

# **Cross-Party Group on Gypsy/Travellers in Scotland**

Wednesday 27th March 2019  
Committee Room 4  
1pm – 2:30pm

## **Attendees**

### **MSPs**

Mary Fee MSP  
David Torrance MSP

### **Other Attendees**

Alan Seath - Seath Planning Consultancy  
Michael Cameron - Scottish Housing Regulator  
John Jellema - Scottish Housing Regulator  
Craig Anderson - Police Scotland  
Hilary Third - Scottish Government  
Eloise Nutbrown - COSLA  
Laura Bernstein - Lanark Council  
Dr Padmini Mishra - NHS Scotland  
Pauline Stratford - Skills Development Scotland  
Petra Biberbach - PAS  
Suzanne Hayat - Police Scotland  
David Donaldson  
Cathy McGuigan  
Michele Foy  
Susan Townsley  
Yvonne Townsley  
Jacqueline McCallum  
Betty McPhee  
Callum Ogden - MECOPP  
Dominique Barr - MECOPP

## Minutes of Meeting

### Welcome

Mary Fee MSP welcomed attendees to the meeting.

Minutes of previous meeting were accepted with no changes.

### Scottish Housing Regulator Update

#### Michael Cameron

- Outlined the role of the Scottish Housing Regulator in relation to Minimum Site Standards in Scotland. The regulator monitors sites for compliance. There are just under 30 sites and just under 30 landlords, with over 400 pitches for Gypsy/Travellers.
- Noted that the deadline for compliance was June 2018. The regulator wrote to providers to request compliance level reviews, and published an analysis of this in October 2018.
- Around half of the sites did not meet the site standards. Required non-compliant sites to develop a remedial plan.
- Statutory Improvement Plans are an option from the regulator in the case of non-compliance with standards. In the first instance the regulator will seek to understand and work with landlords, examine plans for improvement.

#### John Jellema

- Outlined recent updates from landlords. Updates indicate that 11 do not meet the standards. 3 of these advise that compliance is imminent.
- ACHA (Argyll Community Housing Association) owns two of these sites. As residents have not signed leases they are considered non-compliant. ACHA us meeting with residents to attempt to reach an agreement.
- Additional landlords will reach compliance by June 2019
- Aberdeen City Council has invested £1,000,000 into site redevelopment to improve standards.
- Aberdeenshire Council hope to be compliant in the coming months.

### COSLA Update

#### Eloise Nutbrown

- COSLA are working closely with the Scottish Government and community activists. Where appropriate have escalated issues to COSLA leaders and heard from residents.

- Meeting on 28th March to look at draft paper - covers finance, stock, quality of accommodation, agreed commitments with the Scottish Government in action plan. Longer term COSLA is looking to improve assessment of need and what provision for accommodation is needed in local authority areas.
- COSLA is also working in a range of other areas including negotiated stopping, improving needs assessment methodology and ensuring this feeds in to housing strategy.

## Dunchologan Site

### **Michele Foy and Jacqueline McCallum read out Shannon Stewart's written statement submitted in advance:**

"To whom it may concern,

Sorry i can't be in attendance today,i recently had a baby girl and given the distance i can easily make the journey.

In regards to the upgrades that have recently taken place at Duncholgan,i don't believe they meet the minimum standards for many reasons,Acha have not taken into account the basic needs and wants of the tenant,both long standing and fleeting,this is a running trait with acha staff.

Many years ago my mum began a community with site tenant and mecopp workers in hopes of joining forces with acha staff to make our home a better place to live and in turn make there jobs easier by understanding and having open communication with us about things most important to us.

I now have my own plot and a young family of my own and conditions of and around the site are the same if not worse than they ever where,the access road to the site which has always been an issue still remains that,with neither acha or the council wanting responsibility of the road or its maintenance,fly tipping and bad tenants have left the site in states one wouldn't expect to see in a skip but Acha seems to reward this behaviour and completely disregard and disrespect other law abiding tenants.

The amenity blocks were recently "upgraded" i use this term loosely as everything inside the blocks are as standard as they come, a lot of which would have been so much worse had i not refused to allow works to begin on mine as id never been consulted with about any of it and after having spoken with the man who drew up the plans he agreed it did not make sense what they were proposing but he was just going off what the acha staff who was supposed to consult us all had told him we wanted/needed,some of which did not even fit the design of the block.

