



The Scottish Parliament
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

Official Report

EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES COMMITTEE

Monday 4 February 2013

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EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES COMMITTEE

4th Meeting 2013, Session 4

CONVENER

*Mary Fee (West Scotland) (Lab)

DEPUTY CONVENER

*Marco Biagi (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

*John Finnie (Highlands and Islands) (Ind)

*Alex Johnstone (North East Scotland) (Con)

*John Mason (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)

Siobhan McMahon (Central Scotland) (Lab)

*Dennis Robertson (Aberdeenshire West) (SNP)

*attended

THE FOLLOWING ALSO PARTICIPATED:

Sandra Bruce (Aberdeen City Council)

Nigel Firth (NHS Grampian)

Scott Hughes

Jim Hume (Grampian Police)

Moyra Stephen (Aberdeenshire Council)

Donald Stewart

Sammy Stewart

CLERK TO THE COMMITTEE

Douglas Thornton

LOCATION

Clinterty Travelling Persons Site, Aberdeen

Scottish Parliament

Equal Opportunities Committee

Monday 4 February 2013

[The Convener *opened the meeting at 14:03*]

Decision on Taking Business in Private

The Convener (Mary Fee): Good afternoon, everyone, and welcome to the Equal Opportunities Committee's fourth meeting in 2013. Let me start by covering a couple of housekeeping items, before we move on to our evidence session. I ask everyone to turn all mobile phones off because they interfere with the microphones and sound system.

Agenda item 1 is a decision on taking business in private. The committee is asked to agree to consider its approach to its draft report on where Gypsy Travellers live in private at future meetings. Is that agreed?

Members *indicated agreement.*

Where Gypsy Travellers Live

14:04

The Convener: Item 2 is an evidence session on where Gypsy Travellers live. Before we start, it might be helpful if I explain how the session will work.

The other committee members and I have some areas that we would like to explore with you, which are mostly about whether you think that some of the suggestions that other people have given us would work. When we ask a question, anyone who has something to say can answer it. If you catch my eye or raise your hand or catch the attention of one of the other committee members, that will let us know that you want to talk and I will get to you. We will probably ask a few questions on each area and then move on to the next issue, possibly with a small break between topics. If someone says something and you have a different opinion, please say so, as we want to know how everyone looks at things and how different things might work. We will start to round up the discussion at around quarter to 4, as our bus for the train station leaves at 4 o'clock.

Some people at the table will not speak. They are the broadcasting operator, who works the microphones; the clerks, who support the committee; and the official report staff, who will write up what is being said. The microphones on the table are to record what is being said and to help the official report. It is good if you try to talk just one at a time so that it is clear for the official reporters making a note.

For the benefit of people who might not have been here this morning, I should say that a photographer is with us and will take pictures as the afternoon session goes on. If anyone does not want their picture taken, they should indicate that to the photographer when he comes back in, and he will not take your photograph.

I ask everyone at the table to introduce themselves. Please feel free to add anything that you think might be useful, such as whether you live in Clinterty and how long you have lived here, or whether you are with the police, the council or the national health service and what your role is.

I am Mary Fee and I am the committee convener.

Moyra Stephen (Aberdeenshire Council): Hi. I am a housing strategy officer with Aberdeenshire Council.

John Finnie (Highlands and Islands) (Ind): Feasgar math; good afternoon. I am an MSP for the Highlands and Islands.

Sandra Bruce (Aberdeen City Council): Hello. I am an equalities officer for Aberdeen City Council. My remit is to develop equalities policy and strategy for the council.

John Mason (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP): I am the MSP for Glasgow Shettleston, in the east end of Glasgow.

Douglas Thornton (Clerk): I am the clerk to the committee.

Marco Biagi (Edinburgh Central) (SNP): I am the MSP for Edinburgh Central and the deputy convener of the committee.

Donald Stewart: I am a Traveller.

Dennis Robertson (Aberdeenshire West) (SNP): Good afternoon. I am the MSP for Aberdeenshire West.

Nigel Firth (NHS Grampian): I am equality and diversity manager for NHS Grampian.

Alex Johnstone (North East Scotland) (Con): I am an MSP for North East Scotland.

Sammy Stewart: I am a resident in Clinterty.

Jim Hume (Grampian Police): I am community engagement inspector with Grampian Police. I have responsibility for Gypsy Traveller policy, which includes contributing significantly to the Scottish policy on dealing with unauthorised encampments.

The Convener: Thank you. Do members have pressing questions that they want to ask? I am looking around expectantly.

Dennis Robertson: During our evidence sessions, we have heard about various encampments, and this morning we heard about the different Traveller groups that have emerged over the years—that was new to me. For instance, we seem to have an influx of Irish Travellers in the north-east. What impact does that have, first, on the location of appropriate sites for the Scottish Travellers who have traditionally moved throughout Scotland, and secondly, on relationships with other Travellers?

Sandra Bruce: Originally, we looked at the Craigforth needs assessment, which was done in the Grampian region. At the time, we were looking for short-term sites, which would have six to eight pitches. There is evidence over the past couple of years of Irish Travellers and larger groups of Travellers coming in, so we are now looking to accommodate probably 20 pitches on a site. That is where we are at, currently.

The Convener: I read the Craigforth report, which is excellent and covers a lot of the issues that were raised at the dialogue day and which have come up in evidence during the committee's

inquiry. The provision of pitches was a key issue in the Craigforth work, which was done a number of years ago. I accept that there is an understanding that we need more pitches, but I am not sure that there has been much progress towards providing the sites that are needed.

Sandra Bruce: There has been a lot of work to try to identify potential locations for sites. It is unfortunate that proposals often meet with community resistance, negative media coverage and so on. Elected members have a hard job to do to convince the electorate that it should look beyond the short term and think about the long term. In fact, though, having official accommodation for Gypsy Travellers would alleviate some of the problems with unauthorised encampments in high-profile urban locations.

John Mason: One of the messages that I picked up from the informal groups this morning is that it is difficult for local politicians, including councillors and community councillors, to find sites and take that forward. I got the impression that there are many more people both travelling and on permanent sites in Aberdeen and Aberdeenshire than there are in other parts of the country, which I had not realised. In one sense, it seems to be a local issue, but some people suggest that we need national leadership and guidance, perhaps through the Government telling councils that they must find sites. Is that the case?

The Convener: Do the witnesses agree that leadership on this should come from national Government?

Jim Hume: As well as doing this for Grampian Police, I sit on the Association of Chief Police Officers in Scotland Gypsy Traveller reference group and I was in Alex Neil MSP's Aberdeen and Aberdeenshire working party on Gypsy Traveller issues in the north-east of Scotland, which followed on from the particular difficulties that there were in 2010. Speaking from the police perspective rather than from a legislative perspective, I think that the first steps to long-term sustainable solutions for the difficulties associated with unauthorised encampments are through the provision of authorised sites. However, we are not naive enough to think that that will prevent unauthorised sites in their entirety, because it will not.

From working with my colleagues in the local authorities, I know that they have been trying to identify sites, and I know and understand the difficulties that they have in doing that and the resistance that comes from the public at large, which is mainly fed by perceptions that come from the media. Unfortunately, those tend to focus on a relatively small group of Travellers, as opposed to the wider Traveller community. I have presented the perspective before at some of the meetings

with the Government and what have you that the local authorities' difficulty is that there is no requirement for them to provide sites, because it is a recommendation that they do that. There are discussions about the concordat and single outcome agreements, and it is up to local authorities to set their own priorities within their budgets.

From the work that I have done on the issue over the past three and a half years, it seems to me that it is almost like asking the local authorities to fight with their hands tied behind their backs. They cannot get past the planning processes and community council processes, budget allocation and so on, because there is nothing that makes them have to provide sites. Further, as has been alluded to, the provision of sites is not a popular subject and is not a vote winner for many people who are looking to get votes, be they councillors, community councillors or whatever.

Finally, the actions and rhetoric of some elected members of community councils and community representatives do not assist in dealing with the issue. They need to understand fully the onus on them in carrying out their public function to play their part in finding a sustainable solution for all communities.

Dennis Robertson: Is the Craigforth report still fit for purpose, or has the nature of the Traveller community changed somewhat since the report was published?

Nigel Firth: The Craigforth report is an excellent report. As was alluded to at a previous Equal Opportunities Committee meeting, the issues have been debated since 2000 or 2001. Perhaps there have been changes since the Craigforth report was produced, but the fear is that if a new report was commissioned, we could delay the whole process for another two, three or four years. I was impressed by the Equal Opportunities Committee's stressing at a hearing in Edinburgh that the talking has to stop and the action has to begin. My fear is that if the Craigforth report has to be revisited, that will bring in years of delay.

