

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

Wednesday 19 February 2020

Scottish Parliament

Committee Room 5

1pm – 3pm

### **Attendees**

#### **MSPs**

Mary Fee MSP

Mike Russell MSP

Oliver Mundell MSP

#### **Other Attendees**

Suzanne Munday – MECOPP

Gina McCaughan – MECOPP (Minutes)

Donna Lawrie – MECOPP

Peter Ross – MECOPP

Lucy Arnot – MECOPP

Dr P Mishra – Scottish Government

Wojciech Borowski – Planning Aid Scotland

Pauline Stratford – Skills Development Scotland

PC Ewan Smith – Police Scotland Equalities & Diversity Unit Scottish Crime Campus

Kate Burton – Scottish Public Health Network

Rachel McKenzie – Community Member

Michele Foy - Community Member

Cathy McGuigan - Community Member

Edith Townsley - Community Member

Susan Townsley - Community Member

Yvonne Townsley - Community Member

Jacqueline McCallum - Community Member

Betty MacAllister - Community Member

Margaret McKenzie - Community Member

Bella Townsley - Community Member

Margaret Townsley - Community Member

Shirley Townsley - Community Member

Laura Bernstein – South Lanarkshire Council Education

Dominique Barr – COSLA

Eloise Nutbrown – COSLA

Davie Donaldson – Progress in Dialogue and Social Justice Activist

## **Apologies**

Lynne Tammi – Article 12

Dorothy Ogle – Private Housing Services Scottish Government

## **Welcome**

Mary Fee MSP welcomed attendees to the meeting.

## **Minutes of the previous meeting**

The previous Minutes were accepted with one correction. Dr P Mishra should be noted as the Senior Medical Officer with the Scottish Government and not representing NHS Scotland as per the previous minute.

There were no matters arising.

## **Police Scotland Update**

PC Ewan acknowledged the historical lack of trust between the Gypsy/Traveller community and the police and that action was required at both local and national level. Mary Fee MSP questioned how frequently Gypsy/Travellers were reporting hate crime. PC Ewan responded that that there was under-reporting within the community with a contributory factor being a lack of understanding and awareness amongst police colleagues that Gypsy/Travellers and Show Folk were two distinct communities.

Kate Burton asked for clarity on the frequency of advice given to the Ambulance Service as she had been informed of some ambulances refusing to attend on site having been advised they required a police escort. PC Ewan responded that this might be local rather than national advice. He will clarify and report back to the Cross Party Group.

An additional question was asked regarding progress in changing organisational attitudes within Police Scotland. PC Ewan acknowledged that it was taking time but measures were in place to support this including undertaking Equality Impact Assessments on all new policies and procedures and equality and diversity training at Tulliallan Police College as part of the induction process for all new recruits. He acknowledged that the training was limited and that further training on cultural awareness would be beneficial. Davie Donaldson stated that Christina McKelvie MSP and Convenor of the Equality and Human Rights Committee had committed £200,000 to cultural awareness training and queried whether Police Scotland had access to it. Mary Fee MSP committed to finding this out.

Mary Fee MSP fed back that the recent Parliamentary Debate on Gypsy/Travellers had been very positive with all political parties acknowledging the significant and substantial issues faced by the community. The National Action Plan was a clear signal that historically the community had been ignored and that action was required.

Cross Party support continues with every local authority in Scotland committing to implementing the National Action Plan.

### **Health Update**

Dr M Mishra and Kate Burton provided an update on health actions. An e-learning module to support awareness of the Gypsy/Traveller community and culture is currently in development for all health and social care staff and will be available on the Turas learning platform from April. Discussions are ongoing with Scottish Government colleagues leading on maternity based on the feedback and learning from the 'Mums Matter' initiative. Dr Mishra also confirmed that there will be a named principal midwife for each site and a named midwife for each expectant mother. The 'Right to register with a GP' information cards were also highlighted. Michele Foy spoke about the continuing difficulty of registering with a GP Practice when you have no identification. Dr Mishra undertook to follow this up with the practice concerned.

Dr Mishra also highlighted the 'save a life' roadshows/workshops that are taking place throughout Scotland providing basic tuition on CPR and first aid. Workshops may be extended to include issues such as 'childhood choking'. The pilot initiative 'Community Health Matters' is also being extended to Aberdeenshire, Aberdeen and Moray.

Feedback from the use of the Place Standards toolkit in four sites had also highlighted the need to amend the toolkit for use with the Gypsy/Traveller community. This work is ongoing.

Davie Donaldson reported on a recent Mental Health of young Gypsy/Travellers event. A series of videos produced by Travellers Times, 'Kushti to Rokker' (it's good to talk), was premiered at the event. It was noted that these videos could also be used for awareness raising amongst professionals of the problems faced by Gypsy/Travellers. A number of actions were agreed from the event which is currently being written up. The final report will be shared with the CPG. Mary Fee MSP suggested the use of Parliamentary Questions as a possible means of raising awareness.

