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17 March 2026

Dear Angela,

**RESPONSE TO SHRC'S REPORT "NO MAN'S LAND' - A HUMAN RIGHTS ASSESSMENT OF THE 'TINKER EXPERIMENT' AND REDRESS FOR ITS VICTIMS"**

I am writing on the Scottish Government's behalf in response to the Scottish Human Rights Commission's report, "*No man's land': A human rights assessment of the 'Tinker Experiment' and redress for its victims,*" published on 28 January.

Following that report, the SHRC organised a "listening afternoon with victims of the 'Tinker Experiment'" on 23 February at which the government was represented by senior officials; I regret that I was unable to attend myself. I also understand those officials subsequently met with the Commission on 4 March to further discuss the report.

The Scottish Government welcomes the Commission's report. It contributes to the Government's continuing commitment to action to improve outcomes for Gypsy/Traveller communities, including the legacy of historical practices known as the "Tinker Experiment(s)".

Since 2019, through the Gypsy/Traveller Action Plans, the Scottish Government, in partnership with COSLA, has been driving positive change and addressing many of the issues raised through our engagement with communities, with the latest action plan published in 2024. While more work is needed to continue improving outcomes for Gypsy/Travellers, significant positive progress has been made across several areas, including accommodation, planning, education, health, and community empowerment.

On the "Tinker Experiment(s)" specifically, the government commissioned independent archival research in March 2023 and carried out independent community consultations between April and May 2025. The findings from both the research and the consultations

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were published on 25 June 2025. On the same day, the Scottish Government published a written response and the First Minister delivered an apology in Parliament for the historical policies that resulted in children being removed from their families, and families being forced to live in substandard and degrading conditions.

I meet regularly with Gypsy/Traveller community members, including individuals directly impacted by historical policies relating to the “Tinker Experiment(s).” Those discussions are invaluable, and this dialogue will continue to ensure the Scottish Government’s engagement with communities to remain strong.

I would like to now formally respond to the recommendations set out in your report, namely compensation, rehabilitation, satisfaction, and guarantees of non-repetition.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

### 1. Compensation

*The SHRC report recommends the establishment of a reparations scheme, with a clear timeline for its development and a deadline for first payments to be announced before the parliamentary election. The report also emphasises the importance of ensuring the participation and leadership of those affected in designing and delivering such a programme.*

Consideration of a potential reparations scheme requires detailed assessment, including careful analysis of legal and likely significant resource implications. This will be a question for the incoming government after the election.

Since the First Minister’s apology in June 2025, the government’s immediate priority has been to create further opportunities for community members affected by historical policies to shape our next steps and enable a wide range of voices to be heard, supporting transparency around what the Government could deliver.

I wrote in December 2025 to those we had engaged with to set out the immediate practical actions being taken, including launching a £10,000 Cultural Fund to support initiatives linked to the “Tinker Experiment(s).” I also confirmed that recommendations - like a restitution scheme - requiring more detailed evaluation or involving commitments for a future administration, had been noted for consideration by the next government.

The voices of those directly affected have remained central to the Scottish Government’s decision-making. The First Minister’s apology was shaped by engagement that identified it as an essential first step in rebuilding trust between the Gypsy/Traveller communities and the government, and our subsequent immediate actions have been shaped in the same way.

The Scottish Government is committed to working collaboratively with communities and partners to identify priorities, remove barriers, and ensure that lived experience informs decision-making across accommodation, planning, education, health, employment, and tackling discrimination.

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On 20 March, ahead of the International Day for the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (21 March), the Scottish Government will publish its new Anti-Racism Delivery Plan 2026–2030. This will embed anti-racism as a systemic principle across government. Continuing work with Gypsy/Traveller communities will be one of the Plan’s five strategic priorities, supporting progress in partnership with COSLA across accommodation, health, education, anti-discrimination, trust-building, and tackling exclusion.

## 2. Rehabilitation

*The SHRC report recommends urgent upgrades to existing Gypsy/Traveller sites where the Scottish Housing Regulator has identified failures to existing site standards (for example, Bobbin Mill, Tarvit Mill and Double Dykes), as well as to review the cultural appropriateness of current demonstration sites funded through the Gypsy/Traveller Accommodation Fund, with direct engagement from residents. The SHRC also recommends scrutiny of local authority use of funds, pace of project development and levels of engagement and responsiveness to the needs of Scotland’s Gypsy/Travellers.*

Improvement to Gypsy/Traveller sites and accommodation has been taken forward under both Gypsy/Traveller Action Plans since 2019. The Scottish Government also published an Interim Site Design Guide in 2021, developed collaboratively with local authorities and Gypsy/Traveller community members, to drive more substantial improvements in site quality. Tarvit Mill and Double Dykes have received investment through the Scottish Government’s Gypsy/Traveller Accommodation Fund. Residents returned to Tarvit Mill in May 2025, with work to some communal areas still being completed. At Double Dykes, where the work was phased, all residents had moved into their new homes earlier this month with some wider site works still to be completed.

