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Equality when you really need it

Grampian Gypsy/Traveller
Cross-Community
Dialogue Day

***Building Consensus:
A Constructive Way Forward***

DRAFT

Contents

Summary	Page 4
Introduction	Page 5
Format and Methodology	Page 8
Programme and Discussion	Page 11
Pledges	Page 21
Feedback and Evaluation	Page 24
Moving Forward	Page 27
References	Page 32

Summary

- At the meeting of Grampian Joint Police Board in September 2010, there was unanimous support for a proposed summit event to “bring together Local Authorities, Police and other Local and National Agencies to explore the pertinent issues in Grampian and identify appropriate solutions” with regard to improving relations between Gypsy/Travellers and the settled community. Specifically, the Board also agreed that the Area Procurator Fiscal, appropriate members of the Scottish Government, members of the Gypsy/Traveller community, and members of the settled community should be involved. In January 2011 GREC were asked to organise and facilitate the proposed summit event.
- A steering group was set up to plan the organisation and format of the event. The group brought together council officers from Grampian’s three local authorities, members of Grampian Police, members of GREC, the clerk to the Grampian Joint Police Board, and George Dunwoody - an expert in community engagement who was volunteering his services to GREC.
- From the start of the planning process there was wide agreement that the overarching focus of the event should be to improve relations within the Grampian area. As it became clear that what was being planned was the start of a new approach focussing on participation and dialogue, the following was agreed upon as the aim of the event: *To facilitate a process allowing multiple stakeholders to contribute to a dialogue that enhances cross-community relations.*
- The day was a success, with just under 70 delegates attending, including around 20 Gypsy/Travellers. Participants were asked to put forward topics for discussion and a diverse range of issues were covered. The day ended with participants making personal or professional pledges to improve relations within Grampian.
- The event received positive news coverage across Scotland.

The Press and Journal

Summit held with travellers is hailed a breakthrough

PROGRESS IN BID TO COOL TENSIONS

BY CALUM ROSS

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Introduction

Gypsy/Traveller is an over-arching term which includes those who identify themselves as Travellers, Gypsies or Roma, and may be of Scottish, English, Irish, Welsh, or European origin (EHRC Scotland 2010: 8). The term refers to those whom travelling is an important part of their shared group culture and identity (Ibid: 8).

In 2001 the Equal Opportunities Committee of the then Scottish Executive published its first report, an *Inquiry into Gypsy Travellers and Public Sector Policies*. The report was based on wide-ranging research and hearings undertaken over the previous year. The Committee's report made a number of significant recommendations, for example that Gypsy/Travellers should be recognised as a distinct ethnic minority group until they are recognised as a distinct racial group in case law (Equal Opportunities Committee 2001: 7). Many of its 37 recommendations focussed on a number of changes and initiatives to be put in place in order to improve education and health provision, whilst others covered issues of equalities and anti-discrimination (Ibid: 7-30). In a follow-up report in 2005 the Committee raised concerns of the lack of progress and the slow pace at which developments had been made (Equal Opportunities Committee 2005).

In May 2009 social research company Craigforth published the report, *An Accommodation Needs Assessment of Gypsies/Travellers in Grampian*. Craigforth were commissioned by the three Grampian local authorities to undertake the research, which involved 73 Gypsy/Travellers at that time located in the area (Craigforth 2009: 3). In the report it was estimated that there was an estimated population of 500-650 Gypsy/Travellers living in Grampian; this is a conservative estimate during the summer months, though numbers were lower in the winter months (Ibid: 3). The report spawned an inter-agency action plan covering the whole of the Grampian area, based on the following outcomes of the research project:

- Outcome 1: Better planning by local authorities, RSLs [Registered Social Landlords] and partner organisations to anticipate, and plan to meet, the future needs and aspirations of Gypsies/Travellers in Grampian.
- Outcome 2: Gypsies/Travellers normally resident in Grampian and Gypsies/Travellers visiting the area have accommodation that meets their needs, culture and lifestyle.
- Outcome 3: Individual support and community development needs are identified and met.
- Outcome 4: Better and more constructive relationships are developed between Gypsies/Travellers and settled communities.

(Craigforth 2009: 9)

The Craigforth report has played an important role in encouraging and focussing inter-agency work in Grampian and has also shaped the relevant work of each individual Local Authority.

As a “Housing Needs Assessment”, one of the issues that the Craigforth Report focussed on was the lack of site provision. There is currently one official site in Aberdeen City, Clinterty, which is owned and managed by the Council. There is one seasonal site in Aberdeenshire, Greenbanks (Banff). There have been no official sites in Moray since the closing of the Channonry site in 2004. In addition there are private Gypsy/Traveller sites in both Moray and Aberdeen. All three Local Authorities have made efforts in the past to develop short-stay Gypsy/Traveller sites¹, though efforts have so far been unsuccessful. The lack of site provision in the North-East and elsewhere in Scotland has often been cited as the cause of increased tensions between Gypsy/Travellers and the settled community.

