Written evidence submitted by the London Gypsy and Traveller Unit

The London Gypsy and Traveller Unit is both a community development and a regional strategic organisation. We seek to support Travellers and Gypsies living in London: to have greater control over their lives; to influence decisions affecting their lives; to improve their quality of life and the opportunities available to them; and to challenge the discrimination they routinely experience. We work with Gypsies and Travellers to use this detailed local and regional experience to contribute to national policy.

We would like to make a number of comments in response to this Inquiry, based on the Government’s ‘Action Against Hate’ plan for tackling hate crime published in July 2016, in support of other submissions from Gypsy and Traveller organisations.

General comments

We are not satisfied with the process of producing this document as we believe there has not been sufficient consultation with a wide range of stakeholders at the formative stages of the action plan. The Gypsy Roma Traveller DCLG Liaison Group has only received this document for feedback after it was finalised, rather than as a consultation on scoping, evidence and options. Therefore we don’t believe the action plan reflects to a full extent how the Gypsy and Traveller community is affected by hate crime.

We feel the action plan has a number of important omissions:

- It does not mention what will be done about known groups which incite to hate crime, such as neo-Nazi groups.
- It does not address the important role of public officials, politicians and elected members in condemning hate crime and promoting good relations between different groups across society. For Gypsies and Travellers for example the predominant experience is that politicians are often allowed to make offensive and discriminatory remarks strengthening the racial stereotyping the community faces.
- In terms of the delivery of the action plan (paragraph 8), there should be more clarity regarding how voluntary and community organisations can be represented on the project board and Independent Advisory Group, establishing an accountable and transparent process of monitoring and evaluation so that the public can easily track the progress made in implementing these actions.

Detailed comments on Chapter 4 – A plan for tackling hate crime

Paragraph 40 - Teachers also need equalities and cultural awareness training to understand the particular needs and differences of groups that are usually abused, bullied and discriminated against. They should be
trained to mediate sensitive topics and discussions and enable those students who are marginalised to take part in the debate, preventing situations where they might feel incriminated or put in a difficult position by colleagues.

Paragraph 41 – We strongly recommend that Gypsies and Travellers are included in the new educational material which will be produced by CPS. This should be done in consultation with community groups and support organisations that have first-hand knowledge, evidence and experience of what will be most effective. For example our experience is that most children do not read leaflets and more innovative media outlets should be explored to disseminate information, for instance mobile apps, games, Facebook adverts, trending videos.

Paragraph 44 – We would note the incidence of bullying for Gypsy and Traveller children can be as high as 85%, as evidenced in a report by the Children’s Society.

Paragraph 45 – The True Vision website is a very word heavy website and we would suggest that there should be a simpler format and more accessible for children and adults with low literacy.

Paragraph 46 – Gypsies and Travellers are consistently negatively reported on in the media, from local press to national TV for example Scrappers and My Big Fat Gypsy Wedding. Even though we believe that that ‘Reporting Diversity’ justly represents Gypsy and Travellers we are not convinced this is widely used by media outlets. This should be strengthened by quality standards and stricter sanctions for those not abiding.

Paragraph 48 – This is a very welcome initiative, but more detail and clarity is needed to understand how voluntary sector and particularly small community organisations and groups can access this funding. Across a wide range of funding programmes (for example the European Social Fund) our experience is that VCS organisations supporting minority groups and catering for groups sharing particular protected characteristics find it very difficult to secure grants for targeted projects and initiatives. Often Gypsy and Traveller related projects are not seen as a priority for public bodies and other funders, despite being one of the 4 most disadvantaged groups in England, according to a recent report from the Equality and Human Rights Commission (see particularly pages 6-7 ‘Stigmatising treatment’).

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1 Ureche, H. and Franks, M., This is Who We Are: A study of the views and identities of Rroma, Gypsy and Traveller young people in England, The Children’s Society, 2007
2 www.mediatrust.org/uploads/126633791358471/original.pdf, see pages 17-18
Paragraph 50 – An example of best practice is the recent initiative from Gypsy and Traveller Empowerment Hertfordshire, the Report Racism GRT website for reporting hate crime in the Gypsy and Traveller community⁴.

Paragraph 54 – We would welcome a clear and detailed action plan of working with the DCLG Gypsy Traveller Liaison Group which we attend regularly.

Paragraph 71 - This is a very concerning issue and very difficult to regulate, see for example the investigation into the Metropolitan Police private Facebook group which was a forum for racist comments against Gypsies and Travellers⁵. This investigation is extremely unsatisfactory due to the length of time it is taking to conduct. Other examples include online newspapers comments sections which are not moderated and often spur racist exchanges. We would welcome a partnership between the public, private and voluntary and community sector to find innovative and accessible solutions to limit and prevent online hate crime.

Paragraphs 116-117 – We believe it is extremely important to have evidence and research into attitudes and motives for hate crime, racism and discrimination. We would welcome a programme of scholarships/funding opportunities for partnerships between academics and community groups to understand racial stereotyping of Gypsies and Travellers and the hate crime incidents this causes.

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⁴ https://reportracismgrt.com/
⁵ http://travellerstimes.org.uk/News/Investigation-into-police-Facebook-pikey-group.aspx