Our bathroom areas where not touched as we were told these were standard but they would repaint over the damp and mildew to freshen it up which they did,the mildew has returned.

My weekly electricity cost is around 70-80 pound a week in the winter,i own a 2 bed caravan that i have gas heating in and one electric oil heater,i do not use the hot water in the block as this then raises it to around 100 pounds a week,my washing machine/dryer and freezer run same as any household,Acha has provided an energy efficiency test but admitted he didn't have the correct numbers to run through the machine so improvised which came out with an efficient reading.

A lot of us,including myself, stay on this site due to family connections or just wanting to maintain our way of life, i have the options to move to a nicer,well kept,clean and friendly places but i'd like to stay here with my family and the people i was raised with but unfortunately due to Acha's poor management and failure to listen to tenants and treat us as human beings who have a right to decent living which includes minimum standards this may no longer be our future or anyone's for that matter.

I'd also just like to add that it wasn't an independent surveyor who ticked off on the site meeting minimum standards, Acha decided they'd done enough to meet the standards and signed it off themselves .

along with everything else there's also the matter of,

- No bus stops or means of using public transport.
- The connecting road to the local town is unusable due to overgrowth.
- No speed limit signs entering or on the site.
- Ditches and access road over grown.
- Rubbish left from other tenants not removed.
- Access road in terrible conditions.
- Most Acha staff very disrespectful and patronising of tenants old and young,especially visitors.
- Street Lights very temperamental.
- Drains on the site permanently blocked.

Sincerely Shannon Stewart”

Sanctions against landlords

David Donaldson

- Highlighted the disparity in standards between sites and settled accommodation. Asked when will sanctions be applied in cases where landlords repeatedly fall short of the standards? If standards are not met by 2020 will sanctions be applied?
- Will the Scottish Government agree to require independent assessments of sites to ensure compliance with minimum site standards?

Michael Cameron

- The regulator would want to understand the intention of the landlord in making the necessary improvements, and try to understand if the timescale and plans are appropriate. The regulator will monitor the plans to ensure they are put into place.
- If minimum standards are not achieved we will consider use of our statutory intervention powers.
- The regulator does not have the resources to undertake independent assessments. If we were sufficiently concerned that we weren't getting the right amount of evidence then we might require the landlord to provide evidence of their work to meet the standards.
- Further complaints can be taken to the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman.

Cathy McGuigan

- Has been working to improve standards on local Dunchologan site for five years. Same issues with the site persist today. Residents weren't allowed to let family come onto the site - family members were asked to leave, they weren't even allowed to stay for the funeral.

Ministerial Working Group on Gypsy/Travellers

Hilary Third

- The Ministerial Working Group met four times in 2018. Individual ministers have met with community members and visited sites.
- Accommodation was looked at first by the Ministerial Working Group as this was seen as a key area which impacted most on other areas.
- Draft Actions will be shared with the Cross Party Group next week in early April.
- We will be working with key delivery partners and the Gypsy/Traveller community. We hope to have conversations about how we can move forward and deliver rapidly within the two year life of the plan.
- Working jointly with COSLA has been very helpful, too long this has been a back and forth on blame, but in this case we have been able to overcome these barriers. The draft will be a joint output from the Scottish Government and COSLA.
- The Draft Action Plan doesn't include everything, there will be delivery plans which sit behind the Action Plan. A series of community conversations are planned for the coming weeks, first of which will be in Aberdeen on 16th of April where the women's voices project and youth assembly will be looking at accommodation actions.

Planning future sites

- The importance of place standards and planning law was discussed in relation to future provision of Gypsy/Traveller sites.
- Discussion around plans to upgrade existing sites, and to build new sites where it is not possible or practical to upgrade existing sites.
- It is unlikely the Action Plan will contain commitment to build a certain number of sites over a given number of years. The Action Plan will look to ensure

accommodation needs for the community are properly assessed and included within broader accommodation policies and strategies.

- Community members raised the issue of location in choosing Gypsy/Traveller sites. Many sites are built on undesirable ground such as former landfill or industrial land.

AOCB

None

Date of Next Meeting

Date to be set and minutes circulated in coming weeks.