



The Scottish Parliament
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

Official Report

EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES COMMITTEE

Thursday 7 February 2013

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EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES COMMITTEE

5th 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 ATTENDED:

Iona Burke

Michelle Foy

Betty Irvine

Lizzie Johnstone

Michelle Lloyd (Minority Ethnic Carers of People Project)

Charlene MacDonald

Georgia McCann

Katrina Stewart

Edith Townsley

Fiona Townsley

Susan Townsley

Christine Ward

CLERK TO THE COMMITTEE

Douglas Thornton

LOCATION

Committee Room 4

Scottish Parliament

Equal Opportunities Committee

Thursday 7 February 2013

[The Convener *opened the meeting in private at 09:00*]

09:15

Meeting continued in public.

Policing (Sub-committee)

The Convener (Mary Fee): Good morning, everyone, and welcome to the Equal Opportunities Committee's fifth meeting in 2013. I remind everyone to switch off their mobile phones or to set them to flight mode.

Agenda item 2 is on the establishment of a sub-committee on policing. We have received a letter from the Justice Committee, which explains the reasons behind the setting up of the sub-committee. It invites us to comment on the proposal that a member of our committee be represented on the sub-committee, with a view to our putting forward someone to be a member of it.

I have spoken to Christine Grahame about the matter and I would quite like to be put forward to go on the sub-committee, if the committee agrees to that.

Alex Johnstone (North East Scotland) (Con): Agreed.

John Mason (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP): As the proposal has come from the Justice Committee, I can see why the focus is on the police, but it struck me that the fire service is a relevant consideration, too, particularly for our committee, as I think that the police have been slightly better at integrating men and women in the force, whereas the fire services have, in general, failed in that regard—in comparison with the police, at least—as very few women work in them.

Is there any mechanism whereby arrangements for both the police and the fire services could be reviewed?

The Convener: I am not altogether sure. The sub-committee has been proposed to look at the changes to the police service. It will not take an overview of the new fire service.

I do not altogether agree with your summing up of integration in the police force.

John Mason: I was just making a comparative point.

The Convener: In taking forward the single police force, it is extremely important that a view on equality and a number of other issues is represented. The sub-committee will be important.

John Finnie (Highlands and Islands) (Ind): There was quite a bit of discussion of the proposal at the Justice Committee, of which I should declare that I am a member. Some recent unfortunate events have shown that, now more than ever, there is a compelling need for parliamentary scrutiny of the situation.

I notice that the letter from the convener of the Justice Committee says:

"we are not asking at this stage for you to nominate a particular member".

The Convener: As I said, I spoke to Christine Grahame about the matter. We are to respond by tomorrow. I expressed an interest in going on the sub-committee. If the committee agrees, we can write back and say that we will nominate someone, but do that later, or we can nominate someone now, if we so choose.

John Finnie: I mention that because the Parliamentary Bureau has to be involved. If we are to have a representative on the sub-committee—I have no issue with you being our representative—it might be worth establishing what the bureau's view is first. I am not a spokesperson for any group, but the independent and Green grouping of members would anticipate having a member on that sub-committee.

The Convener: As far as I am aware, the political make-up of the sub-committee has already been decided. I am also aware that members of other committees have been suggested as members of the sub-committee. The representative from this committee would be a Labour member.

John Finnie: I am blissfully unaware of all of that. Such are the workings of the Scottish Parliament. If the committee's representative is to be a Labour member, I would be content if it were you, convener.

The Convener: Thank you.

Marco Biagi (Edinburgh Central) (SNP): I echo that point. I do not think that we should nominate someone until such time as we are asked to do so, given that what goes on in such channels is always subject to change.

In the letter, we are asked to make a decision in principle. It specifically says:

"we are not asking at this stage for you to nominate a particular member".

I am perfectly content for us to agree in principle to nominate a member and to nominate someone when we are formally invited to do so.

The Convener: That is fine.

Alex Johnstone: In which case, I withdraw my previous agreement. I agree to the principle and should you require someone to nominate you at a later stage, I will do it.

The Convener: Thank you very much.

We will contact the Justice Committee and say that we would like to have someone on the sub-committee. We will send a letter to that effect.

09:20

Meeting suspended.

09:35

On resuming—

Where Gypsy Travellers Live

The Convener: Good morning, everyone. I welcome our witnesses, who have just joined us. If you have a mobile phone, could you switch it completely off, please, as it affects our microphones? Item 3 is an evidence session on where Gypsy Travellers live. We are joined round the table by members of the Gypsy Traveller community and representatives of the Minority Ethnic Carers of People Project—MECOPP. As we are having a round-table session, members and witnesses are sitting together around the table.

Before we start, I will explain how this session will work. The members and I have questions on areas that we would like to explore with you. We will ask a question, and anyone who wants to reply or say anything should catch my eye or raise their hand—we will make sure that you get a chance to speak. I will try to include everybody. You might have to wait a little bit, but we will make a note of who wants to speak. We might ask a few questions on one thing and then move on to talk about something else. A lot of our questions will be about how we can make things better for you. We will start to wind up the evidence session at about 20 past 11.

There are some people at the table who will not be speaking at all: the broadcasting operator, who works the microphones, the committee staff on my left, and the official report staff, who will write up everything that is said this morning. You do not need to touch the microphones, which will automatically come on to record what you say, so that the official report can write it up. It is good if you can try to talk one at a time—if too many people are speaking, it is difficult for the official report to pick up what you are saying.

I will start by getting everybody introduced. When you are introducing yourselves, feel free to add anything that you want. You might want to say what site you are from if you are from a site, or, if you live in a house, how long you have been there—anything that you think would be useful to the committee. We have visited quite a number of Gypsy Traveller sites, so it would be good to know what site you stay on, as we might have visited it.

I also welcome the people at the back of the room. I hope that you enjoy this morning's session. My name is Mary Fee, and I am the committee's convener. I now ask everyone round the table to introduce themselves.

Charlene MacDonald: I am 27, and I have come down from Oban. I live on a caravan site in Oban.

Lizzie Johnstone: I am a Traveller, and I have come all the way down from Crieff, Perthshire. I stay in a house. I am a volunteer trainer for MECOPP.

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

Georgia McCann: Good morning. I am a Scottish Gypsy Traveller. Currently I stay in Forfar, in a house, but I have been trying to count up how many council sites I have been on, and I have got to about seven already—that is just sites.

Betty Irvine: Good morning. I stay on Duddingston caravan site.

Alex Johnstone: I am a member of the Scottish Parliament for North East Scotland.

Michelle Lloyd (Minority Ethnic Carers of People Project): I am a manager with MECOPP.

Edith Townsley: I am from the Dunchologan site in Lochgilphead.

Siobhan McMahon (Central Scotland) (Lab): Good morning. I am an MSP for Central Scotland.

Iona Burke: I am a peer educator for Article 12 in Scotland, and I am from Aberdeen.

John Mason: I am the newest member of the committee, and I am the MSP for Glasgow Shettleston.

Katrina Stewart: I live in Dalkeith, and I have been there for 21 months. I do not like it, but I have no other choice.

Susan Townsley: I am from the Double Dykes site in Perth.

John Finnie: Madainn mhath—good morning. I am an MSP for the Highlands and Islands.

Christine Ward: I am from a travelling site in Kinross.

Fiona Townsley: I am from the Double Dykes caravan site in Perth.

Marco Biagi: I am the member of the Scottish Parliament for Edinburgh Central, and I am the deputy convener of the committee.

Michelle Foy: Good morning. I have recently moved from Dunchologan caravan site into a house, because there was no alternative.

The Convener: Committee members want to ask you some questions. We will begin with Dennis Robertson, who will ask about the relationship between Travellers on sites as well as

the location of sites, and then John Finnie will ask about overnight stopping places.

Dennis Robertson: As we have heard previously—we certainly heard about it on Monday when we were in Aberdeen—the relationship between some travelling families might be one of the reasons why people do not stop in certain areas or live on particular sites. We have heard about Irish, English and, obviously, Scottish Travellers, but I wonder whether you can help us to understand the relationship between yourselves and other travelling communities.

Who is going to start? I know that Georgia McCann is not too shy about answering questions.

Lizzie Johnstone: Perhaps I can comment. Like Michelle Foy, I was forced to go into a house so that I could get proper medication and health services for my younger son but, having travelled around sites, I can say that, at the end of the day, it is like any community. It does not matter who it is; not everyone gets on and you cannot just assume that because you are a Traveller you are going to get on with your neighbour. It could be anything. Some of the English like to keep to themselves, the Scottish like to keep to themselves and then there are the Irish. My view is that, as in any culture, you get good ones and bad ones. It all depends.