At Bobbin Mill, Perth and Kinross Council has implemented some immediate improvements and is engaging with residents on potential longer-term options. Funding for publicly provided Gypsy/Traveller accommodation will be made available under the Affordable Housing Supply Programme (AHSP) from April 2026. Guidance has been issued to allow social landlords to progress their projects and local authorities can submit Gypsy/Traveller project proposals through their Scottish Housing Investment Plans (SHIP). Perth and Kinross Council has included Bobbin Mill in its SHIP and will continue to work with residents on plans for the site.

In addition, as part of the current Action Plan, an independent evaluation of the Gypsy/Traveller Accommodation Fund and the Interim Site Design Guide is underway and a final report will be published in 2026. The evaluation will draw lessons from the demonstration projects to inform future policy decisions and a final Site Design Guide. An important part of this evaluation is direct engagement with residents living on the funded sites about their experiences.

In April 2025, we published Supplementary Material to the 2021 Interim Guide, including layout plans from demonstration projects, information on community engagement approaches including different accommodation types to aid engagement, decant processes and fire safety. Alongside work to mainstream funding into the AHSP, the Scottish Government and COSLA have agreed to work in partnership to review site standards. This

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work will begin in 2026 and include engagement with members of Gypsy/Traveller communities.

*SHRC also highlights the need to adequately invest in community empowerment, self advocacy and cultural development projects.*

The Scottish Government has ensured that actions to empower communities, improve representation, and tackle racism and discrimination are appropriately funded. Since 2021, through the Equality and Human Rights Fund, nearly £1.5 million has been provided to partner organisations supporting the delivery of the Gypsy/Traveller Action Plans, including work to build capacity and skills within Gypsy/Traveller communities. In addition, since 2020, over £650,000 has been invested by the Scottish Government in the Community Health Worker programme, with a further £155,000 of funding allocated for 2026/27. Community Health Workers are members of Gypsy/Traveller communities who are trained to help others overcome barriers to accessing health services and other public services. The £10,000 Cultural Fund is also intended to raise awareness of cultural activities specifically linked to the “Tinker Experiment(s)” in the Perth and Kinross area in 2026/2027.

### **3. Satisfaction**

*The SHRC recommends issuing a formal written statement recognising the “Tinker Experiment” as a continuing human rights issue whilst clearly accepting State responsibility, and providing direct written apologies to victims acknowledging the harms they experienced and the State’s role in perpetuating those harms.*

During the meeting on 4 March, the SHRC clarified its view that certain harms from the “Tinker Experiment(s)” remain unaddressed and therefore constitute ongoing human rights issues. This view was reiterated through SHRC’s intervention at the Human Rights Council on 17<sup>th</sup> March.

It is important to be clear about what is meant by the “Tinker Experiment(s).” The term is colloquial and not formally defined or codified. The Scottish Government understands it to refer to a range of historical policies and practices, particularly throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century, that targeted Gypsy/Travellers. These included the removal of children and the enforcement of substandard accommodation and degrading living conditions.

The First Minister’s apology in June 2025 acknowledged the significant and long-lasting trauma caused by these policies, including for those who identify as “victims of Tinker Experiment(s)”, and recognised that there is much more to do in addressing the consequences. The independent research reports we published in June 2025 and the SHRC’s report have brought greater clarity to these issues and their legacy, and demonstrated that the effects of these policies continue to be felt today.

We are committed to continue engaging with SHRC and with Gypsy/Traveller communities on how best to reflect this in our ongoing work and communications.

*The SHRC also recommends that the Scottish Government establish further truth-recovery work on the harms experienced by Gypsy/Traveller children.*

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The independent research reports we published in June 2025 offer valuable insight into these issues but do not fully reflect all experiences. Future research could be undertaken by a range of organisations, including third-sector bodies that were involved in historical policy implementation. The Scottish Government will consider what support it might offer to such work, including on options for memorialisation. These matters will be a question for the incoming government.

