



Public Services Committee

Uncorrected oral evidence: Access to public services for the Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities

Wednesday 2 February 2022

4.05 pm

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Members present: Baroness Armstrong of Hill Top (The Chair); Lord Bichard; Lord Bourne of Aberystwyth; Lord Davies of Gower; Lord Filkin; Baroness Pitkeathley; Lord Porter of Spalding; Baroness Sater; Lord Willis of Knaresborough.

Evidence Session No. 2

Virtual Proceeding

Questions 7 - 13

Witnesses

I: Allison Hulmes, Co-founder, Gypsy, Roma and Traveller Social Work Association; Victoria Hamnett, Social Worker, Rochdale Borough Council; Dr Dan Allen, Deputy Head of Department, Faculty of Health, Psychology and Social Care, Manchester Metropolitan University; Abbie Kirkby, Policy and Public Affairs Manager, Friends, Families and Travellers (FFT); Ivy Manning, Community Engagement Officer, Friends, Families and Travellers (FFT).

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Examination of Witnesses

Allison Hulmes, Victoria Hamnett, Dr Dan Allen, Abbie Kirkby and Ivy Manning.

Q7 The Chair: The next panel have, I think, been waiting and watching. We have Allison Hulmes, co-founder of the Gypsy, Roma and Traveller Social Work Association; Victoria Hamnett, a social worker with Rochdale Borough Council, Dr Dan Allen, deputy head of department at the Faculty of Health, Psychology and Social care at Manchester Metropolitan University; Abbie Kirkby, Policy and Public Affairs Manager at Friends, Families and Travellers; and Ivy Manning, community engagement officer at Friends, Families and Travellers. Welcome to all of you.

As you can see, some of us are in a room, and others are, like you, virtual. That always gives us one or two problems, but we will try to work through those. We have an hour, so inevitably we will not be able to cover everything, but we will try to cover as much as we can. As you know, we are taking this session to look at what has happened since the national strategy on Gypsies, Roma and Travellers was put out, particularly on access to public services, because that is this committee's remit.

If I can open up the questioning again, most of you are involved in research and in monitoring and evaluation of activity. Previous studies, including the Race Disparity Audit and the Women and Equalities Committee report, have highlighted inequalities of access to various public services for Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities. A national strategy was also launched to tackle entrenched inequalities. We are interested in whether you have seen anything that has really worked and seen change for these communities from these initiatives.

Abbie Kirkby: I am afraid to say that we are a bit of a way off achieving meaningful change for Gypsy, Roma and Traveller people in the UK. We are still awaiting the publication of the strategy that you mentioned. That was the promised cross-departmental strategy to tackle the inequalities experienced by Gypsy, Roma and Traveller people, which were exposed, once again, by the Women and Equalities Committee during its inquiry. The Women and Equalities Committee rightly referred to the persistent failure of policymakers, which Lord Filkin recognised during the first panel session.

The Race Disparity Audit exposed inequalities and race disparities, but only where government departments monitored those ethnic communities. Most government departments do not have a category for Gypsy, Roma and Traveller people, aside from the Department for Education. Proper, disaggregated ethnic monitoring is sorely lacking. One of the recommendations of the Women and Equalities Committee was to harmonise ethnic data collection across government departments. It was also in the Race Disparity Audit's quality improvement plan to do that harmonisation of data collection. We are not sure where that is at. We have not seen any progress on data collection across government departments, so we will wait to see how that progresses. I believe that we are due for a report in the spring of this year.

Although data is important—crucial, in fact—we really need to speed up the implementation of the harmonisation of data collection. These inequalities have been exposed time and time again. This is not new. We know about the stark inequalities experienced by the Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities, but we need the action to address those inequalities. The premise underpinning the Race Disparity Audit was to explain or change race disparities, and I am afraid that we are not quite seeing enough of a move to changing the situation.

Allison Hulmes: I would echo everything that Abbie has spoken about. It is critical that we have harmonisation and disaggregation of ethnicity data. In the last session, there was a lot of discussion about the distinct ethnicities and how we are not able to focus on their needs because of a lack of disaggregated and harmonised ethnicity data.

I live and practise in Wales. In relation to our experiences in Wales and that desire and drive to see action, we all talk about the problems. We have report after report, but what we want to see is action. The Welsh Government are in the process of developing a race equality action plan, which is founded on the need to see actual change. There is an ambition for Wales to be an anti-racist country by 2030.