Dennis Robertson: Did that influence where you stayed when you were travelling around sites or whether you moved on?

Lizzie Johnstone: No, because I was more than glad to get on to a site. The site that I was on was in Bathgate in West Lothian; it had not been built that long and I was its third resident. It had a variety of Irish, Scottish and English Travellers but, as I have said, I was more than glad to get on to it because I had been sitting by the side of the road. I was not bothered who was on it.

The Convener: Did you want to come in on that question, Georgia?

Georgia McCann: Yes. I was just going to agree with Lizzie Johnstone. Where you stay and who you stay beside will depend on your own personality; they might be people you feel comfortable with because you grew up with them. You might go and stay in a certain place to be beside your uncles or aunties because there is something going on in the family. Where you go and who you want to stay with comes down to family influences and work but, as in any culture anywhere in the world, not everyone gets on with their neighbours.

Dennis Robertson: So you sometimes move to a certain site or move on to be closer to families.

Georgia McCann: Most definitely.

Dennis Robertson: Thank you.

Susan Townsley: It is the same if you live on a housing scheme or on a site. My daughter stays in a house and people there do not get on; people on sites do not get on either. Not everyone can bear to live with other people; there are always some rows going on between them. Even on our site, there are some people who have not spoken to each other for years. Housing schemes and sites are just the same—not everyone gets on.

Dennis Robertson: Do you agree with Georgia McCann that people sometimes move to a site to be closer to family members? Has that been the situation with you?

Susan Townsley: All my family but me is in housing. I have cousins on the site, but that is about it. My children, my grandchildren, my mother and so on are all in houses.

Fiona Townsley: Some Travellers avoid sites for two reasons. First, you might not want to go on to a particular site because it is associated with certain Traveller families and you do not want to take up what you believe to be their pitches while they are away. The second reason is antisocial behaviour, but you get that in the Traveller and non-Traveller communities. If sites were managed properly, there would be no problems with antisocial behaviour, but in some sites it is just ignored and allowed to continue because there is nowhere else to put Travellers.

The Convener: Did you want to ask anything else, Dennis?

Dennis Robertson: That is fine for the moment, convener.

The Convener: John Finnie wants to talk about stopping places, and then Marco Biagi wants to ask about the media.

09:45

John Finnie: We have been trying to establish how best we can allow Travellers to continue with their lifestyle as safely for them as possible. Different phrases are used, and the one that has been used often is “transit site”, which means different things to different people. If Travellers are going from one place to another and they know where they are going, but they cannot get there in a day and they need to stop somewhere, what facilities should be made available and where should they be?

Katrina Stewart: Until recently, I travelled and moved from place to place all the time. It is just in the past 21 months that I have been settled. The one thing I would like is for us not to get so much hassle. The police cannot move us on by law, but if we pull on to a piece of ground, we are no

sooner on it—we do not get a chance to get the jacks down or get unhitched—than the police are down harassing us. They do not let us speak. We are not allowed to say to them that we are just staying the night and then moving to another place. They do not want any explanation. They give us a lot of hassle. If they would just listen for once—do you know what I mean? They just do not do that.

It would be better if we had transit sites in towns up and down the country instead of official sites. A lot of Travellers go in and out of Edinburgh during the summer. They travel all over and they get a lot of hassle because they have nowhere to stop. If there were transit sites for people to go to for three or four weeks in the summer, no one, including the council, would get any hassle. The councils keep saying that they get these big bills because they have to clear up rubbish and that they have all these other problems. If they made transit sites in towns, they would not have any hassle from Travellers. That would be the end of their problems.

I have been fighting a battle to have a transit site built in Edinburgh for the past 25 years. There are not enough sites for Travellers anywhere.

John Finnie: Does the situation with the police that you described happen across the country?

Katrina Stewart: Yes, it happens across the country. If we pull on to any piece of ground, the police will come down and take names and registrations. We all know that in these high-tech days, the police just need to look at a registration to know whether we are insured or taxed, but they still want to see documents for the vehicles and paperwork for caravans. They ask for the names of everybody who is there, including the children—it does not matter what age they are, even if they are a baby. The police want to know everything. That is the kind of thing that we have to put up with.

John Finnie: What about the countryside as opposed to the towns? What should be made available for Travellers who are travelling in the Highlands, where I am a representative, for example? Some of the traditional stopping spots are blocked off with concrete blocks or tree trunks, as you know. What should be made available there?

Susan Townsley: There used to be certain bits of road that we could pull into but, as you said, they are closed off. A few years ago, there was going to be certain bits on the road up from Glasgow where we would be able to pull in for a couple of days. They would have bins and mobile toilets, and we would be able to get water. That never came to anything, so they are now just pulling into, for example, shopping centres and car

parks because there is nowhere for them to pull in on the road up. They need stopping places that are maybe tarmacked, so that the caravans can go on to them, and where bins are uplifted and things like that on the roads right around Scotland.

The Convener: What size should stopping sites be?

Georgia McCann: How long is a piece of string? That would depend on who was using them, their quality and where they were. Travellers move for various reasons—it could be for health, families or schooling or because they have come from England and they want to be in Scotland. There are so many different reasons.

The size would have to accommodate, at a minimum, 10 and forward from there. Personally, I think that roadside camps—traditional roadside stopping places—should be reopened, so that we can move where our families have been for generations, and so that I can take my children and say to them, “This is where your grandfather stayed. This is where I stayed as a child.”

My young daughter has just married. It is like I have lost a limb because she is not at home now. If I was in my caravan and we had roadside camps, my daughter would still be at home and I would be able to look after her. She is not because I am in a house and, unfortunately, the council will not allow Travellers to stay—there are restrictions.

Charlene MacDonald: I want to pick up on what Susan Townsley said about roadside camps and the regular collection of rubbish. I have stayed in camps—regular camps that Travellers use—where toilets have been placed for Travellers. Even the locals run about those camps and they know that Travellers go there in the summer. Toilets have been placed there for them and bins are collected once a week. That makes a big difference. As Georgia McCann said, roadside camps should be opened back up—and definitely to younger Travellers. My honest opinion is that I do not agree with transit sites, but everybody to their own.

Lizzie Johnstone: My first comment is on transit sites, although I know what Travellers will think about that because I have had so many years in a house. I stay in a small village in Perth and Kinross, and there is a main lay-by that is being used every year. Travellers move into it, stay for a few weeks and move off it. The police do not bother, and the Travellers do not get hassled or nothing. Even a few women—the lassies—will come up and, because I am in the village and I go out to them, I will fill their water cans.

I work with MECOPP on health issues, so I go down to see whether there is anything that the lassies might need. I tell them my address should they need water, and they will come up with their

cans and I will fill them all up, and tell the lassies that they can bring up their washing.

The other point is on the size of transit sites, which Mary Fee asked about. The thing that has to be watched, if the Travellers come in force, is the fact that they could be taking over a site. The number of transit sites up and down the country would have to be limited, with the scheme being fair to everyone so, if they wanted a few days or weeks or whatever, they would have limit them to ensure that they are maybe allowed only a fortnight before they have to move on. Otherwise, it would end up like a proper site, which is when you would have problems maybe getting everybody off. Then you would have something like what happened in Dale Farm in England. There would have to be limitations on how big a transit site would be and restrictions on how long people could stay there.

Christine Ward: I do not think that they should do transit sites. They should just open up all the old camps. Transit sites would just bring more trouble than they were worth. The old places, where we used to stay, would be a lot better, as long as the bins were collected and there were toilets. Years ago, most of us used to stay in places where there was an Asda or a Tesco, so that we could go across there to the toilet. We cannot do that now. If we go to a garage for water, they tell us, “You’re not allowed water.” We are not allowed to do anything any more.

Edith Townsley: I agree about not having transit sites, but if there are transit sites, I agree with Elizabeth Johnstone that there has to be a limit—a seven-day or 14-day stop, say, before someone moves on. If not, what would happen? The sites would probably become permanent. People would say, “Well, it’s quite comfortable and I like the area. I’m just going to stay.”

I agree on the point about camps. I live in Dunchologan and I am one of nine children, so my family is massive. I have nieces who are English born and raised and I have Irish nieces and nephews. Some of my family live in Ireland, some live in England and so on. There is a holiday caravan park in Lochgilphead, so any non-Traveller can pull on with a caravanette or a car and trailer and pay for a night or two before going on to Oban or such and such. If a Traveller comes up with a distinctive type of caravan or pick-up, they cannot get on the site. They cannot pull up in the area to visit people on the Dunchologan site. They go up to the industrial estate, but that has been blocked off.

