

Cross Party Group on Gypsies & Travellers
National Assembly for Wales
Tuesday, June 25th 2019

Committee Room 4, Ty Hywel
12 pm

Hosted by Jenny Rathbone, AM

Minutes

1. Welcome

Tom Tom Hendry welcomed members of the group and reminded people that since the Annual General Meeting in November Julie Morgan, the chair, had been appointed Deputy Minister for Health and Social Services and so was no longer able to chair this Cross-Party Group. As a result, it was necessary to appoint a new chair.

2. Appointment of Chair

Tom Tom had received only one nomination, which the Group agreed to accept. Jenny Rathbone, Assembly Member for Cardiff Central, was duly appointed.

Jenny said that she was happy to accept the appointment and reminded the Group that while all Cross-Party Groups must be chaired by an Assembly Member they could be co-chaired by community members. Tyrone Price (Association of Gypsies and Travellers in Wales – Pembrokeshire) joined her as co-chair for the day.

3. Present

Jenny Rathbone, AM	Chair	Cardiff Central
Tyrone Price	Co-chair	Association of Gypsies and Travellers in Wales
Tom Tom Hendry	Secretary	Association of Gypsies and Travellers in Wales
Kirsty Williams	Minister for Education	Welsh Government

Thomas McCarthy	Folksinger and Storyteller	
Leanne Morgan		Association of Gypsies and Travellers in Wales / Travelling Ahead
Bernadette Skuse		GEMS
Louise Dunn		GEMS
DS Hannah Lawton	Force Lead for Gypsies & Travellers	Gwent Police
Jasmine Jones		Gypsies and Travellers Wales
Amy McNally		Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council
Lillie Bramley		Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council
Ian Rees		Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council
Sion Jones		Office of Helen Mary Jones
Helen West		Office of Julie Morgan
Deborah Stauber		Pobl
Gemma Griffiths		Pobl
Isaac Blake	Director	Romani Cultural and Arts Company
Claire Arnold		The Priory Project (Pembrokeshire)
Mags Richmond		Traveller Education Service Cardiff
Denise Barry	West Wales Co- ordinator	Travelling Ahead (TGP Cymru)
Hayley Morgan	Roma Coordinator	Travelling Ahead (TGP Cymru)
Rhiannon Jones	South East Wales Co- ordinator	Travelling Ahead (TGP Cymru)
Trudy Aspinwall	Manager	Travelling Ahead (TGP Cymru)
David Phillips		University of South Wales
Carly Thomas	Student	West Mon High School (Torfaen)

Michael Purcell	Student	West Mon High School (Torfaen)
Sue Morgan	Teacher	West Mon High School (Torfaen)
Wayne Thomas	Student	West Mon High School (Torfaen)
Demi Jones	Student	West Mon Youth Forum (Torfaen)
Rona Jones	Student	West Mon Youth Forum (Torfaen)
Savannah Miller	Student	West Mon Youth Forum (Torfaen)

4. Apologies for Absence

Helen Mary Jones AM	Assembly Member	Mid and West Wales
Emma Keen	Head of Service	GEMS
Leanne Pole	CADRO	Gwent Police
Mark New	Site Manager	Neath Port Talbot Council
Jayne Bryant AM	Assembly Member	Newport West
Sian Gwenllian AM	Assembly Member	Arfon
Mike Docherty	Editor	Travellers Times
Martyn Gallagher	North Wales Coordinator	Travelling Ahead (TGP Cymru)

5. Report (November 2018 until the end of May 2019)

Members received a report on the Group's activity since the last meeting:

- Resignation of Julie Morgan, AM as chair

Jenny explained that convention prevented ministers and deputy ministers from interfering in the subject areas of other ministers and therefore made it difficult for them to take part in Cross-Party Groups that often discussed issues that were the responsibility of other ministers. The Minister with responsibility for equality was now Jane Hutt, AM.

However, she told the Group that Julie could be invited in her capacity as Deputy Minister to talk about issues relating to Social Services.

On behalf of the Group, Jenny thanked Julie for her work raising issues on behalf of Gypsies and Travellers over many years and particularly her work with this Cross-Party Group

- Holocaust Memorial Day event

The January 2019 event was larger than usual as a result of combining our own event with a speech at the Senedd by Holocaust survivor Mr Henri Obstfeld, a volunteer with the Holocaust Education Trust. The programme included the traditional vigil, readings (provided by pupils of West Monmouthshire High School) and one-minute silence on the steps, followed by folk music (Thomas McCarthy) and speeches by Darren Millar AM, Henri Obstfeld and pupils from Whitmore High School serving as Young Ambassadors for the Holocaust Education Trust in the Neuadd.