There is a change in the way the Welsh Government are approaching the equalities gaps that exist for our communities. It is important to say that I am a Welsh Gypsy. They are starting to look at those inequalities in terms of structural racism and how that operates. The race equality action plan is absolutely about focusing on the role that structural racism plays in these equality gaps that we know about and that never close.

Dr Dan Allen: Nelson Mandela said, “The true character of a society is revealed in how it treats its children”. Let us then consider the true impact of any equality policy concordat or measure and how that impacts on children. That is the perspective that Victoria and I come to this committee from, as child protection social workers and researchers.

Since 2009, there has been a steady increase in the number of children of Travellers of Irish heritage and Gypsy and Roma children recorded by the Office for National Statistics as living in state care. In 2009, there were 90 Gypsy/Roma children living in care. The Office for National Statistics, as Abbie and Allison have already alluded to, conflates those ethnicities and considers them to be the same for the purpose of those data recording censuses. We know that they are not the same but are distinct, discrete ethnic groups who characterise themselves sensitively and differently from one other. As of March 2021, 12 years on, that number was 680. For Travellers of Irish heritage, which is the Office for National Statistics definition of that ethnic group, there were 30 in 2009 and 210 as of March 2021.

Across Europe, there is a significant concern about the overrepresentation of children living in state care and of children who are subject to child protection services or child-in-need family support services. For us, any measure of any equality policy should impact on the

numbers of children who are being supported through statutory social work services, but we are not seeing a reduction in them. If anything, we are seeing a gradual, steady increase that is considerably disproportionate to the number of children who are experiencing social care and social work support in the UK.

The research that Victoria and I have done is to start to understand why that representation has come about. We wanted to consider whether Gypsy, Roma and Traveller children are overrepresented in child protection services and, if they are, the reason for that. We considered three potential reasons: multiple levels of deprivation that colleagues have already reported as key drivers for social work and child protection intervention; families' continual experience of structural inequality; and child protection services and universal services, including public services, being institutionally racist.

One of the biggest challenges we had in trying to uncover an answer to that question relates to a point that Abbie and Allison have already made, which is the conflation of ethnicities. Positioned rather uniquely against other countries in Europe, the ONS does collect data, but it conflates ethnicity, which makes any analysis to understand the impact of policy extremely difficult. Luckily, there is consistency in that conflation. The Department for Education uses Traveller of Irish heritage and Gypsy/Roma, but so do the school pupil characteristics databases. Those two sources of information gave us a point of statistical analysis, so we could advance a qualitative study of this topic the UK.

Although this conversation about supporting public services for Gypsies, Roma and Travellers—we have heard the term GRT used a lot—is really important, our research found that we now need to think separately, because the issues affecting Irish Traveller children are different from the situations and challenges facing Gypsy and Roma children.

In 2008, Irish Traveller children were three times more likely to be referred to social services, which means that one in five Irish Traveller children were referred to social services in 2008. Think about the economic cost, as well as the social and emotional cost to families, of those referrals. Unlike Gypsy/Roma communities, we found that, over time, social work services reduced from the point of initial referral. Conversely, the number of referrals of Gypsy/Roma families to social services are almost similar to those of any other ethnic group. Unlike those patterns, we see a gradual increase in social work involvement over time, so those children are more likely to be brought into state care.

What that separation has highlighted is that, for us to create parity and for any race equality or inequality policy or concordat to create a levelling-up agenda, we need to reinvest in early support services that can bridge the gap that was Billy talked about earlier by building relationships. We have seen a gradual decline in Traveller education services and specialist health services. If we can reinvest and re-enable early help preventive services, we will reduce the number of referrals to

social services and bring parity in the way that policy concordat is set out.

For Gypsy/Roma, it is very difficult for us to come up with a recommendation for how we can create a level playing field and tackle the entrenched inequalities that they face until the Office for National Statistics disaggregates, so that we can look at the statistical representation of Gypsy and of Roma, and recognise the discrete challenges that may be affecting those communities.

The Chair: You are giving us a whole range of new problems there, but that is exactly what we are here for.

