

EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES COMMITTEE

Tuesday 7 June 2005

Session 2

£5.00

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EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES COMMITTEE

9th Meeting 2005, Session 2

CONVENER

*Cathy Peattie (Falkirk East) (Lab)

DEPUTY CONVENER

*Nora Radcliffe (Gordon) (LD)

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

*Shiona Baird (North East Scotland) (Green)
Frances Curran (West of Scotland) (SSP)
Phil Gallie (South of Scotland) (Con)
*Marlyn Glen (North East Scotland) (Lab)
*Marilyn Livingstone (Kirkcaldy) (Lab)
Elaine Smith (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)
Ms Sandra White (Glasgow) (SNP)

COMMITTEE SUBSTITUTES

Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
Linda Fabiani (Central Scotland) (SNP)
Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green)
*Carolyn Leckie (Central Scotland) (SSP)
Mr Jamie McGrigor (Highlands and Islands) (Con)

*attended

THE FOLLOWING GAVE EVIDENCE:

Ron Ashton (Association of Local Authority Chief Housing Officers)
Sandra Bruce (Aberdeen City Council)
David Cooper (Aberdeenshire Council)
Douglas Hamilton (Save the Children Scotland)
Michelle Lloyd (Save the Children Scotland)
Sandra Wood (Aberdeen City Council)

CLERK TO THE COMMITTEE

Steve Farrell

SENIOR ASSISTANT CLERK

Zoé Tough

ASSISTANT CLERK

Roy McMahon

LOCATION

Committee Room 1

Scottish Parliament

Equal Opportunities Committee

Tuesday 7 June 2005

[THE CONVENER *opened the meeting in private at 10:15*]

10:30

Meeting continued in public.

Gypsy Travellers

The Convener (Cathy Peattie): I open the public part of the meeting. I remind those present to turn off their mobile phones.

Item 2 is the committee's review of progress on Gypsy Travellers. This is our third evidence session. I welcome Douglas Hamilton and Michelle Lloyd from Save the Children Scotland. We have a lot of work to get through this morning, so I will go straight to questions.

You note in your submission that it remains socially acceptable to discriminate against Gypsy Travellers, and that that needs to be tackled head-on as a matter of urgency. Are you aware of any co-ordinated efforts to tackle that? How do you suggest that we do so?

Michelle Lloyd (Save the Children Scotland): We are not aware of any co-ordinated efforts, particularly at a national level. We argue that a package of measures is needed. As I am sure committee members are aware, the amount of discrimination, vilification and stereotyping of Gypsy Travellers is extreme; therefore, specific measures are required at a number of levels. There is a need for a high-profile media campaign that presents positive and realistic images of Gypsy Travellers, not the negative images that we so often see in the newspapers and on television. That needs to be aligned with awareness-raising training for the public and for service providers, preferably led by Gypsy Travellers themselves. Good practice is already evident in some areas of Scotland, but we need to have a national programme. The Executive is the obvious agency to lead on that issue.

The Convener: Your submission highlights the fact that we are still failing to involve Gypsy Travellers effectively in decision-making processes that affect their lives. Why is that, and is it a particular issue at the local level?

Michelle Lloyd: It is an issue at both national and local levels. Unfortunately, at national level there are two recent examples of Gypsy Travellers

not being included. One was in the preparation of guidelines on unauthorised camping—no Gypsy Travellers were members of the working group that drew up the guidelines. The second example is that of a recent conference in Edinburgh entitled "Developing Services for Scotland's Gypsy/Travellers", yet the community was specifically excluded. Also, to our knowledge there has been no investment in capacity building at a local level, nor have specific mechanisms been put in place to encourage or enable Gypsy Travellers to get involved in the process.

The Convener: Clearly, when local authorities are looking at particular projects within specific communities, one would expect them to involve stakeholders. While they may do that in other areas, there is little or no evidence of Gypsy Travellers being involved.

Michelle Lloyd: Yes. Throughout the country there is some evidence of good practice, but there are inconsistencies.

The Convener: I want to pursue another question, but I will go first to Marlyn Glen, who has a view on the conference, which I believe she attended.

Marlyn Glen (North East Scotland) (Lab): I attended the conference and wondered about its participants. I wonder whether the committee should write to the conference organisers to ask about the exclusion of Gypsy Travellers, unless Michelle Lloyd has some background information on that. The conference was aimed at council officers.

Michelle Lloyd: It is for the conference organisers—the City of Edinburgh Council, the Scottish Executive and the Scottish Human Rights Centre—to answer that question.

Marlyn Glen: It would be useful for the committee to write to the organisers and ask about that.

Michelle Lloyd: We were disappointed that Gypsy Travellers were not involved.

The Convener: We will ask that important question.

Douglas Hamilton (Save the Children Scotland): We are pleased that, in a couple of weeks, you are having some Travellers along to the committee. I know that during the committee's previous inquiry members engaged in site visits and visited roadside camps. I wonder whether you plan to do the same this time. We are able to give a perspective, but working with Travellers and involving them in partnerships is vital to the inquiry and to gaining information on local issues.

The Convener: We are currently reviewing our recommendations and the Executive's response.

We want to see whether there have been changes since our report in 2001. We will decide what to do when we pull our evidence together.

The committee recommended in its report that Gypsy Travellers be regarded as a distinct ethnic minority group until such time as a court decision formalised that status. Has that recommendation had any impact on service provision for Gypsy Travellers?

Michelle Lloyd: I refer to my previous answer—in some areas, the recommendation has had an impact, in that Gypsy Travellers are now included in some racial equality schemes and policies, but practice is inconsistent and patchy. Too many racial equality schemes do not specifically mention Gypsy Travellers. Because there is a lack of clarity on the issue, some public and private agencies can get away with discriminatory policies and practices.

The Convener: If Gypsy Travellers had that status, would it be more difficult for the press to campaign negatively?

Michelle Lloyd: One would hope so. We do not see similar campaigns against other minority ethnic communities whose status has been recognised under the Race Relations Act 1976.

Marilyn Livingstone (Kirkcaldy) (Lab): You state in your submission that local authorities have been reluctant providers of sites over the past 30 years, and that current provision does not meet existing or future needs. To what extent do you feel that there is a clear understanding of current or future needs, and what immediate action could or should be taken to improve the situation?

Michelle Lloyd: Save the Children argues that current and future needs are poorly understood. To use one example, current site provision in Scotland is based largely on figures that were produced in 1980, which was 25 years ago. With the best will in the world, there is no way that current provision can be meeting the needs of the community, which has grown in the past 25 years.

In relation to future needs, we and Communities Scotland recognise the absence of long-term planning. As I mention in our submission, given that there continues to be insufficient provision, a number of young people have asked, "Where are we going to go when we get married and have children?"

Douglas Hamilton: We also refer in our submission to "An Assessment of the Housing Needs and Aspirations of Gypsies/Travellers in Tayside", and we encourage the replication of that exercise throughout Scotland. We cannot know the full range of needs unless we have such comprehensive housing needs assessments. The

report from Tayside has been helpful in that regard.

Marilyn Livingstone: Dave Simmers of the Traveller Education and Information Project (North East) suggested in evidence to the committee that opening up traditional transit sites would alleviate tensions overnight between the Gypsy Traveller community and the settled community. What is your view of that suggestion?

Michelle Lloyd: It would provide part of the answer but, as Douglas Hamilton said, we are calling for a full housing needs assessment and the taking of a holistic approach to accommodation. It is not just about opening up a few roadside camps. There is a need to examine the requirement for a range of accommodation to meet the varying needs of families. That is no different to any other community in society.

Marilyn Livingstone: Your evidence highlights the fact that although some Gypsy Travellers live in settled housing for extended periods of time, they do not therefore cease to be Gypsy Travellers. What are the issues for those Gypsy Travellers and how can we ensure that they are not excluded from our considerations?

Michelle Lloyd: That is an obvious question to ask Gypsy Travellers themselves. As Douglas Hamilton said, we call upon members to do that as much as possible. Approximately 40 per cent of our casework continues to be with families who reside in settled housing. Many of them feel that they have been forced into housing because of the lack of alternative options, either on sites or on roadsides, but many still face difficulties in accessing health and education services.

Some recent peer research that young Gypsy Travellers have done has shown that many of those who live in housing feel that they have to hide their identity to avoid discrimination. It is extremely unfortunate that young people in particular feel that they have to do that.

Douglas Hamilton: There is potential for Gypsy Traveller liaison officers to help Gypsy Travellers in housing. That approach does not work if the Gypsy Traveller liaison officer is like a site manager, but it can work if liaison officers are in the community, working with Travellers who are in housing and on sites.

Marilyn Glen: In your submission, you express concern that there is a lack of consistency in the application of a flexible, needs-based approach to education for Gypsy Travellers. I am interested in the issue because the conference about which we talked earlier included workshops on that topic, which seemed useful. Why is there still such inconsistency and what should be done to improve provision?