As usual, the event was well supported by regular participants in the Cross Party Group, by Assembly Members and Ministers and the wider general public.

6. Themes and Issues for Future Meetings

Members proposed a wide range of subjects for future discussion:

- Private planning applications – Gypsies and Travellers who own their own land face considerable challenges in obtaining planning permission and disproportionate costs relative to other ethnic groups – notably because of the number of applications that go to appeal
- Help to Buy Schemes – Welsh Government has a scheme to help people buy their own home (<https://gov.wales/help-buy-wales>) and there are other schemes, for example, the 'Help to Buy ISA' (www.helptobuy.gov.uk/help-to-buy-isa/how-does-it-work). To what extent are these schemes or an alternative available to Gypsies and Travellers?
- Provision of sites – 12 local authority areas still have no site provision despite a legal requirement to provide sites
- Fuel Poverty – The CPG considered the problems of fuel poverty several years ago – notably the common practice of supplying gas, electricity and water to sites via the local authority on commercial rather than residential tariffs, with no choice of supplier and with additional administration charges imposed by the local authority. Welsh Government made some progress in addressing this issue for new sites, but little progress on existing sites. Members would like to revisit this issue:
 - Update from the Welsh Government on the changes and their impact
 - Solar panels – are subsidised schemes, feed-in tariffs and the Export Guarantee available to people who live on sites

- NEST Energy Efficiency Scheme – advisers appear to be ill-equipped to provide advice to people living in trailers with members having had mixed results despite similar circumstances
- Personal Independence Payments (PIPs) – Pobl had had some success in getting medical assessments undertaken at home, but had recently been told that visiting sites was against Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) policy. Members said that they also struggled to get other professionals to visit sites
- Policing – Gwent Police asked if it were possible to revisit policing so that feedback from Gypsy and Traveller communities could be fed back to senior officers and the Police and Crime Commissioners regularly
- Secondary school retention – increasing numbers of young people from Gypsy and Traveller communities are attending primary school and the small number of specialist units, but too little is being done to support retention at ‘mainstream’ secondary schools
- Residential road calming measures – The First Minister has suggested that the speed limit on all residential roads in Wales should be reduced to 20 mph. Would this also apply to the roads adjacent to Gypsy and Traveller sites that are often in areas that are not recognised as residential

7. Membership of the Cross-Party Group

Jenny told members that the following Assembly Members had agreed to join the Group:

- Jayne Bryant – Labour, Newport West
- Sian Gwenllian – Plaid Cymru, Arfon
- Helen Mary Jones – Plaid Cymru, Mid and West Wales (represented by Sion Jones at this meeting)

She had also approached members of the Conservative Group.

Gypsies and Travellers Wales said that they had shared the minutes of the November meeting (policing) with the South Wales Police and Crime Commission and thought that this was a useful way of sharing the Group’s discussions with others.

8. Kirsty Williams, AM - Minister for Education

Jenny introduced the Minister and asked her to say a few words before taking questions from the young people from Torfaen. The Minister thanked the Group for the opportunity to talk to members. She said that she had met some of the young people from Torfaen the previous week when they visited the Senedd.

Savannah Miller (West Mon Youth Forum) asked the Minister why there was a shortage of support services for Gypsies and Travellers in Education?

The Minister said that there were real challenges, specifically in education and that there was a pot of money to address these but said that she had taken some money from this pot to support the Revenue Support Grant¹ because of the cuts that local authorities were facing. As a result, there was less money in most places, except Cardiff, Newport, Wrexham and Swansea where there had been extra money. The Minister said that she had put this money back and that the value of the grant was now £10 million annually (Need to check which grant the minister is referring too). Going forward, the Minister said, that she was looking for an independent group of people to advise the Government on how this money should be divided.

The Minister was asked how decisions could be made without consultation with communities and others working on the ground in places like Pembrokeshire where there was a significant number of young people in mainstream provision (some with and some without support) and at the specialist Priory Project?

The Minister said that she recognised that the picture was complicated with differences between and even within areas. She believed that many Gypsies and Travellers wanted to engage and that many Gypsy and Traveller children wanted to learn. She said that she had seen this for herself on visits to Monkton². She pointed out that local authorities had a duty to support all students out of their 'mainstream' grants and the existence of a specific grant did not '*let local authorities off the hook*'. Some authorities had given the impression that the specific grant was the only money that could be spent on Gypsies and Travellers, but Gypsies and Travellers should also be benefiting from the other funds that local authorities had.

The Minister said that she believed that people should have the opportunity to learn and to do well regardless of their background or finances and that schools needed to recognise the needs of each child and each family would be different. She said that we need to stop planning education around the needs of communities as if everybody within a community would be the same.