No one with a large family wants to take five or six children into someone else’s home, when they have their own home on wheels that they can take up, so that they can have a long visit and go fishing or whatever—but with no old camps it

cannot be done. That is when you get people staying in car parks and leaving rubbish. I agree that the old roadside camps should be reopened, with a big bin placed there. I have done the same thing that Elizabeth Johnstone has done. If people came up to the industrial estate, I would go down and say, "Look, I live up on the site. I've got a water tap; help yourself." I agree on both issues.

Iona Burke: I agree about the camps, but normal facilities should be provided—bins, toilets and everything that we need.

It is important to involve Gypsy Travellers in the planning process and in making decisions about what is happening, to see our point on things and let us know what is going on, so that we can make decisions about where we want camps, sites or whatever, and things do not go ahead without us. Article 12 in Scotland has been doing work with Planning Aid for Scotland, which is helping young Gypsy Travellers to find out about our rights on planning permission and everything that we need to go ahead with that. More Gypsy Travellers should be involved in the process.

The Convener: Thanks, Iona.

Fiona Townsley: I think that we need a range of stopping sites, but that will not work until there are more permanent small sites for Travellers, because young Gypsy Travellers who get married and move into temporary stopping sites will not leave. We need toilets. Some Gypsy Travellers are disabled and need proper facilities when they are moving around.

We need to open up the traditional camping grounds. Some Travellers will not stop at official sites, because they prefer the old-fashioned way of doing things. We need a range of facilities.

The Convener: When you talk about opening up the traditional camps and stopping places, what do you mean? Is it just a case of taking down the signs in lay-bys, so that you can stop there overnight, or do you mean something different?

Fiona Townsley: Double Dykes was a traditional stopping place. It is a place where families go back time and time again, over the generations, because it is where they went as children and where their parents went as children. It is about keeping that going. A lot of those places have been blocked off so that Travellers cannot go into them.

10:00

Lizzie Johnstone: The lay-by that I talked about is only about 20 minutes out of the village. It is quite a big one, because you can get about 10 or 15 trailers on it. Obviously public road users in lorries, vans and the like use it, but the police are very used to Travellers staying there. One local

policeman even said to me that it would be strange not to see Travellers there. You can guarantee that, at some point in the year, especially around the summertime, it will be packed. There will be a handful in winter—it is not an ideal place, because it is off the road just before you get on to the motorway—but in the summer, it is packed. It is constantly used, even by people with bairns. The lay-by is wide enough and, as any Traveller around the table will tell you, we all look out for our own and their bairns. There are no bins and toilets provided—it is just a lay-by—but the people there get no hassle from council folk and do not get bothered by the police. The police sometimes go past just to check how many people are there but, as I have said, it has been regularly used for years. It is the Muthill lay-by, if anyone needs to go there. *[Laughter.]*

Georgia McCann: In all fairness, if you are asking where we want traditional stopping places to be reopened, I think that each council will know how many Travellers go through their communities every year. I know that Dundee gets used quite a lot in the summertime; an area next to Dundee airport seems to be more commonly used than others, and the council could think about making a roadside camp perhaps a little bit away from the airport so that it does not obstruct anything that is going on there. Each council can answer that question for itself.

Dennis Robertson: Fiona Townsley suggested that although stopovers are fine, more permanent sites are needed. It has been acknowledged that there are too few such sites, but how close should they be to towns, villages and cities? Different people have told us very different things. Some say that sites should be maybe a mile or two outside the settled community, while others say that they should be much more integrated. Leaving aside the question of increasing the number of permanent sites, where do you think they should be located? How close should they be to communities?

Fiona Townsley: Double Dykes caravan site, where I stay, is just outside Perth, and I think that it is in the ideal situation. If you are too close to the town, problems can arise. For example, when the council opened up a old public path next to Double Dykes, we got a lot of harassment, abuse and shouting for the first few years. If you are just outside the town but close enough to facilities, you will not get so much harassment.

Dennis Robertson: I guess that you also value your privacy, so would that approach help in that respect?

Fiona Townsley: Yes.

Dennis Robertson: Thank you.

Iona Burke: The site should be close to facilities we need such as shops, doctors surgeries and schools—but not too close. Sites should be far enough away so that people can get privacy, but should not be put on back roads or up in woods away from everything. They should be close enough to get what you need but not right inside the community.

Dennis Robertson: So, you need street lighting, schooling and so on. Families have told us that even when they are on the road a lot of travelling people like to come back to a permanent place that they call home. Of course, that will also be important for children going to school and, as Lizzie Johnstone has made clear, for access to medical care. Does it make sense to locate a site just outside a town perimeter so that people can access those services?

Iona Burke: Yes, it makes sense. Sites should be close enough to things that people need such as doctors, schools and so on and not miles out of town. All the sites are put on back roads, in woods and away from everything. They should be close to everything people need and be in public—not hidden away.

Dennis Robertson: What about the suggestion that Gypsy Traveller families come together, find a piece of land and buy it for their own site?

Iona Burke: We have had problems with that ourselves, on the bit of land in Aberdeen that we stay on. This is where planning permission comes in; Gypsy Travellers should be involved in the process a lot more and know their rights. Getting planning permission was torture for us. People thought that we did not know what we were talking about and that they were right and we were wrong. When you know your rights, you can say, “No—this is what’s going to happen and this is how it’s going to get sorted, so that we have a place to come back to that we call home.” That is where Planning Aid for Scotland comes in. We should have the right to know what our rights are when we try to get planning permission.

Edith Townsley: I want to come back on Iona Burke’s point about the distance between sites and communities and how they are hidden away. I am from Dunchlogan, which is about 2 and a half miles outside town, and we have no footpath, no street lighting and no bus stop at the bottom of the road. It is okay for people who drive, but quite a few people on the site, which has been full for the past year, have children and do not drive. The footpath is totally unsuitable—I have taken pictures of it and given them to local councillors—and the site itself is up in the wood and cannot be seen. In fact, people who have been born and raised in Lochgilphead will say, “I’ve heard of Dunchlogan, but I don’t know where it is.” Sometimes it is just impossible to get something

done. If my teenage daughters want to go into town, they cannot take the bus so they have to put on wellies and trudge through the mud.

The Convener: I have visited the site and know what you mean about wellies and a walk.

Edith Townsley: Two or 2 and a half miles sounds like an easy walk for anyone—unless it is raining or snowing—but because of the conditions people have to endure it is not a quick or easy way of getting to town. There is no indication that the site is there and there is no filter lane, and the road up to it is appalling. Even councillors in their nice cars do not like coming up it.

Lizzie Johnstone: I was not forced off the site that I was on, but as I have said I was forced by circumstances to move into a house, which I have hated every day. Because, as the other lassies have said, so many of the sites are built so far out and do not have the right facilities that Travellers need—as Edith Townsley has pointed out, not everyone can drive—people do not use them.

The site that I was on was built for 25 pitches, which is quite big for Travellers, but because it was so out of the way people would end up there only through necessity. It was the last place they would go and ended up just being abandoned. It was just not suitable for people with disabilities and it was hard for doctors or midwives who were carrying out visits even to find the location. Building those kinds of sites is just a waste of resources and money; as Iona Burke has made clear, Travellers should have more of an input and more of a say on where sites are built, how big they are and so on.

Dennis Robertson: Travellers need to be involved in any new sites that are created.

Lizzie Johnstone: Yes. A lot of sites are put in places where you would not put human beings. We do not know this to be 100 per cent fact, but we heard that the site that we were on was built on top of a graveyard. The site in Dalkeith where my sister stays is surrounded by pylons and there have been a lot of complaints about people suffering ill health as a result. Other sites have been put next to rivers and burns, on top of rubbish tips and so on. Settled people in the room will excuse me, but you would not buy a house that was next to anything like that; you would want a nice view and a nice place. Why stick Travellers in those places?

Betty Irvine: There is a site in the Borders, at Innerleithen—a tourist site where a good idea has been carried out. The site stopped letting Travellers on for a while, then the council decided to set aside part of the site for Travellers. It works out really well. Travellers have to book—maybe a month ahead—and are allowed to stay only for six weeks. It has something like 10 pitches. My

brothers stayed on it in the summertime. Tourists stay on the same site, but they keep to their own bits. It works out really well. The site is privately owned—Travellers do not own it—and the owners got money from the council to build part of it just for Travellers.

The Convener: Do you think that that option could be exported to other areas?

Betty Irvine: Yes, I really do.

