

Cross-Party Group on Scottish Gypsy/Travellers

Wednesday 13th June 2018, Committee Room 4, 1pm – 2pm

Minutes

Attendees

MSPs

Christina Mckelvie MSP
David Torrance MSP
Gail Ross MSP
John Finnie MSP
Mary Fee MSP
Oliver Mundell MSP

Other Attendees

Alan Seath - Seath Planning Consultancy
Aoife Deery - Shelter Scotland
Callum Ogden - MECOPP
Diane Williamson - NHS Fife
Hilary Third - Scottish Government
Jacob Blythe Henry
Judith Robertson - Scottish Human Rights Commission
Katrina Troake - Scottish Government
Laura Bernstein - Lanark Council
Lynne Tammy - Article 12
Dr Padmini Mishra - NHS Scotland
Pauline Stratford - Skills Development Scotland
Petra Biberbach - PAS
Susie Higgins - Shelter Scotland
Sarah Collier - Skills Development Scotland
Suzanne Hayat - Police Scotland

Introduction from Mary Fee MSP

Good Afternoon,

Thank you for coming to the initial meeting of the Cross Party Group on Scottish Gypsy Travellers.

I am delighted to see so many members of the Community have joined us today. I would also like to welcome the many third sector organisations and members of civic Scotland who have joined us today.

Can I also thank my colleagues Oliver Mundell, David Torrance, Christina Mckelvie, Gail Ross, John Finnie for joining me.

I have been really keen to set up this CPG. Colleagues will that this is an issue that I have been campaigning for since I was first elected to the Scottish Parliament.

I feel that this is the most opportune moment to begin this group. Together with the Scottish Government working group I hope that we can work together to achieve progress for the lives of Scottish Gypsy Travellers.

I look forward to working closely with the Cabinet Secretary for Communities, Social Security and Equalities, Angela Constance MSP and Ministers to bring about positive change for the community.

We had a very fruitful debate in the chamber yesterday afternoon. And before that I also held a member's debate on Scottish Gypsy Travellers in the Scottish Parliament.

After the member's debate, someone who was in the gallery asked me why was I doing this? The reason I keep speaking and advocating for Scottish Gypsy Travellers is because it was an issue that was first raised when I was a Councillor in Renfrewshire.

I met with some great people who opened my eyes to the discrimination and issues that Scottish Gypsy Travellers face.

Gypsy Travellers still face a level of prejudice that would be seen as unacceptable in relation to any other group in society.

This relationship continued when I was on the Equalities Committee. It was at this enquiry that I saw the health and education inequality which Gypsy Travellers face and that show too little prospect of improving. These have deep and long-lasting impacts across communities. I made a commitment to enact real change for the community.

If there is anything I want to be known for as an MSP it is for standing up positively for Scottish Gypsy Travellers.

It is my sincere hope that this CPG shall provide a forum for discussion and information sharing on issues related to and faced by the Scottish Gypsy/Traveller community and create proposals and recommendations for actions which can be taken to tackle these issues.

We shall now move onto the AGM part of this meeting before we have a discussion around some of the aims of the groups and issues that we can look at.

AGM Business

The following positions within the Cross Party Group were duly appointed:

Convener - Mary Fee MSP

Co-convener - Oliver Mundell MSP

Co-Convener - John Finnie MSP

Secretariat - MECOPP

Floor Discussion

Mary Fee MSP

Suggested aims and discussion points from MECOPP

- Health and social care
- Financial Exclusion
- Accommodation
 - Site Standards
 - Planning
- Hate Crimes / access to criminal justice
- Unfair Media Reporting and Portrayal
- Education and Employment

Lynne Tammy

Looking at employment and education which is important to us, what often gets forgotten about is community development and that's around the empowerment of young people, capacity building and building the social capital for young people. There are examples of that with the two recent debates in Parliament which had young people in the audience. This is opening avenues for young people, building self esteem. If you've been excluded for a long enough time it's very difficult to find a route back in. It would be good to see more work focussed on that because that runs hand in hand with education. Long term aim is to encourage young people into some element of learning or training, but we need to look at capacity building first, but it has to run hand in hand. It would be good to see joint projects between formal and informal settings, it would be good to see partnerships around this be good to see joined up approaches - article 12 are happy to give support to that.