Michael Purcell (West Mon High School - Torfaen) asked the Minister if she thought that going to school had an effect on young people's culture, for example, changing the way that they talk, fitting in with the way things are done by the settled communities and preventing them from spending time learning from work with their mothers and fathers?

The Minister said that she thought that Michael was probably right. In many schools, we have an idea of a pattern that is what we think people should be like and we try to fit young people into that pattern.

Michael said that it seemed that schools wanted just one culture.

¹ Money given to local authorities by the Welsh Government that can be used for any purpose.

² Monkton Priory Community Primary School, Pembrokeshire

The Minister replied that she did not disagree but that she felt that this was partly because we tell teachers what to teach, this is exactly the same in all schools, and we decide whether a school is good or bad irrespective of the circumstances. But she said that teaching did not need to be like this and gave the example of a school in Wrexham where Gypsy and Traveller culture had been taught each year during GRT History Week but had changed this and now reflected Gypsy and Traveller culture in their lessons throughout the year. She said that the new curriculum³ allowed for this. Teachers would now be able to design lessons according to who was really sat in their classrooms.

It was suggested to the Minister that this would take a long time and that teachers would need to be encouraged to make the changes real.

The Minister agreed and said that the new law⁴ would take effect in 2022 because teachers needed time to prepare and adjust. She said that accountability was important but needed to be broader than measuring how many young people passed 5 or more GCSEs. In the future accountability needed to be about health and well-being, levels of bullying and how well schools were meeting the needs of their children. She said that *'exam performance at the cost of mental health was not right'*.

The Minister asked the young people from Torfaen what they thought was good about their school.

Michael said that he was able to work with his father around school times. He felt that they were lucky to have a unit for Gypsies and Travellers and so there was less pressure to fit in with the culture of the other young people.

Michael said the unit at West Mon School had its own staff but wondered how they were expected to be able to teach young people about a culture that was not theirs. He thought that schools needed some staff like Tom Tom Hendry, who was from the community and knew about the culture.

The Minister asked who Tom Tom was

Tom Tom introduced himself and explained his role and that of the Association of Gypsies and Travellers in Wales. He said that the Association aimed to encourage people from Gypsy and Traveller backgrounds to be more involved, more vocal and to do more for themselves. Although he did workshops with young people, often in partnership with Travelling Ahead, he was not a teacher and had not been to school as a child.

³ Curriculum for Wales 2022 - <https://hwb.gov.wales/draft-curriculum-for-wales-2022/a-guide-to-curriculum-for-wales-2022>

⁴ Consultation on the proposed new law ended in March 2019 and the result are available online at <https://gov.wales/our-national-mission-transformational-curriculum>

The young people said that in school they were trading time spent in their own culture – working with parents – for different knowledge, for example, they learnt about Christians and Muslims but there was a risk that they would not be able to get jobs even with qualifications because of discrimination and would lose out on traditional work because they had not learnt it.

Members of the Group explained that relationships took time to develop and to have a positive impact but that the result of cuts was that experienced staff who were known to and trusted by the community were lost. When new staff were appointed the process of building trust had to start again. Teachers were not just teachers but provided lots of support over and above teaching to the community at large and not just children and young people. This was not always appreciated by decision-makers.

The Minister said that she had met community members working at Monkton and that she thought that this was why Monkton worked so well. She asked if there was an appetite for more people from the community to be working in education.

Members of the Group said that there was an appetite for more staff to come from the community but there were not always jobs for newly qualified people and when there were also concerns about job security because of future cuts. This applied to community members who would be newly qualified and less experienced than other staff. It was also seen as a barrier to attracting more men to work with Gypsies and Travellers in schools where it was thought there was a shortage of male role models. The Minister was asked how this was achieved in other communities.

The Minister said that it was also a problem for other communities and that she wanted more diversity because other communities were also saying that they did not see themselves reflected in their schools and asked *'what do we do to bring in people with experience and skills from the community'*?

Members believed that trainee teachers needed more equality and diversity training in their courses and that delivering Higher Education courses in community settings, for example, the Foundation Degrees taught at Monkton would help. Some members thought good teachers were forced into a 'talk and chalk' approach that undermined their confidence when tackling difficult situations or topics like racism in the classroom or young people's knowledge and use of drugs. The same pressures meant that the different skills and perspectives brought by people from different backgrounds were not valued.

The demise of 'Extending Entitlement'⁵ in schools had also reduced the opportunities available to young people.

⁵ Extending Entitlement introduced a rights-based approach to youth policy in Wales - <https://gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2018-02/direction-and-guidance-extending-entitlement-support-for-11-to-25-year-olds-in-wales.pdf>

Education for adults was seen as a key route to improving educational outcomes for the community because adults were sometimes ready to learn when they had not been ready or able to learn as young people.

