



COSLA's Response to the Public Petitions Committee – Petition PE 1364

1. COSLA welcomes this opportunity to respond to Petition PE 1364:

Petition by Phyllis McBain calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to review all guidelines relating to trespass and encampments for Gypsies and Travellers to ensure their intent is clear and that they are being applied.

2. COSLA is keen to support local authorities to improve outcomes for both Gypsy Travellers and settled communities, and to support the establishment and maintenance of cohesive local communities.

3. On the whole Gypsy Travellers and settled communities live harmoniously together. Problems can arise due to resource pressures. Local authorities are keen to work with Gypsy Travellers and settled communities to find more appropriate sites. There are resource issues for local authorities when seasonal Gypsy Travellers arrive unexpectedly. It is difficult for local authorities to identify sites for immediate use due to the requisite planning requirements that need to be adhered to. COSLA supports identifying a range of options for the provision of land for Gypsy Traveller sites, including private sector land such as farm land.

4. COSLA welcomes the consideration of access to EU funding for mediation services to avoid Gypsy Travellers or settled communities feeling polarised during disputes and to expediate reaching sustainable solutions.

5. Any criminal behaviour committed either by Gypsy Travellers or the settled communities should be dealt with through the appropriate channels.

6. In relation to Petition PE 1364 COSLA wishes to make the following points:

- There should be a review of existing guidance and legislation to ensure parity of rights for both Gypsy Travellers and settled communities.
- There need to be interim outcomes for specific areas, such as Aberdeen and Aberdeenshire, where there are currently pressures.
- Strategic measures for the longer term need to be identified which will reduce the likelihood of unauthorised encampments.

7. COSLA supports the establishment of the Gypsy Traveller Working Group, which is being co-ordinated by Ministers, to investigate the particular issues in Aberdeen and Aberdeenshire.

8. However, COSLA acknowledges that resources available to local authorities to establish halts for Gypsy Travellers are very constrained, at this time of budget reductions.

Caroline Johnston
Policy Manager
November 2010