Michelle Foy: I will pick up on what Lizzie Johnstone said. In Carlisle, in England, a new site was built about two years ago. When the decision to build the site and the decision where to put it were made, the Traveller community was well involved. There was a lot of hands-on work from Traveller men to get the site up and running. Families who stay on the site have been involved in it since it opened. People who stay on sites should be involved in them—it is about communication.

Charlene MacDonald: I want to back up what Lizzie Johnstone said about having Travellers' input on where sites are built. It would save councils an awful lot of money if they listened to Travellers when they tell them what they need. Councils build things and do things that cost an awful lot of money but are a waste of time—I have experience of that. What is the point if things do not meet the needs that they are meant to meet? The council says, "You did have input into it," and you think, "No, I didn't." The council tells people that it has listened to Travellers and that Travellers had an input into how things were built. It would save an awful lot of money and hassle if councils got Travellers' input from the start on where sites were built.

Michelle Lloyd: From what we are hearing, there is obviously a need for a range of options to meet the range of needs in the community. It is important to remember that what Travellers are saying is no different to what people in any other community say; it is not about special treatment or provision. In the settled community—in my community—there is private ownership, public ownership, council houses, shared-ownership schemes and sheltered housing for people with special needs. I am hearing today that people are not asking for anything different—they are just asking for variety.

Michelle Foy spoke about the site in Carlisle; I had heard recently about that example. The organisation is called Home Space Sustainable Accommodation and is the equivalent of a registered social landlord. The company is part-owned by Gypsy Travellers and works in partnership with local authorities and the community to provide different kinds of sites. It is very much into sustainable accommodation. It

seems that it is thinking outside the box more and is not just producing more of the same, as has been done in Scotland.

There are examples of good practice that could be replicated and shared. The committee could find out more about them to see whether there are options for Scotland.

John Mason: Why are we not finding suitable sites? Why are the sites that are being given in many cases unsuitable, as has been described? Is it that the councils want to do the right thing but get pressured by the local settled community? It sounds like things worked in Peebles, where the council has been more helpful.

Betty Irvine: It works out well in Innerleithen.

John Mason: We went to Aberdeen, where sites are not being built, despite everybody saying that more sites are needed. Does anybody have any ideas on how to move that forward? Does the Government need to tell the councils what to do?

Betty Irvine: Previously, it has always been the case that the people who decided to build sites have never met Gypsy Travellers in person. They have never been to a site to experience or see the living conditions there. They draw up the plans and are in charge of the final decisions on where sites should go, how they should be managed and what, if any, facilities for good living conditions—such as amenity blocks—will be put on sites. Until now, the officials who have been making the decisions have had no experience whatsoever of our lifestyle and culture. On council-run sites, we are considered to be council tenants because we pay rent and council tax, but when the right to buy for council tenants came out, we were excluded from that. Why?

The Convener: Good point.

10:15

Susan Townsley: John Mason asked about where the sites are going to be. Once, when we were getting decanted because our site was getting an upgrade, we tried to get a decant site beside a housing scheme. The whole housing scheme was up in arms about it. In the end, Perth and Kinross Council had no back-up places whatever for us. After planning permission for the decant site was turned down, a councillor came up to the portakabin at our site—we were all there, with Fiona Townsley and a lot of others—and told us that if we applied again after the election on 3 May we would get planning permission. A lot of issues came into it—it was not just about people in the town, but the councillors who were deciding on the planning permission. The whole housing scheme was in uproar, and he was not going to

jeopardise his votes from that scheme. That is a problem.

Katrina Stewart: I agree with Georgia McCann that the people who make the sites really do not have a clue. I stay on a site in Dalkeith, and when you drive into it, it is like a cattle pen, with a fence round us and iron gates. The council is doing up the site in the summer and upgrading bits and pieces, but the site has been there for years—since long before my time. As Georgia McCann said, nobody listens to Travellers or speaks to them face to face. They always look down on them. Travellers will never be treated as equals, no matter if they stay in a house. Even if they stayed in a castle, I do not think that they would be treated any better than they have been for years.

As Georgia McCann said, if people would just sit down, as we are doing today, and listen to our views, maybe things would be better. Maybe sites would be better and our life would be better. However, my opinion is that things will never change for Travellers.

Fiona Townsley: I started attending meetings with the council about 12 years ago, and at that time we were talking about getting transit sites, but nothing ever happened. That is because time limits are never put on things, so they just go on and on. Over the years, every time the Scottish Parliament or the Scottish Executive has done a review involving Gypsy Travellers, the council will invite Travellers in, get their opinion and put something in writing, but once the review is over, that just kind of fizzles out and goes nowhere. At the end of the day, the council does not really listen to Travellers. You sit in meetings and give your opinion, but the council goes away and does what it wants to do, anyway.

A fortune has been spent on Double Dykes, but the chalets there are not up to standard. There are problems with insulation and heating and with mould and condensation. The site is run down. It could be a lot better managed if the council would just listen to the Gypsy Traveller community and get it right the first time.

Edith Townsley: John Mason asked for our opinion and ideas on where sites should be built. They should be out in the open, so people know where they are and how they are. We should also get the locals' opinion on how and where they should be. Just to put the sites in the sorts of places they are put is disgraceful.

Fiona Townsley is in Double Dykes, and she said that her chalet is not up to standard. My cousin stays there, as you know, and I visit the site. When I walk in, it is like, "Oh my God! This is a palace compared to where I am."

You asked where we want to build a site. I have talked to our councillors up there. We are asking

for an upgrade. We are not asking for a brand new site village; we just want the site that we have to be made better—maybe with underground plumbing and normal stuff like that—but we cannot get anywhere.

John Mason: Although the location is not perfect, from your point of view, you would rather have an upgrade than move to a better site.

Edith Townsley: If they wanted, they could make a better site—

John Mason: Why do you think the site is where it is? Is it because there has been resistance?

Edith Townsley: I do not know if my history is right, but I think that the Dunchloghan site at Lochgilphead was one of the first to be opened in Scotland, so it dates back to about the late 1970s—1978 or 1979. About 20-odd years ago the one that I am in was rebuilt, because the one down in the hollow was just like the portakabins that you get on the roadside for workmen. They did the upgrade then, and that is how the site is now, but it is very dated in comparison with any other site. The site is not level and the drainage is ridiculous. Something really needs to be done.

Minor repairs are fine; if your hot water stops working, you phone Argyll Community Housing Association and they are out there straight away. If something is broken in the unit, they will come and fix it. They are quite good, efficient and fast at minor repairs, but when it comes to asking for the complete overhaul of the site, we do not get anywhere.

Lizzie Johnstone: John Mason asked about where sites and transit sites should be built. The most important thing—the thing that we are going on about—is for Travellers to have more input. I wish that that had been the case 20 years ago, because I feel that I was forced into a house because there was nowhere for me to go. I was on a site with a disabled son and I could not even get registered with a doctor. As I said at the beginning, I was forced into a house basically to get my son proper health care, but in completely strange surroundings and without the support that I could have had from my family.

It is coming up to 19 years that we have been in the house, off and on—I have travelled up and down with my camper and the trailer for a few weeks here and there in the summertime. I really miss the closeness of the community that I had and my ain health has deteriorated. A survey has been done, and Travellers who have been forced into houses—for various personal circumstances and other reasons—have poorer health and suffer depression and anxiety. They have all these ailments since having to move into houses

because there are no sites for them to stay on. Do you know what I mean?

I wanted to say that, because it is important that Travellers have input on where and how sites are built or even upgraded. Surely to God they should make sure that sites are half decent for the folk to live in.

Fiona Townsley: A lot of Travellers see Double Dykes and think that it is a good, well-managed site with good facilities on it, but that is not the case. I would not want someone to go away saying, "I want what's on Double Dykes." Double Dykes is a good place to look at and say, "These are the kind of things that shouldn't have happened." We still have all the problems that we had when we started fighting for the upgrading. We have the same high electricity costs and problems with condensation and insulation.

The Convener: Thanks. Marco Biagi wants to talk about the media, and then John Mason wants to talk about working patterns.

Marco Biagi: Generally speaking, do Gypsy Travellers get a fair deal from local and national newspapers and TV? [*Laughter.*]

Georgia McCann: Not at all.

The Convener: Was that a collective no?

Marco Biagi: I look forward to seeing how that is recorded in the *Official Report*.

Georgia McCann: I am a Christian, and I attended a Christian convention in Essex last year. The media had a field day. There were no reports of crime in the village, although there was one write-up in which an elderly resident said that the Travellers were driving really slowly through her village. "This is promising," I thought. However, the second remark was, "They were obviously sizing it up." I had thought that it was a really nice thing to say—that the Travellers had been going really slowly and respecting the community—but the second remark took it away.