The Minister said that there would be a new curriculum for teacher training and that she thought that opportunities to return to learning were a “*brilliant idea*” not just for Gypsies and Travellers but for other communities too. She said that “*Wales should become a nation of second chances*”. She said that many teachers had returned to education as mature students and often in non-traditional settings. The Minister said that the Welsh Government would be introducing a part-time route for teacher training and would be offering this outside of university campuses because these were not always local, for example, in her own area (Brecon and Radnorshire) or in Pembroke. In addition, the Welsh Government was making grants available to students studying part-time with the Open University from September⁶.

Members of the Group told the Minister that there had been an improvement in the number of young people from Gypsy and Traveller communities attending secondary school, both in specialist provision and in ‘mainstream’ provision (reference ESTYN report). Members thought that the growth in numbers at ‘mainstream’ provision was particularly welcome because it gave young people an opportunity to mix with a wider social group and gave them access to a wider range of subjects and teaching methods. However, members thought that this improvement was still limited and that there were still many young people who dropped out of secondary education to be home tutored instead. Members argued that there was still too little support in ‘mainstream’ secondary schools and especially at transition from primary school.

The Minister said that she recognised the importance of the transition phase from primary to secondary school and of the impact of bully and racism in schools where young people found themselves as part of a minority, for example, a small number of young Gypsies or Travellers in a large school. She felt that safety was an important aspect of empowerment and felt that Welsh Government guidance on bullying was now out of date, too big to read and not underpinned by law. She said that anti-bullying guidance needed more teeth.

Members told the Minister that the implementation of Welsh Government guidance needed to be monitored to ensure that it was actioned on the ground. Members also argued that transition projects could be run quite cheaply during the summer holidays with small numbers of staff, but that there was still a funding gap.

The Minister asked what a good transition project would like.

Members said that transition projects should:

- Take place in the school holidays
- Provide inexpensive activity and food
- Not look like an anti-poverty project (which would be a barrier in itself)

⁶ <http://www.open.ac.uk/courses/fees-and-funding/learning-and-support-grants>

- Involve families in meetings, introductions and site visits
- Familiarise young people and families with the place, what happens (when, why and how) and the culture of the school
- Be open to small community groups and the viability of a project should not be threatened by small numbers of participants

The Minister said that there was an increasing number of summer programmes including transition and food projects attempting to address poverty and support retention and suggested that a pilot project could be run with Welsh Government SHEP⁷ funding. The Minister recognised that anti-poverty programmes were often culturally inappropriate but said that similar outcomes could be included in other projects and that Welsh Government would be looking at schemes that targeted the needs of specific communities but she also made the point that there had to be clear educational outcomes because this was education money.

Carly Thomas (West Mon High School - Torfaen) asked the Minister if she had any experiences of working with people from Gypsy and Traveller cultures?

The Minister said that she had a little bit of experience. She was the Assembly Member for Brecon and Radnorshire, a rural area in the southern part of Powys, often described as having more sheep than people.

She said that there was no permanent site in South Powys but that there was a family who wanted permanent accommodation. Because there was no official site they had camped in car parks and had been bullied while they were there. The council had offered them space on a farm that was distant from any amenities and there had been a battle to persuade the council to build an official site. When the council was applying for planning permission the Minister received lots of letters (as the local Assembly Member) from other people asking her to support a campaign against the site but she refused. Planning permission was eventually approved, the Welsh Government provided money to build the site, the family have moved in and there are no problems.

Invitations

Michael Purcell (West Mon School – Torfaen) asked the Minister if she would visit the young people at West Mon School.

Leanne Morgan (Travelling Ahead / Association of Gypsies and Travellers in Wales) told the Minister about 'Loose Talk' a group for women from Gypsy and Traveller communities and invited the Minister to visit them.

The Minister said that she would be pleased to accept both invitations. She was always keen to talk to young people about their views on the education system.

⁷ The School Holiday Enrichment Programme (SHEP) is delivered on the ground as 'Food and Fun' - www.wlga.wales/food-and-fun-school-holiday-enrichment-programme

She said that there was evidence that parents were the second most important factor in determining educational outcomes for young people and so she was always interested in talking to mothers.

9. Any Other Business

Tyrone Price thanked the Minister from attending the Cross Party Group and for engaging in the discussion so openly with members. He congratulated Jenny on her election as the new chair and thanked everybody else for their attendance saying that the Group would be nothing without them.

He said that it was important to look at 'Food and Fun' for next year to improve attendance from the community.

Finally, he thanked the young people from West Mon School for coming along and for their work in preparing and asking the questions.