

# Cross-Party Group on Scottish Gypsy/Travellers

25<sup>th</sup> March 2022: 1.00 - 2.30pm

Minute

Present

MSPs

David Torrance  
John Mason

Convenor

Invited guests

Non-MSP Group Members

Suzanne Munday	MECOPP (Secretariat)
Sheena Mills	Researcher to Elena Whitham
Tony Cain	ALACHO
Dominique Barr	COSLA
Aqeel Ahmed	Scottish Government
Mark Lawson	Scottish Government
Diane Steele	Scottish Government
Leslie Drury	Article 12
Lynne Tammi	Research Associate, University of Dundee
Laura Bernstein	South Lanarkshire Council
Maureen Finn	STEP
Jennifer Allan	Fife Council
Shirell Johnson	MECOPP
Davie Donaldson	Progress in Dialogue
Jacqueline McCallum	Community Member
Virginia Francis	Community Member
Tommy Bennett	Community Member
Georgia McCann	Community Member
Susan Townsley	Community Member

Apologies

Elena Whitham  
Maggie Chapman  
Roseanne McPhee

MSP  
MSP  
Community Member

Mags Johnston  
Eloise Nutbrown  
Kate Burton  
Alison McFadden  
Dorothy Ogle

Community Member  
COSLA  
Scottish Public Health Network  
University of Dundee  
Scottish Government

## Agenda item 1

David Torrance (MSP) welcomed attendees to the Cross Party Group meeting and invited those who had not attended the previous meeting to introduce themselves. Apologies received were read out.

## Agenda item 2

The minutes of the previous meeting were proposed by Tony Cain (ALACHO) and seconded by Dominique Barr (COSLA).

## Agenda item 3

There were no matters arising.

## Agenda item 4

COSLA and Scottish Government officers provided an update against priorities within the National Action Plan.

Dominique Barr gave an update on behalf of COSLA.

Councillor Parry had attended both the Community Conversation and the Ministerial Working Group. A paper had gone to the Community Wellbeing Board and it was agreed to continue to work in partnership on the Gypsy/Traveller Strategy and Action Plan which has been extended to 31<sup>st</sup> March 2023. Joint discussions will take place on continuing the work beyond March 2023.

The draft report on the spend of the £2million was sent to the Ministerial Working Group and has been signed off this morning. A link will be sent to the report for circulation. In brief, 19 local authorities claimed their full allocation for immediate site improvements, of which 8 have reported works fully completed, 7 have works in progress to be completed by June, 2 have incorporated their funding allocation into fuller redevelopment of their site/s and 2 have still to provide updates.

In response to a previous question by Susan Townsley on the spend by Perth & Kinross Council, Dominique Barr feedback that the local authority have confirmed residents have been consulted on and agreed priorities for funds left over from their allocation. Dominique Barr confirmed that information on specific sites was available and could be provided.

Dominique Barr confirmed that an event is to be organised to learn from the experience of the £2million fund, particularly in relation to community engagement and involvement.

An update on the Negotiated Stopping pilot was given. The pilot is now to be evaluated and there will be two elements: casestudies; and, community views/experiences. Although the 'pilot' has finished, the practice established will continue. This was agreed by the COSLA Local Leaders Network last year.

An update was given on the COSLA Local Leaders Network. The Network was paused during COVID-19 and will be re-launched post local elections in May. There will be an induction process supported by an online learning resource.

Aqeel Ahmed gave an update from Scottish Government.

The Minister is keen to engage directly with the community and visits to sites will take place from June onwards. The Minister will be reporting on activities to the Equality, Human Rights and Civil Justice Committee next week. A summary of progress against the Action Plan was issued last week. There is to be a focus on education going forward and joint work is being undertaken with STEP on developing innovative solutions and digital learning. It was noted that more progress needs to be made on adult learning.

Diane Steele feedback that there had been good progress against the health priorities but that a number of new priorities were emerging: fuel poverty; local authority funding/grants to alleviate hardship; access to social security; Royal Mail and postal issues; and, addressing hate crime/discrimination. She confirmed that funding has been set aside to develop an anti-hate crime campaign and that the community would be involved in developing resources.

Davie Donaldson shared that he was involved in a project in the North East of Scotland which had a flexible funding approach and he was keen to share their learning and experience.

Diane Steele confirmed that the revised Scottish Government and COSLA Joint Framework for local authorities was now available having been published on 15 March. A toolkit to support better engagement with the community for housing need assessments is also to be developed. A research advisory group has been set up and procurement is being progressed.

