

GYPSY/TRAVELLER ACTION PLAN

Letter to the Gypsy/Traveller community from Scottish Government + COSLA

As we come to the close of this Parliament, the date when the [Gypsy/Traveller Action Plan 2019-2021](#) was due to end draws near. This Plan commits the Scottish Government and COSLA to working together to improve the lives of Gypsy/Travellers across Scotland.

We have made some good progress and want to offer heartfelt thanks to all the community members who worked with us to develop the Plan, and to take forward some of the actions; as your input has been absolutely crucial to helping us achieve some of the changes that are so long overdue.

In the time since it was launched (October 2019) the world has changed unrecognisably COVID19 has impacted all of us, and sadly people have lost loved ones; experienced poor health; and had to live with difficult restrictions and significant changes to the ways they live.

While we are still committed to delivering all the actions in the plan, we know that more time is needed because of delays caused by COVID19. The Scottish Government and COSLA have therefore agreed to extend the life of the Plan.

It will now run for an extra 18 months and end in October 2022. This gives us the opportunity to follow up on actions that cannot take place until restrictions lift and prevents us from losing the momentum we've gained during the pandemic.

The rest of his letter provides an overview, which we hope will give you an idea of where things have got to; and what work we intend to achieve for the remainder of the Plan.

Summary of Progress So Far

While the pandemic has prevented us from moving forwards in ways that we had planned – it has also allowed us to move forward more quickly in areas that we didn't expect.

Local Authorities had to switch their attention to managing the spread of the virus, and many public services had to change rapidly. The work in COSLA and Scottish

Government also had to focus on supporting people most impacted by the pandemic.

While it wasn't possible to meet in person with Gypsy/Travellers because of national lockdowns, we have been able to accelerate solutions to problems such as digital exclusion and the provision of online distance learning – which we know are both common issues within the community. We have also seen some positive changes in the way we work together across National and Local Government to support Gypsy/Travellers.

As a result of the work we have done around digital inclusion, we have seen good numbers of young Gypsy/Travellers engaging with education online. Well over 100 digital kits were distributed to families over the course of the pandemic by third sector partners, as part of the wider government spend of £1 million on improvements to Gypsy/Traveller education since January 2018.

Other areas of success include the Negotiated Stopping programme, which has begun to create more positive relationships between local authorities and families living a traditional way of life.

We have worked more closely together with our partners in the NHS and the third sector to ensure that COVID19 responses were designed to include Gypsy/Travellers. A great example of that was the speed with which the Gypsy/Traveller Facebook Information Page was set up. Starting life last March as a simple way to distribute safety information on coronavirus, it quickly went from strength to strength; including informative videos from real Gypsy/Travellers, links to helpful websites and infographics on how to stay safe. It has now evolved into a general information page, with wider ranging topics than first envisioned, and has become a central part of all of our comms work to the community.

Behind the scenes, we also continued to work on crucial policy changes that are needed to help deliver more and better accommodation that meets the needs of community members.

We know that the impact of the pandemic on mental health has been particularly difficult for people to manage, and that more work is needed to make support services accessible. As a first step towards this, Scottish Government funded third sector partners MECOPP to set up and run a Mental Health Community Support

Telephone Service. This has been staffed by health care professionals, and was designed to best fit the Gypsy/Traveller community's needs.

Regrettably, though, the shortage of sites and safe stopping locations has also continued to have a daily impact on people's lives; and we know that many are still living with racism and discrimination because of their identity. We are committed to giving a clear focus to tackling racism and discrimination throughout the extended period of the plan.

For More Information

The annex to this letter provides detailed information on the work we have taken forward, as well as work that has been delayed. You can also find updates on the 33 actions on our websites, with details on what we intend to focus on in the coming 18 months.

Thank you for your patience and support. Your ongoing involvement will be absolutely critical to our success, and we very much look forward to working with you as we continue the good work laid out in the Action Plan.

Kind regards,



Cllr Kelly Parry
COSLA



Christina McKelvie
Minister for Older People and Equalities



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Christina McKelvie
Minister for Older People and Equalities

Cllr Kelly Parry
COSLA

ANNEX 1

LETTER TO THE COMMUNITY – EXTENDED SECTIONS

COVID19 Response Work

Although the pandemic is still far from over, we wanted to share with you the work we have been doing since March 2020 to assist Gypsy and Traveller communities.

The Gypsy/Traveller COVID19 Impact Group was quickly set up by COSLA and Scottish Government in conjunction with Public Health Scotland; third sector partners and Police Scotland – with £155,000 of Scottish Government money put aside specifically to combat COVID-based problems in the community.