Ivy Manning: Abbie and Allison have conveyed the messages well, but I would say that the Women and Equalities Committee's recommendation for a strategy was welcome. It is very disappointing that it has gone by the wayside and that accommodation was not met at that point. I would like to see more about accommodation in the strategy, because we know—we heard this in the first session—that that is the bottom line and the top line. It revolves around accommodation and a safe space for people to live, whether nomadic or not.

We have touched on negotiated stopping. This is not a new practice. I lived roadside for 25 years and, for about 17 years, it was through negotiated stopping with different local authorities. It is not new. It is just that the press has made it something new, with unauthorised encampments. When people talk about negotiated stopping, they think that this is a new thing. It has been done for many years, but I would like to see departments crossing over and maybe looking at this as adopters of a policy. I am sorry that I could not add much more value, but Allison and Abbie covered it very well.

Q8 Lord Willis of Knaresborough: Dan, your statistics are interesting, as are most academic statistics. As a committee, we have to make one or two recommendations to a Minister that will make the change. What are your top three recommendations that this committee should make, which will make the profound change that you want?

Dr Dan Allen: The first recommendation would be that local authorities are now legally obligated to alert the Department for Education of the reasons why families are being referred to children's services. At the minute, there is no obligation for that data to be collected, so we do not know, for example, whether one in five Irish Traveller children are referred to social services because of educational absenteeism or because of concerns around housing, health, family or poverty. Until we know that, it will be very difficult for us to think about the restorative and remedial actions that are needed in preventive and early help services.

The second action is to disaggregate the ethnicities of Gypsy and Roma within the datasets. There is no other conflation of ethnicities within those datasets. It is brilliant that we are, arguably, progressive compared with other countries in Europe in monitoring these ethnicities, but by

conflating them we are not enabling a full understanding of the issue. There is an overrepresentation of those particular communities in care. Because of that conflation, we do not know whether specifically Romani Gypsy or Roma are affected. Until the Office for National Statistics separates that in the way we have talked about, we cannot move forward.

The third recommendation is to develop our grass-roots services, recognising, with the support of the Gypsy, Roma and Traveller Social Work Association and Friends, Families and Travellers what issues are affecting families at the grass roots that lead to the crisis that triggers the threshold for social work involvement. There, we will have the opportunity to analyse the situation through accurate data and the experiences of families.

Lord Willis of Knaresborough: We do not seem to be doing anything to pick up where the first panel left off. They said quite clearly that unless we have people from those ethnic backgrounds leading these developments at grass-roots level, we will not go anywhere. What is your solution to that?

Dr Dan Allen: There are people at the grass roots who are developing these initiatives. Friends, Families and Travellers is engaging in significant community development work to support families, as are the Traveller Movement, Law for Life and the Gypsy, Roma and Traveller Social Work Association. Their work can be supportive at the grass roots only if there is evidence to submit to policymakers of statistical effects and the value in creating change at a macro level. Social services, as we are broadly aware, often arrive in the lives of families where there are chronic examples of deprivation. No matter how hard these grass-roots organisations work, they will not achieve the levelling-up agenda that is largely the responsibility of this committee and others.

Q9 Lord Bichard: Thank you for coming in today. It is a day when we are hearing a lot about levelling up. Dan, you mentioned it a little earlier. Would you expect to see some reference to Travellers, Roma and Gypsies in the levelling-up White Paper? We have a wonderful set of clerks to this committee, so I can tell you that there are three mentions of the Romans in the White Paper published today, but no mentions of Roma or Romani people, which maybe proves the point. Would you expect levelling up to include references to your communities?

The second question will probably be ruled out for being provocative, but I have sat here for two hours now hearing about all sorts of data and strategies, and none of them seems to have been put into place. When that happens in an organisation, the only conclusion I can draw is that the organisation is institutionally racist. I begin to wonder whether we are skirting around the core problem here, in that, on the whole, so far as Gypsies, Roma, Romani and Irish Travellers are concerned, our public services are institutionally racist. Discuss. Start with levelling up, because that is less contentious.

Abbie Kirkby: The degree to which Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities will fit into the levelling-up agenda is not really clear at this stage. It would really depend on how much the levelling-up agenda looks beyond regional disparities and looks at other disparities between communities. That will be a key factor in whether that impacts on Gypsy, Roma and Traveller people.

Having seen the press release this morning on levelling up, there is certainly scope for improvements within the levelling-up agenda, particularly when you look at goals such as addressing the gross disparities in health and healthy life expectancy. This is a major issue for Gypsy and Traveller people, whose life expectancy is reported to be 10 to 25 years less than the general population. Gypsies and Travellers experience high levels of poor health, with a high frequency of respiratory and cardiovascular conditions.