Davie Donaldson asked why other local authorities did not apply to the £20million Fund. Dominique Barr responded that 12 local authorities had applied and funds were awarded to 3 local authorities as their proposals were more developed. Going forward the following actions were to be taken to support future bids: an event will take place in April focusing on community engagement and early indications show this event will be over-subscribed; and, an online 'hub' is being developed to share practice and for local authorities to support each other.

Diane Steele confirmed that monies will be drawn down this financial year by the successful local authorities delivering demonstration projects for preparatory work that is underway. The main grants will be distributed next year. Funds will only be paid after the local authority has spent money. The second round of applications to the £20million fund will open shortly for spend in 2023/24 and 2024/25. .

Virginia Francis commented that the fund is not supporting a significant increase in accommodation. Diane Steele accepted that point but highlighted it was expected the first projects to be improvements to existing sites as it will take longer to find land and get planning permission for new sites.

Tony Cain responded that bigger pitches were needed to comply with fire safety regulations but stated that accommodation in Scotland was inadequate. Only 19 local authorities have sites, that there were significant gaps and that conversations were required with those Councils who do not have sites. He stated that bigger pitches had an impact on family lives as families could be divided.

Tony Cain questioned how culturally appropriate the negotiated stopping approach was as this was very different from what used to happen in the past.

Dominique Barr responded that the negotiated stopping approach had been developed in the Scottish Context and that the priority was on traditional stopping places as set out in the Action Plan.

David Torrance (MSP) asked if the evaluation of the negotiated stopping pilot would be shared when it was available. This was confirmed.

John Mason (MSP) asked Tony Cain how those local authorities without sites be challenged. Tony Cain responded that both politicians and the community should ask questions giving the example that Glasgow does not have a site. John Mason (MSP) said he would raise this with Glasgow City Council.

David Donaldson commented that the community needed support to have these conversations as the political will was not there. He gave the example of the site in Elgin being closed down despite families living there.

David Torrance suggested that a public petition be considered to raise the issue with the Scottish Parliament.

## Agenda item 5

The meeting moved onto the substantive agenda item of education.

Maureen Finn (STEP) provided an overview of progress, STEP's work and what is needed (please see attached paper).

Jen Allan (Headteacher Additional Support for Learning Services in Fife/member of TENET) provided an insight into her work with Gypsy/Traveller young people and education. Her team has been working with the community in Fife for 25 years and they are currently supporting 42 young people in education. They are primarily

working with teenagers who require support which can be one to one, small groups or with digital devices. They are working in a variety of vocational areas but if the young person wants to work towards a SVQ, then they must be on the school role.

The flexible approach to learning has been very successful and welcomed by young people and parents.

Leslie Drury (Article 12) provided an insight into the issues they have identified. There is a lack of ongoing educational opportunities for young people and young adults. Education has to be relevant to the lives and cultures of the community. There is a lack of continuity for maintaining contact with young people who often go 'missing' in the system with no follow-up. The impact of racism in schools and fears of personal safety are significant. Digital 'poverty' is a major issue which requires sustained support to build and develop digital literacy. Overall, there needs to be systematic change to better support young people achieve their potential.

A question was raised about what could realistically be done within the extension period of the Action Plan to improve outcomes for the Gypsy/Traveller community.

Jacqueline McCallum asked who provided support to families in Perth & Kinross as she had contacted an organisation but did not receive a response. Lesley Drury committed to looking into this for her. Jacqueline McCallum also stated that teachers needed more insight into the community and that they should learn about Gypsy/Traveller culture as they were currently failing children and young people.

Davie Donaldson agreed with Maureen Finn that there needed to be more of a focus on education and a separate forum for this as it was not the duty of the third sector to provide education but that of the Scottish Government. He also highlighted the lack of support and provision for those over 25 years of age and that this needed to be addressed.

Tommy Bennett agreed with the need for education and commented that if it was prioritised with the parents, they would subsequently prioritize with their children. Virginia Francis stated that it was wrong on the part of professionals to assume that the community did not value education and spoke positively of the educational provision onsite at Larkhall.

Jen Allan responded that the 'story' needed to be changed – if no effort is made to get to know and understand the community, it will be taken at face value. A clear message needs to be communicated that education does not need to take place in schools.

Laura Bernstein agreed with the points made by Maureen Finn, Jen Allan and Leslie Drury. She commented that very often parents and grandparents had had bad experiences of school and education. She also highlighted the need to address the transition from primary to secondary school.

Davie Donaldson highlighted that not every community member lives on local authority sites or in housing with a sizeable number living on private sites. His experience has been that community members on these sites are not linked into either support

organisations or services more widely yet access to education/learning is still required for future career development.

Aqeel Ahmed agreed to raise this with Skills Development Scotland for a response.

David Torrance thanked community members for their support of his cross party motion and brought the meeting to a close.

## Agenda item 6

The date of the next meeting will be circulated.