Michelle Lloyd: There is an absence of a strong lead from the Scottish Executive on the matter. You are correct to say that there are some examples of good practice, but they are scattered throughout the country and opportunities for good practice to be rolled out nationally are rare. There is also a role for a body or agency to monitor what good practice is taking place and to use the evidence to promote the development of good practice throughout the country. Our experience is that there is a lack of co-ordination. In some authorities or agencies, there might be good practice on education but poor practice on sites. The inconsistency within local authorities and throughout the country is evident not only on education, but on health and accommodation.

Marlyn Glen: Will the recent changes in the Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) Act 2004 be more helpful in focusing on individual needs?

Michelle Lloyd: The potential exists for the 2004 act to help, but whether that potential will be translated into changes for young Gypsy Travellers remains to be seen. Unfortunately, their needs—whether in health or education—are rarely recognised in the school system and, throughout the curriculum, the Gypsy Traveller culture and heritage are rarely valued or presented positively. I am sad to say that, until that changes, the inconsistency is likely to remain.

Nora Radcliffe (Gordon) (LD): We have had some discussion about hand-held health records for Gypsy Travellers; would there be merit in pursuing a similar solution for pupil records?

Michelle Lloyd: That is one of the suggestions that the Scottish Traveller education programme made. It could certainly be tried and rolled out but, unfortunately, even if such records were available, there would still be a gap because some young people do not cross the threshold of a school, for whatever reason. That gap is our primary concern, because those young people miss out on a number of educational opportunities if they are not willing to enter school. That is why we argue that alternative approaches also need to be considered and attention should not focus only on what happens within the school.

Nora Radcliffe: Do you know whether record transfer is a problem for Gypsy Travellers who attend school but move around?

Michelle Lloyd: That is not particularly our area of expertise.

Nora Radcliffe: I am asking the wrong person.

Marlyn Glen: In its submission, Save the Children expresses concern at the slow pace of progress on the collection of information on Gypsy

Travellers' health needs. Why is progress so slow and what should be done to improve the situation?

Michelle Lloyd: It is a case of the issue not having been prioritised. There is a need for needs assessment, but there is also a need for the action that comes next. The issue has not been given enough attention and its urgency has not been highlighted, despite the recommendations that the Equal Opportunities Committee made in 2001.

Marlyn Glen: I will ask a little bit about hand-held records. Might recent changes in technology be helpful, perhaps by enabling records to be kept on computer and transferred much more easily?

10:45

Michelle Lloyd: Those changes certainly provide the potential for improvement. In its report, the committee made a clear recommendation on the use of hand-held records. It has been progressed—we argue that that is a good example of partnership working with the community and the voluntary sector—but, although a national record was produced at the end of last year, it has not yet been launched. That is a great disappointment, because the records could be used by families that move around throughout the summer months.

Douglas Hamilton: We do not know why, but, as Michelle Lloyd said, Gypsy Travellers' health needs do not appear to be a priority for many groups. The hand-held record exists and we are aware of no reason why we cannot simply get it in place so that people can start to use it. In addition, as far as we are aware, no one is working on community-based health needs assessment. There is the potential for such measures to be put in place but, for some reason, work on them has stopped. The committee could help with that and provide a bit more of a push because, as far as we are aware, there is no reason for that work to have stopped.

The Convener: We hope to move some things forward.

Carolyn Leckie (Central Scotland) (SSP): In what has been said, a theme of patchy provision in a variety of fields is coming through. On health, the Save the Children submission says that

"examples of good practice tend to be reliant upon individual interest rather than strategic planning."

What action is necessary to turn that round? Is it to do with resources or direction, or is it a combination of both?

Michelle Lloyd: It is a combination of both. Unfortunately, many of the examples of good practice appear to have come about almost by luck rather than by design. Health is an obvious area in which that is the case. Some excellent health visitors who work with Gypsy Travellers

have built up a lot of trust and do some excellent work, but when a family cross over a local authority or health board boundary, they can suddenly find that there is no provision for them. What is necessary is a combination of leadership with—in some cases—a redirection of resources, which do not always need to be additional resources.

Carolyn Leckie: Is provision dependent on individual health visitors having an interest in Gypsy Travellers? Is it the case that they have to add such work on to the work that is determined for them by their health boards' strategic objectives and fight to provide the quality of service that they would like to provide?

Michelle Lloyd: I am sad to say that, in many cases, that appears to be the case.

Carolyn Leckie: I have a question on a separate, but related, issue that is of interest to me because I was previously a midwife. Have you encountered any problems with Gypsy Travellers accessing appropriate maternity care?

Michelle Lloyd: Yes. Unfortunately, in our fieldwork we still come across examples of pregnant women who are turned away from the general practitioner or maternity services because they cannot provide an address. In some areas, health visitors have recognised that Gypsy Travellers—particularly those who are on roadside camps—are often in a vulnerable position and under threat of eviction, and they have been very proactive on maternity services and have set up some good schemes to speed up the process, but progress is patchy and inconsistent.

Carolyn Leckie: You also mention that insufficient attention has been focused on young Gypsy Travellers' health needs. What are the specific issues in relation to providing for the health needs of young Gypsy Travellers and why is that group receiving so little attention?

Michelle Lloyd: It is not that young Gypsy Travellers have different health needs—one would guess that they have the same health needs as any other young people—but that their needs are often neglected. That is sometimes because adults' needs are met at the expense of the young people's needs but it is also because the young people do not have, or struggle to have access to, information and advice in an appropriate format. How will a 14-year-old young woman who lives on a roadside camp on the outskirts of a town and whose reading and writing is not brilliant get access to information about her health needs? She might have to rely on an elder relative to take her to the GP, who might ask why. The issue is access to appropriate health information and advice, rather than young Gypsy Travellers' health needs being different.

Carolyn Leckie: How can such provision be achieved? Is a more proactive strategy required? Do we need to go out to the young people instead of depending on them to seek out advice—or even to know that they need to seek advice?

Michelle Lloyd: A proactive approach is most definitely needed. We have been involved in health education work with young Gypsy Travellers for a number of years. When the young people have identified health needs about which they would like to find out more, we have brought in appropriate tutors and combined our work with healthy activities and so on. Such projects work: the young people are very much in favour of them. Again, however, they happen in one area but not in others, and a more national approach needs to be taken.

Shiona Baird (North East Scotland) (Green): In your submission, you make reference to the lack of suitable provision for disabled Gypsy Travellers who live on sites. Will you explain the problems and say how some of the issues can be addressed?

Michelle Lloyd: Some of the problems relate to insufficient insulation or a lack of warmth in some of the chalets on sites. Throughout the country, very few sites have good provision for disabled Gypsy Travellers. When the sites were built, it was as if people assumed that there were no disabled or elderly Gypsy Travellers—which, of course, is not the case.

The issue was highlighted in the report, "An Assessment of the Housing Needs and Aspirations of Gypsies/Travellers in Tayside". Many of the elderly or disabled residents to whom the report's authors spoke said that insufficient and inappropriate facilities meant that they would be unable to remain on site. Many of the grants for adaptations are available only to someone who lives in a council or housing association house, for example, and are not available to people who live on sites. A number of issues are involved in the way in which disabled Gypsy Travellers are disadvantaged.

Douglas Hamilton: The question flags up a couple of points, the first of which takes us back to the value of the housing needs assessment. The Tayside needs assessment report helped to identify the issue. Again, we do not know what the situation across the country is because no national assessment has been done. The second point concerns access to grants, which is an issue that is closely tied to the definition of "house", about which the committee made a recommendation in its report. Without that legal definition, entitlement to grants and so forth cannot come through.

Issues that have been identified as a result of the problems that disabled or elderly Gypsy

Travellers in caravans experience are linked into some of the wider strategic issues around the housing needs assessment and the definition of "house". There could be a significant difference—

Shiona Baird: So we literally have to accept a caravan as a house, as that is the way in which to access the flow of grants. I presume that there is no such access at the moment because caravans are not included in the definition.

Douglas Hamilton: It is all linked. These issues have to be taken into account in the discussions on current and future site provision, which was flagged up earlier.

Shiona Baird: What role, if any, can site managers usefully play in supporting access to services for Gypsy Travellers who live on local authority sites? Do you support the committee's recommendation that the role of the site manager be reviewed?

Michelle Lloyd: We support the need for the role of site managers to be reviewed. As for their role, the question is not one for us to answer. However, we feel that the title of Gypsy Traveller liaison officer should not simply be passed over to site managers—the two roles are very different; different skills, knowledge and so on are involved. Some local authorities have redefined site managers as Gypsy Traveller liaison officers. Obviously, that was not what the committee envisaged when it made its recommendation.

Shiona Baird: Why have so few Gypsy Traveller liaison officers been appointed since the publication of the committee report? If more GTLOs were appointed, would that have a significant impact on the delivery of services to Gypsy Travellers?

Douglas Hamilton: It would have a significant impact. We are looking for a holistic approach to be taken to the range of needs with which we are dealing. If housing needs impact on education needs and health needs, a co-ordinated approach requires to be taken to the linked nature of those issues. If Gypsy Traveller liaison officers are to make a significant impact, they have to be appointed to a genuine authority-wide post.

In some respects, part of our role is similar to that of the Gypsy Traveller liaison officer and, as we said earlier, the role of the GTLO is not just related to work on sites but to work with Gypsy Travellers who live in houses.