A large portion of this allowed us to hire shower and toilet blocks, as well as extra handwashing stations, for public sites and roadside encampments nationwide. Although originally organised for an immediate response in the first 3 months of the lockdown, beginning March 2020, contracts were extended to the end of August in line with need. When the programme finally came to a close with the end of funding, all but one site that had been using the extra facilities had now moved on. The single remaining site keen to continue their hire did so, with their local authority taking over responsibility for payments.

Later in 2020, due to Covid restrictions and the second lockdown, sanitation for roadside camps and support to follow public health guidelines became a priority once again. As part of the wider Winter Plan for Social Protection, the Scottish Government made funding available to Local Authorities between October 2020 and 31 March 2021. Local authorities have requested nearly £60,000 to cover costs of sanitation and accommodation so far.

Some excellent projects also sprang up as a result of Covid funding. Mental health and financial resilience telephone support lines were started; and individually tailored Health Boxes for those in self-isolation or Shielding were also distributed.

More recently, in response to anxieties surrounding coronavirus vaccination, we hosted a Zoom Q+A with a member of the vaccination policy team. This gave an opportunity to speak directly with a policy maker, with exchanges going live on the Gypsy/Traveller Information Facebook Page for those not wishing to participate directly.

We are also providing financial support with specific regard to vaccine up-take. This will include a Hardship Fund for those struggling to reach vaccination centres, videos of community members discussing their experience of the vaccination, and the distribution of leaflets with helpful information and points of contact to sites.

More & Better Accommodation

Despite setbacks as a result of lockdown, we have kept a strong focus on the accommodation actions throughout the pandemic.

Momentum has gathered in the last few months around the £2 million capital funding available in 2020-21 to make immediate improvements on public sector Gypsy/Traveller sites. A number of local authorities have worked with residents on the changes they want made. Community engagement to decide how to spend this money is a priority, but because of the pandemic some local authorities are still to complete this. COSLA has been planning with local authorities for conversations to take place safely as soon as they can.

A key commitment in the Action Plan was for Scottish Government and COSLA to review their housing and investment programmes, to ensure that the needs of Gypsy/Travellers were included going forward. Work has been undertaken to look at investment needs on sites in future years. **As a result of this, we are delighted to say that Housing to 2040 (Scotland's first ever long-term national housing strategy) includes a commitment for the Scottish Government to make up to £20 million available, over five years, for more and better Gypsy/Traveller accommodation – starting in 2021-22.** Building on the £2 million of short term funding in 2020-21, this represents a sustained investment to support local authorities to improve and widen access to Gypsy/Traveller accommodation.

Alongside this, we have been working with stakeholders with the aim of driving up the quality of accommodation on sites. We are currently developing a Design Guide for Gypsy/Traveller sites, which will set the standard for new building of accommodation. These will be in keeping with the key principles of Housing 2040; such as accessibility and energy efficiency. For the guide to work, we need to talk to site residents to gather their views. We are looking at the best ways to do this, and to test out the Guide, but as a starting point we are running an online survey to ask questions about what residents would like to see on a site. We want as many Gypsy/Travellers as possible to complete it: [Design Guide Survey](#). If anyone needs help to complete the survey, or would rather give answers over the phone to someone who can fill it in on your behalf, call Scottish Government on 0141 244 1162 or contact MECOPP.

Additionally, local authorities have been engaging with roadside encampments during the pandemic to ensure as much adequate support and facilities have been in place to keep people safe as possible. The work to test out Negotiated Stopping as a human rights based approach launched in September 2020, and will continue during 2021. Three local authorities are formally testing out the approach, and a further four are supporting learning from their local areas. A well-attended local authority group has been established, and has support from a multi-disciplinary group. Learning sessions will be delivered to build understanding, inclusion and equalities side camps – as well as looking at practical ways in which relationships with people camping roadside can be developed and better services delivered.

Housing 2040 is Scotland's first ever long-term national housing strategy, with a vision for what we want housing to look like and provide the people of Scotland with. We have considered the needs of Gypsy/Travellers in the document, and it includes a commitment to continue to work with Gypsy/Traveller communities to make sure their needs are embedded in housing and planning policy going forward. The extension to the Action Plan allows us to do this, and we will continue to work with the stakeholders and community members that have helped us so far.

Improving Access to Public Services

A lot of work was undertaken prior to the pandemic to support access to essential services, such as education; health or the wide range of services local authorities and other public bodies had put in place.

In terms of health, a Gypsy/Traveller Forum was created to meet and discuss community health issues on a regular basis. Information cards were distributed explaining everyone's right to a GP, and how to register with one. The Gypsy/Traveller

Short Life Working Group was established to identify and tackle the stigma and discrimination many feel when access NHS services generally – with e-learning modules launched for public sector employees, to raise their awareness and understanding of community-specific issues.