There are a number of factors that may influence Gypsy/Travellers in their pattern of movements, such as proximity of family and employment factors (Craigforth 2009b: 47). As an economically affluent area in a time of economic hardship in many other areas, the North-East has seen an increase in the numbers of Gypsy/Travellers coming to the area, drawn by employment factors (amongst others). This has further emphasised the lack of site provision in the North-East and led to increased numbers of Unauthorised Encampments. Although there had been previous problems with tensions between Gypsy/Travellers and the settled community, the summer of 2010 saw increased tensions reach dangerous levels in some circumstances. Stand-offs took place between local youths and Gypsy/Travellers on Unauthorised Encampments. The location of some Unauthorised Encampments appeared to be the source of discontent within sections of the settled community and the media. One notable case was that of an Unauthorised Encampment on private land in Aberdeenshire which drew much media attention and put a spotlight on issues such as the role of local authorities and the police in such situations, especially in situations where refuse and waste are left on the property.

As a result of the Unauthorised Encampment mentioned above a petition was presented to the Scottish Government's Public Petitions Committee. The petition, submitted on October 6th 2010, called on “the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to review all guidelines relating to trespass and encampments for Gypsies and Travellers to ensure their intent is clear and that they are being

1 This report takes the terminology recommended by the 2004 Scottish Executive guidelines on the management of unauthorised encampments: “Please note that for the purposes of this paper, the term ‘short-stay’ supersedes terms such as ‘transit site’, which has negative connotations for the Gypsy/Traveller community” (Scottish Executive 2004: 8).

applied” (Public Petitions Committee 2010). The Committee asked respective agencies for their input on matters relating to the management of unauthorised encampments, in the hope that some of the issues raised in the petition could be resolved.

In November 2010 the Aberdeen & Aberdeenshire Gypsy/Traveller Issues Working Group was set up by the Scottish Government Minister for Housing and Communities, Alex Neil. The group was made up of relevant parties in the area (including Gypsy/Traveller representation in the form of young person's group Article 12) and the following remit was agreed upon: “Our objective is to improve community relations by ensuring that issues relating to unauthorised Gypsy/Traveller encampments in Aberdeen and Aberdeenshire experienced during 2010 are resolved and/or mitigated to the extent that incidents are significantly reduced” (Scottish Government 2011: 1). The group thus had an over-arching purpose of improving relations in “a manner underpinned by improved communication, respect and understanding” (Ibid: 1). An action plan was developed which formed a substantial part of an Interim Strategy for the area, published in March 2011.

In light of the above developments, at the meeting of Grampian Joint Police Board on September 10th 2010, there was unanimous support for the call for a “summit” to “bring together Local Authorities, Police and other Local and National Agencies to explore the pertinent issues in Grampian and identify appropriate solutions” (Grampian Joint Police Board 2010: 3). Specifically, the Board also agreed that appropriate members of the Scottish Government, members of the Gypsy/Traveller community, and members of the settled community should be invited to the event (Ibid: 4). In January 2011 Grampian Regional Equality Council (then Grampian Racial Equality Council) were asked to organise and facilitate the proposed event.

Format/Methodology

Steering Group

A steering group was set up to plan the organisation and format of the event. The group brought together council officers from Grampian's three Local Authorities, members of Grampian Police, members of GREC, and a clerk from Grampian Joint Police Board. Efforts were also made to include Gypsy/Traveller representation on the steering group. GREC engaged a volunteer, Abeline, from the Gypsy/Traveller community, who helped recruit Gypsy/Traveller attendance. Abeline was also able to influence the structure of the day, making it a more appealing event to the Gypsy/Traveller community.

Format of the Day

The initial format decided upon by the group was one that reflected the wording used by Grampian Joint Police Board, i.e. that the event was to be a summit. The purpose of the day would therefore focus on reaching an endpoint, with a fairly rigid format covering only a few key issues or questions. As time went on there was a growing acceptance that what we were really embarking on was a starting point to further cooperation and dialogue, rather than fulfilling any ultimate goals at this stage.

A key addition to the steering group was George Dunwoody, an expert in community engagement and consultation, who volunteered his services to GREC. George helped focus the group on defining its objective, and secondly in encouraging the group to choose a format that would allow such an objective to be realised.

Aim, Objectives and Desired Outcomes

From the outset of planning the event there was agreement that the overarching aim should be one of improving relations within the Grampian area. This was re-enforced by the remit of the Housing Minister's Working Group, and the discussions of the Grampian Joint Police Board. As it became clear that what was being planned was the beginnings of a new approach, encouraging progress with a basis in participation and dialogue, the following was agreed upon as the overarching aim of the event:

To facilitate a process allowing multiple stakeholders to contribute to a dialogue that enhances cross-community relations.

Following discussion and debate within the steering group and some input from Grampian Joint Police Board, the following objectives for the day were identified:

To encourage better community relations.

To improve awareness of the needs of the respective communities.

To discuss the obstacles to alternative provision for Gypsies/Travellers as recommended in the Craigforth Accommodation Needs Assessment.

To increase understanding of the roles and responsibilities of the respective agencies.

To increase understanding of the Aberdeen City and Aberdeenshire Interim Strategy and what it may mean for the area.

The following desired outcomes were also agreed upon:

The beginnings of a dialogue process involving multiple stakeholders to enhance cross-community relations.

Participants identify and commit to one or more personal/professional actions that will improve community relations.

