“Everyone has their own way of life and their own culture… We want people to let us be who we are.”
(Donald Stewart, a Gypsy/Traveller)
**Introduction**

“I am determined this report will make a difference to a community that has been discriminated against for far too long.

“We visited seven council sites across Scotland for ourselves and were appalled at some of the squalid conditions endured by tenants who pay rent and council tax for sub-standard services. We also heard of attitudes towards the Gypsy Traveller community that would not be acceptable if directed at any other members of Scottish society.

“The Equal Opportunities Committee is painfully aware of the utter frustration expressed by the Gypsy/Traveller community at numerous published reports making positive recommendations that have frankly been ignored for over a decade.

“Our report demands urgent action.”

Mary Keo

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**Background**

In early 2012 we decided to follow-up on the work done by the previous Equal Opportunities Committees on improving the lives of Gypsy/Travelling people in Scotland, and decided to hold two inquiries. The first, *Gypsy/Travellers and Care*, focused on access to care services and improving the general health of Gypsy/Travellers.

We chose to look into where Gypsy/Travellers live after hearing that accommodation is at the root of many problems faced by Gypsy/Travellers. As part of our inquiry, we visited travelling persons’ sites near Edinburgh, Dalkeith, Perth, Pitlochry, Oban and Lochgilphead, and held an external meeting at Clinterty Travelling Persons’ Site near Aberdeen.
The reality of Gypsy/Traveller lives

What Gypsy/Traveller means

Some people prefer the term ‘Gypsy’ to describe themselves, others use ‘Traveller’. We use the term ‘Gypsy/Traveller’ to recognise that Gypsy/Travellers are not a single, uniform group. We heard about different groups in evidence, including Scottish Gypsy/Travellers, Irish Gypsy/Travellers, English Gypsy/Travellers and Roma. Although there are cultural similarities, such as a history of travelling, these groups are all different.

A Tribunal judgement in 2009 held that Gypsy/Travellers are a distinct ethnic group covered by the law.

Where Gypsy/Travellers live

We visited sites to see for ourselves the horrendous conditions that families, including infants, older people and disabled people, have to live with:

- freezing cold shower and toilet blocks with overpriced heating
- a fire hose that couldn’t even reach all of the pitches
- no bus stop or roadside pavement, with the nearest playground a two-mile walk along a muddy, unlit woodland path
- inadequate attempts to make adaptations for a disabled resident
- a site with no fixed phone line or stable mobile phone signal, leaving residents with medical conditions unable to easily seek emergency care

Gypsy/Travellers live not only on sites, but in fixed housing amongst the settled community – where some have felt a need to hide who they are.

Gypsy/Travellers on council-run sites pay council tax in addition to rent. It can be hard for Gypsy/Travellers living on sites to find work amongst the settled community.
Discrimination

The Scottish Human Rights Commission described discrimination towards Gypsy/Travellers as “the last bastion of respectable racism”.

The media tend towards negative reporting of Gypsy/Traveller issues. They encourage a ‘not-in-my-backyard’ attitude, with little reporting of the Gypsy/Traveller point of view. Some newspapers criticise planning and building of private and public sites, and talk about sites damaging local house prices.

TV programmes often portray Gypsy/Travellers badly, going as far as sexualising children in some cases – an approach that would not be taken with any other ethnic community.

“I have read a thousand articles in the papers about Travellers; I would love to read something nice, for once.”
(Katrina Stewart, a Gypsy/Traveller)

“We are put in a hole that cannot be seen by the community. That is not nice.”
(Donald Stewart, a Gypsy/Traveller)

“The terms “Gypsy Traveller”, “Irish Traveller” and so on are basically the same thing—you are still just a Traveller.”
(Sammy Stewart, a Gypsy/Traveller)
Summary of Recommendations

For all recommendations, we would expect the Government to agree with all those involved a firm timescale, and provide regular progress updates. In all cases, Gypsy/Travellers should be involved in bringing recommendations, and resulting strategies, to fruition.

Leadership

1 We feel it is crucial that an existing Scottish Government minister is given a new specific and overarching responsibility for the on-going support and profile-raising of Gypsy/Travellers.

2 We strongly recommend that the Scottish Government launch a national public awareness-raising campaign aimed at tackling discrimination and racism against Gypsy/Travellers as soon as possible.

3 The Government should explore the suggestion of pulling together existing research into a single national action plan, allowing the flexibility for regional variations.

4 Scottish Government leadership is needed in supporting the development of sites. This is essential in supporting local authorities and elected representatives, both in building new sites and setting an example against discrimination.