14:15

Dennis Robertson: I believe that, when the report came out, its recommendations related to encampments of six or eight pitches. However, we are now seeing larger encampments of perhaps 20. Are the recommendations on the types of sites still fit for purpose?

Nigel Firth: As Sandra Bruce suggested, an update on the number of pitches would be useful. However, the Craigforth report's basic principle that Grampian has insufficient permanent and short-term halting sites is still relevant.

John Finnie: My question is for Donald and Sammy Stewart. You have read all the reports and heard all the talking; indeed, the first report that has been mentioned came out in 2000. What has happened for you and your families in those 12 or 13 years? Has your situation got any better?

Donald Stewart: Not really, because nothing has come out of any of that. It has been all talk and we have not seen any action. It is about time that something got done, because neither we nor other Travellers are benefiting. No other sites are being built. We are not seeing any difference; it is just as hard as it used to be.

Sammy Stewart: There should be a lot more sites in Aberdeen. After all, it is a city, not a village. In Scotland, there are not really a lot of Travellers travelling around in big groups; that is what the Irish tend to do. When I am travelling, there is just me and Donald or perhaps there might be three groups. Having more sites might sort the situation; the problem in Aberdeen is that if there are not enough facilities, people just get sent to Clinterty, which is already quite packed and has a lot of families.

John Finnie: Where do you travel when you leave this area?

Sammy Stewart: We go to Fife, the islands and the Highlands and sometimes we go down to England, but that is about it. We basically just travel about Scotland. We have been travelling in Aberdeenshire for a lot of years now, but for the past three years we have been getting a lot of hassle. No one helps you when you are on the road. We keep all the places we go to tidy and we might be there for only a fortnight or four weeks at a time. We will visit elderly relatives and then go away again. We never stay long.

I will agree that the place is getting overrun by the Irish, but I do not know what the solution to that would be. A lot of Irish Travellers are coming here. Perhaps if there were more sites, some might settle, but you just do not know.

John Finnie: A lot of Travellers I have spoken to do not like the term "Gypsy Traveller"; instead, they prefer "Scottish Traveller". What are your views on that?

Sammy Stewart: I do not think that it matters if you are called a Gypsy Traveller, Irish Traveller or whatever—you are still a Traveller. I do not know much about "Gypsy Traveller". When we go travelling, a lot of the community calls us Gypsies, and we are Travellers. The terms "Gypsy Traveller", "Irish Traveller" and so on are basically the same thing—you are still just a Traveller.

Donald Stewart: It is just a different way of saying "Traveller". Some people will say "Gypsies".

Sammy Stewart: But Gypsies are different from Travellers. They come from Egypt and other foreign countries.

John Finnie: I am just conscious that we, all the papers and so on use the term "Gypsy Travellers".

Sammy Stewart: I have always recognised myself as a Scottish Traveller.

Donald Stewart: The biggest problem we have got here, and everyone here knows it, is that lots of Travellers come to Aberdeen but Aberdeen has ignored that fact for a lot of years. It has just been stubborn. We need more sites; there is no doubt about it. Aberdeen can fight against it and keep moving Travellers on. It can do what it wants, but I know for a fact that the problem will never stop until more sites are built. If they do not get built, you are never going to get to the end of the problem.

There is another thing. The community always gets its say before the Traveller does, and when it gets its say, we have to go by what it has said. We have got no say. We are just kicked aside and forgotten about. Do people ever think of coming to the Traveller first and asking what the Traveller wants? If you listen to the community, you will never get to the end of this problem. There are bad and good among Travellers and among settled people.

John Finnie: You are in the community too.

Donald Stewart: I class myself as part of the community, but we do not get treated that way.

Sammy Stewart: It does not seem like that sometimes. When Asda is putting up a shop, it asks the community for permission to put it up and it gets that permission. We have been asking for about 10 years for places to put sites up in Aberdeen and the community goes against it all the time. That is true even if we buy our own ground. I know Travellers who have said that because they cannot get into sites, they will buy their own ground, but they cannot even get permission to build there. It is ridiculous when the community has its say over ground that someone has bought and they still cannot get permission to stay there.

The Convener: I will let Marco Biagi ask a brief supplementary and I will then bring in Alex Johnstone and Jim Hume.

Marco Biagi: I just want to be clear about one of the things that you said. You said that there need to be more sites, but are you looking for more permanent sites, like Clinterty, or for short-stay ones? Does Aberdeenshire really need both?

Donald Stewart: To be truthful, transit sites are a waste of money. Every Traveller wants the same thing. They want a place where their kids can go

to school and where they can get to the doctor. People need homes where they can settle down. The thing is that Travellers like to have their independence. We do not like being thrown into a street. When a Traveller gets a house in the town, they get thrown into any riff-raff place. I have experienced that, and that is why I am back here. Transit sites are a waste of money because people want to stay somewhere permanent and make it their home base.

Alex Johnstone: I want to follow on from what John Mason said earlier and what Marco Biagi has just said. It relates to the idea that, at the end of the inquiry, we might be in a position to force the hand of government, whether local or national, to get on and do what it needs to do. I am concerned that we need to know what government needs to do. My first question is for Donald and Sammy Stewart. If we start with a blank sheet of paper in Aberdeen and Aberdeenshire, what should we aim for at the outset? Should we be looking to have a large number of smaller sites or a small number of larger sites?

Sammy Stewart: As was said earlier, there are 20 lots of Travellers moving about all the time, so the biggest site should maybe have 20 bays. That should be big enough.

Alex Johnstone: Rather than have more places like Clinterty, would it be better to go for a much larger number of sites that provide four or five pitches?

Donald Stewart: That might help, but would you not be out a lot more money if you were making more smaller sites?

Alex Johnstone: I assure you that, at this stage, money should not be our concern. We should be making sure that we get things right.

Donald Stewart: I say that because I know how Aberdeenshire Council is. It is not keen on spending money.

Sammy Stewart: I am not saying that this will solve the problem, but I agree that transit sites are no use. If I did not live in Aberdeen, I would just pull up here for a week and then pull away again. There are a lot of Irish Travellers and Travellers from different parts of the world, and when they find out about a transit site, they will pull up there, get up to all sorts, and then pull away again. The difference with a permanent site is that people know who you are and who stays there. Transit sites, as has happened down south, will never be wound down. They are always vandalised because people are just moving in and out and not caring for the place. Clinterty is a place to stop—you need a home—but everybody here cares. The difference is that we tidy up and look after the site. A lot of people attend hospital and do other things, but in a transit site there is not much care for the

community or the property. In big housing schemes, rough tenants move in but, as well as bad tenants, there are good ones.

Alex Johnstone: I am certainly picking up the message that you feel that transit sites are less important than permanent sites in the north-east. Is that because Travellers who come to this area tend to stay in the north-east for a while?

Sammy Stewart: They do not stay. Most of the Irish who came up here during the summer only stayed for a short time before going back to Ireland. They are not here permanently—they are all gone.

Alex Johnstone: To return to my original question about the scale of sites, should we create a few larger sites like Clinterty?

Donald Stewart: Yes.

Sammy Stewart: Yes.

Alex Johnstone: Would you definitely prefer that to a larger number of smaller sites?

Donald Stewart: It would be better if there were a few more sites.

Alex Johnstone: Would you prefer a larger number of small sites or a couple of bigger sites?

Donald Stewart: That would not bother me, but if there were more sites that would help out. If there were two large sites, they could be at either end of the area.

Sammy Stewart: Yes—you could have one in the south and one in the north. There are four sites in Fife, which helps the situation. Travellers moving into Fife have places to go to, unlike the situation up here. A lot of people settled up here—I settled when I was 16 years old. Transit sites are not a good idea—they are no use.

Alex Johnstone: You suggested geographical locations for the sites. Is there a need for sites in the north-east to be around or adjacent to Aberdeen?

Sammy Stewart: Yes. If I had the choice, I would be at the south end of the town and not this end. I have a lot of relatives in the south, and my two boys box, so I have to travel two nights a week into Aberdeen and I get stuck in traffic. There should be a choice about which end of the town you live in. Aberdeen is a city like Manchester, but in Manchester there are perhaps 10 to 20 sites.

Where the sites are and where you want to go should matter. There is a proposal for a site at Aikey Brae, but who wants to stay up there? No one wants to go to the back of beyond. We do not have relatives there and we do not stay there.

