

Organisational Policy

Gypsy Traveller Strategy

Our Commitment

The Argyll Community Housing Association Group is committed to providing equal opportunities across all services and to avoid discrimination. This strategy is intended to assist ACHA and AHFA in putting this commitment into practice. Compliance with this strategy should also ensure that employees do not commit unlawful acts of discrimination.

This strategy can be made available in other formats, for example in large print, audio-format or Braille: the document may also be available in other languages, in full or summary form, as appropriate

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1. Section 1 - Introduction

- 1.1 The Scottish Government uses the term Gypsy/Traveller to describe a distinct group of people who regard the travelling lifestyle as being part of their ethnic identity. That term is used throughout this strategy.
- 1.2 ACHA is in the unique position that we are the only Scottish Housing Association that owns Gypsy/Traveller sites and provides pitches for Gypsy/Travellers. ACHA owns two Gypsy Traveller sites - Duncholgan which is 2 miles outside of Lochgilphead and Bayview which is 6 miles outside of Oban in Benderloch.
- 1.3 Duncholgan Gypsy Traveller site contains 7 pitches and Bayview contains 4 pitches.
- 1.4 Each pitch contains an area of hard standing and an amenity unit offering a bathroom and storage facilities. Pitches are let via the HOME Argyll allocations Policy, which is a common housing list for all applicants wishing to be rehoused in Social Housing in Argyll & Bute - available at <http://www.homeargyll.co.uk>.
- 1.5 ACHA also has 4 cottages in Lochgilphead which are specifically for leasing to gypsy/travellers, where there is demand.
- 1.6 ACHA's policies and services such as repairs, allocations, estate management, Anti-Social Behaviour, apply equally to all our residents including those living in our gypsy traveller sites. Our Gypsy travellers also have leases based on the Scottish Secure Tenancy agreement and takes account of model core rights and responsibilities.
- 1.7 This strategy aims to outline the services ACHA will provide for our Gypsy Traveller site tenants, other Gypsy Travellers living in our properties and gypsy traveller applicants on the Home Argyll waiting list, in the period 2025 to 2030, ensuring that they are efficient and good quality, meeting the needs of the community and provided in a non-discriminatory way taking into account cultural requirements and explains how we will deliver them in the period 2025 -2030. It also aims to describe how we will work with our gypsy traveller tenants and other agencies to improve and sustain community relations and improve the lives of our gypsy traveller tenants in a manner underpinned by improved communications, respect and understanding.

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2. Section 2 - Context

- 2.1 The Scottish Governments Housing to 2040 vision commits to improve and widen access to Gypsy/Traveller accommodation.
- 2.2 Improving the Lives of Scotlands Gypsy Travellers Scottish Government Action Plan 2024 to 2026 is divided into 5 sections which include:-
- Accommodation and planning
 - Education
 - Health
 - Social Security, work and combatting poverty
 - Empower Communities
- 2.3 ACHA is responsible for the day-to-day management of our Gypsy/Traveller sites—including the provision and maintenance of accommodation and associated landlord services. The broader statutory responsibilities for improving the lives of Gypsy/Traveller communities remain with Argyll and Bute Council. While we work in partnership with other agencies, our focus within this strategy is on the responsibilities that fall within our remit.
- 2.4 ACHA's Main Aims and Objectives
- 1) Delivering more homes in great places
 - 2) Achieving housing quality & affordable warmth
 - 3) Enabling ACHA to be a sustainable business
 - 4) Realising the ACHA transformation programme
 - 5) Delivering effortless customer experiences.
- 2.5 According to our records only 17 of our tenants identify as gypsy/traveller, this includes the residents of our gypsy traveller sites, the residents of our 4 cottages which are let to gypsy travellers and 2 other tenants. This is unlikely to be an accurate figure as it is reliant on information provided by our tenants which does not always include ethnicity.
- 2.6 In Scotland's Census 2022 – 84 residents across Argyll and Bute identified as gypsy/traveller.
- 2.7 There are no private gypsy traveller sites in Argyll and Bute and over the last 5 years there have been no applications to develop any either.
- 2.8 Within Argyll and Bute there have been periodic instances of roadside stopping and unauthorised encampments reported across the area. These are generally short stays by transient gypsy/traveller households and resolve

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themselves. There is insufficient evidence to suggest a requirement for the provision of transit sites or negotiated stopping places at the present time.