Michelle Lloyd: Some local authorities have chosen to fulfil the role of the Gypsy Traveller liaison officer through the voluntary sector. The option is one that should be considered in some areas, as the Gypsy Traveller liaison officer does not necessarily have to be a council employee. Although the role has the potential to make a

significant impact, we have to recognise the length of time and the amount of energy that have to go into building up trust with families. No significant improvement in any of these areas can be made overnight; the levels of discrimination and stereotyping are such that this work is an uphill struggle. Nevertheless, when sufficient time and energy are invested in building up trust, improvements can be made.

Shiona Baird: Rather than councils delivering services through different council agencies, you seem to be saying that the role of the Gypsy Traveller liaison officer is crucial.

Michelle Lloyd: We are saying that the role of the GTLO is crucial, but that this is not an either/or situation. Mainstreaming is always the ideal: services should be provided without the need for a GTLO. However, at present there is a gap between service providers and families, wherever they live. The GTLO is simply one way of bridging the gap, but I stress that it is only one way. As I suggested, there are other ways, including the involvement of the voluntary sector.

Nora Radcliffe: You talked about building bridges, which needs to happen. However, when we talk about bridge building, we always seem to say that it needs to start from the local authority and settled community side. Is there any reason why bridge building should not come from the Gypsy Traveller side? Perhaps members of the Gypsy Traveller community should be appointed as liaison officers.

Michelle Lloyd: Quite possibly, yes. Efforts are made by the Gypsy Traveller community, but—unfortunately—our experience is that those efforts are met with rebuttal or discrimination. There is no reason why the role could not be fulfilled by Gypsy Travellers, however.

Nora Radcliffe: In your submission, you mention capacity building. Should we consider the provision of support for the establishment of representative groups for Gypsy Travellers in Scotland?

Michelle Lloyd: The question is one that would be better directed at Gypsy Travellers. I return to what we said earlier, which is that we encourage members to speak to as many Gypsy Travellers as possible, including those who live in housing, those who live on sites and those who live on the roadside. Gypsy Travellers are in the best position to advise the committee on that question.

Nora Radcliffe: The question is whether they would feel properly represented by a representative group. After all, membership of such a group would have to be fairly widely based.

Michelle Lloyd: It is always important to remember the diversity of the community. Too

often, we find that service providers expect one view on education or accommodation, which, of course, is no more true of the Gypsy Traveller community than it is of any other community. Unfortunately, there appears to be a reluctance to take on board the diversity of the community.

Nora Radcliffe: That is a strong point.

In your submission, you mention the problem of funding for local projects and the fact that key projects have ceased to operate. Given the particularly difficult situation of Gypsy Travellers in respect of exclusion and discrimination and the virtual absence of any community infrastructure, is there a need to prioritise funding for specific Gypsy Traveller projects? If so, should such funding be sourced from the national or the local level?

11:00

Michelle Lloyd: There is certainly a need for robust investment in capacity building. Our experience is that local projects are one way of delivering that. There are examples of good practice across the country. To be blunt, I do not really care where the funding comes from, as long as it is made available. This is another area in which there is an opportunity for strong leadership to be shown at national level and for good practice to be shared across the country. Many agencies and individuals have become disillusioned with reinventing the wheel or constantly having to source small pockets of money in order to run a project.

Nora Radcliffe: In its written evidence, the TEIP noted:

"there is a real weakness in the Scottish Executive's decision to, largely, devolve responsibility for implementation to the local level."

It believes that

"left to the local level means populist positions and nimbysism prevail."

Do you agree? You are hinting that national direction is important.

Michelle Lloyd: Yes.

Nora Radcliffe: You speak positively about the work of the police and the impact that that has had on relations between police forces and Gypsy Travellers, but you note that in the past year there have still been instances of failure to follow recent guidelines. Are police forces in Scotland moving in the right direction, or is there still a need for them to be encouraged to do so?

Michelle Lloyd: Police forces are moving in the right direction. The development of the guidelines is one sign of progress. The guidelines are national and forces are being encouraged to follow

them. However, that is not enough. The guidelines operate only in relation to roadside camps. What about the other Gypsy Travellers who live on sites and in housing, where there is evidence of a mistrust of the police that has developed over many years? Gypsy Travellers are often the victims of crime, especially racist crime. There is a reluctance to report racist crime and, perhaps, a suspicion that the police as an agency are not as neutral as they could be in such situations.

There is a need for more training. The awareness-raising seminars that I mentioned earlier have been well attended by police officers and we have witnessed a breaking down of barriers on both sides. That should be encouraged and promoted more widely. The Scottish Police College has shown an interest in involving Gypsy Travellers in the training of new recruits, which is a positive sign. However, training must not be limited to new recruits; it must include other officers.

Nora Radcliffe: The guidelines must be extended to cover situations other than just unauthorised campsites.

Michelle Lloyd: Yes.

Douglas Hamilton: I want to reinforce the point that Michelle Lloyd has made about the safety of Gypsy Travellers and the crucial role that the police have in relation to that. If the relationship between the police and Gypsy Travellers is not handled in the way in which Michelle described and trust is not built up, young people will be put at risk. They will be frightened to go to the police, because they will not know who will be there to help them. We have flagged up the issue of Gypsy Travellers in houses, for whom safety is also a vital consideration. The role of the police in addressing that issue must be sorted out soon.

Michelle Lloyd: As I mentioned earlier, we recently did some peer research with young Gypsy Travellers. The report, which is entitled "Having Our Say", will be launched in a couple of weeks. The young people were asked to identify the three best and worst things about their current location. Many people mentioned the presence around them of their family, friends and community in the best column. That was similar to the findings that were published in 2001. However, as Douglas Hamilton said, this time young people emphasised not just the familiarity but the safety and security of having their family around them. The best thing that one young person—a 14-year-old girl who lived on a site—could think to say about where she was living was, "We don't get stoned here." Those few words are shocking.

Marilyn Livingstone: This morning, we have talked a great deal about promoting good relations between Gypsy Travellers and the settled

community. You have partly answered the question that I intended to ask. In your submission, you clearly express disappointment about the failure of the one Scotland, many cultures campaign to include Gypsy Travellers. What could the Executive do to promote good relations between the Gypsy Traveller and settled communities?

Michelle Lloyd: The Executive could do a number of things. We must remember that the Executive and other public authorities have a statutory duty to promote good relations. As I said in my response to the first question, a package of measures is required. A media campaign is not enough, although the one Scotland, many cultures campaign could have helped. We would have liked one of the television, radio or billboard advertisements in the campaign to have targeted Gypsy Travellers and to have highlighted one of the discriminatory situations that they face. That suggestion was made to the equality unit prior to the second phase of the campaign, but unfortunately the unit chose not to take it up. Although such an advert would not have alleviated discrimination overnight, it would have sent out a powerful visible message that discrimination against Gypsy Travellers is not only unacceptable but potentially unlawful.

The awareness-raising seminars that I mentioned are also part of the picture, because they are led by skilled Gypsy Traveller trainers. The seminars have a dual role. They can have a significant impact not only on the audience—service providers—but on the Gypsy Travellers who deliver them, who are empowered and whose confidence is raised. We would like the Executive to fund a national programme of seminars. The package is waiting to be rolled out, but it requires funding in order for that to happen across the country.

Douglas Hamilton: We can offer the committee examples of initiatives that young people have developed to help with awareness raising. There is a video called "Judge yourself, not Travellers!" If the committee would be interested, we can make the video available to it, so that members can see what work is already being done.

The Convener: We would like to see the video.

Michelle Lloyd: The video was developed by young Gypsy Travellers with a small amount of money from the Executive. They made three one-minute adverts. The adverts are not broadcast quality, because we did not have the resources necessary for that, but they are very powerful and provide a good illustration of what Gypsy Travellers can produce if they are fully involved and take a lead in the process.

Nora Radcliffe: We have talked about positive use of the media. In your written evidence, you cite recent media articles that were anything but positive. Would you like to say more about those articles and the impact that they had on Gypsy Travellers? How did the articles affect relations between Gypsy Travellers and the settled community?

Michelle Lloyd: Gypsy Travellers are the best people to comment on the impact that the articles had on them. From the point of view of Save the Children, they have had a tremendous impact. They have created a great deal of anger, disappointment and fear. Families have spoken about being stoned or of people driving on to their sites in cars and shouting names at them. The articles have instilled a sense of fear in many of the families with whom we have worked.

Douglas Hamilton: The nature of some of the media coverage flags up the need for us to make particular efforts in relation to Gypsy Traveller communities, rather than just relying on mainstream anti-racism and anti-discrimination campaigns. If stories that appeared in *The Sun* and some other newspapers during the recent general election campaign, in particular, can legitimately be put on the front page of national newspapers, we have big job to do. We need to target resources on some of the anti-discrimination and anti-racism messages that we spoke about previously.