There is also a goal to address poor-quality housing and to build more affordable social housing, but it is whether those goals cover poor-quality sites and the increase in site provision, which I know we have talked a little about already. It is whether that levelling-up agenda is strictly regionally based or whether it will look at issues between communities. Ultimately, levelling up is about investing in overlooked and undervalued communities, so there is certainly scope for that to include Gypsy, Roma and Traveller people. We would hope to see it in the agenda, but we do not know at this stage.

Lord Bichard: The levelling-up White Paper is focused on place. I am normally very keen for people to focus on places, but for these communities it does not work very well, does it? We are talking about communities that are quite mobile in some respects, so the danger is that our emphasis on place means that we do not focus enough on people.

Abbie Kirkby: It certainly will be an issue for nomadic people who move around, but you might have a high population of Gypsy or Irish Traveller people living in a very prosperous borough who will be forgotten about if it is purely regionally focused.

Allison Hulmes: If Gypsy, Traveller and Roma people are not overtly talked about in the White Paper, my fear is that we will continue to be overlooked. It has to be overt in the White Paper. Going back to what Abbie said, you may have a really wealthy local authority, but the experiences of Gypsy, Traveller and Roma people living in that authority may be very different from those of the general population, so it has to speak to a locality. An inclusive levelling-up strategy has to make provision for nomadic peoples, which, again, needs to be overtly written into the White Paper.

Dr Dan Allen: The specific inclusion of those ethnic groups is worthy of consideration. Let us not forget the EU framework for national Roma integration strategies and the value that has given to communities. Our relationship with that obligation has changed recently, for reasons that I am sure are obvious to everybody. There is value in that policy, because

it was built on the principles of identifying and building capacity in health, education and housing. A targeted local response built into multiple deprivation indices, run through local authority strategic needs assessments, for example, might speak to the localised efforts to include those people rather than acknowledging or including the group per se, because while there are chronic levels of deprivation, poverty and inequality in some families and in some communities, that is not reflective of all. Those strengths and opportunities should be considered too.

If it is okay, I will move on to the next question: are public services institutionally racist? I was fortunate enough to be invited to speak to a committee in 2017 led by Baroness Whitaker on exactly the same topic. Five years later, I am still calling for the disaggregation of the Gypsy and Roma ethnic groups. Will we be here in five years' time, with Victoria and me saying the same thing? That perhaps becomes a rhetorical question—"Is institutional racism a factor?"—given the lack of action. There is continual representation now from grass-roots organisations, in academic research and in the policy concordats that we have already talked about, which talk about the levers for change. It may be just that we are not seeing them, for reasons that we may do well to consider another time.

Lord Bichard: We have seen some quite significant progress in diversity and inclusion, particularly in the public sector. My point was really whether there is something about these communities that public services still find difficult, so they are excluded from some of the progress. Abbie made the point a while ago about just getting the ethnicity data. The box to tick, which we all tick endlessly, does not say anything about these communities. You do not need a lot of money to do that. You just need the will to do it, and if you do not have the will, you have to ask why.

Ivy Manning: I do not think that I can add much about institutional racism. My work is in race hate, so I am reporting hate incidents and hate crimes all the time. I do feel that some politicians are very outspoken. If you have that power of leadership, it has a trickledown effect, which has a knock-on effect on all services and on people from all walks of life. If they are seeing it in the media and hearing it from someone they vote for, they are going to go anti-Traveller straightaway. It is a very difficult one, but that is not for me to tackle, so I will not add any more.

Q10 Lord Bourne of Aberystwyth: I have a question following on from Ivy's point. That is absolutely right about negative images and negative speaking. On the other hand, there is an issue that I would appreciate thoughts on: getting Gypsy, Roma and Traveller people mainstreamed into governmental activity and into public roles, which sometimes happens but they then slip from consciousness and no longer represent the community.

For example, as I found out in a debate that we had, a Member of the House of Lords is from the Roma community. He does not keep it quiet, but he does not get up and bang a drum about it. If there is some way we could get people much more mainstreamed into public life, which has

happened with other minorities but perhaps not so much with Gypsy, Roma and Traveller—it is not so obvious, perhaps, that somebody is from that community when on a committee or doing something in public life—that might be helpful. I would appreciate your thoughts on that.

