SUBMISSION FROM PERTH & KINROSS COUNCIL

1 Introduction

Perth & Kinross Council’s Housing and Community Care Service was invited to attend the Equal Opportunities Committee on Tuesday 29 May 2012 where evidence was taken from David McPhee (Commissioning and Contracts Officer).

This submission supports the oral evidence provided by David during that parliamentary committee session and also provides additional background information and context in response to evidence provided by Gypsy/Traveller community members from the Perth and Kinross area in the Equal Opportunities Committee round-table evidence session of 15 May 2012.

2 Council Sites in Perth and Kinross

Perth & Kinross Council is responsible for 2 Gypsy/Traveller sites in Perth and Kinross. Double Dykes in Perth has 20 chalets on-site, and each chalet has a touring caravan space; Bobbin Mill at Pitlochry has 6 chalets, again each with a touring caravan space. There are no temporary or short stay pitches on either of these sites. All the chalets are currently occupied but there are very occasional vacancies. Gypsy/Travellers have to apply for this accommodation in the same way as mainstream tenants and there are currently waiting lists for both sites.

Both sites were re-furbished significantly in recent years, Double Dykes was completed in June 2008 and Bobbin Mill in September 2010 grant funding was accessed from the Scottish Government to support the Council with this.

With regards to Double Dykes, modern new all-season insulated chalets were purchased whilst at Bobbin Mill second-hand wooden chalets were purchased and upgraded. Earlier this year, further work at Double Dykes was completed to ensure all chalets now have gas central heating installed this was a major upgrade from the previous electric panel heating system and involved installation of a gas infrastructure (via Scottish Gas Network grant support) with the rest of the installation funded by the Council.

Tenants on the sites are classed as Council tenants and pay rent and council tax. There is a site manager at Double Dykes but Bobbin Mill chose to self-manage their site with assistance from the Local Area Housing Office as required.

3 Policy for unauthorised encampments/ funding for transient sites

Perth & Kinross Council has a policy for unauthorised encampments which emphasises negotiation rather than enforcement and the Council officer attending an ‘unauthorised site’ would identify if there are any health, education or carer issues and refer on if appropriate. This Council does believe however, that the terminology “unauthorised encampments” does lead
to immediate negative perceptions from the wider public and recommends that this should be reconsidered at a national level. Consideration should be given to re-titling guidance simply as the Policy for Encampments.

Perth & Kinross Council has also set aside funding for a dedicated transient site and has been proactively seeking a suitable location for this. 2 prospective sites have been identified and are being assessed for suitability. Gypsy/Traveller community members were asked for their views on suitable areas for prospective sites at a ‘Get Together’ engagement event last year and will continue to be kept informed of developments as they progress.

This Council supports the view that a common format of information across Scotland should be provided to Gypsy/Traveller community members who stay in a site temporarily. A similar format would avoid individuals having to access different types of information in each local authority area they access and should take account of potential literacy difficulties. A sample suggested format is included.

Perth & Kinross Council also has a Policy on Gypsy/Traveller Sites in its Proposed Local Development Plan for the area which covers existing and new sites.

Policy RD5A (Existing Sites) states that “existing authorised Gypsy/Travellers’ sites will be protected and there will be a presumption against their conversion to other uses”.

Policy RD5B (New Sites) states that “The Council will assess applications for permanent sites and temporary ‘short-stay’ sites in small groupings; generally considered to be between 1-10 pitches. Proposals for the development of a site for Gypsy/Travellers’ accommodation on unallocated land will be supported provided:

(a) The Council is satisfied the number and nature of the pitches provided on the site is appropriate to the site size and general area.

(b) The site will not detract from the physical character, and there is no more than a minimal effect on the appearance of the wider area; the site is, or can be, adequately screened and landscaped.

(c) The use of the site must be environmentally compatible with, and not negatively affect or be affected by, the neighbouring land uses.

(d) The needs of the residents of the site, temporary or permanent, for essential services can be met appropriately by local facilities; these include rubbish collection, access to water and drainage.

(e) There is satisfactory access and the site does not generate traffic of an amount or type inappropriate for the roads in the area.
(f) The site can be adequately secured to provide a safe environment for the residents using the site.