Jacob Blythe Henry

I quite agree with everything that was said. Accommodation is one of the most important things, there needs to be a base. If there's a potential base, a transit site base, then children can get educated going forward. I was born in edinburgh, went to tollcross Primary School. My wife has been through this moved from site to site. We must find bases, somewhere to settle. Travellers generally settle in winter, travel in summer. For example, near Montrose travel between banff and montrose. Central belt is more difficult. Both my kids went to private

school, we didn't hide we were gypsy/travellers. Respectfully, we don't need a site underneath power lines - It's wrong. We Understand there are a lot of people who say we don't want gypsies here. We need more transit sites, and all parties working together. Get the young people to to school

Petra Biberbach

Can i echo that. We have a planning bill going through here in Parliament at the moment. This is a crucial opportunity to bring in some amendments, because at the moment it is not being talked about. One of the challenges in Planning is not addressing inequality and equity. The Gypsy/Traveller community is one of those affected by this malfunctioning system. The bill is going through Parliament, stage two review will be in September.

Mary Fee MSP

You've taken the words out of my mouth I've had conversations with Chris Oswald to put forward amendments to the planning bill. We need to have a conversation about what amendments to lodge, because if anything else even if these amendments don't succeed, they will raise the profile of what we're trying to do. Over the next few weeks I'm going to try and take some time to see how we can frame amendments to that Planning Bill.

As MSPs We can put down amendments and raise questions in Parliament to find out things like that, for example what sites have been closed, what work has been done to build new sites, what work has been done to raise standards on sites and more.

I think there is a lot of merit to putting emphasis on accommodation, we can do this through the planning bill. We can take the issue of planning and the accommodation standards and say we have a plan and proposals for helping address these issues and we could work on that over the next couple of months.

John Finnie MSP

I'd agree with the importance of the development plan and the importance of getting in there early rather than as a rear guard action. At the debate yesterday I talked about the need for this. I think a lot of the concern is the tension between not wanting to appear to be interfering in local government decisions - there needs to be coordination. I thought the COSLA paper was pretty pathetic and said nothing - it said "we don't like discrimination, it's good to have nice things, and let's work together to have nice things" there was no meat on the bone. Planning bill, had discussions with andy white to look at many issues in this, of which Gypsy Traveller accommodation is a priority, I think it is important we go forward on a cross party consensual basis on this someone is going to have to take hold of it and say there has to be central direction.

Judith Robertson

I just want to say we haven't specifically looked at the planning bill - but the right to adequate housing gives a huge framework to actually locate planning decisions and thought processes. it may be possible to put a duty on local authorities to have due regard to the right to adequate

housing which then touches on issues of discrimination and the participation of people in the process and actually bring those features right centrally into the decision making process. There may be ways to integrate that into the legislation.

Jacob Blythe Henry

Id bring back to that word "Housing". Some travelling people do not want to live in houses, some people want to live in trailers or chalets. You get professional educated people, planning officers who work for the council who bamboozle travelling people. They were looking for £12,000 from me towards my planning application - it was wrong, Alan helped get this down to £2085. I know travelling people who have applied for planning for sites and pay a fortune for this. The wording should be accommodation, not housing, to reflect the kinds of accommodation the travelling people want to stay in.

Judith Robertson

Intrinsic to the whole issues is culturally appropriate accommodation, not housing.

Christina Mckelvie MSP

I sit on the council of europe's current affairs committee - a large piece of work has just been done all across europe about changing language to sites. If Europe and it's 47 countries can do that then Scotland across it's 32 local authorities can manage this too. A big problem is having 32 different regimes in Scotland on this issue. Whether it's on sites or the standard of sites, whether it's the approach to education or the approach to health or licensing for show people which is another big area. Seems to me there's a bit of a missed opportunity here, we're saying the same thing which has been said for years. What are the easy wins, medium term goals, long term goals, and some of that has to be about a national strategy. The national performance framework was just announced yesterday by the first minister and this might be a place to put some of that as far as equalities go, and the other place that I can see quite clearly that we could influence is with equality duties - if one of the equality duties is better outcomes for Gypsy/Traveller people.