Abbie Kirkby: It is about providing opportunities early in children's lives. We need to address the issues of accessing educational services. The first panel spoke at length about some of the barriers that prevent Gypsy, Roma and Traveller children maintaining their education, with issues of bullying. Those issues need to be addressed from an early age, so that Gypsy, Roma and Traveller people have those opportunities to prosper in terms of social mobility.

Ivy is right, in that the messaging we see from the media and, I am sorry to say, a lot of politicians is prejudicial and negative. It is very much focused on a small number. It is focused on encampments and perhaps an issue of litter. You do not hear about the Traveller police officer or the Romani Gypsy nurse who saved your mum's life, or all those other stories, of which there are many. Unfortunately, the media focus on a small minority of issues and we are not hearing about all those other wonderful contributions that Gypsy, Roma and Traveller people make to society.

Q11 **Baroness Pitkeathley:** My question is about obstacles to improving equality and the importance of data, but we have had a lot of agreement in both the first session and this one, for which many thanks, about both of those things, so we must be quite convinced about those.

With the Chair's permission, I would like to ask a different question. I am very struck by the number of different organisations and agencies that are working with these groups. How much do you, as organisations, work together to put over a policy point of view or to work on the PR side? I was quite struck by what has just been said about the PR aspect of getting to know these communities. I would like to know about the co-operation and cohesion between your organisations and any others that work with these particular groups. As you are policy and public affairs manager, Abbie, perhaps I will start with you.

Abbie Kirkby: In answer to that question, those involved in advocating for Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities are quite a small sector. We have to work together in order to make our voice louder. One example is a project that we are involved called Roadside Futures, which a number of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller organisations are part of. It is all about improving the outcomes of people living in roadside camps. That is a big national project that supports grass-roots projects in local pockets across the country. We frequently work together in order to achieve change.

Baroness Pitkeathley: Allison, would you like to give us the Wales point of view?

Allison Hulmes: I would agree. We are a very small sector. There is tremendous collaboration in Wales. We have FFT here this afternoon with us and we have really positive, strong relationships with the Roma

Support Group and Law for Life. I am on one of the strategic groups of the Traveller Movement and was at a meeting with them yesterday. It is really important that we collaborate and share knowledge, ideas and resources.

Baroness Pitkeathley: Ivy, is that across the board and across all three different communities that we have been talking about this afternoon, or do you sometimes have to disaggregate what you do, to use Dan's word, in order to focus on a particular community?

Ivy Manning: No, not in that sense. We work with the Roma Support Group and other organisations. Most organisations will cover Gypsy and Traveller issues, so GRT across the board. For Friends, Families and Travellers, we do not have a high population of Roma in our area. We cover outreach projects. We will do referrals to other organisations if they are in that locality. We will work on key issues because we understand fundamentally that it is an enriched culture and a subculture. There are lots of issues that cross over between education, race hate, discrimination and access to services. For Roma, there are probably not so many issues with accommodation on local authority sites, but they have their own issues with overcrowding and housing. We have a housing issue, full stop, in this country.

We do try to work together as best as we can, when we can, but some organisations are very small and underresourced. I feel that this current Government could put some more streamlined funding in to help build up organisations where there are gaps in areas, and for more grass-roots work. That feeds into policy. If there are no outreach projects and no one working on the ground, how do we feed that up to make changes? More resources and funding should be put into the sector.

Baroness Pitkeathley: Victoria, do you have a take on that?

Victoria Hamnett: I just want to go back to the obstacles to accessing public services for Gypsies, Roma and Travellers. Historically, we know that Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities often have fear and shame in accessing the support, from quite early on, of children and welfare services. As a result, there are fewer opportunities to engage and accept that early help.

I would also like to reinforce that professionals often do not have the insight and the perception from Gypsy, Roma and Traveller families that the experiences they have had previously are often very negative. How they engage other ethnicities may be different from how we engage Gypsies, Roma and Travellers at that really early level. At the point of a referral to children's welfare services, Gypsy, Roma and Traveller families are often at crisis point.

That reinforces how we need to implement extra support for Gypsy, Roma and Traveller families in accessing early help intervention before it gets to a crisis point. That may prevent further referrals, with a reduction

in children in child protection conferences and going into state care. Implementing some funding at that low level is crucial.