Donald Stewart: That is the problem. When they get a place for us, we are out in the middle of nowhere, miles away from shops. Every site that is being built for Travellers seems to be hidden—all Travellers know that. We are put in a hole that cannot be seen by the community. That is not nice.

Alex Johnstone: You want to be adjacent to services. Is privacy a value, too?

Sammy Stewart: We like our privacy. We like to be in and out of town, but we do not want to be next to a housing scheme. For example, a site in Mastrick would only last for perhaps two days before guys came down and put us out of there. We need to be a mile or two from our neighbours.

Alex Johnstone: Not hidden, but private.

Sammy Stewart: Yes.

Moyra Stephen: Aberdeenshire has a proposal for Aikey Brae, which has been used for a number of years by the Travellers community—although not necessarily by the Travellers here at Clinterty.

Sammy Stewart: No.

Moyra Stephen: It is an unauthorised site, and we will endeavour to make it an authorised site for the Scottish Travellers who use it. It will not meet the needs of all the Traveller community, but it will meet the needs of those who currently use it.

14:30

Sammy Stewart: Does the council own Aikey Brae?

Moyra Stephen: The council owns the land, yes.

Sammy Stewart: It is easier because you have the permission and all that.

Moyra Stephen: We do not have the planning permission yet.

Sammy Stewart: A lot of Travellers stayed in Aikey Brae just to dump and then moved away. It was mostly Irish, English and I do not know who.

I am sure that a lot of Travellers would not want to be way out in the middle of nowhere. I stayed in Aikey Brae when I was a kid and I was not happy that I could not get to the nearest shop for sweeties. It is the same thing.

Donald Stewart: If you stay at Aikey Brae, you are hiding, because you are out in the wilderness. It just seems an easier solution.

Sammy Stewart: There are no houses and you are about 4 miles from the nearest shop or school. There are no bus stops—it is hidden away in the middle of nowhere. That is my point of view—I am

not saying that it is everybody's. Every Traveller has their own mind.

Moyra Stephen: There are people whom Aikey Brae will accommodate and whose needs it will meet.

Sammy Stewart: The ones who stayed there left an awful lot of mess behind. That was not people who come from the area; they were from Ireland and England. They just dumped and went away. The only reason they stayed in Aikey Brae was that it was big enough for dumping.

The Convener: We will move on. Jim Hume has been waiting patiently.

Jim Hume: A few things have cropped up in the conversation, which I will try to work through as quickly as I can.

On the question of whether the Craigforth report is fit for purpose, I agree with Nigel Firth wholeheartedly that the report's recommendations are sound. However, the profile of the community has changed significantly since the report was produced. The report was based on the evidence and experience of Scottish Travellers. Since 2010—and probably a couple of years before then, in smaller numbers—we have seen a significant rise in the number of Travellers coming to the north-east of Scotland, predominantly from England and Ireland. That has changed the game, as far as Craigforth is concerned.

The danger is that if too much emphasis is placed on the Craigforth report and the figures in it are used to identify the number of sites and pitches to be created in the area, they will not be sufficient, and then there will be a "well, we told you so" mentality.

Craigforth does not need to be revisited in its entirety. Nigel Firth is right that that would take a number of years. Those who are charged locally with taking decisions need to recognise that there are substantially different Traveller profiles in the area, which will impact on decisions. That is clearly a different issue from the question of where those sites should be and whether they should be large or small.

I will put the issue in a bit of perspective for the benefit of the committee—Dennis Robertson, John Mason and Alex Johnstone have already heard this from me. Either Donald or Sammy Stewart touched on the point that there are no problems in Fife because there are four sites. The number of unauthorised encampments elsewhere in the country is very limited; 10 or 12 occurrences in a year is a busy year for encampments. Over the past three years, we have had about 110 to 120 unauthorised encampments per year.

Depending on the area—Aberdeen, Aberdeenshire or Moray—the profile of those

encampments is different. In Moray, it tends to be Scottish Travellers at sites that they have visited for a number of years, such as Lossie Green and the Portgordon foreshore. At the majority of encampments that we monitor in Aberdeen and Aberdeenshire, we tend to be talking about English and Irish Traveller groups, who come to the area because Aberdeen and Aberdeenshire are relatively affluent communities in which there is a lot of work. That is where some of the conflict can arise between the Scottish Travellers and those who are coming in from elsewhere.

We have heard Donald and Sammy Stewart's perspective on what they think would be the answers with regard to the size, number and uptake of transit sites. I suspect that if you had some of the Irish Travellers here, they would put forward a different perspective. Whereas the likes of Donald and Sammy and their families want to stay in a Clinterty or wherever and have that sense of home and community, the Travellers who come up are effectively coming up to find work and they move around to find it; for them, transit sites or a network of sites that are big enough to accommodate 20 or 25 caravans would probably be fit for purpose and meet their needs. The Scottish Traveller would perhaps see it in a different way. We come back to the fact that the Traveller community is not a homogenous community. There are different perspectives and ideas, and within the Scottish Travellers there will be different ideas on that.

Planning permission is clearly a huge stumbling block. I think that it was Alex Johnstone who touched on the steer from the Government on what local authorities can do. It is difficult for them to overcome the processes. I understand the legislative processes and so on, but when decisions are taken, it is important to consider the profile of the north-east and look at it from the point of view that the north-east is pretty much unique in Scotland given the number of unauthorised encampments and the difficulties that can arise from them. It is important to have some form of site provision that meets people's accommodation needs.

Let us face it: Travellers have come to the north-east of Scotland for hundreds of years and they will probably continue to come here for hundreds of years. The status quo of having—in effect—nothing cannot continue, because if it does, the problems that we have been facing, particularly since 2010, will be repeated and repeated, and they will escalate. It was not quite so bad last year, but certainly in 2010 and 2011 there were a few times when the issues became very close in terms of tensions and stand-offs between Traveller families and communities. It only takes a flashpoint for things to go badly wrong at some

point, and that is because of the unauthorised encampments.

Dennis Robertson: Can I ask a supplementary question, convener?

The Convener: Yes, but please be brief. I will then bring in John Mason.

Dennis Robertson: Jim, are you suggesting that there is a new type of Traveller, and that it is the occupational Traveller who has come to the area?

Jim Hume: No. There is a difference. Who is classed as an occupational Traveller is one of the areas that can cause confusion. I sought some guidance from the Equality and Human Rights Commission about two years ago, particularly based on examples of what happened in the Stonehaven area, because elected members or people in the community at large were trying to have the Travellers who had come up defined as occupational Travellers.

For the benefit of those who do not know, I point out that occupational Travellers are not covered by the same legislative provision in terms of the presumption against prosecution for unauthorised encampments. That is why some people wanted them classed as occupational Travellers, because they could then be prosecuted for a trespass offence.

In brief, it was explained to me that an occupational Traveller is somebody whose work precedes them to an area. If Travellers come with a pre-arranged, pre-advertised event, they are occupational Travellers. The reason why the group that I am talking about does not fall into that category is that those people come to the area and seek work once they arrive. That is no different from the historical position 200 or 300 years ago, when Travellers came to take work on farms, did knife sharpening or worked as tinsmiths or whatever. The modern equivalent of that is work on roofing, driveways and so on.

There is a clear distinction to be made, and the groups that we are talking about are not occupational Travellers. I think that the Scottish Government—or was it perhaps the EHRC?—recommended that the term “occupational Travellers” be removed. It was suggested that the terminology should be removed because it causes confusion in the guidelines.

John Mason: Work has been mentioned, and I have a question on that for Donald and Sammy. Work has changed over the years. It used to be more agricultural but now, I guess, it is more in towns. We talked earlier about where sites should be, and I presume that in general they will be wanted more in the towns. Is that broadly correct?

How do you think that that will work in the future? How will it change?

Sammy Stewart: Maybe that is why Travellers are not recognised enough—because they have been put in places like this. If you are in the town and mixing with the community, you will maybe be recognised. A lot of people who come out here—my wife got a carpet fitted—never even knew Clinterty existed. A lot of people do not know that Clinterty is here. They do not recognise this place.

When we first came to Aberdeen, the reason I wanted here was nothing to do with work or anything like that; it was to do with hospitals. My wife attends hospital in Aberdeen, and that is why we wanted here. It is a wee bit awkward when you have a good run into town—it must be 13 miles from here to the town.

John Mason: So from a work point of view it would be better if you were nearer the town.

Sammy Stewart: Well, I do not actually work—

John Mason: Okay, but for folk that do—

Sammy Stewart: For people that work, it would probably be good if they were a wee bit nearer, yes.

