



**Irish Traveller Movement in Britain
The Resource Centre
356 Holloway Road
London N7 6PA
matthew@irishtraveller.org.uk
0207 607 2002**

**Submission to Communities and Local
Government Select Committee inquiry into
localism and decentralisation**



Submission by the Irish Traveller Movement in Britain

October 2010

The Irish Traveller Movement in Britain (ITMB) welcomes the opportunity to participate in the Communities and Local Government Select Committee inquiry into localism and decentralisation. ITMB is proud to work in partnership with the Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities together with service providers and policy makers across the UK, to better promote social inclusion and community cohesion.

Key Points

- As highlighted in the Irish Traveller Movement in Britain's submission on the abolition of regional spatial strategies, there is strong evidence that a localism and decentralisation agenda is limited in its capacity to identify and provide accommodation for the Gypsy and Traveller communities.
- A simplified and centralised national approach to the provision of Gypsy and Traveller accommodation is essential to overcoming the discrimination Gypsies and Travellers face at the local level on accommodation issues.
- *The Community Right to Build* is a good example of how a localism agenda could negatively affect Travellers as it is unlikely that autonomous local community organisations will be any more willing to address Gypsy and Traveller accommodation needs.
- Local authorities spend approximately £18 million a year evicting Gypsies and Travellers from unauthorised sites.¹ The pursuit of a decentralisation and localism agenda - in relation to Gypsy and Traveller accommodation provision - will more than likely lead to an increase in local authorities' expenditure on evictions of Gypsy and Traveller communities.
- Strong evidence from the Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) and local authorities has shown that once proper Gypsy and Traveller sites are provided, conflict and tension between local settled communities and Gypsies and Travellers is significantly reduced, leading to greater community cohesion.

¹ Commission for Racial Equality, 2006, *Common Ground*

1. Introduction

- 1.1 The Irish Traveller Movement in Britain (ITMB) is not adverse to the localism and decentralisation agenda. However, ITMB believes the Governments' existing proposals will not address the severe shortage of Gypsy and Traveller sites. Localism and decentralisation also pose the danger of increasing inequality within and between communities with disadvantaged groups such as Gypsies and Travellers potentially suffering from even greater exclusion.

2. The extent to which decentralisation leads to more effective public service delivery; and what the limits are, or should be, of localism

Limitations of Localism in the provision of Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation

- 2.1 The Government's decentralisation and localism agenda is, by its nature, limited in its ability to provide accommodation for Gypsy and Traveller communities. Evidence has highlighted that unwilling local authorities, often unduly influenced by hostile local residents, are predominantly the reason why there has previously been a failure to deliver the required number of sites throughout the regions. A 2009 EHRC research report ascribed the main barrier to provision of Gypsy and Traveller accommodation as being 'the planning system and, more fundamentally, resistance from the sedentary population to the idea of new sites for Gypsies and Travellers.'² Communities and Local Governments' (CLG) 2009 *Progress Report on Gypsy and Traveller sites* stated:

² EHRC, 2009, *Inequalities experienced by Gypsy and Traveller communities: A review*, p. 24
http://www.equalityhumanrights.com/uploaded_files/research/12inequalities_experienced_by_gypsy_and_traveller_communities_a_review.pdf

*'The current position on site delivery remains unsatisfactory. It is clear that local authorities need to increase the pace at which suitable locations are identified that can be used as Gypsy and Traveller sites.'*³

A move towards a more localised decentralised system of accommodation provision for Gypsy and Traveller communities will most likely lead to a reduction in provision of Gypsy and Traveller sites.

2.2 Presently there is a severe shortage of Gypsy and Traveller sites with research in 2009 by the EHRC finding that 83 percent of local authorities are not on track to meet their five year pitch targets as identified in the Gypsy Traveller Accommodation Assessments (GTAA's):

- There are approximately 8,263 pitches for Gypsies and Travellers in England. GTAA's have highlighted a need for 5,733 pitches over 5 years. That is a 70 percent increase (EHRC 2009).⁴
- At the current rate of pitch provision it will take local authorities 18 years to meet the GTAA's specified in relation to permanent pitch requirements set for a 5 year period (EHRC 2009).⁵

Case for a centralised national approach to Gypsy and Traveller accommodation provision

2.3 As the evidence suggests, local authorities have been slow to increase site provision for Gypsies and Travellers. However, evidence also indicates that since

³ CLG, 2009, *Progress Report on Gypsy and Traveller Policy*, p. 4
<http://www.communities.gov.uk/documents/housing/pdf/1284500>

⁴ EHRC, 2009, *Assessing local housing authorities' progress in meeting the accommodation needs of Gypsy and Traveller communities in England*, p. 12
http://www.equalityhumanrights.com/uploaded_files/13assessing_local_housing_authorities_progress.pdf

⁵ Ibid

the introduction of more centralised measures for the provision of Gypsy and Traveller accommodation provision - through the Housing Act 2004 and ODPM Circular 01/06 - there has been an increase in authorised pitch provision by approximately 13 percent.