The first desired outcome reflected the overarching aim of the day, to initiate a dialogue process aimed at improving relations, as well as emphasising that the event was the beginning of a longer, challenging process. The second desired outcome came about as an example of a similar type of event that a steering group member had previously attended. As it was decided that there was no need for another action plan, this second outcome, with its focus on personal responsibility and initiative, was deemed a suitable alternative.

A title of the day, reflecting the aim and objectives, was then agreed upon:

“Grampian Gypsy/Traveller Cross-Community Dialogue Day. *Building Consensus: A Constructive Way Forward.*”

Invite List

In-keeping with the concept of building a dialogue involving all respective parties it was decided that all relevant stakeholders should be invited. Gypsy/Travellers, MSPs (including the Housing Minister), councillors, council officers, Grampian Police, representatives from community councils, the fiscal's office, NHS Grampian, relevant organisations/groups such as the Equality and Human Rights Commission, the Scottish Traveller Education Programme and Article 12 were all invited to participate in the event. It was decided that due to limited spaces being available that members of community councils should be invited to represent the settled community. Community Council representatives were invited based on the past

occurrence of Unauthorised Encampments in the area. Emphasis was placed on attracting Gypsy/Traveller attendance at the event as meetings and events regarding this community and related issues have often lacked legitimacy and effectiveness due to a lack of participation. This was particularly important in this circumstance due to the event being designed as a “dialogue day”. Unfortunately no MSPs were able to attend, due to the event falling within the purdah period.

There were subject areas that were predicted as topics participants would want to discuss, and experts in these fields were invited to attend to aid the group discussion. Experts were asked to “be on tap, not on top”, i.e. to provide their expertise when answers could not be reached through the general discussion of the group. Experts were paired with a facilitator whose role was to encourage all participants to contribute and to ensure that there was an appropriate focus to the discussion. Facilitators were also asked to make sure participants were respectful and polite to one another, and that a constructive attitude was encouraged throughout.

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Programme and Discussion

The Dialogue Day was opened with a welcome from the Director of GREC, Jeannie Felsing. Jeannie emphasised that the day was future-focused and that participants should concentrate on matters that improve understanding and communication. Participants were reminded that the day was informal and that only first names should be used, and no job designations.

Jeannie then introduced Dave Simmers, someone with long experience of direct work with Gypsy/Travellers. In 1997 Dave helped set up GTEIP- the Gypsy Traveller Education and Information Project which he coordinated for 7 years. Dave offered some insights that he had gained from his previous experiences. He made it clear that the Gypsy/Traveller community was a heterogeneous group and not the homogenous group of wrong-doers that is portrayed by the local media. Dave made the point that the closing off of traditional sites and moving people from encampments is just moving the problem elsewhere. Gypsy/Travellers just want a safe and secure home like everyone else, and therefore new site provision is needed. Dave emphasised the benefits that would arise from such new provision in terms of the greater access to services like education and health. Dave concluded by saying that it doesn't really matter what people think of Gypsy/Travellers, they will still be here, and so we must find a way that we can live side by side.

George Dunwoody then introduced the first session of the day, asking participants to introduce themselves to their group and state their areas of interest that they would like to raise as topics for discussion groups in the following sessions. Facilitators then fed back each groups' areas of interest to the wider room and discussion group topics were assigned to each table on the basis of this feedback. Although many of the areas raised by participants had been foreseen by the steering group and "experts" had been asked to join groups covering these topics, there were topics raised that were unforeseen, such as cultural awareness, employment issues, and site facilities. With each table assigned a different subject area, participants were then able to choose the discussion group they wished to join and were encouraged to move between different groups during this session. This Open Space-type format allowed participants the opportunity to cover all their areas of interest and also allowed for participants to leave a group if they were becoming frustrated with the discussion.

Feedback to all participants was given by facilitators:

Education

Issues raised during the discussion:

- Bullying at school.
- Parents are often lacking information and knowledge of schooling and the education system in general.
- Gypsy/Traveller children who attend primary school don't tend to continue into secondary education. Often Gypsy/Travellers feel neglected and that the school is not interested in what they have to say.

Suggestions made by the group for resolving issues and moving forward:

- Raise awareness of bullying within schools. A holistic approach was recommended which provides support for both victims and perpetrators of bullying in order to break ongoing cycles of harassment and abuse.
- Better communication between schools & Gypsy/Traveller families to improve parents' knowledge, with the hope of avoiding misunderstandings, therefore building up trust. Better use could be made of the school and local authority websites to enable wider access to information.
- Teachers working more closely with primary 7 pupils to promote the benefits of continuing with their education. School could be more flexible, taking into account that different communities have different beliefs and approaches.
- Local authorities should make sure that relevant information is easily available and is kept up-to-date, e.g. home tutoring information, curricular guides etc. Schools and Local Authorities should also be aware, and make use, of national guidance from the Scottish Government and the Scottish Travellers Education Programme (STEP).
- STEP, with funding from the Scottish Government, are piloting a new scheme – eLearning and Traveller Education Scotland (eLATES) - making use of ICT by issuing Gypsy/Traveller secondary school children with laptops to allow further access to education beyond primary school. Only 4 local authorities in Scotland have taken up this scheme – involvement from a greater number of authorities could be a move forward.
- If Gypsy/Traveller children are unable or unwilling to attend school then the possibility of specialist teachers visiting sites should be considered.