Michelle Lloyd spoke about the impact that recent newspaper articles have had on the Gypsy Traveller community. That is not a surprise. Some of the evidence that will appear in the report "Having Our Say" about young people's views on racism, discrimination and how they are viewed by other people in their community indicates that the situation is much worse than it used to be, or at least that it has not improved at all in the past four years. That is probably no surprise given the negative messages about Gypsy Travellers that are allowed to be put on the front pages of newspapers.

Nora Radcliffe: The media have had an insidious effect on the settled community as well. I found it interesting that, when I was canvassing on the doorsteps just before the election, people would tell me that one of the most important issues for them was Gypsy Travellers, because they had picked up that attitude from the press stories. However, when I asked them to be more specific, I was told that they had had no problems with Gypsy Travellers and that they had never seen an encampment. In other words, people had had no first-hand experience; it was all an impression picked up from the press. The insidious effect of such messages should not be

underestimated. The example of that front-page story was awful.

Michelle Lloyd: The coverage has had an impact on individuals' willingness to engage with the media. Now people are understandably much more afraid of being identified in the media for fear of what might come next.

Carolyn Leckie: On Saturday, Cathy Peattie and I attended a Scottish Civic Forum debate on media, human rights and democracy, which was about exploring the balance between the freedom of expression of the press and people's rights to be free from discrimination. Has your organisation thought about any strategies, apart from trying to issue positive media statements, to combat the ability of the press to conduct campaigns such as the one that we talked about? Are more stringent measures necessary?

Michelle Lloyd: I am not so keen on the idea of taking more stringent measures, but mechanisms could be used to promote positive messages, not just through the media. One example is the young people whom committee members met who were involved in the who we are project—they produced a range of positive posters, DVDs and comics, which can be used in schools and youth centres, for example. Many of those materials were on show at an exhibition in Kirkcaldy museum a couple of weeks ago. Three of the young people live in the Kirkcaldy area and were proud to identify themselves clearly and to show their work. That is great and a real sign of progress. However, more of that kind of work is needed. There was an element of fear among some of the young people involved about what the exhibition might lead to, given the current climate in the media.

Douglas Hamilton: You are right that we need to promote positive images in the media. The committee could play a key role in that and in how the messages come out. It is clear that the committee's report from four years ago has had an impact. The result of the current inquiry will also have an impact. We need to make the most of opportunities such as the inquiry to launch positive stories about Gypsy Travellers and to send out clear messages about what is and is not acceptable in the media—such opportunities do not come along very often for the community.

Marlyn Glen: You say in the conclusion to your written submission that there is a need for a national body to monitor the implementation of the committee's recommendations. Will you expand on what you have in mind?

Michelle Lloyd: The important thing for us is that there was a gap after the committee's 2001 report. No monitoring mechanism was put in place and there were no specific action plans or timescales, which is why we are revisiting the

report's recommendations four years on. The key points are the need for monitoring and a clear implementation plan, perhaps along the lines of the recommendations from the National Assembly for Wales, which issued a clear action plan stating who was responsible for what and giving timescales. I do not have up-to-date information about whether that has made a difference, although one hopes that it has. For us, the important point is not what the national body is called—whether it is called a working, steering or advisory group—but that a robust mechanism be put in place to ensure that the recommendations are implemented.

11:15

Douglas Hamilton: We say in our written evidence how frustrated and disappointed we were. I am sure that that is also true of many other witnesses to the inquiry and of committee members. We need to do everything that we can to ensure that the action points are acted on.

The Scottish Executive's report last year on progress since 2001 made disappointing reading. Its lack of drive did not inspire confidence that the Executive is pushing the agenda forward. Anything resulting from the committee's inquiry that can start to implement clear actions, with timescales and methods of holding people to account, as Michelle Lloyd says, would be welcome so that we do not come back here in another four years and say, "We are still struggling with the same issues from the recommendations that were made in 2001." We need to do as much as we can to push the agenda forward.

Marlyn Glen: We talked a bit about your recommendation that there should be a nationally co-ordinated awareness-raising and anti-discrimination programme. Would such a programme focus specifically on Gypsy Travellers or cover all areas of discrimination including Gypsy Travellers?

Michelle Lloyd: As we said, we believe that there is a need for a specific targeted campaign. Mainstreaming or a more general campaign might be the long-term goal. I hope that in a few years we will be at a point where Gypsy Travellers can simply be included in a more generic anti-discrimination campaign. However, the situation at the moment is so extreme that a specific targeted campaign is needed.

Nora Radcliffe: You said that timescales and monitoring mechanisms were missing from the original recommendations. Is there anything else that you want to say about the impact that the original report might have had? Are the original recommendations still valid? Are there any that we need to add?

Michelle Lloyd: Are you asking us to do your job for you?

Nora Radcliffe: We are asking you to help us.

Michelle Lloyd: Many of the recommendations are still valid, because progress has been disappointing, as we said. As for additional recommendations, the main gap in the original ones was the absence of implementation and monitoring mechanisms. As Douglas Hamilton mentioned, most of the issues raised in “Delivering for Scotland’s Gypsies/Travellers”—the Scottish Executive’s response to the committee’s recommendations—were generic and pointed responsibility towards local authorities. That was unfortunate. We are now four years on from the initial report and that approach has not worked. A much more targeted and specific approach needs to be taken and people must be held to account if recommendations are not implemented.

Douglas Hamilton: We refer in our submission to the need for a statutory framework for the measures—that may have been one of the original recommendations, too. Some questions have been grappled with for years, such as whether we need statutory regulation and the definition of “house” in housing legislation. There is a real need to grapple with those questions. Perhaps legislation is required to nail them down once and for all, so that people have the legal right to take action rather than relying on promises and, as has been said, general suggestions for proceeding, which have not delivered. Michelle Lloyd told me yesterday that our figures on site provision are from 1980. It is about time that we moved on and put a statutory framework in place that people can make use of.

The Convener: Before we close this session, do the witnesses have further comments?

Michelle Lloyd: I will just follow on from what Douglas Hamilton has said and add that there are signs of progress. One interesting development concerns the Gypsy and Traveller law reform coalition. As members might be aware, the coalition originated in England but now hopes to set up a similar coalition in Scotland, to be led by Gypsy Travellers with a broad-base representation from Gypsy Travellers throughout the country. One of the aims of the coalition would be to amend the statutory definition of “home” through a Traveller law reform bill. That approach will not resolve all the issues overnight, but it is certainly a positive way forward.

The Convener: I am aware of those discussions.

Douglas Hamilton: I think that we have probably covered everything that we want to cover. A key point is to ensure that Gypsy Travellers are involved. You will probably hear a

lot more about that in the evidence session in two weeks’ time. We encourage you to visit some sites to hear directly from people where they are in relation to some of the difficulties that we have outlined this morning.

Another key issue is the count. We do not think that that is useful and we request that the committee recommend that it be replaced or stopped. If the resources for that were fed into something that could be of use to the Gypsy Traveller community, that would be a welcome development. As we have stressed throughout our evidence, the issue is not numbers; it is housing and health needs. If we can start to address those issues, that will be a big step forward.

The Convener: I thank you both very much for your evidence this morning. There will be a short break to allow a changeover of witnesses.

11:21

Meeting suspended.

11:26

On resuming—

The Convener: Can we get started again? I welcome Sandra Bruce and Sandra Wood, from Aberdeen City Council; David Cooper, from Aberdeenshire Council; and Ron Ashton, from the Association of Local Authority Chief Housing Officers. We have quite a lot on our agenda, so I would like us to go straight to our questions, if that is okay.

My first question is for Aberdeenshire Council. In March 2005, you noted that the council’s tenancy agreement was under review. Has that review been completed and, if so, what was the outcome? You also mentioned the establishment of a new site. Have you consulted the residents on the new site? If so, how was that consultation process carried out?

David Cooper (Aberdeenshire Council): I am from the council’s environmental health department, rather than its housing service, so I have not been involved in any review of the tenancy agreement. I understand that a review is on-going, but that is all that I can report. I believe that a report will be published after the summer, and the information can be relayed to the committee.

The Convener: We are especially interested in how the consultation was carried out. Gypsy Travellers have highlighted that as an issue—not in Aberdeenshire in particular, but in other parts of the country.

David Cooper: The Traveller Education and Information Project was contracted by the housing

service to carry out a series of interviews with Travellers on the site. I understand that that has been the main focus of the consultation. Quite a limited number of Travellers were involved—possibly fewer than a dozen. Unfortunately, I do not know the outcome of that or the issues that were raised.

The Convener: When the report is ready, we will be keen to get sight of it.

Can you tell the committee what the current status is of your review of the role of site managers? How has the review been carried out? For example, have you been in contact with other local authorities, the Travellers Site Managers Association or Gypsy Travellers themselves? What issues have been identified and what action are you taking? There was a big discussion about the role of site managers last time around, prior to a report being written, and there is still on-going discussion of it.

David Cooper: Again, my knowledge of that side of things is limited. I believe that the review of site management and site managers' role has not yet been undertaken, although it is about to start. I do not know the timetable for it.

The Convener: Do you have a view on how site managers operate?