Dr Dan Allen: The grass-roots organisations that we have already talked about have a role in identifying those early help needs specifically for those communities in those specific areas, because there will be differences between families as well as regionally and nationally. The work that colleagues on this and the previous call have done in raising our awareness is so important. Our duty now is to listen.

Q12 Lord Willis of Knaresborough: One thing that has struck me about this evidence session is the life expectancy being 10 and sometimes 20 years less than the average population. Significant numbers of children are in care, going up by 400% or 500% in just over 10 years. As we speak today, 10,000 Travellers are on the roadside. They are all, quite frankly, disturbing statistics. What we come down to is this: how do we get good services to Gypsies, Roma and Travellers, including New Age Travellers?

My question here is to try to get answers from you, rather than for you to continually tell us about the problems. It seems to me that we have three groups: people living on sites, people living nomadically and choosing to do that, and mainly Roma living often in substandard housing in distinct family units. They are the three silos.

We then have silos of services. Whether it is health, social work, education, transport or police, all are quite separate. The challenge of those individual groups accessing those services, often without education, without the internet and other modern aids, is massive.

I would like each of you to say how we could improve the communication levels, so that we can at least let people know what services are available to them and encourage them to move to those services. What are the solutions to dealing with this huge communication problem? It is a simple question.

Dr Dan Allen: We can go first to the concern about the significant increase in representation of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller children in public care services. If we look at the significant increase in those numbers—we have been used to looking at charts with numerical representation more recently—there is a clear spike in 2011 and 2012, when there was a reduction in and removal of specialist Traveller education services. For the reason that Victoria has already outlined, the sense of community trust in and reliability of public services has been damaged, as Allison, Ivy and Abbie will attest to, by centuries of oppression and mistreatment. That Traveller education service became a really important lynchpin in bridging the divide between community apprehension and public service interest and support.

The removal of that specific organisation and, later, specialist health visitors and other key people responsible for community development work, including the late Michael Ridge—rest in peace—who worked for the Haringey Travelling People's Team, has created a vacuum. That vacuum

has created a yawning gap, which is making harder the lives of the families Victoria and I are working to support, which is then increasing their involvement in statutory social work services.

We need to think about how we can bridge that divide and make sure that our services are accessible. The Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities are not hard to reach; our services are hard to reach. That gives us a way to start thinking about how, working backwards, we can make our services accessible to the people who are most in need.

Lord Willis of Knaresborough: Is this is a dedicated group of people in individual local authorities who you would like to see have this co-ordinating role? You have to have somebody advocating, who is able to look across services. Do we want more diverse people working in these services?

Dr Dan Allen: The economic impact of an austerity measure on child protection services means that our opportunities for prevention and early help have been reduced further and further. There is a real gap in that intermediary in universal services. If there is a concern about school absenteeism, for example, as we heard Billy Welch talk about earlier, the school may interpret its responsibility to safeguard that child as sending a referral to social services. That social worker may not be fully equipped or knowledgeable to work effectively with the community in order to understand the intersectional challenges that we have already heard about and to make an assumption about risk.

We need that development work with the communities, at grass roots, as our representatives here are too, but also those who work in local authorities, within health structures, housing structures and education, to bridge that gap. At the minute, some of the most vulnerable families are falling through that gap.

Allison Hulmes: We spoke about structural racism. In terms of what needs to change, we do need to focus on the role of structural racism. The race equality action plan in Wales is a really good example. The Welsh Government are acknowledging that structural racism is probably the most significant barrier to change. We have all these fantastic strategies and action plans, but we keep saying, time and time again, that nothing has changed. Why has change not happened?

We may just have to say that change has not happened because of structural racism. The race equality action plan is all about actively dismantling those structures in public bodies in Wales. There is a draft race equity action plan being consulted on at the moment, and we are waiting to see the report, but the approach of the Welsh Government is actively to say, "We have to talk about structural racism".

In relation to doing something really positive to change experiences, particularly the educational inequalities of Gypsies and Travellers, Wales is the first country in the UK to make the teaching of black, Asian and

minority ethnic history and racism mandatory on the school curriculum. This will start to be taught from September this year.