Note: All authorised sites will require a caravan site licence from the Council, as per the Caravan Sites and Control of Development Act 1960; the licence deals with the management of the site so further detail on this has not been duplicated in the policy. Any non-domestic waste (i.e. commercial and industrial), will be the responsibility of the landowner to dispose of appropriately.”

4 Awareness raising training

Perth & Kinross Council is committed to ensuring that our staff are given the best possible training and development opportunities in relation to being able to deal with cultural differences which may present themselves from our diverse population.

Housing & Community Care Service has commissioned Gypsy/Traveller Awareness raising training for staff since 2007. This training is delivered by Gypsy/Traveller community members and is independently facilitated. We have seen in excess of 250 staff attend the training and feedback has always been positive. We are also keen to make sure newly elected Councillors receive a version of this training and it has been built into their current ongoing induction programme. This training has been opened up to staff in other services in the Council and has occasionally seen representatives from other partner agencies attend.

Our Council also has a long-standing and very positive working relationship with Show Racism the Red Card – they chose Perth as the venue for their launch of the ‘Out of Site’ anti-racism materials (which focuses on anti-racism towards Gypsy/Traveller/Roma groups) in 2010. During the current school year we used these materials in local schools as part of our annual programme of Show Racism the Red Card workshops – 9 primary schools and 347 pupils received specific ‘Out of Site’ workshops (in addition to the other 27 primary schools and 754 pupils which were involved in general anti-racism workshops in partnership with Show Racism the Red Card and the St. Johnstone community coaching team). Perth & Kinross Council believes that this positive influential training in schools will start to change attitudes amongst our young people and counter the influences of negative media reports or sensationalist TV programmes.

5 Positive community engagement activities/partnership work

Perth & Kinross Council has been making efforts to engage positively with our local Gypsy/Traveller community members in partnership with other local agencies and also through the Minority Ethnic Carers of People Project (MECOPP)’s Gypsy/Traveller Carer Project.

The Council independently commissioned a specific research and policy and literature review in 2011 relating to Engaging with the Gypsy/Traveller
community. The key findings from this work have influenced our approach to engage with this community subsequently. Copies of the research are enclosed for information.

It is recognised that perceived poor experiences can put people off engaging with Council-led initiatives however, and that is why we value the services of MECOPP and have invested specific funding this year to allow a part-time Carers Development Worker to be appointed locally.

We would like to highlight some specific events in the last year.

(i) Gypsy/Traveller Get Together – a multi-agency event was held last September the aims of which were to promote different services to members of the Gypsy/Traveller community focusing on health and wellbeing in a fun way and find out what they think of services. This was an event which involved a range of different organisations – such as the Council; NHS; Police; Fire; Leisure services and partners in the voluntary sector including MECOPP. It was attended by 45 Gypsy/Traveller community members of all ages and genders. MECOPP were able to facilitate the involvement of some Gypsy/Traveller community ‘advisers’ to assist the multi-agency planning group which they were full members of. These Gypsy/Traveller community advisers advised the event planning group on activities that may be of interest to the wider Gypsy/Traveller community; ensured us that cultural needs were taken fully into consideration and advised on event timing and venue suitability as well as assisting with promotion of the event to the wider Gypsy/Traveller community. The event is currently being planned again for September this year taking account of feedback received in relation to last years event. A full evaluation report of this event is included with this submission.

(ii) Subsequent to that event, with MECOPP’s support the Council has provided funding for the establishment of a monthly community lunch club for Gypsy/Traveller community members. This is to allow community members an opportunity to meet together and have some social interaction but also allows service providers an opportunity to meet them more informally and tell them more about services which may be of benefit and also hear directly from community members. This is at an early stage and we hope it will grow.

(iii) Most recently also working with MECOPP the Council hosted a family day at Kinross for Gypsy/Traveller community members staying in that area – the majority of whom came from private sites. This event was to try and get to know the community members in that area and to allow them a chance to familiarise themselves with the facilities at the local Community Campus. There were complementary therapies; manicures; use of the beauty salon; activities for children and refreshments were provided. There was an attendance of 27 (11 adult females and 16 children – both genders
mix of ages from six months to 15 years) which was very encouraging. An Easter Family Day was also held and summer events are also scheduled in that area part of which will include gathering information from the community members to support this Committee’s Consultation on accommodation.