- 2.9 In September 2023 ACHA carried out a satisfaction survey of our gypsy traveller site residents and this showed that only 42.86% of our site residents were satisfied with our management of their site. We need to improve this. The satisfaction rate from the previous year was 75% which indicates that the drop in satisfaction is linked to concerns regarding the current condition of our sites and the need for major improvements which are reliant on us receiving funding.
- 2.10 Current demand for our gypsy traveller sites is low. There are currently 0 applicants on our waiting list for Duncholgan and 2 applicants for Bayview. This does not suggest a requirement to extend our existing sites or to build any new sites in the next 5 years.
- 2.11 What Our Gypsy Travellers say:- In 2022 ACHA began consultations with residents on improvements to our 2 gypsy traveller sites, with the intention to apply for funding from the Accommodation Fund. Our residents told us that the following were important to them:-
- Good lighting
 - Easy to clean surfaces
 - Good wifi
 - Improved drainage.
 - Improved traffic control for safety reasons.
 - Site to be accessible for all and a home for life.
 - Provision of an enclosed field for children to play
 - Amenity units to be placed at the back or sides of pitches
 - Improved access road to site
 - Safe walking/cycling route into town

3. Section 3 - Customer Involvement and Participation

- 3.1 The involvement of our Gypsy Traveller tenants in the design, delivery, and evaluation of our services is essential to ensure that their specific needs are met. This section of the strategy will focus on fostering meaningful engagement, empowering the community to collaborate and creating sustainable relationships. Below are the key elements of customer involvement:
- 3.2 ACHA engage Gypsy/Travellers in the design and development of services. This includes holding focus groups, conducting surveys and hosting workshops where community members can provide input on service design, accessibility and effectiveness

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- 3.3 ACHA consults with Gypsy Travellers on a number of issues including: proposed rent increases, changes to service delivery and major repairs work. In addition, we also carry out regular satisfaction surveys with tenants living on our Gypsy/Travellers sites. The results of surveys are reported to our Gypsy Traveller tenants along with what actions we will take as a result of their feedback to ensure ongoing communication and transparency.

Copies of our Gypsy/Travellers survey outcome reports can be viewed on our website at <https://www.acha.co.uk/services-gypsy-traveller/>

- 3.4 ACHA's Customer Involvement Strategy outlines the variety of ways our tenants can get involved. When Gypsy/Travellers are involved in decision-making, services become more reflective of their needs and helps strengthen the voice of their community. Information is available at <https://www.acha.co.uk/get-involved-customer-involve/>

- 3.5 Benefits of Customer Involvement for Gypsy/Travellers include

- Better services: By have a say, Gypsy/Travellers can help shape services to be more relevant and responsive to their specific needs.
- Improved housing conditions: Active involvement in planning and consultations can result in better accommodation options and improved living conditions.
- Stronger community support: When the community comes together to advocate for change, it can create a more supportive environment for everyone.
- Increased visibility and representation: Engaging with services and agencies increases the visibility of Gypsy/Traveller issues, helping to address challenges like discrimination and exclusion.

- 3.6 There can be challenges and barriers to Customer Involvement such as:

- Cultural barriers: Gypsy/Travellers may face discrimination or may feel that their needs are not understood by service providers.
- Language barriers: Gypsy/Travellers may speak Romani or other dialects and may not always have access to services in their preferred language.
- Lack of trust.: Due to historical mistreatment and marginalization, there may be a lack of trust between Gypsy/Travellers and authorities or service providers.