John Mason: So in future—

Sammy Stewart: I think that they should stop just making Travellers sites—Moyra Stephen talked about Aikey Brae: a lot of people want Aikey Brae and a lot do not want Aikey Brae. A lot of Travellers do not get the right to say yes or no to where the site is going up. A site just goes up and that is it. You should get Travellers’ points of view about where they want sites to go, instead of just putting them up.

John Mason: Is work not a major factor? Is it a factor for some people?

Donald Stewart: From our point of view, but we do not know how other people think—

Sammy Stewart: I agree with everything that Jim Hume said. He said it the way I would have said it.

Donald Stewart: For instance, this place is so far out of the way that everyone on the site has to have Sky telly and they cannot even get normal telly. That is just an example. We have got to put Sky in before the kids can get TV, because we cannot even get telly here. That is what we mean when we say that people do not look at what Travellers really want or see the situation for families. They throw down whatever they decide and that is it.

Sammy Stewart: From my experience of travelling down in England—I go down there sometimes because my sister stays there—I have

noticed that they make sites in a lot of places where Travellers used to stay anyway. I talked about Travellers buying their own land. This place, Clinterty, used to be green belt, but it was okay to put a Travellers site here. My grand-uncle used to stay here when it was just waste land. That just shows that they just watched where Travellers were going and picked those places, but it does not make any sense.

Donald Stewart: The last time they came up with a decision about making a transit site, guess what they came up with? They wanted to build an extension on to this site, to make a transit site up at the top. This site is already big enough. That was the suggestion: build more here and have another four or five bays for transit. They cannot just keep building on Clinterty.

Sandra Bruce: We have touched on one of the issues in this respect, which is that Travellers are not a homogenous group. That is the risk that we take when we consult individual Travellers or the families who are there at the time—because Travellers travel. It is difficult to get a clear picture of what will meet everyone's needs, but that is not to say that we are not trying.

In its local development plan, Aberdeen City Council has provision for one site in the north and one in the south. That is in recognition of the fact that a lot of Travellers want to be in the south, because they see that as being where most of the employment opportunities are. That is for up to 20 pitches—but we talked about the issues to do with getting planning permission and bringing things to fruition.

On the point about consultation, to some extent we have overconsulted and Travellers are fed up with being asked for their views. We have had excellent reports—there was the 2001 inquiry and the 2005 review—and I can honestly say that we would be in a much better place if we had implemented the 37 recommendations in the report of the 2001 inquiry. The report was comprehensive and took an holistic view of what would make life a lot better for Gypsy Traveller communities.

Because we live in a democracy, and elected members, community councils, the public and the media play their part in shaping things, it is difficult. Officers work their socks off to try to come up with sites and consult on potential locations, and they get as frustrated as the Travellers do sometimes, because it is difficult to make things happen in a world in which the elected members change every three or four years or whatever and a new set comes in.

14:45

With every opportunity that we get, we try to be positive. We might decide to stick something in our single equality schemes or draft something in our equality outcomes, which will be a statement that the council wants to improve the quality of life for Gypsy Travellers or provide sufficient accommodation to meet the needs and provide for the culture and lifestyle of Gypsy Travellers who live here permanently and who visit the city.

Again, however, those are just statements, and it is really hard to get such things implemented. As somebody who develops policy and strategy, I know how hard it is. We listen to the communities and engage with them, we work with our partner organisations, and we listen to what the council services are saying; we also have to take cognisance of what the community councils are saying. There is a melting pot of views to consider, and we have to come up with something that will work. Going back to an earlier conversation, some instruction from the Scottish Government might be very helpful for us.

The Convener: Are you saying that, instead of guidance from the Government, a requirement on local authorities to provide sites would make a big difference?

Sandra Bruce: That would be helpful. I represented that view in 2005 as well.

John Finnie: I would like to hear Donald and Sammy's views on something—I will mention transit sites again. We sometimes use the same phrase when we are thinking of different things. When you travel to the islands and stop off somewhere, that is where the difficulties come. Would there be a benefit in having stopover sites, if I can call them that?

Sammy Stewart: We are well known up in the islands, and the people there look forward for the Scottish Travellers coming in. That has been going for hundreds of years—for generations. You might talk about transit sites, like those in Aberdeen, and I agree that they should be on a permanent basis, because a lot of people want homes. Granted, the Irish and English come and go, as Jim Hume said. It could be a transit site or something like that, but I am thinking more about the benefit for the people who want homes and who want to be settled in, so that their kids can get schooled and they can get doctors—people get nothing like that any more without a proper address. I would not be totally against it if there was a transit site. It would be up to the other Travellers themselves.

John Finnie: Donald, which islands do you go to?

Donald Stewart: I go away up the west coast.

Sammy Stewart: I know what you are meaning. When we go to a place—

John Finnie: You do not get there in a day. You are stopping off en route.

Sammy Stewart: Yes, we are stopping off. There was a site down in Brechin—I think it was just this year when the sign was taken up. When I go on holiday travelling, I would like to go into some of the sites, but when you are travelling you are not allowed in with vans, and we keep vans. The only reason I keep a van is because I carry my stuff and I have a dog. I usually take the van for that type of stuff. We have been refused at hundreds of sites. We were wanting to pay perhaps £40 or £30 a week—however much—but, because we have a dog, we are not allowed in. At one site, it actually said “No children”. I have six children. When you are tired at night and the road is moving, you want to book into a wee site. On the island where I go, there are no sites—there is nothing. There is just beach, and anybody is allowed to camp there. We just go over with tents. There are no caravan parks—there is nothing over there. It is a different world over there.

John Finnie: So you do not take one of your trailers with you.

Sammy Stewart: No, we do not take any of them with us.

John Finnie: I want to ask you about one other category of site that we hear about: seasonal sites. I learned today that there is one at Banff, and there is certainly one at Newtonmore. Do you have a view on them?

Sammy Stewart: I do not know that one myself. I know a couple of locals up in Banff. You get to meet a lot of people when you are travelling about and, according to what I heard, that site was actually a transit site. It was meant to be for people coming and going. That is according to the people who always book it seven months ahead.

We go up to Banff, and we tried to get into that site at Banff a few times. I spoke to a local there, and he was telling me that, when people made the roads or some tunnels somewhere in Banff, they left the site for Travellers. It had been part of a showground—there was a history to the place, the guy was telling me. It was meant to be for stop-offs for two or three nights if you were on the road and were tired. However, there just seems to be the one lot there now—and that is it. It was meant to be a transit site but I do not think that it is any more.

Donald Stewart: It is like St Christopher's in Montrose, which was a transit site for years. It never changed; all the same people stayed there. It has eventually become a permanent site and all the same people are still there. I know how I would

feel: if I got on to a good enough transit site, I would want to make it my home base. I believe that all Travellers would think the same.

Sammy Stewart: In Aberdeen, we have to deal with police officers, bailiff officers, sheriff officers and councillors who are always asking us, “Do you have any family in the area?” If you do not have any family, if you are just—like the Irish—passing through or if you just looking for work, what is the point of going to a place? We go about the area visiting our family but the Irish and those who come from thousands of miles away are not visiting people—they must be here for work or something else.

John Finnie: What about the many people who are travelling a lot of the time, but not simply for work? Where should they have their base? How should they be catered for in different parts of the country?

Donald Stewart: That is a hard question, because not every Traveller thinks the same. They might want to do their own thing.

Sammy Stewart: This is our base but we travel all over the area. I stay here but I travel to Fife, because that is where my mum stays and I have to visit her.

John Finnie: Thank you.

The Convener: Before I bring Jim Hume back in, I want to ask Donald and Sammy whether they have been involved in the planning of sites. If not, do you think you should and what level of involvement should you have?

Donald Stewart: If sites are being made for Travellers, they should have the right to know about the setting and whether they are happy with it. At the end of the day, they are going to live there and they have a right to know exactly where the site is going to be.

The Convener: So have you had any involvement with that process?

Donald Stewart: No.

The Convener: What do you think, Sammy?

Sammy Stewart: What do you mean by “process”?

The Convener: Has anyone from a local authority, a liaison officer or whoever spoken to you about where sites should be provided?

Sammy Stewart: No. That is the first time I have heard of that. I have not seen anyone.

The Convener: Would it be good for the Travelling community to be involved?

Sammy Stewart: Yes. I think that Travellers should be involved.

The Convener: Do you think that if you were more involved in planning sites there would be less trouble with unauthorised sites?

