- Dón to actively monitor funded groups' service delivery to Travellers, including visits, and raise awareness of proactive services.

Update:

1. The ITMB will launch a major capacity building programme in late 2008
2. The ITMB has made a DVD about Irish Traveller community advocates
3. The ITMB has prepared a report for Comic Relief on capacity building

Travellers and Roadside Encampments – considered the difficulties Travellers are experiencing on road encampments and the impact of current legislation and government guidance on managing unauthorised encampments and good practice in supporting nomadic Travellers.

Recommendations:

- Need for a national network of transit sites and the national shortage of residential sites needs to be addressed
- The police do not use new evictions powers under CJPOA 1994 ss62A – 62E until a network of transit pitches have been developed.
- Where Gypsies or Travellers are on a reasonably suitable piece of land which belongs to the same local authority that they have made a homeless application to (seeking a pitch and not bricks and mortar accommodation), then they should be allowed to remain there until a more suitable location is identified'

Update:

1. Bristol Council has developed a transit site leading to a huge drop in the cost of dealing with unauthorised encampments.

Where Next? The Irish Traveller Movement in Britain National Conference 2008

The next Irish Traveller Movement in Britain national conference will again be held at the Resource Centre, 356 Holloway Road, London on the 19th November 2008. It will offer the chance to update delegates on progress made and new challenges by lead campaign groups and service providers for Travellers (free tickets for Travellers). **Don't miss out on this key policy event!** For more details contact:

The Irish Traveller Movement in Britain

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Or visit our website for conference updates <http://www.irishtraveller.org.uk/>