Alan Seath

Listening to everyone, everyone is quite right. Talking about accommodation, local authorities sometimes like to call it housing because it suits them. I won't name councils here but 've worked on 30 private sites in Scotland. Nobody has moved yet - the appeals system is the way to go. They interpret the development plan policy to suit themselves, mostly politicians and councillors within the committees. I've worked 45 years in planning, i say to the councils "please, work with me"

I had another traveller family phone me last night, looking to set up a new site, but I cant do them all. Four new sites being proposed. It's creating that upward mobility in the housing market - we can do the same for the gypsy traveller community, they have the right for upward mobility. When they come to be elderly, we can do what we're proposing in Lothian, allowing that upward mobility in the housing market. The BBC covered what we're trying to do yesterday

in Lothian, and I was told it was the most read article of the entire day, because we created an interest, because we care about what we do.

Mary Fee MSP

There's a further conversation the MSPs around the table here could have about how we can pull together this stuff around accommodation with MECOPP and with the Government. There are certain things that we could probably do fairly quickly but if everyone agrees we'll have a chat and pull together some kind of plan or proposal that we can work on if everyone agrees.

Hilary Third

There is a draft ten point plan in relation to how the planning system can work better for Gypsy/Travellers that has just been cleared by ministers and has gone out to a group which includes PAS and Alan a number of people. We're having a meeting on Monday also with COSLA to discuss that draft plan - and it includes for example an amendment to the planning bill, it includes the possibility of calling in all planning applications that relate to Gypsy/Travellers and a number of other things. Secondly we just jointly did a visit with COSLA and Davie Donaldson from Article 12 to Leeds with on Friday to look at negotiated stopping which I think could provide a really good solution and also pick up on some of John Finnie's points made in the debates about traditional stopping places. We'll report back on this.

Christina McKelvie MSP

If people are pushed into a position where there are no stopping points then they may have to go to illegal sites, and services to these communities going in there are going to be really patchy whereas if you know where they are and they're set in - whether its statute or not - then services can be in there working with the community.

Mary Fee MSP

One of the issues with stopping sites that we've found in previous enquiries is that a lot of the traditional sites had been closed, and new sites had been opened without consultation with the community, which is to be honest a pointless exercise. Any additional sites that are built are welcome, but they need to be where the community wants.

Petra Biberbach

Gypsy/Travellers are not represented on Statutory consultees such as community councils who are making decisions on questions which affect Gypsy/Travellers directly. But also the community empowerment agenda in regard to land assets and transfer value, this might be quite a good opportunity to look at that as well - how can we get more gypsy/travellers involved in that agenda.

Lynne Tammy

That's maybe something we can continue working on - We've been doing work with young gypsy travelers to get them thinking about place and space, in collaboration with PAS. This is

a continuation of the work to build capacity in young people because they're missing, as others have mentioned, in these processes.

Laura Bernstein

On education, if someone is in a place where they are comfortable, where they're safe, it makes everything more approachable. So health visitors, and other people will go into the families - if a family is on a roadside they will often be nervous of somebody coming up, but education is very important in this. We're very fortunate in South Lanarkshire that we're successful and we're engaging and a lot of pupils have engaged in our project over the years and it's taken a long time to build up trust.

But the education I think in Scotland should not just focus on young people and schools. We should ensure that children across every Council are getting the same rights as children that are in school and accessing the same provisions. But also it's about educating those that are educators, and raising awareness - in other schools. It's also about educating the public - reality television has been extremely detrimental to this community. But education across the board is extremely important, even for example those on children's panels to make sure they are educated about the lifestyle and the culture I think is a massive think that needs to go right across.

Mary Fee MSP

Can I just ask, since it's something I remember from Gypsy/Travellers and caring - it was raised in the debate yesterday; the rollout of the health records: has there been much progress in that? I remember when we did the enquiry there were little pockets of good practice across the country where the health records were available and gypsy/travellers could take it so they had a record of any conditions or medications. But my understanding then is that this hasn't been rolled out to any great success - has there been any improvement?