Donald Stewart: I believe so. If a Traveller had a say in where they were going to be based and where their home was going to be they would be happier. If they like it, they will say so; if they do not like it, they will tell you. It would save a lot of hassle. Not everyone will be happy with the same place, but they should be involved if we are talking about where they are going to live.

Sammy Stewart: There is no guarantee that it will stop the problem of illegal encampments. It might stop bigger groups, but I think that Travellers will continue to travel. It is in their culture.

The Convener: But if Travellers were travelling—

Sammy Stewart: —in small groups—

The Convener: —they would be travelling to sites that it had been previously agreed they would go to.

Sammy Stewart: And they might get the chance to get in.

The Convener: So there would be fewer problems.

Sammy Stewart: Yes.

Jim Hume: Quite a few issues have been highlighted. First, let me say that I realise that the committee's remit is Scotland-wide. There was a bit of discussion about the islands; I have connections in Skye and know that Travellers have gone there for many years.

However, I emphasise again that I think that we must look at the north-east of Scotland separately from the rest of Scotland. We have a unique profile up here because of the number of Gypsy Travellers and the issues with regard to unauthorised encampments. I appreciate that the committee has a national remit, but the Government may have to take a different perspective on the issue for the north-east of Scotland compared with that for other local authority areas.

On the sites and the issue of access to work, there is undoubtedly more than enough work for Travellers of all communities in the north-east of Scotland, particularly in and around Aberdeen and the immediate area. The issue is not generally about the work or the standard of work that either community does; it is about the unauthorised sites and the mess that can often be left behind on them. That is the key issue or focus for me. Again, I know that the committee's inquiry is about where Gypsy Travellers live as a whole, but for me it is particularly about the issue of unauthorised sites

and their impact on communities' intentions and perceptions. As long as we have unauthorised encampments in the numbers that we do, that will be difficult to overcome. That clearly impacts on the Gypsy Traveller representatives here and their families.

It is true to say that the seasonal site at Greenbanks is permanently full. There is a waiting list to get into Greenbanks. Clinterty is pretty much the same; it is high on permanently full, so the same issue arises as at Greenbanks.

A comment was made a while ago about Irish Travellers going away in the winter. However, I want to clarify that they do not and that they are still here. That has been the case for the past three years, because the work is not going on. They are on an encampment at the moment—that was agreed as a temporary measure, but if their use of that encampment had not been agreed, there would be unauthorised encampments at the moment.

Smaller transit sites with three to six pitches or so have been mentioned. That is similar to the size of site that the Craigforth report spoke about, which was six to eight pitches. I think that Sammy said that he thought that that size would stop the bigger groups using the sites, but I do not think that that is necessarily the case. The Gypsy Traveller representatives here travel about with their families for a variety of reasons—they can be work related, about keeping the family together or about having security in numbers—and I think that other Traveller groups do much the same. There is therefore a need in creating sites to recognise that they must accommodate the bigger groups, not only the small family group.

My final point—Sandra Bruce touched on this and I mentioned it earlier—is about the difficulties in identifying sites for Travellers to use. At some point, someone has to take positive action to overcome the challenges, within the remit that legislation allows. That will bring with it all forms of challenges from communities and so on. However, at some point in the north-east of Scotland, someone has to take a stance and say, "We are going to develop a site." I hope that the first site that is developed works, because if it fails, significant challenges will be associated with that. However, unless someone takes a stance and does something positive that involves all communities—whether that stems from this committee, the elected members, the local authority or a combination of the lot—the problem will not cease and we will have another committee meeting in 10 years' time to discuss the same issues.

The Convener: Thank you. We have covered the provision of sites, and I think that that issue has been exhausted.

I want to talk about tenancy agreements, which were discussed at the previous dialogue day. I am keen to hear from Donald and Sammy whether they think that tenancy agreements are a good idea, because they give them a right to repair, support and adaptations on the site. Should there be a standard tenancy agreement across Scotland? Or do you not agree that tenancy agreements should be in place?

Sammy Stewart: It depends what you mean by a tenancy agreement. Does it mean that you would be allowed to do up your own place and make it better?

The Convener: A tenancy agreement would mean that you would have a right to repair and a right to a certain standard on your site.

Donald Stewart: Well, it would and it wouldn't. The way it is right now, we are under the agreement with the council, but some people cannot afford to do repairs. Some repairs would come to a lot of money and some families maybe do not have that money. We do things ourselves to make provisions to make it better. We agree that we should have some rights to make our home better.

15:00

The Convener: What would you like to see in a tenancy agreement?

Donald Stewart: I will use this site as an example. I would like it to be upgraded, with resurfaced pitches so that they can be cleaner and a children's swing park—things to make the site look a lot better. To be truthful, with the last upgrade that we got, I did not see any difference. We got closed-in windows.

The Convener: Sorry, what is that?

Donald Stewart: You cannot see through the windows that were put into the chalets where the toilet sits, and there is no way of opening them. To me, that is a fire hazard. There are no fire extinguishers outside with water hoses to put fires out. A lady's caravan was burned here and she lost everything.

The Convener: Yes, I heard that.

Donald Stewart: There was nothing to put it out with. The surface of the pitches is not rubber. We have asked for gates to keep the kids in and off the road, because there are cars there, and also for our own privacy. Those are the types of things that I would like to see done to make the site better. We need fences so that everybody can be closed off from the roads and in private. That would make the site look better.

The warden here, Amanda, has fought for and done a lot for us, but she can only do so much.

Other than that, the big improvements that we want are out of our hands. All the people here are settled families and they want better.

The Convener: If there was some form of tenancy agreement and some minimum standards across sites, including some of the things that you mentioned, would that be seen as an improvement?

Donald Stewart: Yes. That would be an improvement.

The Convener: Should there be a standard tenancy agreement across Scotland or should agreements vary from site to site?

Donald Stewart: It depends. Travellers like to do up their own pitches and then if things get broken, they can fix them. In a way, that makes it easier for the council, because then those things are off its hands and it is left to us to do them. As I said, though, some families cannot afford to pay, so not everybody can afford to do things up. And at the end of the day, it is not going to make things any better for us, because it is a council property. We might make things better for the council, but it is not going to make them any better for us.

The Convener: Sammy, what do you think?

Sammy Stewart: I do not understand what the agreement would mean.

The Convener: A tenancy agreement would mean that you had a right to certain things on the site.

Sammy Stewart: Yes. I probably—

The Convener: You would have a guaranteed right to a minimum standard on the site.

Sammy Stewart: I believe that it is the same when people get a council property as a tenant.

The Convener: Yes. Tenants in a council property have a right to a certain standard.

Sammy Stewart: We should have a right to a standard. I understand what you mean now. I agree.

Donald Stewart: I agree for certain things, but not everything, because there are certain things that we cannot do.

Sammy Stewart: Basically, in a council property, we cannot do anything because it is for the council to do it, but if I report, say, the drains not working, they should have the right to come in and get them fixed. I think it should be all over Scotland.

The Convener: I am going to bring in Moyra Stephen and then Marco Biagi.

Moyra Stephen: We need to clarify the difference between what we term a transit site and

a stopover site. We talked about transit sites earlier. Here at the Clinterty transit site, there is access to the shower blocks and so on. What we would propose at Aikey Brae and any other stopover site is refuse facilities, access to portaloos and access to water. However, we have no Scottish Government guidance to go by on what should be provided at a stopover site. Aberdeenshire Council would appreciate some Scottish Government guidance on minimum standards for stopover sites.

Sammy Stewart: I do not know. As a resident here, they know where to get me if I do anything—they know my name and everything. What would happen at a stopover site? Would they take people's names and their details in case they do anything? Scottish Travellers could be left with the problem.

Quite a lot of times, Irish Travellers have shifted in beside where I am staying and, a wee while later, I have got the blame for stuff being dumped there. If you have a stopover site, you would have no way of contacting the person who did it. What about that?

Moyra Stephen: It is similar to pulling in by a roadside. If you had an authorised stopover site to pull into, would you not use that? Someone could pull into that lay-by, for example, while you were out on your travels.

Sammy Stewart: I would stop off, but people's names and details would need to be taken. When you make a transit site, you need an officer to take people's details so that you know who is staying there.

Moyra Stephen: We would have an officer to ensure that the site was well managed.

Sammy Stewart: I have stayed in quite a lot of illegal encampments and I have got the hard end of the stick—people have come in behind me and dumped. As another Traveller, I cannot say, "Hey! Stop! You can't do that." It was not my place to do that because I did not stay there. That has happened to me.