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- Geographic Mobility: Many Gypsy/Travellers live in caravans and may face challenges in access services that are more stationary or fixed to a particular location.
- 3.7 Overcoming these barriers requires a commitment from both Gypsy/Traveller communities and service providers to ensure better communication, understanding, and respect. We are committed to working collaboratively across Argyll and Bute to build engagement and overcome the barriers faced by the Gypsy/Traveller Community.
- 3.8 Partnership working is a key aspect of progressing improvements in the services and accommodation we provide and in improving the lives of gypsy travellers. ACHA are a partner in the Gypsy Traveller working group lead by Argyll and Bute Council, which has representatives from all services within the Local Authority as well as members from Police Scotland, Scottish Fire Service, Minority Ethnic Carers of People Project (MECOPP) and representation from the Gypsy/traveller community. The Group takes forward actions to improve the lives of gypsy travellers within Argyll and Bute.
- 3.9 In 2024 achievements of the Group involving ACHA included resurfacing of the road to Duncholgan gypsy traveller site and also clearance and improvements of the path from Duncholgan into Lochgilphead.
- 3.10 ACHA also work closely with MECOPP and meet on a regular basis at our Gypsy Traveller sites. We include MECOPP in meetings we hold with our gypsy traveller residents and also consult them on issues involving our gypsy traveller residents.
- 3.11 We will form part of the Site Managers Association, attend their meetings and learn best practise examples from other local authorities across Scotland.
- 3.12 We utilise a variety of communication methods from regular onsite visits, face to face meetings, printed materials, visual tools to ensure accessibility for all Gypsy/Travellers tenants.

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4. Section 4 – Ambitions

4.1 Improving Our Existing Gypsy Traveller Sites

- 4.1.1 Our Gypsy Traveller sites are currently maintained to meet the minimum standards set by the Scottish Government, but ACHA want to improve them within the next 5 years so that they exceed minimum standards and provide good standards of accommodation that promote health and wellbeing.
- 4.1.2 ACHA are currently closely engaging with the Scottish Government to obtain funding to dramatically improve our gypsy traveller sites and we are committed to continue to do so until funding is provided.
- 4.1.3 ACHA have been consulting our residents since 2022 in relation to the site improvements that they would like to see. Our Architects have produced a Stage 2 design concept based on these consultations, but funding has not been available to allow works to take place.
- 4.1.4 In preparation for receipt of funding, during 2025 we will develop the initial feasibility study for the site improvement project, appoint the design team including an architect, engineer and quantity surveyor and submit the planning application. This will allow us to be ready to start work if funding is successful during the Summer of 2026.
- 4.1.5 We will engage with our gypsy traveller site tenants to discuss their preferred decant options for when improvement works are carried out and explore the possibility of phased handover options to allow residents to remain on site if that is their preferred option.
- 4.1.6 We will strive to provide accommodation that will be built to a high standard in line with other public housing. The accommodation will be durable, sustainable, flexible, safe, secure, digitally connected, warm, economic to run and value for money. We aim to provide accommodation with the layout and facilities that meet the needs of residents and provide for different family sizes, allow for movement within the site and which is suitable for elderly and disabled residents also.
- 4.1.7 We will improve our sites so that are pleasant places to live and include attractive outdoor spaces, communal facilities and appropriate facilities for children and young people and that contribute to the health and wellbeing of our tenants.

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4.2 Improve Customer Satisfaction, Relationships and Engagement

- 4.2.1 Staff or contractors visiting the site will respect the culture of Gypsy/Travellers. We aim to widen our knowledge and understanding of the gypsy traveller community through working closely with our tenants and partners. Our staff will receive regular training on gypsy/traveller culture and values. We are liaising with MECOPP to provide this training due to their specialist knowledge of gypsy traveller culture.
- 4.2.2 We will celebrate gypsy traveller culture within our organisation and on our sites.
- 4.2.3 Our Staff will continue to visit our gypsy traveller sites on a regular basis and engage and communicate with residents.
- 4.2.4 We will continue to build relations with MECOPP, working with them to take forward improvements to our gypsy/traveller sites, engagement with our residents and meeting with them regularly at each site.
- 4.2.5 We will involve our gypsy traveller residents in planning any future service developments which may be relevant to them and always try to provide what they require.
- 4.2.6 We will manage our sites closely in engagement with our residents to ensure that they are maintained in a clean, tidy and safe condition.

