

Jane Hutt MS,
Minister for Social Justice and Chief Whip,
Welsh Government

20 October 2023

Dear Jane,

Housing Ukrainian refugees and provision of sites for Gypsy, Roma and Travellers

Thank you for attending our meeting on 5 October in relation to our work on housing Ukrainian refugees and the provision of sites for Gypsy, Roma and Travellers. The Committee agreed that I should write to you to seek further information on some of the issues we discussed.

Ukrainian refugees

In your evidence you confirmed that the contract with the company 'Corporate Travel Management' has now ended and you have transitioned to another accommodation provider 'Calder World of Travel'. We would be grateful if you could clarify whether this company has also been used by the UK Government to provide refugee accommodation and the anticipated length and value of this contract.

We heard that numbers of arrivals have slowed and we welcome the efforts made to keep in contact with those who have a visa but who have not arrived. We note that figures published by the UK Government on 10 October suggest that 7,136 Ukrainian refugees have arrived in Wales via the Homes for Ukraine and Welsh Government Super Sponsor schemes. We would be grateful if you could provide an update on how many Ukrainian refugees are currently living in Wales and any further information relating to what measures are in place to collect this information, including whether the Welsh Government is recording numbers of those leaving Wales and their reasons for doing so.

In your evidence, you provided some details on how the £40 million that was allocated in 2023-24 to support Ukrainian refugees has been spent and also what the £8.2 million allocated by the UK Government has been used for. We would be grateful if you could provide a further breakdown of

how the £40 million has been administered (including an update on the cost of the Corporate Travel Management Contract).

Since providing evidence, it was concerning for us to learn that the allocation for the Ukrainian programme has reduced by £4.3 million. We would be grateful if you could provide further details on this reduction, how it will impact on the support available to Ukrainian refugees and a breakdown of how the £8.2 million has been allocated, including clarification that this amount is being distributed to local authorities.

Additionally, during the meeting, you agreed to provide the following information, requested by Members:

- feedback on progress in relation to converting appropriate placements into commercial lodging arrangements, should thank you payments not be available in year 3;
- more details on analysis undertaken by the Welsh Government on the reasons for refusal of accommodation;
- details of the total costs paid to CTM, once all figures are reconciled;
- details of the Welsh Government's ongoing work to analyse annual returns on the grant provided to local authorities and registered social landlords to provide homes (including modular accommodation) for those in housing need.

Provision of sites for Gypsy, Roma and Travellers

In your evidence, you noted that you would be discussing with the Minister for Climate Change the cross-cutting nature of some of the actions in the Anti-racist Wales Action Plan. Specifically, the pilot programme to provide the GRT community with independent trusted advice service to those seeking to develop private sites. There is also a commitment in the Anti-racist Wales Action Plan to review the current funding policy for Gypsy and Traveller sites, and assess its effectiveness. We would be grateful for an update on those discussions and current progress on the specific actions noted.

We would also encourage, as part of those discussions with the Minister for Climate Change, that consideration is given to addressing the apparent or perceived inbuilt bias that local authority planners and planning inspectors have against GRT applications for private sites. This was something the Committee heard directly from individuals in the community, who often go to great lengths and expense to overcome planning obstacles.

It was particularly concerning for us to hear that one authority has yet to submit its Gypsy Traveller Accommodation Assessment, and that the review process for the remaining GTAAs is still ongoing. We would be grateful if you could provide an update by the end of the year on progress with the review process, and on the submission of the final GTAA.

You told us that, in relation to transit sites, collaboration between authorities was required and that you have:

"got the authorities to think about meeting regionally. In fact, the lead cabinet member for housing suggested at a recent meeting that we should be looking at that as a regional opportunity as well, particularly in relation to transit sites. So, I hope you will see change."

You will recall that we recommended that "the Welsh Government should set out how it intends to support Corporate Joint Committees and individual local authorities to develop a network of transitory provision, and how it will monitor and ensure progress". There is also a commitment in the Anti-racist Wales Action Plan to "Create a national network of transit provision to facilitate travelling life, with consideration for negotiated stopping, as appropriate." We would be grateful if you could provide an update by the end of the year on the progress made in relation to this specific action.

During the meeting, you noted that you had held meetings with Welsh Local Government Association cabinet equality leads to drive forward proposals for new sites and site improvements. This, you noted requires "community engagement" and that it can "attract challenges to decisions". We would be grateful for an update on the active role the Welsh Government is taking to promote meaningful engagement, particularly now there is an Anti-racist Wales Action Plan, with both the GRT community and the settled community when proposals for site developments are made.

Yours sincerely



John Griffiths MS

Chair

Croesewir gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg neu Saesneg.

We welcome correspondence in Welsh or English.