Katrina Stewart: I have read a thousand articles in the papers about Travellers; I would love to read something nice, for once. I have never read any good comments about what Travellers are meant to have done or what they are doing. It is always bad press.

Susan Townsley: I am one of the trainers, with Michelle Lloyd. We do work with MECOPP. We have a board with press clippings on it. If any of you want to see anything from the press, you should just see that board and you will find out how negative the press is towards Gypsy Travellers.

Iona Burke: Article 12 in Scotland has been doing media audits, using positive and negative images and everything that comes from the press.

There is proof from police records and so on that crime does not change and risk does not go up because of Travellers being in the community.

Marco Biagi: When there is an issue around planning permission or decant sites, with people nearby expressing their views on it, local newspapers are important for how the news is spread to the community. Do local newspapers attempt to get in touch with Gypsy Travellers or go to potential sites, or do they report only the views of the authorities or the settled community?

Lizzie Johnstone: As the lassies have been saying, it is all negative. It is not just newspapers, though. I was watching "Come Dine With Me", and the contestants were mocking Travellers. One was acting, playing the part of a Gypsy. They said, "I've seen the Gypsies. Why don't we try some outside cooking?" Years ago, that would have been my mother—she would have been outside cooking on a fire. There are programmes like "My Big Fat Gypsy Wedding"; people assume that we are like that. They give a bad impression of us. I will not mention any names, but I even heard a song last night—the wean had it—with settling country laddies singing and mocking Travellers, making fun of them. The negatives are put over in a variety of ways—it is not just newspapers.

Iona Burke: Many a time, the press have come down into camps, wanting to ask our points of view on things. It does not matter what we say. If they come down and the place is clean, with no rubbish lying about, it does not matter—they still come back with negative comments. Things get twisted. We might think that we have done something really well—speaking to them and letting them see everything, seeing that the camp is kept clean and so on. Next day the newspaper will say that there was rubbish here and rubbish there. They use old pictures. That has happened in Aberdeen a lot, and we have reported it. Old pictures from old camps get used with new articles in the media—in the paper, the news, the internet and everything.

10:30

Susan Townsley: One time, when we were looking for an upgrade on the site, Fiona and I decided to give an interview to a newspaper. The journalists turned everything that we said backwards. They started going on about people not working and not paying tax. My whole family works. My father has never got benefit in his life. Yet they started going on about Travellers not paying tax and getting this or that money. I turned on the radio and people were going on about Travellers not paying tax. If they had come to me, I could have showed them all my family's tax papers. That is what happens. If we talk to the papers, they just turn it around to suit themselves.

They could not get anything down at my bay. They took a photo of a wee dog, sitting on the kerb. They could not get anything else.

Fiona Townsley: Similarly to what Susan was saying, TV cameras turned up at Double Dykes, and we were giving an interview to a TV camera. There was also a reporter there from a newspaper, and he went and printed a whole load of rubbish. I was a year bringing a complaint. It was the *Daily Mail*. At the end of it, we proved that what it had said was a load of rubbish. It gave an apology on its website, but it did not print anything in the paper.

Edith Townsley: I will go back to Iona Burke's point about the press. It has been six years since the last time I moved up to Aberdeen, and that was to a camp. There were pictures of my caravan, my children and my partner, and of us all standing at an open-side fire. We had not taken our work truck with us, because we were only going up for a week to be beside family and to take the girls to Codonas. We went into Asda, and there we were, on the front page of the local paper, with the fire. I knew that nobody had been there the previous night. The photographs had been taken through a hedge. The picture was associated with a different campsite, where there had been some dumping of trees. The different things were totally put together. They had that in Asda, and I was embarrassed. The Aberdeen press did that to me about six years ago.

Siobhan McMahon: I want to mention something that we have heard in evidence, and I stress that it was in evidence—this is not my opinion. People from community councils in particular have said that some of the negative press about and connotations of the Gypsy Traveller community are because of the lack of engagement on the part of the Gypsy Traveller community with the settled community. What are your views on that? Does that lead to negative media reports?

Georgia McCann: The media will do exactly what they intend to do. They will sell their stories and they do not care who gets penalised in the process. I have seen articles in the papers in which the media have complained about Travellers using unofficial stopping grounds, and about how much it has cost the local authority to clean up the ground after the Travellers have left. If bins had been put in, there would not be any mess. That is the media putting the negativity straight into that community, so that they are up in arms, saying that it is their tax money that is allowing those Travellers to stay there, and that it is costing them every time Travellers move in. That is not necessarily the case. We do pay council tax, for wherever we stay. A lot of people in the settled community do not even know that.

I have been on unofficial sites on which people from the settled community have dumped their rubbish—I am talking about three-piece suites, divans and fridges—and newspaper journalists have come and taken pictures and put them into their newspapers. I have ended up telling council officials that I live in a caravan and that a three-piece suite has not come out of it. Common sense goes way over their heads. I have had council officials threatening to fine me for dumping a three-piece suite.

I am sorry; I have lost the last question.

Lizzie Johnstone: Years ago, when I was expecting my youngest, me and my two bairns were in the trailer when it went over in a severe wind. Praise the Lord for his kindness, my bairns came out of that. I was not bothered about the material value of the trailer or its contents. The ambulance and fire engines were not allowed to attend to help me, but I was like a celebrity the following morning. I do not know how the press got a hold of the story, but all these folk came and took rakes of photos of the damage. They wanted to interview me but I was lying in the hospital with two weans.

The trailer was a big residential trailer that was comfortable for me and my bairns in the winter time. I was on the end pitch and the trailer went down the banking through two fields, and in the process of going down, it damaged the pitch and the metal fence that surrounds each individual pitch. They even took pictures of the fence.

After I got myself pulled together, I was put into homeless accommodation because everything that belonged to me was destroyed. When they did come to interview me, I took them to see the pitch because the council had billed me for the damage that the trailer had done on its way out of the pitch.

In 19 years, I have had 11 council houses in three different districts. That is quite a lot of houses to go through. Maybe that is because people saw my face in the paper. Many times, discrimination and prejudice have meant that I have had to move to another house. I am still travelling, girls; I am just going to different houses. That might be why I am against the press. When it happened, they never said that it was a miracle that me and the bairns walked out of it. They never said anything nice, just, "Look at the mess. Look at the money it is going to cost to repair the site so that someone else can get on it."

Charlene MacDonald: Siobhan McMahon mentioned the settled community. I have been in Oban for 14 years and my mum and dad have been on a site for 14 years. I think the negativity has a lot to do with the settled community. Travellers have to have somewhere to stay, but

local people are mostly going nipping the councillors' heads saying that they do not want the Travellers there and we should be put further away.

In the 14 years that I have been in Oban, I stayed on a site, then I moved into a house, and now I am back on the site. I have got to know the locals around me, and I think that that is because I moved into the house, but when we moved there it was the same as when you move to any new place for the first time. The locals hounded us, asked what we were doing there, and told us to go back where we came from. Now they say, "Oh, that's the Travellers that stay at Benderloch." They do not bother any more. I think that our problems have a lot to do with the settled community.

Fiona Townsley: When Double Dykes was first planned, there were a lot of complaints against the location of the caravan site, even though it was a traditional camping ground. For the past 30 years that it has been open, there have been very few complaints against the site. We actually get support from the people who live in housing. A development of 1,300 houses was planned for the fields around the site and the Travellers in the caravan site and the people in the small village of Ruthvenfield got together to object. When we need to, we can get together and talk quite happily with the people who live in housing.

I have made the offer to Perth and Kinross Council that if it goes ahead with plans to build other sites—even temporary sites—I and some other Travellers would be quite happy to go and speak to local councils and communities in the places where those sites are built to break down some of the barriers, because I think that most people get their opinion of Travellers from the newspapers, which give a negative view. Hearing from real Travellers makes a big difference.

Marco Biagi: Has that changed the local press's perception of the site?

Fiona Townsley: Our local press are not too bad. It is papers such as *The Sun* and the *Daily Mail* that create problems. We recently had problems with *The Sun*, which treats all Travellers as the same. *The Courier* and the *Perthshire Advertiser* are not too bad when it comes to Travellers, except when it comes to unauthorised encampments, when they can get up in arms.

Iona Burke: We have been doing awareness-raising workshops in the schools. We have done that in Aberdeen, Edinburgh and Larkhall, and we plan to take it further afield. That should happen a lot more. It could be done in places such as community halls. Wee workshops every now and again would let everyone know what was going on, and would help people to build bridges and to talk about things.

