

Improving Gypsy/Travellers' Lives

Policy Development

This paper seeks views from the Board on ways in which COSLA, and local government more broadly, can drive local leadership to improve outcomes for, and tackle racism and discrimination experienced by, Gypsy/Travellers.

Summary and Recommendations

The report updates the Board on recent developments in relation to COSLA's commitments to improve the lives of Gypsy/Travellers. It highlights recent parliamentary debates which have been critical of the role played by local authorities, and public authorities more generally, as well as the recent Scottish Government report which found that a number of local authorities will not meet statutory Minimum Site Standards by the June 2018 deadline. More positively, it also discusses successful engagement and activities that have taken place at both a political and officer level, and the joint commitment that is now in place between COSLA and Scottish Government to work in partnership to deliver a human rights-based approach to improvement.

The paper also asks members to discuss ways in which COSLA, along with colleagues across Local Government, can help to provide leadership in delivering on our commitments to improve the lives of Gypsy/Travellers at local level. Initial suggestions are provided to stimulate discussion in this regard.

The Board is invited to:

- i. Note updates on recent developments and their implications for COSLA's work on Gypsy/Traveller equalities;
- ii. Indicate whether any local authorities are considering piloting the 'Negotiated Stopping' accommodation model;
- iii. Endorse the work being undertaken at a political and officer level and reiterate our commitment to tackle racism and discrimination of any kind; and
- iv. Discuss and advise on ways in which COSLA and the Community Wellbeing Board – along with colleagues across Local Government – can help to provide leadership in delivering on these aims.

References

CWB Board – 18-03-09 – Improving Outcomes for Gypsy/Travellers

Eloise Nutbrown
Policy Manager
0131 474 9200

eloise@cosla.gov.uk

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Policy Development

1. This paper seeks views from the Board on ways in which COSLA, and local government more broadly, can drive local leadership to improve outcomes for, and tackle racism and discrimination experienced by, Gypsy/Travellers.

Current COSLA Position

2. In March, the Board heard from Davie Donaldson, a Gypsy/Traveller activist who shared with members his experiences as a Gypsy/Traveller and key priorities for improvement in terms of how local government respects the rights and meets the needs of our diverse Gypsy/Traveller communities. Members subsequently approved a paper directing COSLA staff to work constructively at officer level to support the Scottish Government's Ministerial Working Group on Gypsy/Travellers and to co-ordinate policy developments that can help to improve education, health, housing/accommodation and employment outcomes for the community.
3. The Board also discussed the quality and extent of existing local authority accommodation and housing provision for Gypsy/Travellers, noting that that deadline for meeting statutory minimum standards for local authority sites is June 2018. Early indications were that some authorities would not be able to meet the legal requirements at the required date.
4. Members asked COSLA officers to ensure that policy development on accommodation and housing for Gypsy/Travellers included consideration of increasing the number of transit/'stop-over' sites in addition to permanent accommodation options, recognising Gypsy/Travellers right to a traditional lifestyle and to travel as part of their cultural identity. Discussion also highlighted a number of the current challenges that local authorities face with respect to funding upgrades to existing provision and acquiring appropriate land for the development of new sites.

Summary of Recent Developments

5. Since the Board last met, there have been a number of developments that have implications for COSLA's commitments in this area. In particular, debates within the Scottish Parliament have highlighted significant concerns at a national level that racism and discrimination towards Gypsy/Traveller communities is not being adequately addressed and is having an impact on Gypsy/Travellers lives and wellbeing, as well as their access to public services.
6. In addition, in May, Scottish Government published a review of local authority progress towards meeting Minimum Site Standards. This confirmed that not all local authorities will meet the standards and additionally found that a number of sites had serious concerns regarding fire safety and security, including lacking fire alarms and carbon monoxide detectors as well as having issues with the material fabric of the sites.
7. COSLA has increased our officer and political engagement with the Scottish Government in relation to these issues. In particular, Cllr Whitham had a positive meeting with the Cabinet Secretary and agreed to work in partnership with the

Ministerial Working Group to ensure that we have a human rights-based approach to addressing the inequalities that Gypsy/Traveller communities in Scotland face.

Parliamentary Activity

8. The Scottish Parliament has held two debates in the Chamber celebrating Gypsy/Traveller Communities and focusing on improving Gypsy/Travellers lives. Both debates have emphasised a lack of national progress in improving outcomes for Gypsy/Travellers. The debates included criticism of local authorities' actions with respect to supporting Gypsy/Travellers. More broadly, members were very critical of public authorities for not addressing discriminatory language or practices towards Gypsy/Travellers, including within frontline public services.
9. COSLA provided briefing information to MSPs on commitments made by the Board, and on our priorities going forward. We also highlighted examples of good practice at local authority level. Positively, despite the criticism, COSLA's ongoing engagement with the Scottish Government's Ministerial Working Group was acknowledged and praised by the Cabinet Secretary. The Scottish Government's motion in particular commended "COSLA's commitment to transforming the lives of Gypsy/Travellers across the country and looks forward to working together within a human rights framework to accelerate improvements for this community".
10. In addition, Mary Fee MSP, who is a member of the Equalities and Human Rights Committee, announced the establishment of a new Cross Party Group to ensure that there is a political forum for ongoing activity at national level. COSLA officers will attend this to represent local government. The first meeting took place on 13 June and we have been invited to discuss how elected members would like to engage with this forum.

