SUBMISSION FROM VIOLET TOWNSLEY

I am happy the Scottish Parliament's Equal Opportunities Committee is looking into the issues that affect Gypsy Travellers.

There have been many consultations over the years on Gypsy Travellers issues I only hope this time things will change.

Finding a site - What is like finding some where to stay?

When I had my first child I moved of the road and into a house, every summer I went away for a while in a caravan or a campervan. I was in house for 12 years before deciding to move back into a caravan full time.

I waited for 4 years to get a pitch on Double Dykes caravan site, at times I travelled around Scotland and I stayed on Double Dykes doubled up on a pitch during the winter. I paid rent to the council for doubling up on a pitch. I was allocated a pitch on site in 1999 after 4 years of having nowhere permanent to live,

For months my sister lived with her family doubling up on my pitch while she waited on a pitch becoming available. Doubling up on pitches means there is little room on the pitch, caravans are parked side by side and pull bar to pull bar on the pitches. Vehicles are lined up onto the road at the front of the pitch. My sister paid rent to the council for living on my pitch.

When my own daughter became a teenage she got her own caravan and doubled up on my pitch and she also paid rent to the council.

Are sites in the right part of Scotland?

Double Dykes was in a good area as a camp site before the site opened officially in 1982. For the first 15 -20 years of the site opening the area was still good for a site. The fields at one side of the site were taken over by industrial units. The fields at the other side of the site are now part of a proposed large housing development. The council opened a public path a number of years ago next to the site and my pitch used to be facing the public path, we would regularly hear people, teenagers and children shouting abusive language and racist comments at the site.

Perth has only 1 Traveller's caravan site with 20 pitches. There are not enough sites for Travellers and I think there should be many different smaller permanent caravan sites.

Living on a site
What is your site like to live on?

After living in a house for 12 years I felt it was really difficult getting the council to deal with the problems on the caravan site compared to the house.

I lived for 11 years on the site and most of that time was spent fighting the council for better site conditions and to improve site management. When I lived in a house I
complained in the area office only a few times about the house and a problem with the garden fence. These were fixed without any problems, I felt just like any other tenant. When I lived on the site, I felt me being a Traveller stood out and if I wanted to live on a site I should appreciate what I was given no matter how poor the conditions were.

What do you want to say about living on the site.

How sites are run.
How is the site you live on managed - does it have a site manager

There is a caretaker on the site and I felt it didn't make any difference raising my concerns with the site caretaker nothing changed. The caretaker did not inspect the site to see if there was litter or anything broken or vandalised on the site. Over the year there has been a lot of money spent on Double Dykes it should be a show site but instead it is still a mess.

I was speaking to one of the site managers from 6 years ago before she left the job and I asked her why she was leaving the job as the site manager. The caretaker told us the problem was she was not the site manager, the site was run from an office in the town and she had no say when it came to the site.

After years of complaining about site conditions and through funding from the Scottish Executive we eventually got chalets on the site. The first year was fine, tenants were getting used to the chalets on site but it soon became clear that nothing had really changed. Electricity was high, the chalets were always cold. Water would freeze during the winter leaving tenants with no running water or working toilets. The attitude of the council didn't change. The attitude from the council was, you got the chalets and you are still complaining.

I thought the management of the site would improve with the amount of money spent on the site but the poor management didn't change ether.

The council doesn't listen to complaints; most Travellers have problems with reading and writing so the council says tenants are not complaining but they do complain verbally.

It doesn't matter how much money is spent on a site if there is not good site management the money is wasted.

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