



Ministry of Housing,
Communities &
Local Government

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***Ministry of Housing, Communities and
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Dear colleagues,

COVID-19 – MITIGATING IMPACTS ON GYPSY & TRAVELLER COMMUNITIES

Thank you for your continued work in responding to the COVID-19 crisis. I know that you and your staff are going beyond the call of duty to support your communities.

During this unprecedented time Local Authorities have a responsibility to ensure all communities are supported to stop the spread of COVID-19 by following the advice given by Public Health England. This includes members of Gypsy and Traveller communities.

Some Gypsies and Travellers are particularly vulnerable and have the potential to be disproportionately impacted by COVID-19, and some will already have been asked to shield for 12 weeks due to high risk underlying health conditions. Social-distancing or self-isolation may be particularly challenging for members of these communities due to often confined and communal households, and restricted living conditions on many sites. In addition, we know that some families lack basic amenities including running water, adequate sanitation, and refuse disposal facilities, all of which are essential to limit the spread of the virus and keep people safe. Many will no longer have access to places they may have relied on for water and cleaning purposes, due to closures of leisure centres, churches and petrol station toilets. The closure of many recycling centres has also had an impact on the disposal of refuse.

It is for Local Authorities to determine how best to support vulnerable groups during this unprecedented period in line with their public health responsibilities. To enable compliance with COVID-19 public health guidance on hygiene requirements, access to basic facilities is essential. This might involve the provision of additional temporary water, sanitation and waste disposal facilities to those currently lacking access to these, or making alternative stopping places available, such as transit sites, suitable local authority land, and holiday campsites which may have closed and have established facilities.

In support of this, Government has taken several steps, which may help address the needs of these communities:

- **You will have seen the Local Government Association [guidance](#) on protecting vulnerable people during COVID-19 outbreak.** This sets out in detail how you should be supporting your communities, including vulnerable people of which Gypsy, Roma, Traveller and Liveaboard Boaters are part.
- **Colleagues in the NHS have written to General Practice reminding them of the importance of continuing to deliver appropriate care to their local population and the requirements on registration** of patients, including those with no fixed address.
- **Provisions for rough sleepers** were set out in a [letter](#) from my colleague, Luke Hall, Minister for Rough Sleeping and Housing, to Local Leaders on 26 March 2020. Local Authorities may conclude that some Gypsy and Traveller communities, especially those living on unauthorised sites and lacking basic amenities, require alternative places to stop where access to facilities such as water pipes and water bowsers and portable toilets is provided, or can be made temporarily available.
- **Where people live permanently in caravan parks or are staying in caravan parks while their primary residence is unavailable, they may continue to do so.** Luke Hall [wrote](#), on 27 March 2020 to caravan site owners and managers to keep the sites open to allow people to remain if they would otherwise be homeless.
- **The Government has announced a package of financial measures to support public services, individuals and businesses affected by Covid-19.** This includes an injection of £1.6 billion in new grant funding, and bringing forward an initial £1.8 billion grant for business rates reliefs measures; £3.2 million in targeted funding to local authorities to protect rough sleepers; and a £500 million Hardship Fund, so that local authorities can provide council tax relief and other financial support to the most vulnerable people and households in their area.

Friends Families and Travellers maintains a service directory of Gypsy and Traveller support organisations across the country, who may be able to help you engage with and understand the needs of Gypsies and Travellers in your area: <https://www.gypsy-traveller.org/services-directory/>.

Thank you for your dedication in leading your communities during these difficult times.



STEPHEN GREENHALGH
MINISTER FOR COMMUNITIES