Equalities

Issues raised during the discussion:

- Lack of data regarding discrimination suffered by Gypsy/Travellers, which in turn leads to a lack of support and resources. Tied into this is that Gypsy/Travellers are unlikely to report instances of discrimination and harassment.
- Perceived lack of support when discrimination and harassment are reported.
- Although policies are in place, it seems they are not fully implemented.
- Discrepancies in the cost of renting council properties and the cost of renting a pitch on Gypsy/Traveller sites.
- Specific instances of discrimination such as bin men refusing to pick up rubbish because of alleged fear of Gypsy/Travellers.

Suggestions made by the group for resolving issues and moving forward:

- Doing what needs to be done to move beyond fear on both sides.
- Encouraging a more balanced coverage of Gypsy/Travellers in the media.
- A need to foster the political will to provide Gypsy/Traveller sites and therefore off-set the tensions that arise from some unauthorised encampments.
- Equalities training should be provided to relevant stakeholders, whether this be mandatory or voluntary.

Unauthorised sites

Issues raised during the discussion:

- The lack of official sites and appropriate stopping places.
- The problem of fly-tipping and the difficulty of identifying perpetrators. Specifically, the leaving behind of work-related materials and waste. There is a perception that the number of Gypsy/Travellers coming to the area from outside of Scotland has increased in number and that such groups may tend to be worse in terms of fly-tipping. There was recognition that this was a generalisation.

- Some Gypsy/Travellers stay too long on temporary sites. An example was given of one family/group staying on a site for 10 months.
- Perception that police don't always act when problems are brought to their attention. However, this was refuted by at least one member of the group.

Suggestions made by the group for resolving issues and moving forward:

- More well-run sites. This would take some pressure away from unauthorised sites. There should be more planning groups working on setting up new sites and it should be easier to access local authority and Scottish Government grants for setting up sites.
- Basic sites, with limited facilities provided in fields could be adequate for a temporary site. Some Gypsy/Travellers would be quite happy to pay fees for such sites.
- There is a need for an increased political will to give planning permission to Gypsy/Travellers for private sites.
- Older/traditional sites which have been blocked off over the years for various reasons should be re-opened. If such land is now in private ownership this would obviously be problematic.
- The task of local authorities could be helped by placing a statutory duty upon the crown commission and forestry commission to provide land for sites. .
- In terms of fly-tipping and removal of waste there is a need for dedicated staff within local authorities to deal with such issues.
- The need for building up a rapport between designated officials roles and Gypsy/Traveller groups, though this is a long-term project.
- There should be firmer ground rules for the use of sites, and these need to be enforced.
- In general the dialogue between Gypsy/Traveller communities and settled communities could improve.

Sites and facilities

Issues raised during the discussion:

- There is very little authorised provision in terms of sites, with Clinterty being the only one in Aberdeen.
- A lack of understanding of Gypsy/Traveller culture and related things such as group sizes and movements. There needs to be recognition that Gypsy/Travellers tend to work and move around in family groups, and therefore site provision needs to be large enough to accommodate this, but small enough to be manageable.
- Gypsy/Travellers in the group suggested Clinterty is small enough for Gypsy/Travellers to develop a relationship with the site manager.
- The community centre at Clinterty's site has been closed for some time – having a negative impact on quality of life.
- Some in the Gypsy/Traveller community often feel that there is no point in applying for planning permission as they have a very low expectation of getting it.
- Lack of Gypsy/Traveller participation and representation. Gypsy/Travellers are spoken about in their absence and no-one represents their views.

Suggestions made by the group for resolving issues and moving forward:

- There should be more authorised sites. This would reduce unauthorised encampments, which in turn would have a knock on effect in terms of reducing costs and tensions created by the mess left behind by some Gypsy/Travellers.
- New sites should be of a manageable size, taking into account Gypsy/Traveller culture and corresponding needs.
- Good working relationships between site managers and Gypsy/Travellers on new sites should be fostered.
- There should be an improved process of applying for planning permission. There should be more information available to explain the system so that people have a better understanding.
- The possibility of Gypsy/Travellers having representatives on local community councils or community area forums.

Policing and Legislation

Issues raised during the discussion:

- the relationship between unauthorised encampments and the lack of sites. Other areas in Scotland have sites in place and appear not to have the same problems as in Grampian.
- Budget cuts - what priority do local authorities now place on getting sites up and running?
- There is a lack of clarity in terms of guidance and policy that relates to Gypsy/Travellers. Much guidance and policy is ineffective without legislative backup.
- Cities and towns have grown, old policies are no longer fit for purpose
- The blocking off of more sites.
- Not meeting problem in terms of timetable.
- Coverage in the local media is high profile and negative.
- There is a lot of self-policing within the Gypsy/Traveller community, which is often not seen by the general public.

Suggestions made by the group for resolving issues and moving forward:

- Look into the experience of other local authority areas and see how better relations are maintained and how sites are developed.
- Liaison workers playing a key role in mediation between Gypsy/Travellers and public authorities.
- Suggestion that Gypsy/Travellers should attend Community Council meetings.

Short-term sites

Issues raised during the discussion:

- The difficulties of getting short-term sites established. This is something that has been talked about and attempted for years but with no result at the end of it. Some local authority areas have many sites.

