**Surrey Gypsy Traveller Communities Forum**

**Minutes of a committee meeting**

**held by Zoom, 2nd February 2022**

**1. Welcome from John Hockley (host)**

Present: John Hockley, Lalage Grundy, Dee Cooper, TJ Cooper, Jeremy Harte, Jean Howey, Andy Hill (for Chris Raymer).

Apologies: Jack Ayres, Nikki Parkhill.

**2. Minutes**

The minutes of the last committee meeting (17th November) were agreed.

**3. Matters Arising**

There were none.

**4. Transit Site at Merstham**

Lalage reported that Tandridge Council were taking a stand against the transit camp. She had contacted Lisa Gavin, who was acting as the go-between because Merstham was where she lived, and her view was yes, we could usefully go and talk to residents there, if we did it in a reasonably civilised setting, through the Merstham Hub, or some other group that Lisa had convened.

Lalage had done an interview with Emily the *Surrey Life* journalist, who had behaved responsibly and would now like to talk to someone from the community. Well, this had been met with silence from everyone who might have volunteered, and that said a lot. But if we didn’t talk to her, then the bad guys would. There was a woman from FFT who would offer support, and Lalage and Lisa could act as go-betweens.

Dee said that she had had bad experiences with journalism and certainly wouldn’t want to be photographed. It wasn’t acceptable putting yourself up for racial slurs. Jean said she knew that we had to talk to people but… look at the *Surrey Life* site. There was a comment there using the p— word and they’d still not taken it down, though she’d asked, they hadn’t even got back to her. Lalage said that she could get back to Emily and explain the reason why no Gypsy would talk to her was the uncontrolled abuse hosted by her newspaper online. Dee said that if we put out a story, with questions managed by the committee and the contributors anonymised, she would be comfortable with that.

**5. Police Video**

Andy felt that the police had still not got it right with their language, their approach to the community. As, for instance, a wedding or a funeral were just that, they weren’t automatically to be billed as a *Traveller* wedding, a *Traveller* funeral. People would call into their contact centre and start out making all kinds of assumptions, and officers got drawn into that, were going down the wrong path with them.

Well, he’d seen a video on tackling sexism in police forces, and that was very good, very well expressed. Hundreds of officers attended these briefings. The film was shown, a sergeant would lead discussion, and that got people thinking. Now the plan was for something similar on Gypsy and Traveller issues, a short video, 1 minute long. There was a lot to be said for animation, especially because it kept individual people from being highlighted, but it was a professional technique which cost £10,000 a minute, so that knocked that one on the head. Production was still in the early stages but it would be a great help if anyone from the community could contribute clips and soundbites. Dee suggested that a local university or film school could help with animation. She’d like to see the sexism video, to get an idea of how it was scripted. Lalage offered to help on what to include. Andy will look into viewing the sexism video arrange a date for a three-way Zoom meeting.

**6. Police, Crime, Sentencing & Courts Bill; Injunctions**

Lalage reported that the Bill was going through and despite interventions by the Lords it looked as if trespass would still be criminalised. At the same time injunctions against people stopping on publicly owned land were coming back.

John said that when the far-reaching injunction imposed by Bromley was turned down, there was relief all round because it looked as if the trend for imposing these was over. Several district councils had followed Bromley with injunctions against stopping on their land, and Surrey had issued one, though it was confined to Chobham Common. Now that the decision had been reversed, more injunctions would follow. Jeremy said that the court’s reversal of the decision was made on purely legal grounds of interpretation – it found that there were valid precedents for injunctions against future unknown persons doing something, rather than just against named existing persons. Most of the case law was about political protestors rather than Travellers. So although the reversed decision was going to prejudice Gypsies and other Travellers, we couldn’t combat it on those grounds. Andy felt that while the Bill would pass into law, its implementation was in the hands of local police authorities, who had opposed it right from the start, so they was likely that they’d handle its provisions with discretion.

**7. Mental Health Drama**

Lalage introduced this project, which had been developed through Surrey County Council. There should have been another performance in January but Maya from the County Council was not available then; Dee would go back to Megan and pick up the threads. Dee explained how the plot of the drama developed, with two actors representing a young couple, him with mental health problems and her struggling to find the best way to deal with them. Performances were followed by an opportunity for discussion and a chance to rewrite the characters’ responses so that they had a better chance. Everyone had input into this but she’d actually written the scenario. She was hoping to run it again in the next couple of months.

Lalage said that she had been discussing this with some health workers – they felt that their input ought to be mediated by a trusted person, and they’d like to see some Gypsies trained for this. We’d explained that yes, this seemed a good scheme, but our people weren’t professionals, they had lives of their own. So how far did we want to go down this road? Dee said that once you began with mental health you were opening a whole can of worms, the phone would never stop – if we offered initial support, then what? People would be wanting help every week afterwards. At Sutton they had Cecile, she was one of us, and she was trained for the job – she helped and supported Ambition for a long time. But she had an office, she had rooms where people could go. We needed somewhere where we could deliver services if we were going to provide them.

