



HOUSE OF COMMONS

LONDON SW1A 0AA

20th Jan 2021

Dear Delegates,

Re: Language used by Scottish Parliamentary election 2021 candidates to describe Gypsy, Traveller & Roma communities

I write to you in my capacity as Co-chair of the All-Party Parliamentary Group for Gypsies, Travellers and Roma, to draw attention to some of the stigmatising language used by prospective candidates to describe Gypsy, Traveller communities and Roma communities in Scotland. With the Police Powers and Protection Bill having had its 2nd reading over the last few weeks in the House of Commons, instances of discriminatory and demonising language are likely to escalate.

Examples of the type of language I refer to include the repeated use of warfare language to describe encampments, such as ‘incursions’ or ‘invasions’, and the constant conflation of the existence of nomadic communities and anti-social behaviour and criminal activity. Included in the text of this letter you will find specific examples of inflammatory and problematic language used by parliamentarians in the House of Commons which I hope you will agree is unacceptable.

“...causes a huge amount of heartache to those law-abiding citizens in the settled community who have to deal with it...”

“...which falls on hard-working taxpayers...”

“...a big Traveller problem”

“...an expensive menace...”

Martin Docherty-Hughes MP
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"...people in the UK who repeatedly suffer from being besieged by Gypsy and Traveller communities."

"This year Surrey has been particularly plagued by groups who descend on open land..."

As Co-Chair I am concerned there will be an escalation of this kind of derogatory language during the Scottish Parliament election campaign.

Romany Gypsies, Irish Travellers, Scottish and Welsh Gypsy Travellers are all defined ethnic groups and entitled to protection from discrimination under equality legislation. Given the scale of hostility and the impact of this on already marginalised groups and on community relations, I ask that in your role as Party leaders that you will ensure that your candidates exercise their freedom of speech responsibly on this sensitive matter and moderate their language when discussing Gypsy, Traveller and Roma communities during the campaign and if elected, that future MSP's consider joining the Cross Party Group Gypsy Travellers.

In light of the issues above, I would very much welcome the opportunity that if you or any of your candidates are elected on May 6th to meet with you to discuss the matter, along with representatives of the Gypsy, Traveller and Roma communities in Scotland. No matter the election outcome, I hope we can work together to end the discrimination against the Gypsy, Traveller and Roma communities across Scotland

Sláinte, sonas agus beartas,

Martin Docherty-Hughes

Co-Chair, All-Party Parliamentary Group for Gypsies Travellers and Roma