#### **4. Guarantees of non-repetition**

*The SHRC recommends a review of all legislation and policy identified in the report as “perpetuating the forced assimilation of Scotland’s Gypsy/Travellers.”*

The Scottish Government does not consider any current laws in Scotland to be intentionally targeted at Gypsy/Travellers. These recommendations will be considered by the next government.

The Scottish Government recognises the right of Scotland’s Gypsy/Traveller communities to enjoy, maintain and develop their cultural identity and way of life, and to do so free from discrimination. Our approach is to support culturally appropriate services and accommodation, shaped by lived experience, so that community members are not placed under any pressure to change or abandon their culture, including nomadic traditions.

*The SHRC also states that a consistent and transparent national approach to addressing past harms should be developed in line with international principles on remedy and reparation, and that a publicly available plan for creating this standardised approach should be produced within one year.*

In his apology last June, the First Minister was clear that, since its inception the Scottish Parliament has demonstrated a willingness to confront uncomfortable and, for many, deeply painful elements of our national story. The Scottish Government recognises that only by acknowledging and learning from the difficult truths of our past can we move forward, building a more just and equitable Scotland.

Clear evidence and data are essential to ensure that government decisions are robust and well-informed, with the voices of those with lived experience at the centre. We will continue to work to address historical injustices appropriately and to improve outcomes in partnership with the communities affected.

Before concluding, I would like to emphasise how important it is for the Scottish Government to remain accountable for its actions. Only through transparency and accountability can trust between public authorities and communities be rebuilt. I would also like to reiterate the importance of ensuring that as many voices as possible are involved in shaping policies and decisions on these crucial matters, so that the next steps have broad support and no one who should be at the table feels excluded.

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## THE IMPORTANCE OF ACCOUNTABILITY

The Scottish Government recognises the central importance of accountability to Gypsy/Traveller communities and is committed to taking responsibility for its actions.

Our latest Gypsy/Traveller Action Plan was once again shaped directly by lived experience, informed through an extensive and meaningful year-long listening exercise involving over ten engagement sessions and more than one hundred individual voices.

Governance arrangements ensured transparency, accountability and regular feedback from community members and organisations working with Gypsy/Traveller communities. The Ministerial Oversight Group for the Gypsy/Traveller Action Plan provides alignment between Scottish Ministers and COSLA political leadership on progress, challenges and next steps, ensuring that community feedback directly informed decision-making. Minutes of these meetings are published on the Scottish Government website to support public transparency.

Community Conversations offer myself, the COSLA Spokesperson for Community Wellbeing, and officials a regular opportunity to hear directly from Gypsy/Traveller communities, helping shape policy through lived experience and ensuring that follow-up actions are clearly communicated. The Stakeholder Delivery Group reviews delivery progress on a monthly basis, translates community insights into practical improvements, and strengthens accountability across officials and funded organisations. The Scottish Government has also committed to publishing a final report setting out what has - and has not - been achieved through the most recent Action Plan, in order to maintain transparency and accountability.

Looking ahead, we are open to discussing with SHRC how together we might rightly encourage accountability amongst other duty bearers and ensure complementary approaches.

## THE IMPORTANCE OF MAKING SURE ALL VOICES ARE HEARD

In the Scottish Government's written response to the independent reports published alongside the First Minister's apology in Parliament in June 2025, we made clear that we recognise that the effects of historical policies and practices have not been experienced uniformly across individuals, families and groups in Gypsy/Traveller communities. Some people were directly affected through the immediate impacts of certain policies, while others experienced more indirect but still significant harms. We recognise the intergenerational nature of these impacts: the consequences of past decisions extend beyond those originally affected, influencing the lives of later generations through trauma, inherited disadvantage and systemic barriers. Understanding and acknowledging this complexity is vital as we work to move forward together.

We know that some community members explicitly identify as "victims of Tinker Experiment(s)", but others may not. We fully recognise and respect the right of individuals to self-identify as they choose. To avoid excluding those who do not use that term, we refer generally to "Gypsy/Traveller individuals, families, and groups who continue to be affected by historical policies."

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Scottish Government engaged widely through independent community consultation, with focus groups held in Stirling, Dunfermline and Pitlochry, and an online session with Gypsy/Traveller women from across Scotland. It is essential that a full diversity of voices continues to be heard to ensure that future actions are properly informed.

As we move into the next Parliamentary session, I expect that the incoming government will continue to engage with SHRC in progressing human rights realisation for Gypsy/Travellers in Scotland.

Yours sincerely,

**KAUKAB STEWART**

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