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Unauthorised development and encampments: Written statement - HCWS1305

WS Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government

Made on: 06 February 2019

Made by: **James Brokenshire** (Secretary of State for Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government)

Commons **HCWS1305**

Unauthorised development and encampments

The Government has today published its response to the consultation on powers for dealing with unauthorised development and encampments. This statement should be read alongside the written ministerial statement on 'Improving the effectiveness of enforcement against unauthorised encampments' made today by my Rt Hon Friend the Secretary of State for the Home Department.

Since 2010, the Government has taken concerted action to address these matters, including issuing revised planning guidance on enforcement, updated policy, and reforms to temporary stop notices. In March 2015, the Government issued advice on dealing with illegal and unauthorised encampments to all local authorities, the police and landowners to encourage them to work collaboratively to tackle unauthorised encampments, and to remind them of the array of powers which exist for tackling such situations.

In terms of wider Government support for the provision of traveller sites, the New Homes Bonus provides an incentive for local authorities to encourage housing growth in their areas, and rewards net increases in effective housing stock, including the provision of authorised traveller pitches. In addition, the £9 billion Affordable Homes will provide a wider range of homes to meet the housing needs of people in different circumstances and different housing markets, including funding for new traveller pitches. We have also seen that the number of caravans on authorised sites has increased from 14,498 in July 2010 to 19,569 in July 2018, showing that the locally-led planning system is working.

But the responses received in our consultation were clear that significant problems are created by many unauthorised encampments. Responses highlighted the sense of unease and intimidation residents feel when an unauthorised encampment occurs, the frustration at not being able to access amenities, public land and business premises, and the waste and cost that is left once the encampment has moved on.

That is why the Government is today setting out a comprehensive range of further measures across multiple government departments and agencies, which will help to achieve the Government's overarching aim of fair and equal treatment for travellers, while respecting the interests of the settled community. The package includes:

- a set of measures to extend powers available to the police, to enable unauthorised encampments to be tackled more effectively.
- a review into the potential criminalisation of unauthorised encampments.
- new statutory good practice guidance to support local authorities use of powers to deal with unauthorised encampments and a commitment to keep these powers under review, particularly in instances of deliberate and repeated breaches of planning.
- a commitment to further work to ensure that measures are in place to address issues around the clean-up costs which can occur following an unauthorised encampment.
- up to £1.5m of funding for local authorities to support planning enforcement through the next round of the Planning Delivery Fund, helping them deal with unauthorised development.
- a commitment that the Government is minded to extend the period of time that a temporary stopping notice can be in place for.
- guidance making clear that the Secretary of State will be prepared to review cases where concerns are raised that there is too high a concentration of authorised traveller sites in one location.
- a commitment to consult on options for strengthening policy on intentional unauthorised development, helping to maintain confidence and fairness in the planning system.
- work to make information on permanent and transit sites freely available in open data format so that local authorities have a single clear source of data on the availability of such sites.
- a reiteration of the planning obligations which local authorities already have to make transit sites available and for joint-working between authorities on the setting of pitch and plot targets.

Finally, I am keenly aware of evidence showing that members of the Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities have significantly worse health and education outcomes than the rest of society, and of the prevalence of domestic abuse in these communities. I will ensure that my Department's forthcoming response to our review of domestic abuse service provision takes into account the support needs of victims from this community, and I will work with my colleagues across Government on a strategic approach to improving outcomes for Gypsies, Roma and Travellers, as well as settled communities.

This statement has also been made in the House of Lords: **HLWS1272**