Billy Welch spoke about the importance of community going into schools and teaching children. We have to change the hearts and minds of children. They are the future and this is where it starts. What Billy was talking about is so important, and that changes hearts and minds, but the Welsh Government are making that mandatory. It is backed up by £500,000 of funding to support the implementation of teaching black, Asian and minority ethnic history and culture in the school curriculum.

One of the barriers to Gypsy, Roma and Traveller children going to school is that they do not see themselves represented. They do not see teachers from their communities. There are no role models and they do not hear about our contributions, our history or our culture. If I think about the history of me as a Welsh Kale Gypsy, we can go back to the very first Welsh Gypsies who started the clans here, but that is not taught. We need to see ourselves. Other children need to see it.

These are really important levers that could be adopted outside of Wales. I know that this is one of the questions later, so I am sorry that I am coming in a bit early, but we were talking about some of the solutions. They include focusing on structural racism and making the teaching of Gypsy, Traveller and Roma history and contributions mandatory on the school curriculum.

Ivy Manning: I want to echo what Dan and Allison said. We need Traveller education services put back in place in all areas. They work and are really helpful in bridging the gap between all communities. If you are on a local authority site, your Gypsy liaison officer or site warden is an enforcement too. You can imagine that if you have been roadside in that local area and been shifted on several times by that same person, and then you get housed on that site, that person becomes, essentially, your landlord, but they have been the enforcement.

They are not a great person to engage with. If you want to engage with people on the ground, you need Traveller education services or a midwifery service. I went through Traveller education services as a very young child, and they helped my education. There was a green card scheme, where you had a primary residency school. You would obtain that green card when you were going away and, at every school that you went to, work would be added. They would check your work and send you away with more. If there was a lapse of two or three weeks not attending school, you had a school pack to go with. That stopped.

Unfortunately, school buses stopped going to people on roadside camps, private land or local authority sites. All that needs to come back in. It seems like we are receding in advancements, where things were much better 20 years ago than they are now. It is such a shame to see that things have to recede this far back and we are still having these conversations about Traveller education and just bringing services in. There needs to be more cultural awareness training. We need to celebrate Gypsy, Roma and Traveller History Month.

We need to look at public bodies such as the police, because there is no confidence in or trust between the police and Gypsy, Traveller and Roma people. For example, if you are on a local authority site, the police will turn up to visit one resident but will raid everyone onsite, when we are not all related. It is like going into a street of houses, knocking on everyone's door and raiding everyone for one specific person. There is no trust there.

When you report a hate crime or hate incident, there is no consistency across the jurisdictions in how it is dealt with. It is very confusing if you have low literacy, you are at that time of need and want to use that service, and you are being pushed back and othered by the police saying, "That is technically not a hate incident. I thought it was okay to say the P word". There is a real of confidence in public services.

There are GP registration refusals. I have changed GP about seven times, all because of my address, yet where I live has been established since 1891. It was a Gypsy and Traveller halting site. It has been here for as long as the village has, yet we still have these knockbacks.

We really need to reintroduce simple services that were in place and really worked, and then build on them. I feel that we are receding in this current time. So much more needs to be done. We should not be having to spoon feed educators. They are educators and they should be educating others when it comes to bullying and anti-racism.

I find it very difficult, because I have had so many conversations with schools over the time. My son has been removed from school and is currently home educated because of issues with the school. To touch on what Billy Welch said, he is thriving and beating the national curriculum. Again, one box does not fit all, so introducing that service would really help bridge that gap in the meanwhile.

Dr Dan Allen: A committee member recognised an estimation of 10,000 vulnerable families who are currently homeless and are potentially going to be made subject to Part 4 of the policing Bill. From a child protection and public service point of view, that signifies a red flag.

An earlier question asked whether services are institutionally racist. If we come to present to the committee in one, two or three years because we have run a chronology of the numbers of children entering statutory child protection services, we predict that that number might spike because of the dearth of community services that Ivy has just articulated.

Q13 **Baroness Sater:** Good afternoon, everyone. We do not have long, so perhaps we can finish on some positives. Could you give us an example today of best practice in improving equality of access to public services for Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities? What lessons can be learned from existing strategies—we have talked about many today—that have already been launched elsewhere, perhaps in Wales or Scotland?

