

What people say about the Traveller Law Reform Coalition (TLRC)

Lord Eric Avebury

“The TLRC has kept us all on our toes, and has been instrumental in keeping up the momentum towards the reforms that are so desperately needed. Members of both Houses of Parliament have benefited greatly from their incisive comments, and the ODPM are taking them seriously. At last, there are grounds for hope that the ice age that has lasted since 1994 is coming to an end, and the TLRC is playing a key part in the process”.

Rodney Bickerstaffe – The Labour Campaign for Travellers’ Rights

“A litmus test of society’s commitment to fairness and equality is how it treats the most excluded, current evidence suggests that we are failing with regards to the Gypsy and Traveller community. It is for that reason that the work of the TLRC is so important, it is my sincere hope that the concerted campaign it has mounted will make the Government address the accommodation needs of Gypsies and Travellers”

Kevin McNamara MP- Chair – The All Party Parliamentary Group for Traveller Law Reform

“Gypsy and Traveller issues are finally entering into the mainstream of the equalities debate, this is reflected in the growing involvement of bodies such as the CRE and IPPR, this is largely a result of the effective lobbying and campaign strategy of the TLRC”

Ken Livingstone - Mayor of London

“Gypsies and Travellers are one of the most marginalised groups in our society. The TLRC has worked hard to increase the dialogue between the Gypsy and Traveller community and those in charge of the policies and services that directly impact upon the lives of this community. Only by consulting with Gypsies and Travellers can decision-makers ensure that the policies and services they develop will work to address the issues adversely affecting this community. The TLRC has made a valuable contribution to this process”

Catherine Beard - The National Association of Gypsy Women

"When the Gypsy and Traveller people arrived here over 600 years ago we were the first asylum seekers and although we have been in the country for this long we have never really risen above refugee status. Now things are changing and Gypsy and Traveller people have a voice, the TLRC is not only bringing people together but making politicians more aware of the desperate need for sites".

Tom Sweeney – Co Chair Irish Traveller Movement Britain

"The coming together of so many groups into the TLRC is so important, all the groups have many similar interests and there are times when we need to speak with one loud and clear voice".

Trevor Phillips - Chair Commission for Racial Equality

"The Commission for Racial Equality firmly supports the work of the Traveller Law Reform Coalition, which is playing a critical role in driving improvements for Gypsies and Travellers, and providing a powerful voice to lobby for change. There are clearly huge challenges ahead - and we hope to work closely with the coalition in taking this and our own Gypsy and Traveller strategy forward."

Traveller Law Reform Coalition Progress Report

Background

The Traveller Law Reform Coalition (TLRC) was formed in September 2002. A number of Gypsy and Traveller organisations decided that it would be useful to co-ordinate a campaign to get the government to address their accommodation needs. From October 2003 Comic Relief funded a full time worker to assist the TLRC.

TLRC Key Aims

- An obligation on local authorities to provide and facilitate Traveller sites
- Housing Corporation money to be used for site development
- Improved tenants rights for Gypsies and Travellers
- Mainstreaming Gypsy and Traveller accommodation with housing/accommodation policies.

Lobbying/Parliamentary Work

The TLRC realised that to make further headway it had to make more friends in parliament and persuade MPs to support the campaign to see more Traveller sites created. The TLRC did the following:

- Formed an All Party Parliamentary Group for Traveller Law Reform under the chairmanship of Kevin McNamara MP. The MPs in the group have promoted the Bill, sought amendments to government legislation and raised concerns over the plight of the Gypsy and Traveller community.
- David Atkinson MP, Vice Chair of the All Party Parliamentary Group twice introduced the Traveller Law Reform Bill as a private members' bill.
- An early day motion calling for more sites gained the support of 80 MPs in 2003, a second motion was supported by 110 MPs in 2004.
- In June 2003 members of the TLRC (Chris Johnson, Charles Smith, Cliff Codona and Father Joe Browne), gave evidence to the standing committee for the Housing Bill, this committee of MPs called upon the government to introduce a duty to provide/facilitate Traveller sites.
- In October 2003 the TLRC held a joint seminar with the IPPR in Bournemouth at the Labour Party conference, it was decided to form a campaign alliance with the Institute for Public Policy Research (IPPR), Commission for Racial Equality (CRE), Children's Society and Shelter.
- The campaign alliance has led to the CRE drafting clauses for the Housing Bill to create an obligation to provide/facilitate sites and improve tenants' rights.
- The TLRC was closely involved in the research by the IPPR into Traveller accommodation and both co-hosted it in January 2004 the report 'Moving Forward'

The Policy Review by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister

- The TLRC organised a meeting with Yvette Cooper MP, the Under Secretary of State at the ODPM in June 2003.
- In the autumn the ODPM launched a policy review into Gypsy and Traveller issues. The TLRC hosted three of the four policy seminars and facilitated input by the Gypsy and Traveller community.
- The TLRC has prepared written submissions on the policy review and for a range of government consultations such as 'Every Child Matters' and 'Decent Homes for All' and the new planning system.
- As part of the ODPM Policy Review the TLRC hosted a seminar with Ken Livingstone on Gypsy and Traveller issues in London in April 2004.
- Helped the London Gypsy Traveller Unit organise a tour of unauthorised/local authority sites in London for the minister Yvette Cooper MP.

Working in the Midlands/North/Scotland

The TLRC has met with the Northern Network of Gypsy and Traveller organisations to promote support measures for these groups and attended meetings and events in the North. Our Policy Development Worker has also held meetings with Gypsy and Traveller groups and organisations like Save the Children –Scotland and the Scottish Executive to help find means by which the TLRC can give support to groups in Scotland.

Organisation

The TLRC mission statement opposes all forms of discrimination. We aim to have a gender balance on the committee. The TLRC does not have a Chair or President, the leadership is collective. The majority of the committee are Gypsies and Travellers, it is composed of the nine bodies that have been active in the establishment and campaign work of the TLRC. In the autumn of each year three new groups will come onto the committee for one year to assist with developing their skills in policy formulation.

The TLRC since its foundation has held a series of events for activists in parliament and in November 2003 we held a conference in association with Neil Stewart Associates at which the minister Yvette Cooper MP attended.

We have now decided to increase the involvement of the wider coalition through regular three monthly meetings. The first was held in March 2003, we

will have a national conference in May, so the next wider meeting will be in the autumn of 2004.

4000 briefings on the TLRC campaign have been distributed at conferences, fairs and on Traveller sites.

Evictions

The TLRC focuses on policy change/lobbying, our funding agreement does not allow us to get involved in protests at evictions. This is a matter for front line organisations and individuals. However, Andrew Ryder interviewed residents of a site in Essex where the residents were evicted, and prepared a detailed report on this case for the Traveller Law Research Unit. The TLRC has also called for a moratorium on evictions where sites are not causing a nuisance or obstruction until new policies can give these Gypsies and Travellers a place to live.

Member Organisations of the TLRC

Friends Families and Travellers
The Gypsy Council
Irish Traveller Movement in Britain
The Derbyshire Gypsy Liaison Group
The Light and Life Missions
Leeds Gypsy and Traveller Exchange
The National Travellers' Action Group
The Trans European Roma Federation
The British Committee for Romany Emancipation
The Travellers' Aid Trust
The National Association of Gypsy Women
The London Gypsy Traveller Unit
The Labour Campaign for Travellers' Rights
The Travellers Advice Team/Community Law Partnership
Merseyside Community Care - Liverpool
The Irish Catholic Travellers' Chaplaincy

**Join the TLRC - Contact Andrew Ryder – Policy Development Worker at:
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Visit our Website <http://www.travellerslaw.org.uk/>