We go down to Montrose a lot. The people in the council, the police and so on all know me there. We always leave the site clean. Before we go away, we tidy the place up. I know what you mean about the toilets and the bins, but I have noticed that quite a lot of the facilities have not been getting used.

With a permanent site, the situation will be different. There are toilet and shower facilities, and the council knows who comes in and who goes out, because the wardens take your name. If you are permanent, they know that you will not do damage to the site, but I think that people who

came for just a couple of nights would do a lot of dumping. That is my point of view.

The Convener: Something that was suggested in the group that I was in at this morning's event was that there should be some kind of management in a stop-off site. It was suggested that that would stop the rubbish dumping. People could use a stopover site for a certain period of time, after which they would have to move on.

Sammy Stewart: Yes. Perhaps they could stay for a fortnight or three weeks.

The Convener: If there was someone there to monitor who was coming into the site, people would be less likely to leave rubbish.

Sammy Stewart: That might work. Four years ago, my father-in-law was the first man to stay at Aikey Brae. He had to move out, because he is the type of old guy who keeps everything tidy. He says that Travellers moved in and started to dump rubbish, so he was forced to move out. For the past two or three years, he would go back every year, but last summer so many people came in and dumped rubbish that he had to move out, in case he got the blame for it. He did not want to get the blame, because the council, the police and everyone knew his name.

Moyra Stephen: That is because it is an unauthorised site. If it was an authorised site, it would be managed effectively and we would have an officer in place.

Sammy Stewart: Perhaps you can deal with that situation.

Moyra Stephen: We will take that into consideration.

Marco Biagi: I want to follow up on the issue of standards and what you expect. Have you been to the Perth site, which gets mentioned a lot? What do you think of it?

Sammy Stewart: I have been there—I have relatives there.

Marco Biagi: What do you think of it?

Sammy Stewart: It is quite nice. The people there have facilities that we have not got. My granny used to stay there. The people were moved. They looked after the property and then it was upgraded. That happened in the past four years.

I have been coming to Clinterty since I was 16, off and on. Over the past five years, a lot of good families have come here. I have seen a big improvement. A lot of wee things have happened here and there, but it is not up to the standard of the Perth site.

Marco Biagi: So do you think that the differences in the Perth site result from the people who live there?

Sammy Stewart: Yes. The people are known and everyone has a good word for them; if one of them is looking for a job, they will get a recommendation or a reference. The people on that site have been there for years; they have never moved, have never made a mess and have kept and looked after the place. That is probably why it was upgraded.

I agree that the Perth site has good facilities. I do not know whether you are going to have a meeting to discuss health issues, but you have to realise that Traveller sites have all varieties of people—older people, younger people and so on—and many who are coming in have health problems. My wife has health problems, and there are also a lot of elderly people. The Perth site has helped quite a lot of old people, people with disabilities and so on. It is like a house; it is quite nice.

Donald Stewart: Also, the council has helped and stuck by those people.

Sammy Stewart: But the help came mostly from the Scottish Government.

When my father and mother were staying in Aikey Brae, people kept coming in and dumping things. My father had a good name with the police and councillors for keeping his place tidy, but what if a person no one recognised had come in while he was away and done some dumping? He would have got the blame.

I know that a lot of dumping goes on. I am not going to go into any details, but I have relatives with their own land not far from Aikey Brae. The old guy thought it was scandalous how others were treating the place. If you are getting to stop, are getting peace and so on, you should respect the place—but some people do not.

I am not just talking about Travellers. When I was staying in Fife, this builder kept dumping right beside us and I had to tell him, “Look—I’m giving you one more chance and then I’m phoning the police. If you dump here, I’ll get the blame.”

Jim Hume: Reference has been made to the Aberdeen and Aberdeenshire Gypsy Traveller issues working party, which was set up by Alex Neil MSP in his capacity as the then Minister for Housing and Communities and comprised representatives from the local authority, the Travellers, the police, the EHRC and so on. I stand to be corrected but at the back of my mind I have a recollection that the strategy drawn up by the group talked about identifying a model for a Traveller site, tenancies and so on.

The group and its work halted during the purdah period before the elections and it never seems to have been reinvigorated. I think that, on a lot of the issues that we are discussing this afternoon such as, for example, the development of sites, its action plan would have provided some focus and suggested some form of governance. The group’s original remit was to reduce tensions, mitigate the circumstances that created them and thereby reduce the number of incidents. Although in that sense the group’s remit was fulfilled, I have always felt that its strategy was left hanging and not seen through to its end and wonder how much it might contribute to dealing with the issues under discussion.

The Convener: I am not sure what happened with that, but we will certainly check it out when we get back to Parliament.

John Mason: On a slightly different issue, we have not yet touched on Gypsy Traveller liaison officers, who are mentioned in the Craigforth report. I do not know how much experience people have of other parts of the country, but I believe that there was a recommendation that every council have a liaison officer. What has been the experience in that respect not only in Aberdeen and Aberdeenshire but in other parts of the country?

We got the impression that in some council areas there is a site manager who is also a liaison officer; some councils tell people, “Well, you just approach whoever you get”; and in some places the approach is more organised.

15:15

Jim Hume: The recommendation is that there should be two separate roles—I am pretty sure that that is what EHRC says. The reality is that in a climate of limited finances, the roles tend not to be separate. Sammy Stewart spoke about Amanda Farquhar, who fulfils the role of site manager here and is the Gypsy Traveller liaison officer in Aberdeen City Council. Given the current budgetary restrictions, it is unlikely that the position will change.

John Mason: There could be a conflict of interest there.

Jim Hume: I do not think that a great conflict of interest is created for Sandra Bruce, as far as I am aware, but I can see that there could be an issue, particularly if the person dealing with people in unauthorised encampments was linked to work in Clinterty—that would clearly be a potential area of conflict.

The situation is different in Aberdeenshire Council. Certainly at the moment, the environmental health officers are the local point of

contact for unauthorised encampments—I am not sure what role they hold, but environmental services oversees the situation. I think that that role is potentially moving to the council's housing division.

There should be two separate roles but, given the finances in Aberdeen City Council, there is one.

Moyra Stephen: I can clarify the position in Aberdeenshire. We have a manager at our seasonal site at Greenbanks, in Banff, and we have a Gypsy Traveller liaison manager, which is a totally separate role.

John Mason: Is it the liaison manager's role to deal with all the council services and try to build relationships?

Moyra Stephen: Yes, and to deal with unauthorised encampments. They work with environmental health on unauthorised encampments and are involved in education, information, signposting and so on.

John Mason: That was the area that I was thinking about—social work and so on. Is the approach working quite well?

Moyra Stephen: Yes, it works very effectively. Through Grampian Regional Equality Council, we employ Dave Black, who is here, as our Gypsy Traveller liaison officer for the whole of Aberdeenshire.

Sandra Bruce: As I understand it, Amanda Farquhar's role is backfilled in the height of the summer, to release her to visit unauthorised encampments, complete needs assessment forms and hold case conferences as required.

Dennis Robertson: My question is for Donald and Sammy Stewart, although I would welcome the other witnesses' thoughts. Does the community at large understand the life of a Traveller? I think that what we heard from you both is that you like a permanent place to come back to and you like to travel whenever you want to do so. You want to come back to an area that you can call your home, where you have access to, for instance, the health service—hospitals, GPs and so on—and schools. Is there a lack of understanding in the community of who Travellers are?

Donald Stewart: Yes, there is.

Dennis Robertson: Am I right in saying that you want a place that you can call your home, which is permanent, and to which you can come back when you have been travelling?

Donald Stewart: Yes. That is our culture. Everyone has their own way of life and their own culture. We follow the old traditions and go places, and then we want to come home. As you said, the

community thinks that we want a lot more. They say that we want this and we want that, but we do not want anything special. We just want to be recognised as people, just the same, and we want people to stop criticising us and saying, "Oh, they shouldn't get this or that." We only want to be equal. We want people to let us be who we are.

Dennis Robertson: You want access to maternity services and the hospital, for example—Sammy said that his wife is not particularly well and needs to go to the hospital—just the same as everyone else has.

Sammy Stewart: It is not about being the same as everyone else, but I am sure that you go on holiday; we go on holiday just the same.

We do not fly on planes, go to foreign countries or take the type of holidays that some people do. When we go on holiday, I will perhaps visit my mum and dad, and just go away for a wee while—that is about it.

Years ago, when I was a little boy, there was a lot of stress for Travelling people when we were on the road because we never saw doctors or got schooling. We need a permanent address, just like everybody else. If I bought a house tomorrow and then wanted to go on holiday, that should be up to me—it should be every man to their own free will.