Ivy Manning: I can jump in with best practice. There need to be more intervention and outreach programmes. Just before Christmas, we took

part in a Covid pilot project. We visited Gypsy and Traveller sites, and people who were housed, and explained to them the new guidance in a language that they would understand. We helped them to set up the NHS Test and Trace app and Covid passport, gave them lateral flows and delivered PCR tests when they needed to self-isolate. That worked really well. In terms of vaccinations, it seems like everyone was on board with getting the health messages, but those were just lacking from local authorities.

I found that, probably for the first half of the pandemic, people were saying that we needed to isolate. We live in a rural area and we could not get any deliveries. The local authority would not come out. We were stuck. We could not get access to gas or electricity, because we are on a key meter. Good practice is about bridging the gap in those areas and identifying that need. Quite clearly, services that are in place from local authorities are not working in areas that I know of. We work at a national level and have a national helpline, so we do get data from clients and we get a vast range of issues, but there is always that emerging pattern of local authorities not stepping in and helping where they should. As I said, it seems like it is more about enforcement than helpfulness.

There is loads of stuff that you can do, such as cultural awareness training, but outreach is a very good model to try to bridge that gap and achieve that understanding. We need diversity leaders in different areas—that would help—and more funding, please.

Allison Hulmes: We need more funding, absolutely, including to support community development. Mihai, in the first session, spoke about the importance of community development and supporting grass-roots initiatives. Community Champions is a model that has worked really well in Wales. We need to support the community in being empowered.

I have talked a bit about some of the important levers in Wales, particularly the new school curriculum and the race equality action plan. In Wales, we have pro-Gypsy and Traveller legislation in relation to housing. Part 3 of the Housing (Wales) Act 2014 places a statutory duty on all local authorities to assess and meet the housing needs of Gypsies and Travellers in their locality, which includes the provision of sites as well as transit sites. There is something really important about having that statutory duty.

I have to say that it is really fantastic that we have that, but since the legislation has been implemented we have not seen any new sites in Wales. We have no transit sites. Although we have the legislation there and need has been assessed, those statutory obligations have not been fulfilled. There is something about understanding why that has not happened. We can extrapolate why that might be, and some of it might be about structural racism, but there have to be clear accountability measures built into statutory duties not being discharged.

Allison Hulmes: I just wanted to pick up on the point that Dan and Ivy made about how crucial it is that public services build the trust of the

communities. When you think about it, we are looking at a backdrop of centuries of persecution and marginalisation, so it takes time to build trust. It is often best done through voluntary or community organisations, which Josie touched on in the earlier session. Ivy mentioned the test and trace programme, a scheme that we were involved in, just to ensure that the public health messages are getting to communities on the ground.

Targeted interventions are definitely needed. We were talking about the Traveller education service, but there are other outreach schemes, such as healthcare professionals, community nurses and midwives reaching out to the community to make their services accessible in order to improve the health outcomes of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller people.

You talked earlier about the statutory duty to provide sites. That is, beyond doubt, what we need. Most of the sites in England were built during the period of the statutory duty between 1968 and 1994. We need that, but we also need an interim programme of negotiated stopping approaches, which I know the earlier panel spoke about too.

On funding, which also came up in the first panel, the Traveller pitch fund was reasonably accessed by local authorities. In subsequent schemes for funding for Traveller sites, we had the shared ownership and affordable homes programme. The last programme, which ran from 2016 to 2021, saw only two Traveller sites nationally receive funding. Local authorities do not have the appetite to build sites. We have spoken about local prejudice against having more sites built, which is a massive barrier to addressing that issue.

Dr Dan Allen: I know that Allison would not say it, but the biggest example of improving equality is the Gypsy, Roma and Traveller Social Work Association, a group of very committed Gypsy, Roma and Traveller social workers who are volunteers and who, in addition to their work as full-time social workers, work to train leaders in education, health, housing and social work. They have also been recently supporting a local authority subject to a serious case review after the tragic death of a child, to look at how we can develop public services and child protection practices for those communities.

The whole movement is built on the work that Allison, Doreen, Jackie, Martin, Kate and others have done, based upon their passion, but it is on a voluntary basis, supported, by and large, by the British Association of Social Workers. It has a commitment to change, all done on the basis of their voluntary contribution, so thank you.

The Chair: You have given us lots to think about and lots of very important information about the different communities and your experiences of trying to access public services. Thank you very much. I am sorry that, as ever, we have run out of time, but we are really grateful to you for coming this afternoon and for giving us the benefit of your experience and your knowledge. Thank you.