Georgia McCann: I think that Travellers being more involved with the settled community will help. There has been a huge amount of discrimination against Travellers through the generations. Even today, there is still discrimination; it is still very real. Until we can break down the barriers on both sides—in the settled community and among Travellers—we will not be able to move on. There will be no comfort zone until the barriers are taken down and trust is built up.

Trust is generated through events such as those that Iona Burke mentioned. We offer seminars and awareness-training days, but the people we need to reach with such services are the people who do not attend—it is only voluntary to attend. First, we must tackle the discrimination and the racism. The media must play a more positive role to make up for its years of negativity.

The Convener: It will take them a long, long time to do that, Georgia.

Georgia McCann: Well, it has taken us a long time to get here, but we are here, so we live in hope.

Michelle Lloyd: I echo what others have said. There are examples of good practice, which involve Gypsy Travellers going into communities to break down barriers and to do awareness-raising training. There needs to be much more investment in that work and it needs to be rolled out across the country, not just in the few areas where small non-governmental organisations are working with Gypsy Travellers.

As I have read the evidence that has been gathered for the inquiry, I have been astonished by the number of community councils and local authorities that think that they know best and which have extremely strong views. They believe that they know where a site should be built and do not hesitate to give their opinion, yet it is often the case that the people concerned have never spoken to a Gypsy Traveller, let alone lived on a caravan site or in a trailer.

In the past, people have said that the community planning partnerships might be a way forward. I do not think that many people would disagree with the idea of getting people around a table to work in partnership, but from what I see and from what I have heard today and on other occasions, if Gypsy Travellers were to get involved in community planning partnerships, it would not be a level playing field. Until people can come to the table with the necessary knowledge and rights, free from discrimination and racism, I do not see that as a way forward. Much more groundwork needs to be done.

Edith Townsley: I want to go back to the comment that Siobhan McMahon made about communication with locals and the press. In

Lochgilphead, there is the *Argyll Advertiser*. We do not get bad press, but there is no recognition of our presence.

As for getting on with the locals and communication, all last year I was in college doing an employability and communications course. I find that the more intelligent people you speak to and deal with seem to understand. They are all for hearing your thoughts and opinions on where you live, and you do not get the racist thing from them.

The local council or ACHA staff just get up in the morning and do their job, and they do not want problems or complications that day. An everyday worker cannot really do anything about the state that one site is in, but we never hear, "Why don't you go to the press?" I think that that has been mentioned a couple of times, but that has never come about.

10:45

Lizzie Johnstone: Because my face was put in the media and because my youngest son was like a celebrity when he was born, as he brought in the bells—I stood there proud as punch with my laddie—folk knew me. The thing is that, over the years, in the different houses and different districts that I have had to move to, I have denied that I am a Traveller.

I had to have a van to use for my work—I am not a lady and I would count a car as a luxury. I suffered so much from country people knowing my face and recognising me that I would park my motor somewhere else and walk up to my house. Because I suffered so much from folk, I did not want them to know where my motor was. I had motors that were vandalised outside my place, so I decided that it was easier to park somewhere else.

In the morning, it was like military precision—I would get the weans out, put them in school and go all the way round to pick up my motor. I left it in a posh bit, so I knew that it would be all right. That is what the situation was like. I am proud of my culture and of being a Traveller, but it is only from attending different things that I can speak about things like that and be here today.

Georgia McCann: I will go back to community partnership. I have lived on sites for years and I have been in houses as well. I have been verbally discriminated against by a site warden and a council official. If we do not target the people who are meant to run our sites, how can we expect to come into the community? That behaviour does not create any trust whatsoever among us, so I do not pass on trust to my children. I cannot say, "You'll be okay in the local school," because the children are standing and watching a caretaker call me a dirty tink. If that is acceptable in the

council body, how can we move on and gain trust in communities?

The Convener: John Mason will ask about working patterns.

John Mason: When people have talked about permanent sites and stopping sites, we have heard that generations have gone to one place as a traditional stopping place and so on. How much are things changing? I understand that a lot of work was agricultural in the past, whereas a lot of work is around towns now—the witnesses can correct me if I am wrong.

It was suggested when we were up in Aberdeen that, because of the money and so on, Aberdeen is attracting a lot of Travellers from not just Scotland but elsewhere. That suggests that more sites than used to be needed are now required in Aberdeen. Is a change going on?

Georgia McCann: In the settled community, people who want to work and earn a decent living sometimes find that they have to move as well. I do not think that the travelling community is any different. As in any minority, there are people who maybe do not want to work in the world, but if a person wants to progress and go forward in life, they will go where the work is, regardless of their occupation. If the work is there, they will follow it. There are people who emigrate for a better quality of life. Travelling communities move around for work, but is that not better than the Government subsidising or keeping them?

John Mason: Absolutely. Would you say that that has changed over time? Is the work in a different place than it was, say, 25 years ago?

Georgia McCann: Things change, and we all move with the times. My children's childhood was a lot different from mine. My grandfather could not read or write his own name, but could keep his head above the water financially and look after his family. What he did worked then, but that does not mean that it would work now.

More people are getting more O grades and wanting to go into college or become professionals. It is easier for people to access proper training for trades and get certificates. It is down to how much each individual person wants to know and what they want to do in life.

Edith Townsley: Things have changed. Many Travellers do not move around to follow agricultural work. A lot of them are in proper jobs. On the site that I am on, there is one guy who is working with the council—he empties bins, but it is still a council job—and another who is a mechanic. They pay rent and rates, but they live in Dunchologan, because they do not want to be in a house. However, Dunchologan is just left to go to ruin; it is never upgraded.

A lot of people move about. As Georgia McCann said, it is a lot easier now for Travellers to get into college and get the certificates that they need in order to get proper jobs. However, you will find that a lot of young Gypsy teenagers want to do it from their caravan site and will be proud to do so, even though, sometimes, you might not get a certain job in a local community if you come from a site. In that case, those young people might move on to another site.

The work situation has changed over the years, and the Travellers are changing with it. Some places are making it easier for Travellers to get proper certificates and proper jobs, which is good.

Lizzie Johnstone: I was going to say something similar to what has just been said. Years ago, a lot of the communities, especially in Perth and Kinross, relied on the Gypsy Traveller communities to work on their farms. However, as the lassie just said, the young yins want more education and want to get out there and work. I have done it myself, and I think that it is a good thing. Maybe what we are doing today is one way of helping to break down the barriers so that the settled people and the Travellers can work together.

Charlene MacDonald: I know from experience the truth of what Edith Townsley was saying. My wee sister, who is sitting in the public gallery, has lied about her address when filling out applications for jobs because, at other times, employers who have found out her address have told her that she is not suitable. That is ridiculous.

Georgia McCann: One of my daughters is in the public gallery today. She is 15 but she has had only two weeks of secondary education. The reason for that is the basic one of discrimination. My child experienced discrimination, bullying and physical and verbal abuse.

My child will be 16 in June and has no qualifications whatsoever. How can she possibly fill out application forms and go for a job when she has no trust in the community that she wants to live in and work beside? Through the experiences that she has had, the education system has failed her. The settled community takes the education of their children for granted but we cannot. When our children are in school—most of their schooling comes through primary schools—they do not get sickies and do not take days off. They attend school, and when they are not in school, they are not in school. We value our children's education much more because we insist on it and fight to get them educated. However, our children are still going to school in unsafe conditions. I will not send my child to a school where she is going to be threatened.

The Convener: When we were in Aberdeen, we heard that the level of bullying increases when Traveller children go into secondary education, and fewer and fewer Traveller children are going to secondary schools because of the level of bullying.

Fiona Townsley: I am a carer just now but I believe that, if you live on a Gypsy Traveller caravan site, it can be hard to get a job. I applied for the job of site manager for the caravan site that we live on but I was not given an interview. However, when the new site manager was appointed, I went on to provide him with Gypsy Traveller awareness training to help him to do the job properly.

The Convener: Siobhan McMahon has a question about tenancy agreements.

Siobhan McMahon: We have heard evidence about tenancy agreements, what they should be and who draws them up. The Equal Opportunities Committee's report in 2001 suggested that there should be a tenancy agreement for all of Scotland, so people would have the same rights and responsibilities no matter what site they went to.

What should a tenancy agreement look like? Who should be involved in drawing it up? Should one apply across Scotland or should there be agreements for individual sites? Should it be the Scottish Government or local authorities that draw them up, with your input?