Political Engagement Activity

11. COSLA's Community Wellbeing Spokesperson has met with the Cabinet Secretary Angela Constance to discuss the work of the Ministerial Working Group and highlighted actions COSLA was taking at an officer level to support a local government response. Cllr Whitham also highlighted the significant complexities and challenges facing local government in seeking to fund and provide for Gypsy/Traveller sites.
12. The Cabinet Secretary confirmed that she had written to all 32 local authorities asking that those with local authority provision which were not going to meet the statutory Minimum Site Standards to write to her when these have been achieved. The meeting concluded with a positive agreement to work in partnership with COSLA on these issues and to take a 'human rights-based approach' to drive faster improvements for Gypsy/Traveller communities. This agreement was reaffirmed at the subsequent bi-monthly meeting between COSLA's President and Angela Constance.
13. In April, Cllr Whitham also met with the newly formed Gypsy/Traveller Youth Assembly at the Scottish Parliament to hear directly from young people about their experiences and their priorities for change. The young people shared examples of discrimination, harassment and racism – both within their local community and also when accessing public services. They talked about the lack of appropriate sites and challenges in securing support for planning applications at a local level.

Officer Activity

14. COSLA officers have been working across portfolios to influence and engage with policy developments on housing, health, education and employment. Meetings have included detailed discussions about how to ensure adequate provision of culturally appropriate accommodation and housing for Gypsy/Traveller communities, including permanent and transit sites; work to support communication with Directors of Housing and Chief Executives on responses to the review of minimum standards; and initial engagement with a number of proposed actions to strengthen planning frameworks.
15. Officers have also worked with Scottish Councils Equality Network (SCEN) to begin to identify and evaluate local authority good practice and to support local authorities to learn more about, and in some cases pilot, the negotiated stopping model that David Donaldson highlighted to the Board in May. On 15 June, COSLA officers accompanied Scottish Government officials and representatives from the Youth Assembly to visit the LeedsGATE organisation to learn more about how this approach works in practice.
16. Officers are further supporting Cllr Whitham and officers from East Ayrshire Council to visit Leeds in late August/early September in order to meet with members of the local council and LeedsGATE to better understand the model and to support plans to pilot this in Scotland. We are keen to extend the invitation to elected members and officers from other authorities who would like to attend.

Proposed COSLA position

17. Local Government take its obligations in relation to Equalities and Human Rights very seriously. In particular, we are committed to ensuring that our public services have a zero-tolerance approach to racism and discrimination of any kind. We also have a key role to play, along with our Community Planning Partners, in ensuring that Gypsy/Travellers can access high quality services and are able to engage effectively and be represented within local democratic processes.
18. Members are invited to discuss ways in which COSLA and the Community Wellbeing Board, together with colleagues across Local Government, can help to provide leadership in delivering on these aims. Below are a number of initial suggestions for discussion. COSLA Officers would be pleased to develop more detailed proposals for these or any other specific actions that the Board would wish to take.

i. A Local Leaders Model

Working with colleagues across local government, COSLA officers could support the development of a cross-party network of local elected members who can be 'champions' for our work to improve the lives of Gypsy/Travellers. This could primarily focus on delivering better outcomes and experiences for the community, within local areas, and include speaking up on behalf of the community to challenge discrimination and the perpetuation of damaging stereotypes. Initial stages of this work could seek to provide opportunities for elected members to meet with the Gypsy/Traveller Youth Assembly and other key advocates to learn more about the issues the community face and to discuss opportunities for ongoing learning and advocacy. It could also include a series of visits to see initiatives that are working effectively to support Gypsy/Travellers, including building stronger links within and between local authority areas at a political level;

meeting and working with Gypsy/Travellers in elected members' own local authority areas; and attending a joint meeting with the Scottish Parliament's Cross Party Group on Gypsy/Travellers to ensure that local political leadership is being represented.

ii. **A cross-sector Campaign**

COSLA could seek to engage with other partners in the public sector (including Police, health services and national government) to agree the development of a joint education/equality campaign. This could focus on supporting the public sector, in particular frontline staff working within in our local communities, to better understand Gypsy/Traveller culture, recognise the communities' rights and entitlements to services, including as a protected group under equalities legislation, and take a zero-tolerance approach to racism and discrimination. This would be a significant piece of partnership work, ensuring that local government is leading positive action to address inequalities and is actively responding to concerns about the impact of racial inequalities on Gypsy/Travellers' access to public services.

Summary and Recommendations

19. Over the last few months there have been a number of developments that have implications for COSLA's commitments in this area. These include a series of high level debates that have been critical of progress made to improve Gypsy/Travellers lives (including access to public services) and to address racism and discrimination towards Gypsy/Traveller communities, as well as the publication of a Scottish Government report which found that a number of local authorities will not meet statutory Minimum Site Standards by the June 2018 deadline. COSLA's Community Wellbeing Spokesperson has since held a successful meeting with the Cabinet Secretary for Equality and Social Security, to discuss some of these issues and has agreed to work in partnership to deliver a human rights-based approach to improvement.
20. We specifically ask members to discuss ways in which COSLA, along with colleagues across Local Government, can help to provide leadership in delivering on our commitments to improve the lives of Gypsy/Travellers at local level. The paper provides initial suggestions for the development of a cross-party network of local elected members who can be 'champions' for our work to improve the lives of Gypsy/Travellers as well as the development of a cross-sector equality campaign. COSLA Officers would be pleased to develop more detailed proposals for these or any other specific actions that Board would wish to take.
21. The Board is invited to:
 - i. Note updates on recent developments and their implications for COSLA's work on Gypsy/Traveller equalities;
 - ii. Indicate whether any local authorities are considering piloting the 'Negotiated Stopping' accommodation model;
 - iii. Endorse the work being undertaken at a political and officer level and reiterate our commitment to tackle racism and discrimination of any kind; and

- iv. Discuss and advise on ways in which COSLA and the Community Wellbeing Board – along with colleagues across Local Government – can help to provide leadership in delivering on these aims.

June 2018