

Ministear airson Slàinte Poblach

Minister for Public Health

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Mr Ian Galloway  
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29 August 2011

*Dear Ian,*

Thank you your letter of 9 August in which you enclose a report produced by the ACTS Church and Society Network "A Report on the Churches' attitude to the Travelling Community in Scotland.

Firstly I would like to assure you that the Scottish Government continues to recognise that the Gypsy/Traveller community is among the most disenfranchised and discriminated against in Scotland. The Scottish Government's Race Equality statement makes very clear that we recognise Gypsies/Travellers as a distinct ethnic group and encourage others to do the same.

Turning to the recommendations from the report I hope that I can reassure you that the Scottish Government believes that Gypsies /Travellers should have equal access to services and opportunities to flourish. We take the discrimination faced by Gypsies/Travellers seriously and seek to actively address the issues faced by Scottish Gypsies/Travellers wherever it is within our power and whenever it is practicable to do so.

The Scottish Government is providing £380k in grant funding for site provision, projects and organisations working to improve outcomes for Gypsies/Travellers in 2011-12, reflecting the Scottish Government's recognition that the impact of budget cuts can impact most severely on the most vulnerable groups. We are funding a series of actions to address needs both in the long and short term

- ◆ Funding for the Scottish Traveller Education Programme and its innovative "anytime, anywhere" access to schools e-learning project;
- ◆ Funding for Article 12's Young Gypsy/Traveller Lives project, working with a cohort of young Travellers skilling them up to be able to become a voice for their communities;
- ◆ Funding for a project to explore needs of carers in G/T communities and offer advice and some casework support; and

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- ♦ Funding to 2 local authorities to assist with the development of halting sites and improvements to existing sites and facilities

The Scottish Government recognises that a key issue for both the Gypsy/Traveller and settled communities is unauthorised encampments. In the North East of Scotland during 2010 there were tensions and negative press coverage around the increased number of unauthorised encampments which led to the Scottish Government convening a Ministerial short term working group. The working group produced a strategy "Good Relations between Settled Communities and Gypsies/Travellers. The strategy was published in March 2011 and aims to improve community relations through action that can be supported by both communities. This includes a commitment to develop an effective media strategy.

In relation to point 5 the registration of voters is a reserved matter and the responsibility of the UK Government. However, the Scottish Government would wish to see that all those who are eligible to vote register to do so and will be considering how to encourage voter registration and turnout.

I hope this reassures you that the Scottish Government values the Gypsy/Traveller community as one of Scotland's oldest ethnic minorities and seeks to improve their lives to encourage their participation in community and civic life.

Best wishes  
  
**Michael Matheson**