- The need to look not only at short-stay sites, but a variety of sites.
- Community needs to be clear about what is meant by short-stay sites.
- Where should short-stay sites be placed: nearer larger villages, where much land is already earmarked for housing developments; or more remotely, where there is a lack of amenities and transport links?

Suggestions made by the group for resolving issues and moving forward:

- Going through the Local Development Plan process. This can be used to provide for sites rather than as basis for refusal (which has sometimes been the case or the perception in the past). One way of achieving this may be to link new short-stay sites into new housing development plans.
- A review of the management of sites, and how travellers themselves can be involved in such management.
- Serious assessment of Scotland's policies is needed, as there have been lots of changes to policy in England.

Economics and Employment

Issues raised during the discussion:

- misunderstanding and lack of knowledge about Gypsy/Traveller culture and employment is common. Local Authorities also seen as having problems understanding random movement of Gypsy/Travellers and this can make it difficult to put resources where most needed.
- Finding work is much harder now, it seems there are more people chasing fewer jobs.
- In terms of employment issues there are some unscrupulous groups giving other Gypsy/Travellers a bad name. Tensions between different ethnic groups, rather than resolving these issues themselves the groups felt it was better to move on and move out of the area.

Suggestions made by the group for resolving issues and moving forward:

- Greater awareness and understanding of Gypsy/Traveller cultures.

- Increasing the possibilities of employability; therefore more education is required. This would also involve tackling bullying problems in schools and changing the attitude of some teachers
- Overcoming lack of numeracy and literacy skills with tutors being available on sites to help.
- Innovative education models could be tried out.
- Re-training people with other skills.

Media

Issues raised during the discussion:

- Written media reports are usually inaccurate.
- The Gypsy/Traveller community get blamed for things they're not involved in or the whole community get blamed for the actions of the minority of people.
- Newspaper journalists often take photos without getting permission and this causes discord.

Suggestions made by the group for resolving issues and moving forward:

- Looking for a spokesperson to build up relationships with the press and get more positive stories out there.
- Reaching out to local newsletters and magazines.
- Persevering to get stories out there. It will be an on-going project to affect the media's reporting.

Health issues

Issues raised during the discussion:

- Relatively poor health of some Gypsy/Travellers compared to the settled community, for a variety of reasons.
- Some Gypsy/Travellers, moving to different areas, not registering with GPs. This is an important point of access into health services: offering help with a

lot of advice like stopping smoking, children's health, access to specialists such as midwives, and providing access to prescriptions.

- Relatively fewer male patients accessing health services – a problem in the Gypsy/Traveller community and wider society.

Suggestions made by the group for resolving issues and moving forward:

- Promoting health care and a healthy lifestyle for all, including Gypsy/Travellers.
- More permanent sites as this would make it easier for provision of care, and better access to health services, midwives etc.
- Encouraging GP registration for all. Also encouraging the use of Hand-Held Records to promote better information-sharing.
- Males need to be encouraged to access health services more – effort needs to be made to engage with this section of the population.

Cultural awareness

Issues raised during the discussion:

- Main issues were cultural differences between different Gypsy/Traveller groups – Scottish, English, Irish, all seem to be different. Tensions within Gypsy/Traveller communities themselves – feelings of people coming to take away the jobs of others.
- Changing lifestyle and character of Gypsy/Traveller. There is a perceived new generation of Gypsy/Travellers - the group felt that there is a difference from previous generations of Gypsy/Travellers.
- The question of who is actually a Gypsy/Traveller. Some felt it seems like some people travel to the area to look for work and seem to pick up the name Gypsy/Traveller so they can avoid prosecution for staying somewhere too long or staying somewhere they shouldn't be.
- Concern that there is prejudice against Gypsy/Traveller from settled community, for example, not wanting any sites near them.
- Feeling that some councils are slow to move waste from Gypsy/Traveller sites/encampments. The waste then spreads around as it is left for too long.

Suggestions made by the group for resolving issues and moving forward:

- Need to get different Gypsy/Traveller communities together and facilitate dialogue between them.
- New sites should be agreed with Gypsy/Travellers, not without them.
- Councils should be quicker in removing waste, therefore avoiding the dispersal of rubbish that is left sitting to be picked up.

Closing Summary – George Dunwoody

Pledges

The main afternoon session was dedicated to personal/professional pledges. Facilitators went round their table, asking participants to sign up to either a personal or professional commitment to improve relations. In general the response and participation of delegates was very positive. Here is a selection of the pledges that were made:

To facilitate better communication between Gypsy/Traveller groups and settled communities, and continue to look for short stay sites.

To do my best to speak to private landowners to give land for sites.

I will encourage all politicians to put pressure on the government to pass legislation that requires the Crown Estate and Forestry Commission to bring forward land for sites.

I will seek to encourage respect between Gypsy/Travellers and settled communities, and to encourage Gypsy/Travellers to show respect for the environment.

I will continue to be committed to issues of Gypsy/Travellers and provide the necessary advice and support.

I will improve my knowledge of the situation with regard to Gypsy/Travellers in the North East.

To undertake to speak to Traveller groups and understand their culture and encourage Gypsy/Traveller membership of Community Councils.

To do my best with quality and non-discrimination as the basis for how I treat everyone I deal with.