There was some discussion as to why some community members had not heard about the event. The event had been widely promoted but it was noted that the primary audience was practitioners and that it was about young people's mental health. The importance of mental health for the whole community irrespective of age was noted.

This led onto a wider discussion regarding the need to ensure that all sections of the Gypsy/Traveller community were kept informed about opportunities. Suggestions included more outreach and ensuring wider coverage. This view was echoed by a number of community members present.

### **COSLA Update**

Eloise Nutbrown provided an update on the Accommodation Priority within the National Action Plan. Feedback on progress to the community is to be given every 6

months as per their request with the first progress report due in April. The following points were made:

- COSLA Leaders will be meeting shortly to agree the distribution and principles for spending the £2 million to improve site accommodation with a focus on capital expenditure. The money will then be transferred into local authority budgets;
- Local authorities have agreed to work with residents on how the individual Council allocation is to be spent. She indicated that this may include improvements at a pitch or site level, i.e. collectively improve overall conditions, eg. a play area, or to improve individual homes where there is felt to be a need for improvement.
- COSLA and Scottish Government have agreed mechanisms for monitoring progress against the National Action Plan, including to capture work taken forward by local authorities. This would enable them to identify areas where additional support might be needed.

There was a brief discussion on how the community could be kept informed between each 6-month community feedback cycle. Eloise Nutbrown said she was happy to take the views of the Cross Party Group.

Mary Fee MSP raised a concern that the £2m additional funding could be used by the local authorities for other commitments. Eloise Nutbrown confirmed that there was no indication this would happen and that Councils were committed to improving site conditions and had asked for the funding for this purpose. There will be meetings every 6 months to report on progress; support will be provided to any authorities who request it, for example to assist with participation, and that accountability would also be monitored through the Ministerial Working Group on which community members were represented.

Mary Townsley asked how the money would be allocated as the conditions on some sites were worse than others. Eloise Nutbrown confirmed that whilst a decision was still to be made, there was an expectation that local authorities would consult with residents as to how the money would be spent. Further clarification was provided that local government funding decisions are agreed by local elected politicians even if the distribution of the £2m is agreed by Council Leaders. Reassurance was provided that there was real commitment from Council Leaders and local government as a whole to delivering against the action plan and that monitoring would be in place through the 6-month 'tracker' system being developed by COSLA to ensure transparency in decisions.

Davie Donaldson clarified that the money was to be spent on improving sites that met the minimum standards.

It was questioned as to whether local authorities could consider transferring sites into the Housing Revenue Account as it was felt that this would mean more resources

would potentially be available as Perth and Kinross Council had done. Local authorities make their own decisions about the approach to funding sites, but the benefits of moving sites onto the HRA was to be considered as part of the overall accommodation review currently taking place.

Eloise Nutbrown provided further details on the Regional Accommodation Workshops which will be organised and delivered by MECOPP in partnership with COSLA and the community. The workshops will capture information on what the community want, for example, what does a 'good' site look like and where should sites be. Two workshops will take place by the end of June and a further workshop by the end of September 2020. There is also a need to map traditional stopping places and to work with Councils to look at better ways of managing traditional stopping places. Kathy Townsley pointed out that there are particular issues in Argyll as the site is run by ACHA and not the Council.

Dominique Barr introduced herself within her new role at COSLA and gave a brief introduction to work. She highlighted that she would be setting up a 'local leaders network' to drive forward progress. The Network will be launched before the end of April. She also highlighted positive developments in two Councils she has met with since taking up post.

There was a discussion on how effective the Network would be and how attendance from all local authorities could be ensured. A view was raised that local authority departments did not always work together and that multi-agency groups, whilst useful, had limited power as they did not always have a mandate. Eloise Nutbrown explained that work under the action plan at local level could help to ensure that inter-agency groups have support to drive forward progress.

### **Other Matters**

Cathy McGuigan raised the issue of bullying in schools. Laura Bernstein spoke about the experience in South Lanarkshire which has 3 sites and had provided the surrounding schools with awareness training which had been really well received. Child Protection training is compulsory. A point was made that cultural awareness training should also be compulsory.

Davie Donaldson raised the following issues:

- The need for discussions be held with COSLA ahead of the forthcoming Light and Life Convention to ensure better management of larger events and access to land;
- The need for 'camps' to be kept open as the travelling season was imminent; and,
- The need to ensure access to skips when moving on as currently you are required to sign a document with proof of a permanent address in the locality before you can have access to one.

Suzanne Munday brought the meeting to a close. She thanked everyone for attending and their participation.