- In the year ending March 2010, CLG evidenced that local authorities processed 230 applications for Gypsy and Traveller pitches and granted 48-50 per cent of these applications.⁶ In 1997, the Advisory Committee for the Education of Romanies and Travellers (ACERT) found that 90 per cent of Gypsy and Traveller planning applications were initially rejected.⁷

- In the two years prior to the introduction of Circular 01/06 on 2 February 2006, 68 per cent of appeals relating to Gypsy and Traveller sites were dismissed. In the following two years, 65 per cent of appeals were granted planning permission' (CLG, 2009).⁸

2.4 The ITMB acknowledges the flaws of the previous Governments' approach to Gypsy and Traveller accommodation provision. The ECHR has also criticised the planning process for being too complex, not 'working as intended' and lacking 'clearer guidance' for local authorities.⁹ However, what is evident is that a centralised national approach to the provision of Gypsy and Traveller accommodation is essential in meeting the accommodation needs of these communities. The EHRC supports this position:

'There should be greater leadership at national level not only signalling

⁶ CLG, 2010, *Planning applications March quarter 2010 (England)*, p. 5

<http://www.communities.gov.uk/documents/statistics/pdf/1627448.pdf>

⁷ ACERT and Wilson M. 1997, *Directory of Planning Policies for Gypsy Site Provision*, Bristol, Policy Press

⁸ CLG, 2009, *Progress Report on Gypsy and Traveller Policy*, p. 12

<http://www.communities.gov.uk/documents/housing/pdf/1284500>

⁹ EHRC, 2009, *Assessing local housing authorities' progress in meeting the accommodation needs of Gypsy and Traveller communities in England*, p. 14

http://www.equalityhumanrights.com/uploaded_files/13assessing_local_housing_authorities_progress.pdf

Commitment to increasing site provision but also seeking to tackle the prejudice and racist stereotypes which underlie much of the resistance to site development' (EHRC, 2009).¹⁰

3. The role of local government in a decentralised model of local public service delivery, and the extent to which localism can and should extend to other local agents:

Localism Example: CLG's *Community Right to Build* proposals

3.1 In July 2010, CLG released proposals for *The Community Right to Build* for possible inclusion in the Decentralisation and Localism Bill. The Community Right to Builds' core objective is:

'to allow a community organisation to go ahead with development without the need for an application for planning permission, if there is overwhelming community support for the development and minimum criteria are met' (CLG, 2010).¹¹

3.2 *The Community Right to Build* is a good example of how a localism agenda could negatively affect disadvantaged minority groups such as the Gypsy and Traveller communities. Considering that 83 percent of local authorities are not on track to meet identified Gypsy and Traveller accommodation targets – in many cases as a result of pressure from local settled communities – then it is unlikely that autonomous local community organisations will be any more willing to address Gypsy and Traveller accommodation needs.

¹⁰ Ibid

¹¹ CLG, 2010, *The Community Right to Build*

<http://www.communities.gov.uk/documents/housing/pdf/1648333.pdf>

- 3.3** It is essential that local authorities have a central role in any decentralised model of service delivery, especially in respect of their statutory equality and human rights duties.
- 3.4** In relation to the provision of Gypsy and Traveller accommodation it is essential that local authorities work under a centralised national structure which places an obligation on them to provide appropriate accommodation for the Gypsy and Traveller communities.

4. The impact of decentralisation on the achievement of savings in the cost of local public services and the effective targeting of cuts to those services;

- 4.1** Local authorities spend approximately £18 million a year evicting Gypsies and Travellers from unauthorised sites.¹²

Evidence indicates that when left to the discretion of local authorities and local communities, in a majority of cases Gypsies and Travellers accommodation needs are not properly addressed. This has led to an extreme shortage of authorised sites and a prevalence of unauthorised Gypsy and Traveller sites leading to significant annual eviction costs for local authorities.

The pursuit of decentralisation and localism agenda in relation to Gypsy and Traveller accommodation provision will more than likely lead to an increase in local authorities' expenditure on evictions of Gypsy and Traveller communities.

¹² Commission for Racial Equality, 2006, *Common Ground*

- 4.2** A centralised national approach to Gypsy and Traveller accommodation provision has been proven to be more effective in delivering authorised sites and consequently reducing repeated eviction costs.

Bristol City Council has reduced its annual expenditure on evictions from £200,000 to £5,000 by building a permanent site and a transit site to meet Gypsies and Travellers' accommodation needs (EHRC).¹³

Conclusion

A localism and decentralisation agenda would be limited in its capacity to ultimately provide accommodation for the Gypsy and Traveller communities. It is recommended that a simplified and centralised national approach to the provision of Gypsy and Traveller accommodation is essential to overcoming the discrimination Gypsies and Travellers face at the local level. Once proper Gypsy and Traveller sites are indeed provided, conflict and tension between local settled communities and Gypsies and Travellers will be significantly reduced, leading to greater community cohesion.

¹³ EHRC, 2009, *Inequalities experienced by Gypsy and Traveller communities: A review*, p. 31
http://www.equalityhumanrights.com/uploaded_files/research/12inequalities_experienced_by_gypsy_and_traveller_communities_a_review.pdf