4.3 Enabling Equality of Opportunity

- 4.3.1 Our staff will carry out bi-annual maintenance inspections of our sites which residents are invited to attend. This is to identify and resolve any maintenance or repairs issues that may not have been reported to us through the usual routes and to discuss any improvements required by our residents. This helps to breakdown any barriers to reporting and ensures any issues are resolved quickly.
- 4.3.2 ACHA have our own welfare rights service and our welfare rights officers will visit our sites on a regular basis or when required to provide advice and assistance on benefits, breaking down barriers that our gypsy traveller residents may face in accessing benefits.
- 4.3.3 We are actively engaging with the Scottish Government to access funding to improve the WiFi on our gypsy traveller sites. We are committed to ensuring that our residents are digitally included with good access to online services, education and opportunities.

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- 4.3.4 We will ensure that our gypsy traveller residents are aware of our formal complaints policy and understand how they can make a complaint.

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5. Section 5 Action Plan

Short Term – 0 to 1 years

Medium Term – 1 to 3 years

Long Term – 3 to 5 years

| OUTCOME | ACTIONS | TIMELINE |
|---|---|----------------------|
| Improvement of properties and Condition of our sites | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop Initial Feasibility study for the site improvement project | Short Term |
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Appoint Design Team | Short Term |
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Maintain monthly communication with Scottish Government Representatives to track funding opportunities. | Short Term |
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Planning Application to be submitted Autumn/Winter 2025 | Short Term |
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop a contingency plan to prioritize improvements if partial funding is secured. | Short to Medium Term |

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| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explore phased handover option to determine if our tenants could remain on site during works. • Engage with our tenants to discuss decant options whilst improvement works are carried out. • Submit a Formal funding request to the Scottish Governments Affordable Housing Supply Programme and submit information for a technical appraisal no later than January 2026 for approval in April 2026 | <p>Short to Medium Term</p> <p>Short to Medium Term</p> <p>Short Term</p> |
| Improve customer satisfaction, engagement and relationships | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure a deeper understanding of gypsy traveller needs and culture amongst our staff through provision of training. • Collaboration with community groups already trusted within the community such as MECOPP as a way of engaging with the gypsy traveller community. • Proactively providing advice and guidance on any changes to services or legislation that may influence our residents through face to face and easy to read correspondence. Work with partners such as the local authority and MECOPP to provide clear advice and guidance on any changes they need to be aware of. | <p>Short term to long term</p> <p>Short term to Long term</p> <p>Ongoing</p> |

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| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure improvements to the sites align as much as possible with resident feedback. • Our staff visit the sites on a regular basis to meet and engage with residents. We provide regular updates on progress with our plans to improve the condition of the sites. • We will work with partners to increase awareness and understanding of the community through community events and the gypsy traveller working group. | <p>Short Term</p> <p>Ongoing</p> <p>Ongoing</p> |
| Enabling Equality of Opportunity | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ACHA operates its own Welfare Rights service, which visits our Travelling Persons sites regularly or as needed. This service helps to ensure that any barriers our residents face in accessing benefits are identified and removed, supporting financial inclusion and wellbeing • Our staff conduct bi-annual inspections of our sites to identify any necessary repairs or maintenance issues. These visits also provide residents with the opportunity to raise concerns directly, helping to | <p>Ongoing</p> <p>Ongoing</p> |

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| | <p>remove any barriers to reporting and ensuring that issues are addressed promptly and effectively.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We are actively engaging with the government to secure funding aimed at improving Wi-Fi connectivity across our sites. This investment will help ensure that our residents are digitally included, with better access to online services, education, and opportunities. • We are committed to ensuring that Gypsy/Traveller communities are meaningfully involved in shaping the services that affect them. Through regular consultation and engagement, we provide opportunities for residents to influence the design, development, and delivery of services to better reflect their needs and priorities | <p>Short Term</p> <p>Ongoing</p> |
|--|---|----------------------------------|