

Cross-Party Group on Scottish Gypsy/Travellers

19th November 2021: 1.00 - 2.30pm

Minute

Present

MSPs

Maggie Chapman	Vice Convenor
Jenni Minto	
Elena Whitham	

Invited guests

Non-MSP Group Members

Suzanne Munday	MECOPP (Secretariat)
Tanya Jones	Researcher to Maggie Chapman
Tony Cain	ALACHO
Dominique Barr	COSLA
Aqeel Ahmed	Scottish Government
Kerri Ramsay-Collins	Scottish Government
Mark Lawson	Scottish Government
Dorothy Ogle	Scottish Government
Diane Steele	Scottish Government
Robbie Lambie	Scottish Government
Kate Burton	Scottish Public Health Network
Leslie Drury	Article 12
Lynne Tammi	Research Associate, University of Dundee
Laura Bernstein	South Lanarkshire Council
Greg Hiddleston	Skill Development Scotland
Shirell Johnson	MECOPP
Susan Townsley	Community Member
Virginia Francis	Community Member
Tommy Bennett	Community Member

Apologies

Michelle Foy	Community Member
Roseanne McPhee	Community Member
Maureen Finn	STEP

Eloise Nutbrown
Claire Devine

COSLA
NHS Highland

Agenda item 1

Maggie Chapman (MSP) welcomed attendees to the Cross Party Group meeting and invited those who had not attended the previous meeting to introduce themselves. Apologies received were read out.

Agenda item 2

The minutes of the previous meeting were proposed by Elena Whitham (MSP) and seconded by Tommy Bennett.

Agenda item 3

There were no matters arising.

Agenda item 4

Maggie Chapman (MSP) asked participants to identify topics for future discussion and consideration by the Cross Party Group. The following topics were identified:

- Education, learning and development – a focus on transition from primary education to high school; keeping in touch with young people; ensuring that local authorities are offering appropriate education opportunities, both formal and informal, to each young person
- Accommodation - progress against the £20 million accommodation fund and how this will be used to support more and better accommodation; Housing Needs Demands Assessments
- Addressing racial discrimination – clarity about action beyond October 2022 when the current National Action Plan ends; focus on local leadership & champions within local authorities
- Adult learning and digital literacy – role of Adult Learning Fund in supporting community; learning support beyond provision of devices through Connecting Scotland
- Access social security
- Mental health and suicide prevention
- Violence against women

Agenda item 5

COSLA and Scottish Government officers provided an update against priorities within the National Action Plan.

Dominique Barr confirmed that all local authorities had drawn down their allocation of the initial £2 million made available for short term improvements. A report on what the funds have been spent on is being produced and will be shared at the next Ministerial Working Group and with community members.

Dorothy Ogle provided an update on the progress of the £20 million accommodation fund. Twelve local authorities applied to the fund. The initial focus of the fund is to develop demonstration projects which set a standard for future developments to include 'future proofing', environmental concerns and costings. No announcement on the successful applications has yet been made. One of the factors contributing to this is the uncertainty around costs.

The Site Design Guide (interim) has been published and will be updated from the learning generated by the demonstration projects.

Dorothy Ogle also provided an update on work on the 'rented sector strategy'. She would like to know what impact this will have on the Gypsy/Traveller community particularly in relation to occupancy agreements.

Susan Townsley asked if the spend would be monitored against the £2million as community members had asked for evidence of this from their local authority which had not been received. Elena Whitham and Dominique Barr will follow this up.

Elena Whitham suggested that a visit to one of the demonstration projects, when they are known, would be useful and this was agreed.

Dorothy Ogle also provided an update on the COVID-19 Framework. Work is underway on a review of the existing Framework. The revised Framework will retain a public health focus. Based on a position taken by COSLA Leaders:

- people should not be moved on from a temporary encampment if they don't have another encampment to go to where they can access sanitation and safe living conditions; and,
- that sanitation needs to be available/accessible to people living on roadside encampments who need it – albeit with local discretion on how that is provided e.g. it can be provided roadside or an appropriate place can be provided for people to stop which gives them access to sanitation.

There is to be an evaluation of the Negotiated Stopping pilot in March 2022 and an update will be provided when the report is available.

Virginia Francis asked if Council knew they had to have adequate sanitation facilities in place. Dorothy Ogle responded that not to have them in place was to go against the Guidance. She stated that they may need to reinforce this message with Councils and she will liaise with Dominique Barr about this.

Kate Burton provided an update on health related actions. Following the last CPG where the community had raised concerns about mental health and wellbeing, funding has been made available to support two mental health workers for young people, their

families and carers. Part of this funding is also to look at hate crime within the community. The two organisations leading this work are Progress in Dialogue and MECOPP. Funding has also been made available for a community health team to be delivered by MECOPP.

A new Health Equalities team has also been set up within Scottish Government, members of which are in attendance today.

Kate Burton asked that if anyone was aware of community members having difficulties registering with a GP practice, to contact her directly. Suzanne Munday will share her email.

Virginia Francis highlighted difficulties in getting PCR test results if community members did not have access to individual mail boxes. She asked if results could be texted to individuals instead. Kate Burton will raise this with Public Health Scotland.

Aqeel Ahmed responded that a meeting had been set up with Citizens Advice Scotland, the Post Office, Scottish Government and COSLA to address the lack of access to mail. He will report back on the outcome of this meeting.

Tommy Bennett highlighted the high rate of suicide amongst Gypsy/Traveller men and asked how this might be addressed. It was agreed that it was important to ensure that the voices and concerns of the community were included in the Suicide Prevention Strategy. Work is ongoing to support community engagement in this.

Elena Whitham asked Kate Burton about the availability of the 'blue cards'. Kate Burton confirmed that additional cards were in the process of being made up for distribution.

Elena Whitham also highlighted that the National Planning Framework is currently being consulted upon and she encouraged community members/organisations to respond to this.

Susan Townsley highlighted that individual GP practices have different approaches to filling in medical reports for benefit and grant applications. It was suggested that Kate Burton could be contacted in response to this.

Susan Townsley also raised concerns about the impact of COVID and self isolation on wages and household income. The £500 payment is insufficient if families have to isolate because trailers do not allow for individuals to isolate due to lack of space.

Tommy Bennett raised concerns about the impact of works being carried out on sites on the mental health and wellbeing of residents. He asked if decanting tenants would be a better option in this scenario. He also highlighted the positive impact of a Gypsy/Traveller education group which takes place 2 days per week in South Lanarkshire on young people and asked whether it could be replicated.

Elena Whitham highlighted the need to challenge stigma and racism amongst the wider community. Community Councils do put in objections to sites.

Susan Townsley spoke positively about the awareness-raising sessions she used to participate in with MECOPP as an effective means of challenging negative attitudes. Maggie Chapman (MSP) responded that she has a forthcoming meeting with the Procurator Fiscal's Office and that she will raise the issue of Gypsy/Traveller awareness-raising sessions with them.

Tommy Bennett highlighted that there were no positive media representation of the community.

A meeting between Maggie Chapman (MSP), Elena Whitham (MSP) and MECOPP could be arranged to discuss a media campaign.

It was noted that the previous hate crime campaign did not include any input from the Gypsy/Traveller community.

Agenda item 6

The date of the next meeting will be agreed shortly but it was agreed to aim for mid-February on a Friday between 1 – 2.30pm

The meeting was brought to a close.