To work harder to acquire transit sites.

To have a more proactive role in providing education for travellers.

Try to get at least one transit up and running this year in the county.

Work to meet accommodation needs of Gypsy/Travellers.

To try and get settled community and Travelling community to understand each other better, possibly through Community Council Forums.

To address the concerns both of the Gypsy/Traveller and settled communities and assist in seeking a long term resolution.

To ensure the response to any issues arising from the presence of an unauthorised encampment is proportionate and takes a balanced view which respects the rights of Gypsy/Travellers and the settled communities.

To continue to work in collaboration with partners, both at a local and national level, to achieve the aims of the interim strategy of Scottish Government Working Party, and in an effort to develop sustainable, long term resolutions to the issues arising from unauthorised encampments.

Continue to design and deliver joint training and awareness programmes.

Be involved in short-life projects looking at best practice in relation to the management of unauthorised and short-term halting sites.

If I pull in to a lay-by I will make sure it is kept tidy, even if it is not me who has left a mess.

To put forward the opinion of Gypsy/Traveller community, and try to get a representative to put forward issues/feedback to other people.

I will collate feedback from people and provide a voice for Gypsy/Travellers.

I will discuss the learning issues from today with colleagues, particularly in literacies.

Continue to promote equality and diversity in connection with work that effects both settled and travelling community.

Shared view: treat everyone fairly and continue on path to find a resolution.

To support children who face bullying at schools.

To encourage the involvement of Gypsy/Travellers in community planning matters.

To contact relevant people within Aberdeen City and Shire council and pass the necessary messages on about difficulties with

continuing secondary school, bullying, draw attention to guidance and other supportive leaflets regarding the school.

Pass the message in the form of policy statement to Aberdeen City Council.

To raise personal awareness and understanding of the culture and way of life of Gypsy/Travellers.

Sharing knowledge with others, especially students at the secondary school.

NHS pledges:

NHS Grampian will continue to provide healthcare to all of the people of Grampian and the North East of Scotland. Health care will continue to be provided on a fair and equitable basis.

Specifically we will:

Continue to meet the health care needs of the Gypsy/Traveller communities in a fair and equitable basis

Promote greater GP registration

Promote the Hand Held Record.

Continue the programme of Equality and Diversity training for NHS Grampian Staff

Work jointly with Gypsy/Traveller communities and stakeholder and Gypsy Traveller Liaison officer.

Grampian Police pledge:

To take forward the Interim Strategy for the North-East by progressing all of their action points.

Some participants felt that this was not the right stage in the process for individuals to be making pledges, and that instead it was the responsibility of local and national authorities to be putting in place legislative frameworks for progress to be built upon.

Feedback and Evaluation

At the end of the event participants were asked to give their impressions of the day to the facilitator. Participant's feedback was generally positive:

“Helpful and very worthwhile, start of a new beginning”

“The day was worthwhile in hearing what others had to say.”

“Already knowledgeable on issues but hopefully this can be a further catalyst for change and improvement.”

“A very useful start - “long journeys begin with small steps!””

“Constructive day to take matters forward and provide a platform from which to build.”

“Positive opportunity to share and develop views in a candid and forward looking context.”

“It was useful. It would be good to have a follow up – perhaps every 6 months to make sure progress is made.”

“Ongoing dialogue is important.”

“I'm more informed – it was really interesting and thought-provoking.”

“Excellent to be able to get my views across.”

“I'm more positive now – was a good event and discussion.”

“Better insight into Gypsy/Travellers – positive awareness raising.”

“Interesting and valuable – a lot of work to be done.”

“Good opportunity to start knocking on the door that's been closed for so long.”

“Helpful – greater understanding of Gypsy/Traveller culture and needs.”

“It brought people together.”

“A day well spent – useful for understanding the bigger picture.”

Some participants specifically felt the benefits of the involvement of members of the Gypsy/Traveller community:

“Excellent, particularly great to have many Gypsy/Travellers families. Good to make contacts.”

“Helpful, informative, was good to meet some of the Gypsy/Traveller families”

“Very worthwhile event. Valuable hearing views and exchanging views of the issues regarding Gypsy/Travellers. Of particular value was having members of the Travelling community present. Would have been advantageous to have had a contribution to the discussion from them.”

“Interesting to meet with Gypsy/Travellers, particularly younger travellers views. However, local elections may impact on ability to move forward.”

There was some negative feedback received, though on the whole this was constructive:

“How will pledges be taken forward?”

“Should have had more members of the settled communities; very useful.”

“Of limited benefit for me as many of the issues have previously been discussed”

“Useful in hearing Gypsy/Traveller perspective. However, there were no pointers in how things will move forward – there needs to be a political solution.”

“Worthwhile, reaffirming key focus: halting sites. However, lack of executive level presence from Local Authorities, and lack of attendance from local community councils noted and would have wanted them here as part of debate to listen and contribute.”

“My views haven't changed since I came this morning, I still feel the same way (unfortunately it is negative). Informative but no positive vibes.”

“Difficult to say. There was a lack of councillors and government officials.”

“Enlightening about culture. I would have liked to hear what is to be done – there should have been information on that. Where is info going and where do we go from here?”

