

Health and Wellbeing Board 7 July 2020 – Public Questions

Question from a member of the Gypsy and Traveller Community and Buckinghamshire Resident

I am a Traveller living in Buckinghamshire, my family has been directly affected by Covid-19 as my husband is in the extremely vulnerable group and has been shielding throughout.

I am employed as a family support worker in a school so I am also acutely aware of the negative impact this has had as far as the education of my own children and others from the Traveller /Gypsy community.

It has been extremely difficult for us as a family. As a shielding family we have been entitled to support from the Government but this has not been forthcoming. We were told we were entitled to weekly food parcels and throughout the lockdown we have received only one government funded food box. I have one child of school age and she has been struggling to complete her home learning as expected throughout lockdown. We have no internet or computer and for weeks she struggled to do this using only her phone. The School have since loaned us a laptop but it took over 3 months and I had to get the support of the Bucks Traveller education officer before this was recognised and acted upon.

I have been contacted by Traveller families who are concerned, not only about the safety of their children when they return to school but also how the impact of the barriers to home learning they have faced will affect the long term education of their children. I am also concerned about the cramped and overcrowded conditions because of lack of suitable site provision and the risks imposed by Covid-19.

The community spirit, which has been an overriding positive throughout this pandemic and the "We're all in this together" ethos does not appear to have been extended to Travellers.

I want to ask the Health and Wellbeing Board if consideration has been given to the many Traveller/ Gypsy families living in Buckinghamshire in the areas I have raised and recognition from professionals of the risks to the Gypsy and Traveller Community.

1. Overall Health and Wellbeing (Response Public Health)

We are aware that the Gypsy and Traveller community may be more vulnerable to the impact of Covid-19 and want to address this.

We are in the process of carrying out Community Listening Exercises and Behavioural Insight work as part of Bucks wide Health Impact Assessments and want to work with our communities that may be at greater risk, including traveller and gypsy communities to make sure that we understand the impact that Covid-19 is having in Buckinghamshire. We would very much welcome representatives from the Gypsy and Traveller Community being part of this.

2. Support for shielded and access to food parcels (Response from Localities)

We have been working to provide food parcels to shielded residents when for whatever reason the government food parcels have not arrived or have not been suitable. We have worked with some families from the gypsy and traveller community however, as with all areas of our communities we have relied on residents contacting us for additional support. For this reason, we are sorry to hear that you have struggled to access food. Our eight local support hubs have worked to put residents in contact with either community groups who can support, access to priority supermarket delivery slots or provision of food parcels. We would encourage residents who are struggling to access food to contact us, even after the

shielded programme has ended on 1st August, so we can work with them individually to find a sustainable food source.

3. Living conditions (Response from Housing)

We recognise the potential risks that Covid-19 has on Gypsy and Traveller communities. We sent a letter to all known Travelling and Roma Community locations in early April in relation to Coronavirus Housing Support. It advised that people should contact their local housing department if they or their families needed to self isolate or there were any issues with accommodation. It provided the contact telephone numbers and emails for each area Housing Office as well as where to find information on precautions that could be taken to mitigate the impact of Covid-19 and how to access employment income support. We continue to follow government guidelines, if proceedings are required to take place, then the protection is clear that welfare enquiries are made beforehand, to establish if anyone is suffering from an illness that makes it dangerous for them to be moved, if children are at risk or if an occupant has arrived in the area to receive medical treatment.

4. Education (Response from Children's Services)

We are sorry to hear of the difficulties that your daughter has faced in relation to her home learning and the prolonged amount of time spent without a suitable device to use at home. It is pleasing to hear that your daughter now has access to a laptop and hopefully this has and will continue to support the completion of her home learning. Based on current government guidance, home learning as it is now will come to an end at the end of this term as all pupils in all year groups will be required to go back to school in September. Schools in Buckinghamshire, with support from the Local Authority are working very hard in preparation for this and every school is currently developing a risk assessment to ensure that all preventative measures are taken to mitigate any possible risks. This is mandatory and all maintained schools will be required to submit their risk assessment to the Local Authority for approval and quality checking.