David Cooper: I am not from that side of things. The site manager at the Greenbank site—the official site at Banff, in Aberdeenshire—works only part time, so the manager's role there is limited and is restricted to dealing with issues pertaining to the site itself. There has been talk of expanding the role to a liaison officer-type role, but I do not believe that doing so would be appropriate. That said, the council is committed to trying to develop a network of transit sites, so there might be four or five small transit sites. A site manager—or perhaps one and a half or two full-time equivalents—could have a role in managing all those sites, including the existing site at Greenbank.

11:30

The Convener: You are talking about a site manager, not a liaison officer.

David Cooper: That is correct.

Nora Radcliffe: The Traveller Education and Information Project has highlighted the lack of transit sites. Its view is that better provision of transit sites would remove tensions between Gypsy Travellers and settled communities. What is your view on that?

David Cooper: I agree. A report has been considered by Aberdeenshire Council and we are committed to trying to identify suitable locations to

develop as transit sites, which will not be an easy task. Obviously, wherever we try to establish a transit site, the local community will raise concerns. We must weigh up residents' concerns and Travellers' needs. Currently, a number of encampments exist in Aberdeenshire from January right through until the end of the year and they are not being as effectively managed as they could be if they were proper transit sites. We are committed to developing transit sites, which would address education, health and general welfare issues.

Nora Radcliffe: Can you give the committee a feel for how far forward the council is with progressing such work?

David Cooper: Unfortunately, progress has been slow. We have considered three potential sites, but they have been discounted on the grounds of ownership or access issues or their proximity to housing.

Nora Radcliffe: How much consultation about the sites has there been with the Gypsy Traveller community? Has it put forward suggestions?

David Cooper: There has been no direct consultation on the three sites that I have mentioned, but Travellers have been involved in annual seminars and in general discussions in the Aberdeenshire Council working group and with the Traveller Education and Information Project. We have a feel for the type of sites that Travellers want, but there has been no direct consultation yet. Such consultation is intended to take place if we can identify sites that we can progress.

Nora Radcliffe: But Gypsy Travellers have been involved in discussions.

David Cooper: They have been involved in a general way, but not in respect of specific locations.

Nora Radcliffe: Aberdeenshire Council's submission states that the provision of children's playing facilities, barrier-free facilities for residents with individual access requirements and community facilities is under consideration and that tenants will be consulted. What progress has been made on such matters?

David Cooper: Again, I refer to the Traveller Education and Information Project, which has carried out interviews and consultation. I believe that that consultation focused on such issues, but unfortunately I do not know what the responses were.

Nora Radcliffe: The submission states that a site improvement plan is currently being developed. I presume that the plan is part of the same discussions.

David Cooper: Yes. It will be part of the review process.

Nora Radcliffe: Why is there only one site in Aberdeenshire?

David Cooper: That is a good question. Obviously, it does not meet Travellers' needs. Back in 1999 or 2000, our pitch target was increased from 20 to 36. We tried to develop a site in the south of Aberdeenshire and had discussions with the owner of a caravan site and a meeting with the local community council at the time, but the project fell through for various reasons. The capital grant ceased, so the council had no funding to progress matters.

Nora Radcliffe: To what extent is lack of funding—or specific, hypothecated funding—an issue?

David Cooper: It is an issue. For example, we have a service-level agreement with the Traveller Education and Information Project, which basically takes on the liaison officer function on our behalf. Last year, £15,000 was allocated to that, but the figure was made up of funding from different departments—it was not a corporate budget—so it was difficult to co-ordinate. This year, we have less funding because one of the funding sources is not available, so we have a shortfall. We will try to make it up in some way, but that will affect the service-level agreement and the work that the TEIP puts in on our behalf.

The Convener: With respect, I am a bit disappointed that you are not able to answer some of our questions. We know that work is being done in your area and we are keen to hear its outcome. Perhaps we can receive some further written evidence from you.

I understand the need to fund various projects, but your council and other councils consult the parents of children in schools, the users of accommodation and local residents. Why do you need money to consult Gypsy Travellers? Why are they a separate case?

David Cooper: I am not sure that they are, or that we are treating them differently.

The Convener: I got the impression that you were saying, "Oh, it's really difficult, and money is an issue." To provide services for Gypsy Travellers, as for any other people in the community, you have to talk to them.

David Cooper: Funding is an issue. Last year, we decided that rather than fund a liaison officer post we would fund a service-level agreement with the TEIP. That is the funding issue that I was referring to; I was not saying that there was a specific pot of money to be used in consulting Travellers. The Traveller Education and Information Project carries out a number of

different tasks on our behalf—in relation to education and housing as well as to my department's work in environmental health.

Carolyn Leckie: I am getting the impression that the council's attempts to identify transit sites have been tentative. Have those attempts been combined with really proactive attempts to break down stigmatisation and stereotyping? Is the council prepared to challenge the fears and prejudices that have led to your not getting anywhere with the sites and to only three such sites being identified?

David Cooper: You are quite right to say that the approach has been tentative. That comes down to council resources and to having enough staff time to allow us to concentrate on the issue. Time must be made to identify suitable locations. At the moment, I admit that we are not putting the time and effort into identifying transit sites.

Carolyn Leckie: Do you have specific strategies to break down prejudice? Sometimes it takes a bit of courage to face down prejudice, but is the council willing to try?

David Cooper: The council is not doing anything specifically with the public at large.

Carolyn Leckie: Would you consider doing something?

David Cooper: Yes, of course. We would have to consider that.

The Convener: I would agree.

Shiona Baird: I want to ask Mr Cooper one more question before I move on to the witnesses from Aberdeen City Council. What policies do you have for providing facilities for informal sites? I am thinking about water and rubbish, for example.

David Cooper: If encampments appear on land that the council owns or controls, we provide a skip that is then collected as the need arises. We provide additional refuse sacks and refuse collection. On two occasions, we have provided portaloos, including one on an encampment at the moment.

Shiona Baird: And water?

David Cooper: If Travellers are having difficulty in obtaining water, they can have access to council facilities to fill up their containers. That has happened on a current encampment, and it also happened earlier this year.

Shiona Baird: My next two questions are specifically for Aberdeen City Council. In your original submission, you say that you have no plans to create the role of Gypsy Traveller liaison officer. You also note that relevant issues are addressed by officials in several services, depending on the particular issue. Is that the most

effective way of dealing with the issues affecting Gypsy Travellers?

Sandra Bruce (Aberdeen City Council): We have moved on a bit since that statement of our position was made. We have the Traveller Education and Information Project, which—like Aberdeenshire Council—liaises closely with Travellers both on and off the official site that is supported by the council. A tenants participation officer is working in tandem with the TEIP to develop a tenants association on site.

In addition, we are setting up a small review group that will include elected members and Gypsy Travellers; its first meeting will be on 17 June. The group will work over the summer and its remit will be to review the need for a Gypsy Traveller liaison officer and the role of the site manager; to explore proposals for transit or halting sites, as we call them; and to re-examine and make more robust our policy on managing unauthorised sites. We are in the process of starting discussions with Travellers and getting elected members on board, which is important. We hope to have that work complete and to be able to go to committee with it in the September cycle.

Shiona Baird: Your submission shows that the relevant action plans date back to February 2003 and that they include issues that the committee raised in its 2001 report. You probably heard our first panel of witnesses express concern about how slow-moving the process is. What key challenges have you faced in delivering your action plans?

Sandra Bruce: One of the key challenges has been the fact that the media coverage in Aberdeen has not created a helpful climate. There is just one local newspaper, which has the power to shape public opinion. The council works constantly to promote better relationships with the travelling community and to raise awareness of Gypsy Traveller issues. We counteract some of the negative and hostile media coverage by inviting community representatives to Traveller awareness seminars such as those that Save the Children has held. I am based in a community development section of the council and we write to the people on our extensive database, which has a wide mailing list. We offer to do presentations and to bring Travellers with us. We do everything that we can to promote greater awareness of Travellers and the issues that affect them, such as health, which are never covered in our local newspaper. We try to give people an alternative perspective on the Traveller lifestyle.

In March, a celebration of the heritage, culture and lifestyle of Travellers was organised by the University of Aberdeen's Elphinstone institute. We supported that and sought to get our community

contacts involved. We acknowledge that the process in which we are engaged is difficult, given that many people read the local newspaper and take just one opinion from it. We must be aware of the challenge that that presents.

The council is a large organisation that has more than 10,500 employees, so in spite of our equal opportunities policies and Traveller action plans, getting key messages through to all the staff in the organisation is an issue, even with all the good will in the world. Individual elected members can hold views that differ from agreed council policy and there is an issue about keeping elected members briefed. Council officers or police officers can be attacked by the newspaper simply for executing their organisation's agreed policy or for trying to meet its aims and objectives as part of their professional role. The environment in which we operate is difficult.

Aberdeen City Council has shown a commitment to review its action plan year on year. The 2001 recommendations were the springboard for the action plan; we attempt to mirror those recommendations in what we do. We are committed to engaging with Gypsy Travellers on the action plan and involving them in the actions that we take. We have considered different ways of engaging with the travelling community because it is a group that is hard to reach. We have made a commitment and progress will be made, but not overnight; we are involved in a long, hard campaign. As someone who has been around for a long time and has worked on many controversial issues such as domestic abuse, I know that it takes time to change attitudes and public perceptions.