5 We recommend that the Scottish Government consider piloting any new approaches in the North East.
We are extremely concerned by the fact that in the four years since housing strategy guidance was published there seems to have been little progress. We strongly urge the Scottish Government to explore—

- How it might effectively measure ‘success’ in working with Convention of Scottish Local Authorities (COSLA) on implementation of guidelines;
- Whether a deadline on these measures of success, for instance three or five years, might be applied;
- What steps it might take if agreement cannot be found with COSLA on how to make progress;
- What options there may be, in this event, for the development of legislation.

Site development and maintenance

We expect the Minister to find a way of establishing a required standard for site facilities, whether through statutory guidelines such as the Scottish Housing Quality Standard or by some other means.

Planning applications can be challenging even before taking in to account the barriers of low-literacy and limited educational attainment. We commend the work of Planning Aid for Scotland and Article 12, and expect the Scottish Government to continue to support such initiatives.

“… the local authorities’ difficulty is that there is no requirement for them to provide sites.”

(Jim Hume, Grampian Police)
9  We ask that COSLA clarify its position, and that local authorities, as far as COSLA’s role allows, use COSLA as a forum for support and partnership.

10  Under the equality duties framework, all key public sector bodies must publish a detailed set of equality outcomes by 30 April 2013. We look forward to reviewing and following up on published outcomes.

“Tenancy agreements

11  Gypsy/Travellers as site tenants should have the same rights and responsibilities as people living in fixed housing. We expect that the Scottish Government will work with Gypsy/Travellers and supporting bodies on the development of a standard Gypsy/Traveller site tenancy agreement.

“It would save councils an awful lot of money if they listened to Travellers when they tell them what they need.”
(Charlene MacDonald, a Gypsy/Traveller)
Gypsy/Traveller liaison officers (GTLOs)

12 We feel strongly that, where the role of GTLO is adopted, it should be done jointly between local authorities and site residents.

13 We seek a commitment from COSLA to work on a review of the GTLO role, and urge the Scottish Government to engage with COSLA on the matter.

Transit and temporary sites

14 We recommend that the Scottish Government, in its support role, take further steps to encourage a similar approach on guidance to that of the Association of Chief Police Officers in Scotland (ACPOS) for health, education, social work and other local authority departments.

15 We urge the Scottish Government, in the development of any national strategy, to ensure that consultation with both local Gypsy/Travellers and those passing through the area is an essential feature in guidance issued to local authorities.

“Managing an accommodation facility and potentially having an enforcement role … is quite different from being able to provide a social care, health and education-type liaison role.”
(Michelle Lloyd, MECOPP)

“… we need a diverse and comprehensive accommodation strategy that takes into account the varying needs of the community.”
(Michelle Lloyd, MECOPP)
“Perhaps a starting point would be to ask travelling people themselves, “What do you actually want from an encampment site?””
(Gavin Buist, ASPS)

“I think that roadside camps—traditional roadside stopping places—should be reopened, so that we can move where our families have been for generations.”
(Georgia McCann, a Gypsy/Traveller)

**Encouraging access to services and support**

16 We ask that the Scottish Government carry out a review of traditional stopping places to explore the possibility of unblocking sites and providing services where needed.

17 We expect that any national action plan the Scottish Government develops will suggest that local authorities use multiple options in developing options for temporary stays.

18 We look forward to progress from the Scottish Government on current initiatives and expect it to continue to support voluntary organisations, and ask that it explore how pilots and projects can be replicated.

19 We encourage the Scottish Government to explore the inclusion of positive, non-tokenistic representation of Gypsy/Travellers in the Curriculum and create an action plan aimed at supporting young Gypsy/Travellers move from primary to secondary education.

20 We also encourage the Scottish Government to explore how *Getting it Right for Every Child* is effectively applied, across the spectrum, to Gypsy/Traveller children.

“We have to take services to the site rather than expect that on every occasion Gypsy Travellers will engage with services.”
(Kevin Anderson, Midlothian Council)
Committee Members

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Dennis Robertson

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Alex Johnstone  
John Mason

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Next steps

Once the Scottish Government and COSLA have responded in writing to our report we will consider this and review progress against our recommendations every few months.

www.scottish.parliament.uk/GypsyTravellers

“One of my daughters … is 15 but she has had only two weeks of secondary education. The reason for that is the basic one of discrimination.”  
(Georgia McCann, a Gypsy/Traveller)

“Anyone who works in a public body … and who will come into contact with Gypsy Travellers, should attend a seminar or awareness-raising day.”  
(Georgia McCann, a Gypsy/Traveller)
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