We also funded three new health projects for Gypsy/Travellers. The first tested ways of making maternity, child health and income maximisation services more accessible to Gypsy/Travellers living in Fife; and the second developed an eLearning Module on Health Literacy for Community Pharmacists. The third project is ongoing, and aimed at empowering the community to address their health needs by employing, training and supporting Gypsy/Travellers to be trusted intermediaries and community supporters. Learning from all of these projects will contribute to improved outcomes for the community.

In education, the Strategic Group for Gypsy/Traveller Education was established last autumn – with members from COSLA, Scottish Government, STEP, ADES and Education Scotland, as well as representatives from the community. More specifically, an internship position has been created to work with young Gypsy/Traveller men; to help them identify different pathways to employment. At the same time, pilot programmes are also underway to increase learning opportunities for teenage females in the community who have left school – with a general focus on post-primary qualifications.

A professional learning resource and support network for teaching staff was also launched online last March, creating a positive space to promote good practise in supporting Gypsy/Traveller education. Education Scotland also report that cultural awareness and representation of culture in the curriculum are increasing; as is engagement with early years education (as more home learning is supported).

Unfortunately, the pandemic has forced COSLA to hold back on intended work raising awareness and training others on Gypsy/Traveller culture. However, over the next 18 months there will be a big focus on supporting local authorities to work alongside community members to strengthen the design of public services – as well as to promote access to them. This will involve a particular focus on education and mental health. Engagement groups and workshops are currently being considered, and community input will be invaluable to them.

Furthermore, there are plans to share young Gypsy and Traveller cultural perspectives with a wider audience – with books and animations being devised, with the intent of educating the settled community at the same time as encouraging young Gypsy/Travellers to engage with educational resources that they see their own life experiences represented in.

Better Incomes, In & Out of Work

This work was intended to focus on ways to improve services to Gypsy and Traveller families; increase knowledge and uptake of benefits and address child poverty in a broader sense. Unfortunately this area was not progressed far due to COVID19.

Particular programmes that will benefit from the 18 month extension include the paid work experience project at Social Security Scotland; the Parental Employability Support Fund (which will offer key worker support to Gypsy/Traveller parents); as well as the creation of a pilot project on community larders from the Fair Food Fund.

However the pandemic has helped focus attention on the big problem with digital access, and we have provided assistance to help people access any benefits and support they might be entitled to.

We know that ensuring your family has access to decent work, fair pay and employment opportunities has been a long standing concern for Gypsy/Travellers – and that managing rising living costs can be a challenge, which has only gotten worse since the pandemic order to stay at home. Without reliable access to both devices and the internet, we know some families have faced significant disadvantage in getting the information and support that is needed.

To combat this inequality we funded several new projects through third sector partners, that went some way to evening this out. This led to the distribution of 112 tablet computers and MiFi routers; as well as digital teaching staff and online data packages – which could be used for online learning; job hunting or social purposes; and importantly has enabled more representation from within your community within formal settings, to share experience and inform practise. Between MECOPP, STEP & Article12 we were able to reach just over 120 families with this additional support, who otherwise could have been digitally cut off entirely.

As a direct result of these successes, further digital programmes are now being funded – which aim to build on progress already achieved.

Tackling Racism & Discrimination

The work to tackle racism and discrimination remains crucial, and will continue to be a central focus for us going forward. Over the life of the Plan, we had committed to a number of events intended to bring people together to discuss these issues – but sadly many of these have not been possible. These will remain a focus for the coming 18

months, where we intend to work with Gypsy/Travellers (as well as with allies across our communities) to ensure that there is a zero tolerance approach to this in Scotland.

In support of this work a network of local government politicians came together virtually in November 2020, with a focus on championing the rights of Gypsy/Travellers and tackling racism and discrimination towards their community. The network will grow further over 2021, to include councillors from across Scotland, who will focus on learning more about how they can support Gypsy/Travellers in their own local areas. We are keen to work with community members to help this grow, and to bring about positive changes all over Scotland.

Improving Gypsy/Traveller Representation

Again, work suffered in this area due to pandemic restrictions and the impossibility of face-to-face meetings.

However, there has been a long-standing group meeting at the Scottish Parliament to discuss issues affecting the community; the Women's Voices programme has been developed; and a number of working groups have been established – which provide important opportunities for Gypsies and Travellers to speak out on issues that are important to them– and help to shape our work.

We plan to build on this, and to work with partners such as charities MECOPP and Article12 to ensure that Gypsy/Travellers are both represented and heard.

Next Steps

In October 2019, over 100 community members; elected members and third sector partners joined together to launch the Action Plan.

As we look back over the last two years, it is clear we still have a lot of work to do to achieve our goals. The next 18 months will hopefully bring opportunities for us to meet with more community members; deliver the activities we planned and make our ambitions a reality together.