Shiona Baird: The fundamental problem of negative media coverage makes your job much harder. Have you approached the newspaper concerned directly to engage in more private dialogue with it, to try to deal with some of the stereotypical views that it is expressing?

11:45

Sandra Bruce: I believe that our chief executive meets the editors of local newspapers and offers the local newspapers invitations when we launch a strategy or action plan, but bad news tends to sell newspapers. That is unfortunate and means that we do not have the coverage that we would want for some other issues. The settled community has quite balanced coverage that includes good and bad news stories, but Traveller coverage tends to focus on negative imagery, old library pictures and reinforcing many negative messages on a newspaper's front page. In the body of a newspaper, reporting will probably be accurate and will say that refuse at an unauthorised site

was minimal, for example, but the damage is done by page 1 and its big headlines.

The Convener: Aberdeen City Council is to be commended for being among the first local authorities to launch and implement a strategy. How can we encourage other local authorities to do that and to take a strategic approach rather than the piecemeal approach that some councils appear to take?

Sandra Bruce: We have recommendations and guidelines but no legislative provision. We have the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000, but Travellers do not have ethnic minority status. Legislation would help and provide a great push.

The situation might be easier if the Scottish Executive provided ring-fenced funding for a Gypsy Traveller liaison officer, which might help more authorities to pick up on the issue. I did a round robin with my contacts in the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities equality officers network and I know that few councils have a liaison officer. Most people do what we do—they fulfil the role by using different mechanisms.

Marilyn Livingstone: The Scottish Traveller education programme has reported fear of racist attacks, including bullying, as a reason for young people to exclude themselves from school. Are we doing enough to tackle the problem for Gypsy Travellers, both in and out of school?

Sandra Bruce: Our schools have race equality policies, which cover the bullying and harassment of Gypsy Travellers. Much good work is going on in Aberdeen with police education liaison officers who go into schools. The committee will be aware that Wilma Gillanders of Grampian police was seconded to do much developmental work on delivering resources for schools that are also used. Good citizenship and social justice are themes that emerge from that and Gypsy Travellers are mentioned as part of that.

In Aberdeen, we benefited from having Stanley Robertson, the Traveller storyteller, who was engaged through the Elphinstone institute at the University of Aberdeen. He received positive feedback for the work that he did in schools and libraries. We must educate young people and promote attitudes when they are little, but we must remember that although kids have that education at school, they go home to parental influences, so general awareness raising among the public is still needed. Joe and Janet Public are important, too.

When I go to meetings, I hear anecdotal stuff about Travellers excluding themselves from school because of bullying. That is a real issue.

Ron Ashton (Association of Local Authority Chief Housing Officers): Steps can be taken to educate the general public and—dare I say it—

school-age children by involving them directly with the Traveller community. Authorities throughout the country have undertaken much good work. Achieving that understanding is a long, slow process and is not open to an overnight fix. The long, slow process of educating families and children—as Sandra Bruce said—and of having much better interrelation with the Traveller community has started. We must build on that and set specific and definitive targets if we are to achieve an output with which we can all live.

Marilyn Livingstone: The Executive made funding available to councils for anti-bullying strategies. Perhaps my question is for Ron Ashton. I have been given one example, but are there specific examples of best practice across the country?

Ron Ashton: My local authority, Angus Council, treats the Traveller community exactly the same as it treats any other customer. In relation to site management, we have a participation process—not a consultation process—and have involved the Travellers in the redesign of the site, which is about to be substantially upgraded. Like David Cooper, we are trying to find places for transit sites for the north part of Angus in consultation with the Travellers who are currently fly camping in the area. However, I do not dispute the fact that we can run into problems when we try to explain to the settled community what we are legitimately doing. Such problems can slow the process down and turn it into a long drag. The history of providing permanent sites for Travellers over the past 20 or 30 years shows that the same complaints and planning issues arise again and again. Therefore, we can only look to the good examples that involve understandings being reached and education processes being undertaken. By education, I mean not teaching people how to read and write but educating people about what community means and the benefits that people's differences can bring to the wider community. As I said, I come from a rural area and I know that, in that area, there is an appreciation of the benefits that the Traveller community can bring to the wider community. We have to build on that and set specific and definitive targets if we are going to achieve an output that we can all live with.

Marilyn Livingstone: The committee's 2001 report placed great emphasis on the need to hear directly from Gypsy Travellers and to involve them in decisions that affect them. Bearing in mind the issues that we have discussed this morning, such as the dispersed nature of the community and the fact that many Gypsy Travellers live in settled housing and might be difficult to identify, do you think that you, or the services that you represent or are aware of, liaise effectively with Gypsy Travellers?

Sandra Bruce: There is always room for improvement but we are considering a variety of ways of doing that. For instance, the planning for real exercise is a good one for Gypsy Travellers with literacy issues, as it uses graphic symbols to enable them to say what their issues are with official Traveller sites, for example whether they need a phone. That is better at enabling them to get involved than the approach of some organisations that send out wads of paper and ask people to submit a response by a certain date.

Obviously, we must keep trying to find new ways of liaising with Travellers. Consultation fatigue is a problem in relation to any member of the community and Gypsy Travellers must feel that, although they have been consulted many times, it takes an awfully long time for action to take place.

Ron Ashton: Some services are extremely good, others pay lip service to the original recommendations and others are pretty bad. There is no pattern. Often, the issue comes down to whether there is a champion within a service or authority who is prepared to take the agenda to the next stage.

Marilyn Livingstone: Do we have a good enough understanding of the specific needs of Gypsy Travellers? We heard otherwise from other witnesses this morning. We have to understand what services Gypsy Travellers need and want. If you believe that you have a good enough understanding of that, does that translate into effective services?

Ron Ashton: That is a difficult and thorny question. As one of the originators of the Tayside project that Michelle Lloyd mentioned earlier, I know that, although we thought that we knew what the community wanted and what we had to do, that was not the case. We might have known some things but we did not know everything. Finding out what the community wanted was an extremely worthwhile exercise, but translating that into action entails bids for resources that are prioritised in many ways—you pay your money and you take your shot. You do the best that you can to get resources from the fixed pool of resources but, inevitably, there will be compromises. Some initiatives can be implemented, some cannot be and some have to be implemented in a compromised manner. That is the reality, because we do not have a fixed budget for this particular section of the community.

Sandra Bruce: Obviously, certain individuals within the council have a heightened level of awareness; the issue is to raise the level of awareness among other officers and members, which is what we try to do in our training sessions—we try to mainstream Gypsy Traveller awareness into corporate induction and manager or supervisory training at every opportunity. There

is an equality action network within our council on which the key council officers and four cross-party elected members are represented. The network's remit is to oversee the mainstreaming of equality issues within the council and it produces a newsletter. It looks to raise awareness throughout the council at every opportunity.

The other way in which we are mainstreaming equality issues is by examining the individual community of interest action plans and trying to integrate them. Given the proposals for a single equality commission, the idea is to integrate the six strands. We now have what we call service deliverables, which we tell our neighbourhood directors or service directors we want to see reflected in their neighbourhood plans or service plans. Best-value audits are coming up, so we need evidence, which makes the system more robust. Mainstreaming is now less of a jargon word and more of an action word.

The Convener: That is good news.

David Cooper: I mention the importance of the Traveller Education and Information Project to Aberdeenshire Council and, possibly, also Moray Council, as there is a service-level agreement there. The project has been instrumental in pushing Travellers' issues up the agenda in our council. The staff within the Travellers project are very enthusiastic.

Marilyn Livingstone: It is about having a champion and also getting staff who understand the issues.

Carolyn Leckie: Reference was made earlier to the committee's recommendation that Gypsy Travellers should be regarded as a distinct ethnic minority group until such time as the courts formalise the situation. Has the recommendation had any impact on service provision? Is there awareness of it and has it made a difference to how people conduct their business with the Gypsy Traveller community?

David Cooper: It has certainly made a difference in Aberdeenshire Council. Travellers' issues are encompassed within a range of different strategies and policies, including the local housing strategy, the homelessness strategy and the race equality plan. Within the council the issue is well recognised and our policies on unauthorised encampments, for example, fully recognise Gypsy Travellers' almost ethnic minority status.

Sandra Bruce: Aberdeen City Council affirms that position within our race equality scheme, so such a level of awareness exists. The benefit is two sided because Gypsy Travellers now have increased awareness about their rights under the Human Rights Act 1998 and the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000. It would help if the

recommendation was to be made the position in law, but awareness of the issue still exists in all the good practice that we are implementing.

Ron Ashton: That recommendation was one of those which the vast majority of public sector bodies accepted and implemented wholeheartedly. I have very little doubt that the recommendation has made a difference.

Carolyn Leckie: It is good news that the recommendation has been accepted within your organisations and that you are satisfied with the level of acceptance. Has that been translated externally to other organisations? For example, in your dealings with the media in Aberdeen, do they acknowledge that point? Have you tried to get such acknowledgement from the media and from the public?

Sandra Bruce: We have tried very hard to do that. Our local newspaper now gives a capital G and a capital T to Gypsy Travellers, so that is encouraging.