“Good: the initial idea of wanting to help; the day was well-organised; I would like to have seen more Gypsy/Travellers from different sites.”

“Disappointed that Aberdeen City representatives failed to attend. I will get active and will progress this as soon as possible”

“Would be good to see 6 months from now if any positive outcome from this event is taking place.”

Some feedback was also received after the event. Again, this was on the whole positive, with members of Grampian Police, Local Authorities and the Scottish Government congratulating GREC on organising a successful event. Again questions of future plans and progress were raised.

Over the course of planning the event and the experience on the day itself it became clear that to limit the issue to improving relations between the settled community and Gypsy/Travellers, was reductive. It is clear that there are many divisions and tensions within both communities, and it will be crucial to bridge many of these if significant progress is to be made. On reflection it would have beneficial to try and address both inter- and intra- based tensions during the dialogue day.

DRAFT

Moving Forward

There were ten topics covered during the Dialogue Day. How can the issues and solutions raised under these topics be taken forward? Many of these issues have already been incorporated into such documents as the Grampian Inter-agency Action Plan (based on the recommendations of the Craigforth report) and the Aberdeen & Aberdeenshire Gypsy/Traveller Issues Working Party Strategy. The Dialogue Day can be seen in terms of re-focussing energies on the content of such strategies and action plans and allowing for the type of multiple stakeholder dialogue that has often been missing from previous attempts to address the relevant issues. Below is a summary of how each topic that was discussed on the day fits into the context of previous reports, strategies and action plans, and how things can now be taken forward as part of a wider focus on improving relations in the North-East.

Health, Education and Equalities

There has been much research done across the UK into education provision and Gypsy/Traveller communities. Much of the research focuses on barriers to effective education provision, such as bullying, lack of cultural awareness, distrust between Gypsy/Travellers and Local Authorities, interrupted learning and an unwillingness to try innovative solutions. The Scottish Traveller Education Programme (STEP) is the main organisation that deals with these issues in Scotland. Amongst other things they have worked to explore ways in which the problems of interrupted learning can be overcome. More joined-up working can be done between Local Authorities, STEP and Gypsy/Travellers in the area to develop suitable education provision that meets the needs of Gypsy/Travellers.

Similarly, many barriers exist for Gypsy/Travellers accessing health services. Although there is a lack of reliable data that covers the whole of Scotland, there are smaller studies and substantial studies south of the border that highlight the shocking disparities between the health inequalities that exist between Gypsy/Travellers and members of the settled community. Some of factors that impact on the health of some Gypsy/Travellers and the ability of some to access services are: inadequate accommodation; lack of access to running water; insecurity and harassment; problems with follow-up treatment; lack of continuity of care; difficulties registering with a doctor; lack of postal address; and intolerant attitudes of health staff and receptionists (National Resource Centre for Ethnic Minority Health 2007; The University of Sheffield 2004).

The Craigforth Action Plan calls for greater engagement between Gypsy/Travellers and NHS services, including the proper implementation of barriers to access such as Handheld Health Records (Craigforth 2009: 113). As can be seen from the pledges

made by the NHS staff present at the Dialogue Day there seems to be a substantial commitment to help diminish the gaps in inequalities seen in this area. It is hoped that increased working between relevant staff in all three local authorities, along with a re-launch of the Handheld Health Record scheme, currently in progress, will help improve access to health services.

Equality issues lie at the heart of education and health provision. Equalities also have a wider dimension in terms of Gypsy/Traveller issues. English and Irish Gypsies have already been recognised in law as distinct racial groups; in 2001 the Equal Opportunities Committee recommended (the recommendation was accepted by the Scottish Executive) that Gypsy/Travellers (including Scottish Travellers) be recognised as a separate ethnic minority group until case law confirms this. Therefore it follows that the sections of the Equality Act 2010 relating to race and ethnic minorities apply to Gypsy/Travellers. More work can be done, perhaps in the form of training, in order to further understand the implications of this for Gypsy/Travellers and service providers such as Local Authorities.

Another aspect of equality that is sometimes raised by members of the settled community, is a perception that Gypsy/Travellers get special treatment because of who they are. In order to improve relations it is important that, in moving forward, both the voices of the settled and Gypsy/Traveller communities are listened to, and that relevant agencies make it clear that although in certain circumstances extra efforts may be necessary to ensure that Gypsy/Travellers have equal access to services like health and education, such action is justified because of the ongoing barriers faced by Gypsy/Travellers. Such improvements in relations rely on improved communication between communities. The Interim Strategy Action Plan calls for “improved liaison and communication” with both local settled communities and visiting Gypsy/Travellers (Outcome A1 and A2) (Scottish Government 2011: 4).

Unauthorised Encampments

The issue of unauthorised encampments is perhaps one of the most sensitive in terms of relations between Gypsy/Travellers and the settled community. This can be seen in the coverage of Gypsy/Traveller issues in the local press which focusses almost solely on encampments, and the prominence that the issue has in documents like the Interim Strategy. The Strategy's Action Plan calls for “clear and consistent application of procedures relating to Unauthorised Encampments” (Outcome D1). It is hoped that through such means as improved communications and clear procedures, tensions between communities can be eased while longer-term solutions are developed and put in place.