Moyra Stephen: To return to the role of the liaison officer and the manager, it is worth noting that Aberdeenshire Council and Aberdeenshire City Council are working on a joint venture to manage the transit pitches at Clinterty. I think that the proposal is to employ a part-time officer to manage the transit sites. That would, obviously, free up Amanda, the site warden, and allow her more time to carry out her liaison officer role.

Jim Hume: I wanted to clarify something that Sammy Stewart said, because I do not want anyone to get the impression that Travellers leave sites only for the purposes of a holiday. [*Laughter.*] Correct me if I am wrong, but is that as much about pursuing your family and community traditions?

Sammy Stewart: Yes—it is the culture, not a holiday.

Jim Hume: I knew what you meant.

The Convener: The group that I was in at this morning's dialogue day event said—this was reflected in the feedback from the other groups—that there is an excellent relationship with the local doctor and schools. What are Donald and Sammy Stewart's views on Travellers' relationship with the local community in the broader sense? Do you come across discrimination daily or from a particular area? Do the levels of discrimination differ when you travel?

Sammy Stewart: We get a lot of hassle when we are travelling. I do not know whether you watched the television programme that looked at the situation in Montrose, in Angus. The police there practically do their own thing. What was shown on the TV was nothing compared with how people used to treat Travellers.

One time I was staying in an illegal encampment. There was a fence behind where I was staying. When I came back from visiting my mum and dad over in Fife, police officers came in to the camp and said that I had been seen at 2 o'clock cutting the fence with pliers, or something. I walked over to the fire where my cousin was sitting. I said to the police, "Stop where you are. That's impossible. I've just been over in Fife visiting all these people. I've got 70 witnesses. You couldn't have seen me at 2 o'clock."

Angus is a prejudiced part of Scotland; Aberdeen is, too. However, I would not say that about the school because our kids have been treated very well in the school at Blackburn. The school is very good and the teachers are nice in the way they come about you.

The Convener: Yes—we heard that this morning.

Sammy Stewart: One night I was in my caravan and a car stopped outside on the road. This was following too many stories about "Travellers this" and "Travellers that" in the *Evening Express*—it was the same every week. I was taking my dog out for a walk and someone fired stones at my caravan. I chased the guy away, got the car registration number and phoned the police. I waited up for four and a half hours, but it was actually the next day when they came. We have never found the car to this day. We reported the crime to Amanda. I would say that that was a wee bit prejudiced. Did the person take that into their own mind by reading too much in the newspaper? That is what I thought at the time. The person had just decided to stop and have a go at us that night. There are a lot of places in Aberdeen that are prejudiced.

John Mason: You have mentioned the media; the media have come up a number of times at committee and came up in our group at the dialogue day this morning. The feeling is that the media stay just within the law and, although they are not breaking the law, they build up a lot of prejudice. I am interested to hear how that situation could be changed or improved.

The Convener: Do you want to make your point now, Marco? We will then open up the discussion.

Marco Biagi: My point is slightly related. There is a very good relationship with the doctor and the school here. The police aside, do you find that

other services vary around Scotland? Are things easier or harder in different bits of the country?

Sammy Stewart: I do not think that the police respond very much here. We had a fire just before Christmas, and it was maybe three hours before the fire brigade came out here from the city. That was an awfully long time. By the time they came out, the caravans were burned to the ground—they were gone. We had got the people out of the caravans and they were barely alive.

Alex Johnstone: On that issue, and talking about the facilities that are provided, is there a problem in that there is not enough provision here for dealing with fires? I am talking about fire extinguishers, hosepipes and so on.

Donald Stewart: There are no provisions for dealing with fire.

Donald Stewart: There are none.

Alex Johnstone: I am surprised that the council can provide a site without that.

Sammy Stewart: That day, we could have saved two caravans—actually, three caravans went on fire—but we had no big hoses. I have been to the other end of Scotland. There is a caravan site up at Kentallen, away up near Fort William, and there are lovely big hoses and fire extinguishers there. We could have tried to keep the fire here under control until the fire brigade came, but who knew the fire brigade would not be here until three hours later? It was just our luck that the fire happened through the day, and not at night-time. We got the people out. If it had been at night-time, everybody would have been in bed.

Alex Johnstone: I am surprised that there is no provision.

Sammy Stewart: The CID was going past. The officers skidded up in their car, and the only thing they had to say when they jumped out was, "Did youse cause it yourself?" That was all they said; that was the police. We told them that we had not done it ourselves and that we were just waiting on the fire brigade coming. They could have called people to come to the site; they might have thought about safety first.

John Finnie: We have heard a lot of quite awful information in the course of this inquiry. Clearly, there are often different understandings and different versions of events. It would be very helpful for the committee if the powers that be—Grampian Fire and Rescue Service—could give an explanation of what happened. This inquiry is about where people live. The residents on this site pay council tax and are entitled to the services to which anyone else is entitled. It would be very helpful if that could be followed up.

Sammy Stewart: That is the main issue and it covers every question about what we want. It is true, because we are paying council tax.

Dennis Robertson: Could we move on a wee bit to community health and the role that Grampian NHS Board plays in permanent sites, in engaging with the Traveller community on their health—male health, women's health, children's health or whatever?

Nigel Firth: That is a very good question. One of the advantages of a permanent site such as Clinterty is that it becomes a focus for the local general practice. We heard this morning that the local GP here has been particularly commended. It is also a focus for community nursing, community midwives and health education.

The problem that many of our staff face with so-called unauthorised encampments is that, having gone along and provided healthcare one week, when they come back the following week to do follow-up work they find that the Gypsy Travellers have been served with an eviction notice and have gone. That means that there are serious issues around continuity of healthcare. Purely from a health perspective, permanent sites such as Clinterty make it much easier for us to provide healthcare and to promote health.

Many Gypsy Travellers work outdoors, which we know has a detrimental effect on life expectancy. Across Scotland generally, the life expectancy of Gypsy Travellers is far below what it should be. We have heard evidence from Sammy Stewart about the stress of being moved on constantly; there is no mistake about stress, or constant hassle, being called "the silent killer".

15:30

Dennis Robertson: Would the council or the police know when community healthcare is involved on a site, even an unauthorised site, in order that they might take cognisance of that before serving a notice?

Nigel Firth: Grampian Police is very good about contacting us if there is a newborn baby or someone has a very serious health issue, but between those two extremes, some people with general health issues are moved on.

Jim Hume: Just to be clear, Grampian Police does not have any part in eviction processes. We might stand by, but we have no part in the process. If there are particular concerns, we have a process for reporting through our force referral unit, but the remit of that is fairly specific. There are different processes for dealing with incidences of discrimination, harassment or attacks on Travellers, like those that Sammy Stewart described. We regard such cases as being racially

motivated because of the status of the Gypsy Travellers as a minority ethnic group.

Sammy Stewart: The response should be better. Donald was once attacked by heaps of young boys with stones and baseball bats. We have had a lot of bad experiences. We were going to make the Traveller site up at Mastrick. It is not very far from the boys' boxing gym. I take them up there and I know quite a lot of local guys; they are quite rough boys and they just come down and stone us. Some of the young boys just do it for a joke and a laugh. When you phone 999 in an emergency and tell the police that we are Gypsies or Travellers, that we are staying in a camp and need them here fast, they say, "Ah right, we'll see youse in a while." They do not respond, and I can vouch for that from experience. We have been almost attacked a few times, and have had to wait two or three hours. By the time the police came, we had been attacked.

Jim Hume: My response to that is that if you dial 999 for the police and have a genuine need, and you receive anything less than an emergency response, you should be asking why. It should make no difference if you are a Gypsy Traveller or any other member of the community.

Sammy Stewart: No; it should not make any difference.

Donald Stewart: We were staying just outside Dyce and had just parked and were putting our caravans by because we were heading out to one of the islands the next day and were getting ready to leave, so we were putting up tents. A car came in over the top of the grass and if I had not jumped out, my daughter and Sammy's daughter—my niece—would be dead. I phoned 999. It should be on the records still today that it took them four and a half hours to come out. That is a fact, and it happened in Aberdeen.

Sammy Stewart: Who was arrested?

Donald Stewart: I was arrested.

John Mason: The issue of not getting a police response is something that I get; people come to me or they go to their councillor and we take the issue up with the police and ask for an explanation. Could you go to one of your councillors or your MSP?

Sammy Stewart: I do not know who we could go to. Jim Hume said that we should not be treated any differently.

John Mason: Absolutely.