Ron Ashton: It has been much more difficult to try to progress the concept with non-public sector agencies. Progress is very patchy and such efforts have not been particularly successful in respect of the media.

Carolyn Leckie: What strategies might be necessary to achieve that? Can we do anything else?

Ron Ashton: It is necessary that we re-emphasise the position strongly until the law can be changed. Sandra Bruce said that the problem is about what sells newspapers, but we have experience of a very settled picture being turned on its head almost overnight because of the antisocial actions of a very small minority of Travellers, which has impacted on a settled Traveller community that has lived within an area for a long time and is accepted as a valued part of that area. The whole situation can be turned on its head overnight by bad reporting that is based on incidents that have happened elsewhere.

12:00

Carolyn Leckie: You commented on the involvement of Gypsy Travellers in discussions about service provision. Will you expand on the impact that that has had? Do you have examples or evidence of changes to service provision because of such involvement? Is there room for improvement?

Ron Ashton: There are two elements to that: the physical design of sites and the improvement of sites. Those are fundamental because, as in the rest of Scotland, we have an aging population and needs are changing. The sites were built a considerable time ago according to a concept that

will probably not be repeated. I say that with 20:20 hindsight; we are where we are and we have to move forward. When we design sites, we must acknowledge that the market and concept are different and the only way we can incorporate such considerations is to involve Travellers. In the same way, we must where possible mainstream our policies for dealing with the Traveller community.

The involvement of Gypsy Travellers in discussions has made a difference, but such involvement does not happen universally—again, the situation is patchy throughout the country. There have been improvements in health provision and in how health issues have been addressed, especially through the use of health visitors and through health boards' input. We are starting to achieve distinct and direct services whereas five or 10 years ago there was none. It is about outreach; it is about going on to the camps, especially illegal camps or fly camps, and taking services to people.

Carolyn Leckie: Do the good examples that you are talking about have secure funding? Is their funding continuous? We heard from the previous panel about people constantly having to apply for different pots of money. Has progress been made on that?

Ron Ashton: As usual, funding is a nightmare. It always amazes me how creative or devious—depending how you look at it—local authorities can be in achieving funding for projects. A lot of that funding comes on the back of other initiative funding, such as for community safety, health, homelessness and supporting people. Local authorities design projects that meet certain criteria in order to grab a bit of funding. Difficulty arises if—as in the supporting people fund—definitions change slightly or there is a review. I have to say honestly that funding is not secure or long term; it is a hotch-potch of ad-hocs and people twist things together to get bits of funding to start a project that might not exist in five years. I cannot think of any projects that get that level of commitment.

Carolyn Leckie: That is helpful, because it backs up previous evidence. On the diversity of the Gypsy Traveller community, Michelle Lloyd said that we do not have to identify just one set of needs, because needs are different. I know that you cannot speak for the whole country, but are you getting that right when you design services in your area? Are you taking account of diversity?

Ron Ashton: We try to knock on every caravan door because the Traveller community is notoriously difficult to get one body of opinion from. What is required depends on family groupings and how people travel. We have to reflect that, because it is a fact of life. From a local

authority perspective, that does not apply just to Travellers but to other minority communities in which we find it extremely difficult to get one person to speak for the entire community. We have to tailor services to needs.

Marlyn Glen: What role can site managers usefully play in supporting access to services for Gypsy Travellers who live on local authority sites?

David Cooper: I can speak only for the Greenbank site. The same Travellers tend to go to that site each year, so I am not sure whether they need assistance to access services—they are fully aware of the services that are available. The allocations policy for the site is being reviewed, but at present the site manager has limited involvement.

Ron Ashton: Site managers are a neglected, underpaid and isolated bunch of people. They do the best that they can with limited resources. Their profile needs to be raised and they need the training, knowledge and expertise to back that up. The picture is patchy; there are some very good site managers, but some sites no longer have full-time managers.

The Convener: That can be a problem.

Sandra Bruce: Site managers are in an isolated position and they need to be properly supported and supervised. As part of our review of their role, I looked at their job description, which reads like a job description for a caretaker. It says that the manager must supervise and encourage use of the community building by tenants and other individuals and groups, help tenants with individual problems and enable them to make contact with other agencies if appropriate. However, the role of site managers should be far more developmental than the current job remit suggests. They need an integrated and holistic approach with a focus on supporting Travellers, encouraging their involvement and participation and signposting services for them.

Marlyn Glen: Thank you for your answers, which have been useful and interesting. What recommendations do you make to the committee? How can we assist in improving service delivery to Gypsy Travellers?

David Cooper: The Traveller Education and Information Project, which we have mentioned several times today, has brought a lot of advantages to the way in which Aberdeenshire Council liaises with Travellers. It requires further consideration and financial support, either from local authorities or from national funding.

Marlyn Glen: How is the project funded at the moment?

David Cooper: Its core funding comes from the national lottery, but it has a total of 15 funders.

Funding from Aberdeenshire Council makes up only about 10 per cent of the total, but we have an agreement that it will in return carry out specified tasks, including visits to unauthorised encampments. Council staff are also involved in that, but the TEIP has taken on the role of liaison between Travellers and various council services.

Ron Ashton: We need to expand the assessment of need. On that point, I return to the Tayside project. We need to carry out a national assessment of need and put in place funding that will follow that assessment through, whether that is core funding within the grant-aided expenditure settlement or whatever. It is a question of mainstreaming and centralising and creating a core service.

Sandra Bruce: We need strong central leadership, and we need the committee to make key statements that reach the press at every opportunity. We talked about the missed opportunity of the one Scotland, many cultures campaign which, unfortunately, did not include a Gypsy Traveller scenario. I look back at how the zero tolerance campaign started. At first, local authorities did their own thing. They used powerful positive black-and-white imagery of women, which challenged myths and stereotypes. Next, the Scottish Executive came in with television advertising that reinforced all the key messages. From there, a climate of change developed and women MSPs with a social justice agenda could make that change happen. It is a question of creating a climate in which we can have such legislative change.

Marlyn Glen: The evidence that we received from local authorities suggests that few of them have acted on the committee's recommendation that they should appoint a Gypsy Traveller liaison officer. You talked about the review in Aberdeen, but are you aware of the work of such liaison officers in other authorities? How helpful would the appointment of more GTLOs be in improving local authority service delivery to Gypsy Travellers?

David Cooper: The appointment of an officer in each council is important, but on its own that is not enough. The fact that the Traveller Education and Information Project operates at arm's length from the council, albeit that it works with the council, brings benefits. Council officials are still often viewed with suspicion, but the project has been able to build up a good rapport with many Travellers.

Marlyn Glen: I appreciate the advantages of that, but I am concerned that the council does not appear to have ownership of projects that operate at arm's length. A champion is needed inside as well as outside the council.

David Cooper: We have one or two champions among the councillors. The TEIP attends our working-group meetings and we attend the project's committee meetings, so there is close working between us. However, the fact that the TEIP is not regarded as part of the council brings advantages in enabling the TEIP to liaise with and help Travellers.

Ron Ashton: Both approaches are needed. We need a voluntary sector outside the council that works strongly on behalf of Travellers, but work needs to be done internally, too. The Traveller liaison officers in the former Strathclyde Regional Council were able to advocate in the council not just for individual Travellers but on behalf of the Traveller cause. They could pull together, link, persuade, cajole, beg, borrow and steal to ensure that services were delivered. The problem is one of resources versus priorities, as is the case with everything else. A number of authorities, including my own, have expanded the role and—in our case, certainly—the training of site managers, to enable them to work in partnership with health services and the police. The appointment of staff comes down to the need to make available the necessary resources on a continuing basis.

Sandra Bruce: As part of the preparatory work for the task group, I tried to ring round the officer network of the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities, to ascertain whether other authorities have appointed GTLOs, but I received little feedback.

We held a seminar recently, at which Travellers said that it would be helpful if there were an 0845 national helpline number that could signpost them to other agencies. Given that Travellers travel, it would be good to have a national number.

Sandra Wood (Aberdeen City Council): Partnership working happens: the councils work well together, hand in hand with the TEIP, and Travellers accept that. I am a tenant participation officer: I work on sites but I also work with Travellers who are settled—for want of a better word—in communities. The Travellers know that I am a council officer, but they see me working with the TEIP, so I am no longer regarded as a threat, which is great.

Shiona Baird: It is obvious that you rely heavily on the TEIP, which seems to be working well. How secure is the project's long-term funding?

Sandra Wood: As far as I am aware, the project's funding is very bitty.

The Convener: The TEIP gave evidence to the committee at our most recent meeting, so perhaps we should have asked about funding then. I suppose that, like most voluntary organisations, it pulls together money from various sources, which is often not permanent funding.

Shiona Baird: Funding will need to be addressed, if the TEIP is to maintain its role.

David Cooper: The TEIP's core funding comes from the national lottery, but the amount will reduce over the next two years, so the TEIP must seek other funding to make up the shortfall.

Marlyn Glen: We talked a little about good relations between Gypsy Travellers and other communities. Do Gypsy Travellers feature in the design and content of awareness-raising or anti-racism campaigns? What key factors should we address to improve community relations? Are we doing enough in that regard?