John suggested that we identify groups that could provide continuous support, and then advertise them on our website. We weren’t financed or trained to provide a proper level of help, all we could do as individuals was to help people access the services they needed. It was FFT and the regular charities that should be taking the strain. Lalage proposed that we went back to Maya to say that we welcomed the idea but couldn’t go further without funding.

There is drop-in centre, hosted by Lisa Gavin and Cheryl Wood, to run on the first Thursday of the month. Cheryl would make sure that people received real attention and were not just passed on. They weren’t advertising what they were doing but we could make sure that news spread round the community. Dee felt that if people could say, I’ve been there, done that – if it was a safe space – that would be incredibly helpful. Jean said that she had posted something on the Facebook run by Caroline Bradley and her brother Mark, they were both Gypsies so they knew what it was all about. Dee had already shared details on her Facebook so Jean could copy and paste to the Forum one.

**8. Gardening Project**

Dee reminded John that he had planned to approach businesses to sponsor prizes for this. The competition would be our contribution to Romany History Month for 2022, so it could include ideas about history. Once we had held a meeting on the 9th we would be ready for off.

John said that we could get prizes. We needed details about how we would run the judging. Dee wanted contestants to send in a one-minute video to be judged. We would get match funding to pay for the trophies. Lalage advised us to get details of the project to schools before half-term. Dee suggested that Nikki could email schools with a flyer. We would discuss it on the 9th and get it out soon afterwards.

**9. Rural Life Living Museum and Romany Weekend**

Lalage said she had contacted Haidee and talked through the deal we proposed with Ed Fagan by which he would apply to Surrey Museums Partnership for a grant. This liberated us from any need to go fundraising. We had £1400 in a reserved fund, and Ed was going to apply to Surrey Museums Partnership for a grant of £1100, which together made £2500, the purchase price of the waggon which was currently on loan to the Rural Life Living Museum. As part of the grant, the museum would guarantee to run the Romany Weekend each summer and to provide year-round interpretation of Surrey Gypsy history. So for our money we ended up with a waggon permanently in a museum and that museum acting as a centre for Gypsy studies. Did we agree to this? We did.

Dee proposed a meeting with Jeremy and Lalage to organise ideas for the weekend.

**10. Learning Group**

Lalage explained that this group consisted of herself, Dee, Nikki, John, Jack when he could join it, Cheryl Wood at the last meeting, and someone from REMA: everyone was really enthusiastic. It was all to the good because REMA had been inclined before to do training without consulting Gypsies, but now they’d taken our concerns on board. Dee would be sending out minutes. They had identified the main gap as training for people after the age of 16. Dee said that she had been asked to be a guest speaker, talking about Levi and how he got to university.

**11. Any Other Business**

Marketing

Dee proposed that we set up a yearly care package. There were some members of the community whose names were put forward because they really needed cheering up, we could send them a something, say £100 a year set aside for it – we could afford that –and that way we could hear first hand what was happening throughout Surrey, it would get our name out there. Yes, said John, we needed to be known. He was at Cox Lane the other day, and everyone thought the Forum had collapsed because they hadn’t heard from us. We had communications issues and this would be a good way of promoting ourselves. Dee felt that the gardening project would work in the same way, because the application forms had our facebook details on them, and to find out who the winners were you had to be on facebook so that way we got more followers. We had 67 at present, said Jean, and 66 likes, all built up in just a few months. John thought it was important to get back to meeting in person, face to face encounters were what people wanted, they’d said to him if he thought they were going to log on for a meeting he’d have to think again.

Movement for Change

Lalage said that we’d joined the Movement for Change group.

Deepak Singh Audassie

Lalage reported a contact message from Deepak Singh Audassie, a councillor from Surrey Heath. Jack would be going to meet him.

Mental Health End Stigma

Dee said that on 26th February she would be doing the Mental Health End Stigma package on behalf of the Forum.

Romany History Month

Andy asked what we were doing for Romany History Month. John suggested getting Florrie to contribute, as a Roma. We could add a short history – Kate Jenner would contribute – perhaps add a video clip – it could WhatsApp to other people.

Terence Higgins Trust

Lalage had been contacted by Bridget Kachidza of the Terence Higgins Trust. We are committed to quite a lot at the moment, so we agreed to tell them this, but that we would be interested at a later date.

AGM

Lalage said that we needed to plan for the AGM and advertise it. John felt that this should be our last Forum meeting online, after which we should plan for an autumn meeting in person. Lalage suggested Bourne Hall as a venue for the autumn, since we could meet outdoors if need be. We agreed on Thursday 12th May for the date, to start at 10.30. As there had been so little financial activity in the past year, John proposed that we carry over last year’s audit, and we agreed to this.

**12. Date of next meeting**

To be agreed. We should expect to meet every couple of months.