Although unauthorised encampments were widely discussed at the Dialogue Day, it is important to note the wide range of other topics that were covered: evidence that the issue of unauthorised encampments are part of a much bigger, more complex picture. For example, when considering the difficulties in accessing health and education two important factors are the lack of official sites and the unauthorised encampments that this leads to.

Policing and Legislation

Many of the issues regarding policing and legislation relate to misunderstandings over the powers of the police and when various legislation is applicable. Grampian Police have recently published an updated policy document, *Gypsy/Travellers Unauthorised Encampments Force Procedure*. This new policy is available at As mentioned above Aberdeen City and Aberdeenshire will publish new “Managing Unauthorised Encampments” policies in 2011 and these will include explanations of the various relevant legislation. The publication and circulation of these documents will diminish tensions that have been caused by misunderstandings and lack of clarity in the past.

Short-Stay Sites, Sites and Facilities

One of the themes to arise throughout the Dialogue Day was the lack of site provision in the North-East. There is a fairly widespread consensus that in order for relations to improve significantly and sustainably some form of increased site provision will be necessary. This has formed substantial parts of the Interim Strategy and Craigforth action plan. For example Outcome 2 of the Craigforth action plan states that “Gypsies/Travellers normally resident in Grampian and Gypsies/Travellers visiting the area have accommodation that meets their needs, culture and lifestyle” (Craigforth 2009: 109). Under this outcome Local Authorities are expected to increase provision in the North East by 35 pitches – 12 in Aberdeenshire, 23 in Moray and a reallocation of pitches in Aberdeen to provide for a short stay site (Ibid: 109). Under a similar outcome heading the Interim Strategy calls for continued efforts to provide more sites through Local Development Plans (LDPs) and for an additional “transit” site to be provided at Clinterty (Scottish Government 2011: 6).

Work on increased site provision is ongoing through Local Development Plans (LDP). Additionally, money has been allocated by the Scottish Government for Aberdeen City and Aberdeenshire to develop short-stay sites in the interim period

before LDP sites come to fruition. This additional money and focus (provided by the Housing Minister's Working Group) should lead to the provision of a short-stay site in Aberdeen City and Aberdeenshire by the end of 2011.

Media

There was general agreement within the Media discussion group, and other groups, that media coverage of issues relating to Gypsy/Travellers in the North-East was almost always negative and therefore a barrier to improving relations. The Craigforth Action Plan mentions working together to counter negative media coverage and for greater partnership work in responses to the media on issues pertaining to unauthorised encampments (Craigforth 2009b: 115). The Interim Strategy Action Plan calls for an "Effective Media Strategy" (Outcome A6), calling for joint working between local authorities and the police when dealing with media, and also for greater consideration to be given to the "impact of negative language, stereotypes and press reporting with a view to promoting more positive images and messages" (Scottish Government 2011: 5).

More balanced media reporting is a difficult issue to tackle; as long as output is kept within the boundaries of what is legal (i.e. it does not amount to incitement to racial hatred), then it is the prerogative of the media as to what is broadcast or printed. It may be down to members of the Gypsy/Traveller community to increasingly engage with local media outlets in order to produce the reporting of more positive stories.

Cultural Awareness, Economics and Employment

However, a lack of cultural awareness seems to be at the root of many tensions and misconceptions between Gypsy/Travellers and the settled community. The Craigforth Action Plan calls for "Increased understanding of the needs, culture and lifestyle of Gypsies/Travellers amongst public sector employees" (Craigforth 2009: 118). One of the desired outcomes of the day was to improve awareness of the needs of the respective communities. It felt that this was successfully achieved through the discussion in this group in particular, and more generally in the discussions throughout the day. Outcome A5 of the Interim Strategy also calls for "Improved understanding of Gypsy/Traveller culture and a reduction in prejudice" through better engagement with various groups such as schools, businesses and local communities (Scottish Government 2011: 5). It is hoped that through increased use of an inclusive format such as the Dialogue Day with discussion between all stakeholders, relations can be improved.

General themes to come out of the day

Like the Dialogue Day, the Interim Strategy also focuses on more general aspects of improving relations. This can be seen in outcomes such as “Improved liaison and communication with local and settled communities”, “Improved liaison and communication with visiting Gypsy/Travellers” and “Improved use of mediation” (Scottish Government 2011: 3-4). To achieve these outcomes the report recommends such actions as reviewing engagement arrangements in such settings as community councils, a suggestion that came up in a numerous groups throughout the day, and identifying representatives from both the settled and Gypsy/Traveller communities to attend Grampian's Inter-agency group (Ibid: 3). Due to contacts made at the Dialogue Day, moves have already been made to seek such forms of representation. In this way it is hoped that many more meetings in the future take a similar approach to the dialogue, with as many key stakeholders involved in the process as is possible and practical.

The events of 2010 and early 2011 have made it clear that there must be an improvement in relations between Gypsy/Travellers and the settled community in the North-East of Scotland. The Dialogue Day, along with the publication of the Interim Strategy on improving relations in the area, marked the beginning of a fresh and energised attempt to tackle issues that have been on-going for some time. It is hoped that a multi-stake holder approach based on the foundations of dialogue and understanding the needs of others can provide a solid foundation for making future progress and entrenching good relations in Grampian. As one participant put it: “Long journeys begin with small steps”.

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