Dr Padmini Mishra

Basically it hasn't worked. I don't think professionals engaged with it. Even Gypsy/Travellers did not engage with it because they were mostly attending A&E or different settings rather than the GP practice. There was an evaluation done by NHS Scotland which actually says this is not working, and we should do it differently. So we've put some thought into it to see how we can do this differently. We've got an emergency care summary for everybody who has got a CHI number [community health index number] - so if someone has a CHI number then their information which is their basic information about current problems, allergies, what medication they're taking, uploaded to cloud storage almost every few hours of the day. That can be accessed by ambulance crews, NHS 24, A&E etc, so health care people can access it whenever somebody pitches up - with their permission, so they don't need to carry anything with them. So the issue then becomes, how do you get them all to have a CHI number - they don't need to know their CHI number, as long as they give their name it can be looked up.

how to do you get a CHI number to people with temporary residence, that's what we need to work on. If they are registered, even once, with somebody in Scotland, they will carry that CHI number forever, even if they are temporary or go somewhere else. That is extremely helpful,

even for hospital are and everything else - that is probably a better way. With GDPR you can ask for a readout of your CHI information free of charge from a GP practice. Anyone who needs access can get it. It will gradually go towards everyone being able to access their information via a patient portal - that's some years away but at least if someone is interested they can ask to get this from a GP without charge.

Unfortunately It can take up to thirty days which does not suit some travellers. We're going to work with National Services Scotland to see how we can get CHI numbers to people with temporary residences. If you get a CHI number you can access services such as minor ailment services through pharmacies, you can pitch up to any pharmacy with a CHI number and they will treat you for anything - and you don't have to pay for your medication. It opens up a huge venue when you have that number, and so that's what I think we will put a great deal of priority on - trying to get everybody a CHI number in Scotland.

Diane Williamson

More or less I was going to say the same thing about how it all works. In addition to that, although the systems are in place or ready to be developed further - from our experience in Fife the travellers have told us about their experiences with health services, and they've told us that they have a history of experience that gets passed on, more or less the things that surround us in everyday life that we get exposed to - they maybe don't have that exposure in the wider sense that we do and therefore some of those experiences and ideas perhaps might not be challenged and get carried on through families.

For example when somebody has a baby and a health visitor will come and do the checks for the baby - they think it is not common practice for the health visitor to ask them to take the babies clothes off. Things like that, people are fearful of the general practices which they aren't very familiar with, maybe because they've had a bad experience in the past or because of something they're not so familiar with. We might have all the processes in place but people might not use those routes as well as they could because of their experiences. What we need to do is tackle some of that, and make access to services much easier, and make the experience from services much easier and more positive.

We've done various bits and pieces of work in Fife and also got a Queens Nursing Institute award to develop a Social Prescribing Programme on one of the sites which was evaluated very well - we would quite like to extend and continue to do that kind of work. It connects the community with the services and groups and community venues for them to use and just to bring that integration a bit more closely together.

There are also Issues with maternity and childbirth that we have with people coming to the hospital without having booked in beforehand - so midwifery wouldn't know the blood type for example, which makes it more challenging for health services to protect the mother and baby. I think from the evidence as well that we have Higher rates of stillborn or child death or older childrens death which is not acceptable. All of those kind of factors in the health of young people's lives need to be much more protected than we're currently doing - We need to be able to provide early interventions so that we have young people who can grow up safe and healthy.

We do have an action plan in Fife which has been developed, we have done a recent Equality Impact Assessment with a plan which is ready to go. We have an e-learning module in Fife which is available for staff in Fife to help staff be more understanding and to challenge prejudice. Generally when we do roadshow with staff and MECOPP we get very positive response from the public and staff with no negative feedback. We find that there is interest more than prejudice.

Alan Seath

I used to work in Fife and was lucky to work with travellers there. When I do my work I ask people to tell me everything about their family that I need to know. There's a tactic for that, name, age, where they're from. We make it about people, right up front. The decision maker's need to make a decision with these facts in place. We buy land, we move on, we call Alan Seath. Media are really brutal. They give people a hard time, but we are trying to turn things around. Focussing on health education, inequalities, how planning system is treating gypsy travellers families. People are realising these are people. Chris Oswald has been a great help in this, media are starting to turn around.

Mary Fee MSP

I'm conscious of time - we need to try and pull this together.

Callum and MECOPP to try and draw up a plan going forward, Hilary to circulate draft ten point plan.