(iv) Colleagues in our Community Learning Section in the Council worked with Community members from the local Tenants and Residents Federation at the Double Dykes site and MECOPP to access a ‘see me’ grant. ‘see me’ is the anti-stigma charity for mental health and the grant was awarded to allow positive activities to be held with members of the Gypsy/Traveller community to improve their mental health and wellbeing. A series of weekly activities such as complementary and beauty therapies was held over 6 weeks earlier this year and were attended by between 8 and 16 Gypsy/Traveller community members each week.

(v) Heritage Scotland Arts Event – a number of Gypsy/Traveller community members of all ages attended a series of arts events with other local community members at Huntingtower Castle facilitated by our Community Learning Section earlier this year.

6 Accessing services

Perth & Kinross Council are quite clear that if people have an identified need for care services such as OT Equipment or Adaptations individuals will not be treated differently if they are from the Gypsy/Traveller community it should be in line with our policies. It is clear from the feedback given by community members at the parliamentary Equal Opportunities Committee session on 15 May however, that their perception of accessing services are not always viewed as positive. The Council would like to set in context some specific views on issues which were put forward at that session to ensure a more balanced view is on record. We accept that there are considerable waiting times of in relation to OT services depending on priority, however this is regrettably an issue across all client groups, and is not specifically an issue for Gypsy/Travellers.

Perth & Kinross Council acknowledges that perhaps locally our policies in certain areas need to be more ‘flexible’ to take account of the specific cultural needs and hope that if the community does engage with us either directly or via MECOPP’s work that we can make any necessary changes required where this is practical to do so. For example, there are already a range of services which the Council funds through the Voluntary Sector locally such as Independent Advocacy services or Carers Centres which we would be happy to work with to develop something locally if the Gypsy/Traveller community felt there was a need to do so. Hopefully the ongoing work with MECOPP will assist identifying such needs. This Council also believes that future changes in relation to self-directed support/personalisation present an opportunity for members of the Gypsy/Traveller community however, any proposed policy changes would also need to consider cultural differences.
This Council is investing in a positive engagement programme (outlined above) and hopes that the local Gypsy/Traveller community recognise this.

7 Complaints

Similarly any complaints are dealt with in accordance with Council policy. Complaints covered by this policy are specifically where we as a council have done something wrong or have failed to do something we should have done. It wouldn’t be appropriate to comment on any individual cases but at times it may be that individuals perhaps feel that they have made a complaint however it may not be dealt with as such, especially if the complaint concerns the actions of other tenants and not the actions of the council. As a council we value complaints, and are keen to hear what our tenants and customers feel about the services we provide. However our procedures do allow us if required to manage complaints contacts especially if the contacts are numerous and repetitive. A point of clarity which should be noted is that specifically in relation to the individual point raised by one community member at the Equal Opportunities Committee on 15 May indicating that she is only allowed to speak to one person in the council we would wish to advise that this is incorrect. She has a single point of contact in the Housing and Community Care Service, but is free to contact other areas of the council as required.

8 Conclusion

Perth & Kinross Council has welcomed the opportunity to contribute to this Inquiry.

In summary we are keen to continue to engage positively with the local Gypsy/Traveller community and have demonstrated this commitment by providing direct funding for various initiatives outlined in this report. We acknowledge that it will take time for the community to build up a trusting relationship through this process but hope that in time and by working in partnership with independent organisations such as MECOPP then this will improve. In turn, we believe that this will ensure that individuals will find the care services that they require more accessible and culturally competent to meet their specific needs.

Stephen Rankin
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Perth & Kinross Council
14 June 2012
Enclosures:

1. Engaging with the Gypsy/Traveller Community: Interview Findings
   Prepared for Perth & Kinross Council April 2011

2. Engaging with the Gypsy/Traveller Community: Policy and Literature
   Review Prepared for Perth & Kinross Council February 2011


   from Agencies Involved