

If calling or telephoning please ask for:- Janice Lockhart
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Our Ref: JF/RW/8024
Date: 21st February 2011

Mr John Watson,
Programme Director, Scotland,
Amnesty International,
Rosebery House,
9 Haymarket Terrace,
Edinburgh
EH12 5EZ

Dear Mr Watson,

West Dunbartonshire Council's service provision for Scottish Gypsy Travellers

Thank you for your letter of 1 February 2011 which has been passed to me for response.

I can confirm that I am also aware of the evidence that Gypsy Traveller communities suffer widespread discrimination and have difficulty accessing services. However, I can assure you that within West Dunbartonshire, all council departments are committed to ensuring that Gypsy Travellers have ready access to services which meet the needs of both individual Gypsy Travellers and the wider Gypsy Traveller community.

In response to your specific concerns and recommendations I can advise as follows:

I have noted your comments in relation to the residential agreement and can confirm that the agreement will be reviewed to ensure that the issues around security of tenure are addressed. As you rightly state in your letter, consultation between the site residents and the Council has historically taken place through the Gypsy Traveller Action Group. However, as this Group has not met for some time we will seek alternative ways of engaging Gypsy Travellers in the consultation process.

I can confirm that at this time, West Dunbartonshire Council has no plans to appoint a Gypsy Traveller Liaison officer.

With regard to your recommendation that we should introduce a service level agreement with an independent advocacy service, I would welcome further information on organisations operating in the Glasgow area. Many years ago we did work very closely with workers from the Gypsy Traveller project based in

Maryhill. However, after that project ended due to lack of funding, there has been very little activity in West Dunbartonshire by any other organisation.

As you have rightly concluded, West Dunbartonshire Council does not have a dedicated site warden on the established site at Dennystown Forge, Dumbarton. The last site warden retired six years ago and since that time the site has been effectively managed by a small team of named officers based in the Homelessness & Allocations section.

We are aware that the established site in Dumbarton is often overcrowded. Due to the very settled nature of the site, there is a very low turnover of pitches and demand remains high. However, unfortunately, the plans to increase permanent pitch provision at Dennystown Forge and to create an additional site at Dalmoak have not been progressed due to opposition from the established site residents. Whilst there is a recognition of the issues around the lack of temporary and permanent pitches - overcrowding, unauthorised encampments and the accommodation difficulties of emerging households, members of the Gypsy Traveller Action Group were strongly opposed to the proposals. It was made clear that if the additional site at Dalmoak went ahead it would either be vandalised or lie empty like the purpose built site in neighbouring East Dunbartonshire. This decision should, therefore, in no way be interpreted as the Council 'appearing to take a u turn' in its accommodation responsibilities for this community. The development plans were shelved in accordance with the local community's wishes. There was also similar opposition to proposals to increase capacity at Dennystoun Forge.

I note your comments in relation to the 2004/ 09 LHS.

In relation to more recent planning developments, please see my previous comments.

I note your comments in relation to the single Equalities Scheme and the Gypsy/ Traveller Strategy.

I can confirm that over the last 10 years the Council has worked hard to foster positive relationships with both Gypsy Travellers on the established site in Dumbarton and those passing through the area during the spring and summer months. Just as with all customers accessing council services I can assure you that we deal with Gypsy Travellers in a sensitive, non discriminatory and positive manner.

I trust this letter answers the points raised. However, if you wish to discuss this response in any more detail, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely,



JANICE LOCKHART
HOMELESSNESS & ALLOCATIONS MANAGER

Cc Elaine Melrose, Executive Director
Helen Turley, Head of Housing & Community Safety
Cllr Jim McElhill