Sammy Stewart: When someone phones the police, that means that it is an emergency and they want the police. The police should respond.

John Mason: Yes, but if they do not respond, would you take that further somehow?

Sammy Stewart: When they did not respond to what happened to me here, I made a complaint but I have not heard back about that complaint to this day. That was two years ago. It is as though they do not take us seriously. We phone them, but they do not take Travellers seriously.

John Mason: You could certainly think about going to your MSP or councillor as well.

Sammy Stewart: Yes—we probably could. The same thing happened with the fire engines; they did not come out quickly enough.

Jim Hume: I absolutely endorse what John Mason said. The instruction to the police is that our role is to deal with crimes, irrespective of whether they are committed on the Gypsy Traveller community or by that community—it should make no difference and the level of response should be the same. If Sammy Stewart got anything other than that quality of service from Grampian Police or whatever force it was, he should complain. If he does not hear anything back, he should chase it up and ask why, and/or deal with it through his local councillor or MSP, who will then do that on his behalf if he does not want to take that role on. Sammy should not receive a lesser standard of response than anyone else.

There are timeframes for responses that depend on the nature of the call. However, if it is an emergency and you are in the county area, the response should certainly be within 20 or 25 minutes, and within 10 minutes if you are in the city. If Sammy has had issues with that or has issues in the future, my advice is that he should complain about it and ask why. If he does not feel equipped to do so, somebody like John Mason or an equivalent in the area will help; the police get that kind of representation.

Donald Stewart: When the police came out that time I talked about, I said to them that they had taken four and a half hours. I timed it: the incident happened at 12 o'clock at night and it was exactly half past four in the morning when the police came. To be truthful, I was angry. I asked them why they did not come out and they said "Oh, we had better things to see to. We had more things to look at." That was two uniformed police officers.

John Finnie: There would be a benefit in retaining details of all incidents in which Gypsy Travellers are the victims. I presume that that would take place anyway, as part of on-going monitoring.

Jim Hume: Prior to 2010, that would not have been the case, because we were not able to identify such cases. We use a crime recording system called crime file management, which can put markers on a variety of things—for example, hate crime will have hate-race, hate-disability and

so on. We also have one of those for Gypsy Travellers. The instruction is that that—

John Finnie: I am sorry. For clarification, does that relate to the individual having to self-categorise or could it be for this location, for instance?

Jim Hume: No, but the police could put that down if they thought that it was a factor. It is down to perception. Generally, it will come down to somebody saying "I am a Traveller," or whatever. However, it could be because we know that Travellers are involved. In essence, though, the instruction is that the marker gets used if a Traveller is a victim, a complainer, a suspect or an accused, but not if they are a witness. The reason is that anybody can be a witness to anything. However, through the marker, we can identify the number of instances in crime reports in which Travellers have been victims and complainers, and we can identify where there seems to be—this is not particularly unusual—some tenuous link with them. We talked earlier about people dumping rubbish and somebody phoning in to say "I think it was the Travellers." It may be, but it may not be. Since 2011 we have been able to identify things as I described, but we cannot go back further than that.

John Finnie: Obviously, that is not—

Jim Hume: That system is specific to Grampian Police and is not necessarily national.

John Finnie: Okay.

Sammy Stewart: We always think in our mind what Jim Hume said. I do not think that Travellers should be treated as we are when we go to places and it should be law that we are not treated like that. In Dornoch, three times when we have pulled in and camped people have come down and thrown stones at our caravans. We have had all of that. We think in our minds, as normal people, "This must be because we are Travellers." We ask why we are under attack when we should not be.

Jim Hume: If you make a complaint regarding that, Sammy—again, I am speaking for Grampian Police, but it should be the same across Scotland—we would regard it as being a hate-motivated crime, because you are being attacked because you are a Gypsy Traveller.

Sammy Stewart: We do think that. Most of the time we think that it happens because we are Travellers.

John Finnie: Given the timeframe, there will not have been an opportunity to have worked out any patterns from the system that Jim Hume described, if it began only in 2011.

We are just several weeks short of there being a single police service for Scotland. Given your

involvement at national level, do you know whether there are any plans to regard the practice in Grampian as best practice and to adopt it so that that kind of monitoring can take place?

Jim Hume: The difficulty with that is that the forces all use different crime recording systems.

John Finnie: That is precisely why I asked my question.

Alex Johnstone: Is that going to change next week? *[Laughter.]*

John Finnie: My understanding is that there has already been some reviewing of what may be best practice in relation to certain dealings. Given the prevalence of such incidents in the north-east, that review would clearly relate to Grampian Police.

Jim Hume: In essence, the police service of Scotland—the single force, as it will be from 1 April—is developing a series of policies, many of which are based on what has been identified as best practice from the eight forces prior to amalgamation. The Gypsy Traveller unauthorised encampments standard operating procedure will be based on the Grampian Police procedure.

In recognition of the fact that, as Alex Johnstone said, we cannot make eight cruise liners merge and have them all heading in the same direction within a week, the procedures will include appendices on issues that are of particular geographical relevance. The three forces in Scotland that use the crime file management system will all be able to use that marker; the other forces will need to adapt their systems or recording mechanisms to be able to capture the information. When we eventually go to a single recording system with a single information technology system—I do not know what the timeframe is for that—such things should be built in at national level. However, I cannot sit here and say hand on heart that that will certainly happen on a national level, so you would probably need to ask our Strathclyde Police colleagues how they deal with such matters.

John Finnie: Even in that scenario, there is clearly the potential for some monitoring in the Grampian Police area.

Jim Hume: Yes, there is.

The Convener: Do committee members have any further questions for our witnesses this afternoon? Is there anything that has not been covered?

We have a few minutes to spare, so perhaps we can hear from the gentleman at the back who had his hand up earlier on. Are you a resident on the site?

Scott Hughes: Yes, I am.

The Convener: If you would like to make a point that has not been raised, please come up to the table to speak into the microphone. Perhaps you could start by telling us your name.

Scott Hughes: My name is Scott Hughes and I stay at the Clinterty site.

My point is about the transit site. In my view, as a younger Traveller, building a transit site in Aberdeen is a big no-no. If you are going to build sites, you are better to build smaller sites. With a transit site, all the Irish and so on will come back. There will be a mixture of English, Irish and Scottish, so there will just be fighting all the time because quite a lot of us do not get on. You will get quite a lot of stuff like illegal dumping and people who con people at doors—proper cowboys—and others who give us Travellers a bad name. They will be the ones that you will get up here all the time. In my opinion, a transit site in Aberdeen is just a big no.

The Convener: If transit sites are a no for Aberdeen, is there a useful place for them in other parts of the country?

Scott Hughes: That would be up to the other parts of the country.

Sammy Stewart: Those people will never stay in other parts of the country. Down in Fife, where I know there are heaps of sites, the Travellers were against the transit sites, which is why they never happened.

The Convener: What is the solution to the accommodation problems of the Travellers?

Scott Hughes: Quite a lot of families out there would be willing to put in all their life savings to buy their own bit of land, which they would make into a couple of plots, for their own families—mothers, sons and daughters. It should be easier for people to get planning permission. If they got permission for that around Aberdeen, they would stop camping in Aberdeen because they would have their own place to stay, so there would be no need to build sites for them.

As for bigger sites, I would not have a site any bigger than Clinterty, because you will get too much of a mixture of people in it. Travellers like to keep themselves to themselves. If there are too many people to disagree with, it turns into fighting and stuff like that. I see that as a big hassle, if you know what I mean. If you want to build sites, probably smaller sites would be the best idea.

The Convener: Up to what kind of size should they be?

Scott Hughes: There should be maybe about 10 plots, or 10 pitches, at most. That would be quite a good size.

The Convener: Do you think that Travellers should be more involved in that planning process?

Scott Hughes: Yes—they should get to decide where their pitch is situated and how they want it built and stuff like that.

The Convener: Thank you very much for that. Do committee members have any questions that they would like to ask of our new witness?

Scott Hughes: I am sorry. I am not used to all this.

The Convener: You are doing fine.

As there are no further questions, I thank all our witnesses for coming along today to what has been a really useful session. I also thank the residents of the Clinterty site for their hospitality and I thank Grampian Regional Equality Council. It has been useful for the committee to come up here and meet the Gypsy Travellers, so we really appreciate your taking the time to come and talk to us.

That concludes our formal meeting. At our next meeting, on Thursday 7 February, we will take further oral evidence on where Gypsy Travellers live from both Gypsy Travellers and the Minority Ethnic Carers of People Project.

Meeting closed at 15:45.

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