Fiona Townsley: Our tenancy agreement used to be about two pages long and did not say very much, so we campaigned on the issue and got the council to change it to something that is similar to the short Scottish secure tenancy agreement. However, last year, I took a complaint to the ombudsman because I could not get the council to hold up most of what was in the tenancy agreement. The ombudsman came back to me and said that the council has the discretion to not implement the conditions that are set out in the tenancy agreement. I thought that the agreement was a legal and binding agreement between the tenant and the council. However, it seems that the council can use its discretion not to act on any part of the agreement. It is not that the ombudsman's office disagreed with my view and said that the council was upholding the agreement; it just said that the council did not need to, because it has this discretion. I cannot understand it.

Georgia McCann: I once read over—tried to read over, I should say—a tenancy agreement for the Tealing site in Dundee. It said, "You will keep your caravan mobile at all times." However, above that, it said that the site was permanent.

If I purchase something from a shop and try to return it because it is faulty, when the person behind the counter asks for the postcode, it comes

up on the computer as “Gypsy Traveller person’s site”. They do not know what to say to you. They do not know whether you are a Gypsy Traveller or not, and they do not want to insult you. Their computer does not give such information for other areas—it does not say that a certain postcode is for where a certain ethnic minority group stays—so why should it do so for Gypsy Traveller sites?

We cannot use the site address to hire a DVD, even though the tenancy agreement says that it is a permanent address.

Lizzie Johnstone: That is one of the things that angers me. If I had got proper access to the doctors when I needed it, I would not have been in a house. I would have been able to stay out in the trailer among my own.

When I went to register with the doctor, I was discriminated against. Like the others have said, you have got the name of a Travellers site on your address and your postcode. They turned around and said to me, “Sorry, we don’t take your kind of folk. If you go down to George Street”—or wherever—“you’ll find somewhere that takes your kind on.”

11:00

Years ago, when I was staying out at Loanhead—Katrina Stewart will remember the first time I took the plunge as a single parent—I was staying in a wee trailer in a lay-by, and I was expecting another bairn. I had two buses to catch to get to the hospital, because I could not afford a motor at the time, as I was just getting on my feet. Thank God Katrina was there, because she watched the other wee one, but it was quite a trek to take two weans up to the hospital when I was expecting. I had to do that because I could not get registered with a doctor who was only five or 10 minutes away.

It is the same with dentists. It is not just about doctors or anything like that—it could be any health service. A lot of the time, we use the accident and emergency departments, but now you have to get referred even to go there. They will not look at you. If you go in with an emergency, you still have to be referred by a doctor to get assessed at the hospital.

Katrina Stewart: I have stayed in areas where I have been refused not only treatment by doctors, but services in shops. I have been put out of shops. You go into a shop and you are clean and respectable. My money is the same as everybody else’s, but I have been put out of shops and told, “No Travellers allowed”. I have been refused treatment at the doctors because I am a Traveller. It is hard.

The Convener: Does anyone else want to come in on the subject of tenancy agreements? We are keen to get your views on what should be in a tenancy agreement, and whether you think they are a good thing.

Fiona Townsley: When you live on a mixed caravan site with different Gypsy families, you need a tenancy agreement because you need rules and regulations for the site so that everyone knows where they stand. However, on our site, the council can come and tell us to do one thing today and a different thing tomorrow, and it could ask my neighbour next door to do something differently. If you have a tenancy agreement, everyone knows where they stand. The way that the caravan site is run now depends on whether the council feels like doing something that day or not. That is what causes a lot of the problems and some of the antisocial behaviour on the caravan site—no one knows what they should and should not be doing. You need a tenancy agreement with rules.

I want to ask a question about discretion. Can councils do that? Do they have discretion not to act on tenancy agreements?

Siobhan McMahon: My understanding, although I am not an expert, is that, if someone breaks an agreement, the council can use discretion, but it cannot do that just because it feels like it. We can look into that. You talk about what happens on the site and you say that, if you knew the rules, obviously you would not break them. We are keen to hear about the opposite side, which is the council’s or housing association’s responsibility. The agreement has two parts. We are keen to know what you want from the councils, rather than what they expect of you.

Susan Townsley: When it comes to the tenancy agreement—on our site, anyway—the council seems to pick what it wants to do. We had a problem with antisocial behaviour on the site, and that was covered in the tenancy agreement, but the council would not do anything about it. The council just picks things out of the agreement to suit itself. It sort of turns things round so that it benefits, rather than the people who are on the site.

Katrina Stewart: On the tenancy agreement, there are a lot of rules and regulations about what you should and should not do, but one that I do not agree with personally—most of the mothers here will probably agree—is that you are only allowed two caravans.

A lot of Travellers have big families. I still have a daughter and a son at home, and I am only allowed two caravans. My daughter is 21 and my son is 17. They cannot share a caravan. If I was staying in a house, they would have a room each.

There should be a better rule on the site. A lot of Travellers have mixed families, with boys and girls, and they cannot share the same caravan. Teenagers need their privacy.

Edith Townsley: My tenancy agreement is about two pages long and it is a tick-box thing. You have to ask permission if you want to have a dog or if you want to have overnight visitors. Obviously, you are responsible for your visitors, and I think that that would cover antisocial behaviour as well. Basically, the tenancy agreement is all about what you cannot do, and you have to sign it.

Lately, they have come up with a form that they got from ACHA. Again, it is a two-page form, but it asks you to tell them everything about your neighbours. If they have a fight or an argument, it asks you to write down when it happened, what time, and stuff like that. I still have the form somewhere; I could find it. I thought, "What is that?" Basically, it seemed like an informant form. You were supposed to write down any incidents that occur, with the time and who was involved.

Siobhan McMahon: Did everyone get one of those?

Edith Townsley: Such and such did this at such and such a time on such and such a day. I still have it.

The Convener: Was that issued to you recently?

Edith Townsley: Yes. My other daughter, Kirsty, came and got a pitch last year, and I think that she got one as well. I found it weird.

I have been there for quite a few years, so it is quite a few years since I got my tenancy agreement. It is only a couple of pages long. It is just the usual thing that you get on sites, which Katrina Stewart and the others will know. You have to ask permission if you want to get a dog and if you are having people up to stay for a weekend. You are responsible for their behaviour while they are on the site. People anywhere would be responsible for their visitors. It would be standard procedure to say to anyone who is rowdy, "You can't do that. You're in my home." You don't need your housing association or site people to tell you about that. I think that common sense would prevail.

The Convener: Dennis, do you have a supplementary question on tenancy agreements? I will then go back to Siobhan McMahon.

Dennis Robertson: Something that Georgia McCann said made me think. Form filling can be complicated for many people. Are the tenancy agreements written in language that is fully understandable? If not, what help is there to assist you to complete tenancy agreements?

Georgia McCann: None.

Fiona Townsley: You just sign it.

Dennis Robertson: Are they written in such a way that they are fully understandable and you know what the agreement is?

Lizzie Johnstone: A lot of the lassies that I have known on sites have come to me because it is widely known among many of the Travellers where I am that I do a lot of the work with the settled folk. They usually come to me if they need help. I am not a great scholar but I taught myself and I got a bit of help, too. Usually, that is what happens. If you know somebody in your community or somebody who works within the community, you will go to them for help and they will explain it. Sometimes, it takes them time to understand it.

The Convener: I return to Siobhan McMahon, because we want to ask about Gypsy Traveller liaison officers. After that, Alex Johnstone might have further questions about access to services, and if we have time after that I will come back to people who still want to speak.

Siobhan McMahon: You said earlier that you just sign your agreement. Clearly, you want to live on the site, therefore you do that. What interaction do you have with your Gypsy Traveller liaison officer who is provided by the council or whoever? Do they help in that regard? Are they about the site? Do they come and engage with you, or do you have to seek them out?

I heard someone earlier call the people "wardens"; in fact, I saw the same word in the *Official Report* of Monday's meeting, which I did not attend. When I saw that, I thought, "For heaven's sake—you have a warden going about your home."

Lizzie Johnstone: That is being nice to them. We usually call them Hitler. [*Laughter.*]

Siobhan McMahon: I suppose that the term "warden" is a bit nicer than that.

Hearing that, I am frightened to ask this, but what is your opinion of Gypsy Traveller liaison officers? What could we recommend to make that relationship better?

The Convener: I must ask everyone to keep their comments brief so that we can get in as many as possible, and so that we can move on to the next subject.

Fiona Townsley: Our Gypsy Traveller liaison officer is also our site manager, and my belief is that that man cannot even pick up litter on the site without having to get permission from the council. I would not go to him as a liaison officer, because people in that role should give Gypsy Travellers help and support and act as a go-between with the

council. He is just another council employee; as he keeps telling us, he comes way down the line and has to ask permission from everyone else before he can do anything.