David Cooper: I am not aware that Travellers have been included in such campaigns.

Ron Ashton: I can think of examples in which that has happened as an ad hoc solution to problems in hot spots, but I cannot think of campaigns that have included Travellers in a logical and planned way. Travellers usually rise to the top of the agenda when there is a problem to address, but then they sink below the horizon again.

12:15

Sandra Bruce: To promote good relations, Travellers must come face to face with people. Much is reported in the papers and, if people can ask one another questions at our civic forum, for example, or community councillors can become involved in training, that would help to build bridges. There is a genuine desire to find out more about Travellers; reliance on the local press does not provide all the necessary information.

Marlyn Glen: I go back to the Save the Children panel, members of which talked about promoting positive images and the display that was held at Kirkcaldy museum. Something like that could be held at Parliament. It would not cost a fortune and it would be a way in which to promote relations. A display could be moved around the country. Perhaps we could help in such a process.

There are creative ways in which to make a difference. It is always dangerous to come back to the idea that competing priorities would pull on funding. We are about pushing such matters up the list of priorities, so that people will be forced to provide funding. All authorities could take action that would not cost a fortune.

Sandra Bruce: The mention of displays has triggered another thought. Aberdeen City Council held a Holocaust memorial event for the 60th anniversary of Auschwitz and we had a stand about Gypsy Travellers. People were shocked at the information that they received about how many Gypsy Travellers were exterminated by Hitler. Focus has always been on the Jews, but other

marginalised communities were also targeted. I do not want to use the word “mainstreaming”, but we should use every opportunity that is available to raise awareness.

Ron Ashton: Such action must be long term because the relationship is fragile and can be overturned easily by a bad headline.

The Convenor: Absolutely.

Marilyn Livingstone: Marilyn Glen made a good point when she spoke about promoting best practice. As the member for Kirkcaldy, I am pleased with the work that is being undertaken there and in Fife. Representatives of Save the Children have said that they regard Fife and Edinburgh as exemplars of best practice. If an organisation such as Save the Children says that Fife Council and the City of Edinburgh Council are doing something right, surely work should be undertaken to pick up on best practice, rather than trying to reinvent the wheel. What work goes on among councils to ensure that best practice is picked up?

David Cooper: Speaking for Aberdeenshire Council, Moray Council and possibly for Aberdeen City Council, we have been in contact with Fife Council over the past 18 months. We have visited that council’s headquarters twice to see what it is doing specifically about transit sites and we are following its experiences. We gained that information from the TEIP, but I do not know whether it has been relayed to other councils through other means,

Ron Ashton: There is a pretty close network among local authorities and much of that has been helped in recent years by the emergence of Communities Scotland and its ability to provide research resources, good practice resources and regulation resources for local authorities.

Marilyn Livingstone: In its written evidence, the TEIP said:

“there is a real weakness in the Scottish Executive’s decision to, largely, devolve responsibility for implementation to the local level. For an itinerant community who continue to experience virulent prejudice and discrimination, left to the local level means populist positions and nimbyism prevail.”

Would you like to comment on that?

Sandra Bruce: As I said, if the recommendations had legislative backing, that would help to ensure consistency among the 32 local authorities. Obviously, councillors will always have one view on their constituents, so there is an obvious tension between the desires of the majority of people within their wards. It would be helpful to have legislative backing, rather than guidelines and recommendations.

Sandra Wood: We want clear direction, if that is not cheeky.

Ron Ashton: I am not defending the Scottish Executive, but I was there when the decisions were made, when it was hoped that the community planning agenda, which was in its infancy at the time, would take on the issue and that it would become meaningful. Having been part of the decision-making process X years ago, I am happy to sit here and say, “No, it hasn’t panned out the way it was supposed to, because community planning hasn’t developed as it was anticipated it would develop and it hasn’t taken on board that burden.” I am prepared to admit that the agenda has to be moved forward from the centre.

Nora Radcliffe: Is there a role for local plans? Is there a statutory requirement for local plans to include adequate sites?

Ron Ashton: Sites should be included in structure plans and local plans. That is part of the local housing strategy, which—

Nora Radcliffe: Sites should be in there anyway?

Ron Ashton: Yes—spot on.

Nora Radcliffe: One of the tangible things that came out of our 2001 report was the Scottish Executive guidelines for managing unauthorised camping by Gypsy Travellers in Scotland. Have you seen those guidelines? What is your opinion of them?

David Cooper: The guidelines are very good—they cover all the main issues. We have been following much of the guidance in the past two years and we have benefited from working with Inspector Taggart of Grampian police, who was involved in drawing it up. That has been of great benefit to us.

Ron Ashton: Life has moved on, and the guidelines probably need to be updated now. They may not be absolutely perfect, but you have got to pay tribute to them. If they had not been produced, it is probable that nothing else would have been, or that the guidance would have been patchy. At least we have a national framework, although it is perhaps time to reconsider them and to develop them further.

Nora Radcliffe: You probably heard the suggestion in previous evidence that something similar should be done for authorised campsites and Gypsy Travellers in the settled community. Do you agree?

Ron Ashton: I would probably not disagree with that, but the Communities Scotland regulation regime takes care of authorised managed sites in local authority ownership. The missing bit is the private sector sites within a private sector regime.

The Housing (Scotland) Bill, which is going through this august body at the moment, covers many things, but it does not cover what happens in respect of the definition of accommodation and how regulation fits into that definition.

Nora Radcliffe: That is useful, because it points us to gaps in what we are doing, which is to try to get Government joined up.

Sandra Bruce: On its being timely to do a review, that is why we are examining our own policy, which was adopted in 2002. We want to review it to make it more robust, to have an integrated human rights audit trail within it and to clarify the legal position regarding what is a reasonable time for unauthorised sites. The emphasis on decision making needs to be more fully recorded, just so that we have the evidence. It is three years since the policy was adopted, so it is probably right to review it.

Nora Radcliffe: That is helpful. I suppose that we are talking about the review of our 2001 report. Do you want to add any comments to what you have said about the validity of that report? Has it had an impact? If so, where? What do we need to do in the review? If you have said what you wanted to say do not bother answering; I ask in case you want to add anything.

Sandra Bruce: I was going to say that it was an excellent report on the committee's position in 2001. That was where I got most of my information on the needs of Gypsy Travellers and the recommended actions. I took actions along its suggested lines, which included a comprehensive list of recommendations. It is sad that not everything that was recommended has happened, and that what has happened has been patchy, but where there is best practice, we must learn from it.

David Cooper: What has been beneficial is that Gypsy Travellers' issues have been included in a variety of council policies. Reference is always made to the Equal Opportunities Committee's recommendations—they are recognised as being important.

The Convener: We can move them on a bit further, in that case.

This question is particularly for Ron Ashton. David Simmers of the Traveller Education and Information Project noted in evidence to the committee that accommodation is central to the question of effective service delivery to Gypsy Travellers. In your view, are we moving quickly enough to improve the condition of the sites that are available, and to increase the availability of stopping places?

Ron Ashton: Again, the picture is patchy. Some authorities have studied the subject and recognised that there is a problem—not a problem

with the Gypsy Travellers, but a problem in that there are not enough available sites—and those authorities are moving forward. Others are rather slower, and that comes back to individual political difficulties locally, relationships with local communities and so on.

You would expect me to say this because I come from a housing background, but accommodation is fundamental; it ties many other things together. Frankly, we have not moved as far forward as I hoped we would four or five years ago. It is just starting to be accepted that provision has to be made for transit sites that are acceptable to Gypsy Travellers and which meet their needs, rather than what we bureaucrats think are wonderful, nice and neat fenced areas. We have lost a few years, and we need to catch up.

This sounds like the usual whine from local government, but the biggest question is this: where is the prioritisation within the resources to develop those things, and to create the will to move them forward, in what can be quite difficult environmental conditions within a community?

The Convener: What, in your experience, are the key difficulties that are faced by housing departments in terms of site provision and management?

Ron Ashton: In respect of site provision, the problem is usually getting a site in the first place, which tends to be a long, slow and tortuous process. David Cooper mentioned the number of sites that he had looked at and the difficulties; I remember that when we were considering sites on the west coast—just north of Glasgow, dare I say—we came up with a list of 22 sites, and after three years reasons had been given why every one of the 22 sites was unsuitable for development. This is about willingness to move the process forward, and the ability to resource it properly at the sharp end.

As for management of sites, I firmly believe that a good, well-settled and well-managed site does not require any more management than any other accommodation. Where there is great fear among many Travellers on local authority sites, it is about incursions either by the settled community or by other rogue Traveller elements. Some of the difficulties with sites, and the security measures, come purely from that fear, and the need to manage more intensively to negate it.

The Convener: Thank you all very much for your evidence this morning. Is there any particular thing that you would like to tell the committee that we should be doing—either to include in our report or to highlight areas of concern?

Ron Ashton: We need to move forward with a national agenda, and we need to start setting targets.

The Convener: I thank the witnesses, and close the meeting.

Meeting closed at 12:28.

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