Iona Burke: As Fiona said, everything you need has to come from somewhere else and people need to get permission. The liaison officer in Aberdeen does nothing to help. We are out in camps and do not get bins, toilets or anything else that we need and which they are supposed to provide. They feel intimidated when they come down to the camps and speak to us and we feel the same about them when they come into our homes. Connections need to be made and we need to feel safe and trust these people enough to allow them to come into our homes and talk about what we need from them. We need to help each other.

Christine Ward: Instead of making someone from the council a warden, we should get a Gypsy to do it.

Edith Townsley: We do not have a liaison officer but I agree with Fiona and Iona that the liaison officer and site warden should be separate, with one mediating between people. I only got here today with the help and knowledge of and mediating with Michelle Lloyd and Linzi Ferguson, not through a site warden, liaison officer or anyone like that.

Lizzie Johnstone: Traveller liaison officers should not only be involved with sites, people staying by the side of the road or different camps; they should do outreach work with Travellers who live in houses. Given the number of Gypsy Travellers who have had to move into houses because of their circumstances, they should be working further afield with all the Gypsy Traveller community.

Alex Johnstone: The issue of access to services has arisen a number of times in this morning's discussion and, although that could cover a broad area, I want to focus on education and health services. When we visited Clinterty near Aberdeen on Monday, we heard a good news story: the local general practitioner was very positive and engaged and although the site was some distance from the local primary school the school bus services and so on were very good. However, I have also heard some horror stories this morning from Elizabeth Johnstone and Georgia McCann. What is the general view? Is access to services uniformly poor or patchy and how important is it for services to be available where sites are going to be continued or established?

Lizzie Johnstone: Although I am still angry at having been forced into a house so that I could get access to a doctor and so on, I will say that there

are positives to being in a house. In my opinion, I have managed to give my children quite a good education because they have had a settled lifestyle and I have been able to assist with them going to school and so on. However, that is only because I have been able to go to different meetings, get involved with different things and find out what is available. I am not afraid of speaking up; sometimes, though, I might not shut up.

My opinion is that sites need to be near services so that Gypsy Travellers can get access to them. If Gypsy Travellers get refused access to a public service, whatever it is, and they feel that there was discrimination, they should have the background knowledge and the information so that they can take things forward and say, "Look, it's just because I am staying on the site. I should be entitled to the same treatment."

There should be more information for Gypsy Travellers, to make things easier. We should be asked to come to different meetings and we should be told what is available, so that we can get more involved, for sites or for housing, if we live in houses.

11:15

Iona Burke: We live on private land in Aberdeen, and because of our address we have been refused healthcare, dental care, schools and everything. There are two local doctors beside us, but we cannot get them because of our address. We have to go out to the next wee village, which is miles away, to get a doctor.

There are three schools round about us, but my younger sister has to go way past Clinterty to get to school, because there is a school out there that really understands Travellers. When we travel, the school does not mind. It gives my sister work to take with us when we go away in the caravan. They understand that she goes away and they do not treat her differently. It is a really good school, but there are three schools next to us and we have to go that far out in the morning so that she can get an education.

It is the same with dentists, doctors and everything else. Because of our address we get refused everything like that.

Georgia McCann: It comes back to discrimination. If the teachers themselves have no education about how to treat Gypsy Traveller children in their school, the pupils will be the same. There have been occasions when my child has been excluded from the middle-ground table in the classroom. The teacher excluded her, so the children excluded her in the playground, because they had been given permission by the teacher.

Anyone who works in a public body, be they a council official, police officer or teacher, and who will come into contact with Gypsy Travellers, should attend a seminar or awareness-raising day, so that they have some background knowledge of the people that they are meeting and their qualities. I have always enrolled my children in the school system as Scottish Gypsy Travellers, but teachers have bypassed that and taken my children out of the class to ask them all about their ethnic minority and traditions. My children are put to school to be educated by the teacher, not to educate the teacher there. If the teacher wants educated they should come to the seminars and ask the parents, face to face, not the children. Then the bullying will not go down the ladder, so to speak.

Edith Townsley: I want to comment on the health and education system where I am. My three daughters have been schooled in Lochgilphead primary school. None of them attended the high school. I would leave every summer and the school was okay—it gave me the work so that they could keep up. You can ask any of my daughters and they will say that although they were never bullied or hit, they could never say that they had a friend. They just got through school and that was it.

I drove my children to school every morning, so I did not need to ask for a school bus, but in recent times there have been quite a lot of children on the site. I think that there were 22 at one count; Michelle Foy can confirm that. The ladies on the site did not drive and could not get their children to school, so they asked if they could get a school bus to come on site.

I think that they had to fight for months for that. They had to put the children on the main bus, which takes all the high-school kids into Lochgilphead from Inverary and the outlying villages. We are talking about four-and-a-half and five-year-olds who are just starting school, waiting at the bottom of the road, where there is no bus stop and no pavement. They were on that bus for a while.

On the way home, on a few occasions the bus went past the bottom of the road, because as everyone knows, there is no sign to let anyone know that there is a site, although the locals know that it is there. The children were being dropped off at the gate of the recycling centre and told to run up the road. That was when the women on the site went to the education authorities to ask for help to get the wee school bus, but they had quite a fight to get it.

The Convener: It is quite a walk from the recycling centre back to the site.

Edith Townsley: Yes.

Alex Johnstone: Listening to what Iona Burke said, and knowing the area's geography, I suspect that she was talking about access and services at the same school and the same GP that we were hearing the good stories about on Monday. That indicates to me that there are still a lot of bad stories around.

An issue that came up at Monday's meeting has been reinforced today, and our guests might be able to confirm that. Regardless of how difficult things might be with primary education, there is a critical problem with inclusion in secondary education, and that situation is getting worse rather than better because of current demand. It is becoming more important.

Michelle Foy: I just want to follow up what Edith Townsley said. The problem that we had at Dunchologan was severe. We are talking about the dangers and risks to children and their safety. We had to take the children out of education. We had to stand back and say, "Right, the kids aren't going." We refused to put them into education if we were not provided with transport that would come and pick the kids up and guarantee that they would be brought back.

We had a meeting about the fact that there were no bus stops and taxis would not come in to Dunchologan because of the condition of the road. There were so many potholes, it was like dodgems. I questioned a member of ACHA about how we would get to hospital if we needed to go in the evening when there is no transport to the site, and I got told to dial 999. I said that if some of the kids were sick and we needed to get them to the hospital to get them checked, we could not lift the phone and dial 999 because it might not be a great emergency, but I was just told to dial 999. That is just a disgrace.

We are having meetings and talking, but from ACHA, it is all talk, talk, talk. It takes no action at all.

Georgia McCann: Alex Johnstone said that he was getting good reports earlier in the week, but I do not think that he would have been hearing them from the travelling community. It might have been from the service providers.

Alex Johnstone: No, they were coming from the travelling community.

Georgia McCann: It just goes to show that there are some good practices out there, although they might be few and far between.

Alex Johnstone: As I said earlier, on Monday we were talking largely to men and today we are talking to women, so I suspect that there might be a different attitude.

Susan Townsley: We were talking about access to schools. There is a small school about

200yd up from me. When we lived there, I got into that school. I was in that school when there was an unauthorised encampment at Double Dykes. I was in it for a couple of years and then they moved us out all of a sudden. Even though we are in that school's catchment area, none of our kids is allowed in it, which means that we have to take our kids to schools. There are no buses or taxis, so someone always has to have a car to take the younger ones to school. Even though we got into that school all those years ago, it stopped taking in Travellers about 45 years ago. There has never been a Traveller in it since.

Christine Ward: My daughter does not go to high school but we do a programme with the high school. We also had awful bother getting my oldest daughter the cancer vaccination. It would be good if the committee could do something about that. The health visitor who had attended my daughter since she was born could not give her the injection until after we had been through lots of meetings.

The Convener: Thank you. Alex, do you want to ask about anything else?

Alex Johnstone: We could talk about this at much greater length, but I have got a very clear picture of the view of access to services across Scotland.

The Convener: As there are no further questions, I thank all our witnesses for coming. It has been very important for us to speak to Gypsy Travellers during our inquiry, and a common thread has run throughout the inquiry. Your evidence will certainly help us when we are writing up our report.

That concludes today's meeting. Our next meeting, which will take place on Thursday 21 February, will include evidence from the Minister for Public Health on where Gypsy Travellers live.

Meeting closed at 11:25.

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