



Participation and Membership on Council Minceirs Whiden

Mission

Minceirs Whiden was established in 2004 by a group of Travellers to promote an understanding and recognition of Travellers as a minority ethnic group in Irish society who are proud and confident of their identity. Minceirs Whiden seeks full participation and inclusion of Travellers in the economic, social, political and cultural life of Ireland.

Structures

Minceirs Whiden is a Traveller only forum, open to all Travellers in Ireland, where Travellers can come together as a community to talk about the issues we face and create ways that we as a community can overcome our exclusion within Irish society. Currently we have two structures as follows:

- The Assembly is made up of members of Minceirs Whiden who elect the Council. The Assembly's role is to:
 - Elect or select the membership of the Council
 - Decide the policy objectives of Minceirs Whiden

The Assembly meets twice a year minimum and members must be over 18 years of age to vote, however, Travellers under 18 years of age can attend and participate at the meetings.

The Council is made up of 21 Travellers either selected or elected by the registered members of the Assembly. The role of the Council is to:

- Implement the policy and workplans;
- Be accountable to, report to and take direction from the Assembly.

Membership of the Council is for 2 years and members, including officers can be reappointed / re-elected for a further 2 years maximum. The Council shall, if necessary co-op Travellers and will ensure there is a geographical and gender balance. The Council, through a secret ballot, will elect / select a Council leader for 2 years, who will also be eligible for re-election/selection for a further 2 years maximum. Members must be over 18 years of age.

We seek to:

- Unite Travellers;
- Address divisions amongst Travellers;
- Promote a collective voice and a political Platform for Travellers;
- Promote Traveller culture and ethnicity and our role in Irish society;
- Work together in solidarity with nomadic and excluded groups both nationally and internationally;
- While retaining its independence and autonomy, Minceirs Whiden will work in

the spirit of co-operation and solidarity with Travellers organisations in pursuit of its objectives;

- Seek recognition and consultative status with the State carrying out the work as set by the Assembly

Objective

The objective of the policy is to address the issue of internal conflict within the Traveller community and present a code of conduct for Minceirs Whiden staff and council members in relation to that.

The policy covers the following key areas (of action):

- prevention
- dealing with
- managing and mitigation of the impact of violence
- care and support of workers affected by conflict
- sustainability of initiatives undertaken

Field of application

The policy applies:

- To all employers and workers, trainees and council members
- To all aspects of work, formal and informal

Membership of the Council

Due to various circumstances and a long historical legacy of racism, social exclusion, poor educational opportunities, high unemployment, mental health issues, suicide and drug misuse, we as a community have found ourselves oppressing each other. Often that oppression manifests itself in different forms of anti social behaviour. This may include conflict and feuding amongst families or extended families, homophobia, criminality, domestic violence or intimidating more vulnerable families.

As stated in Minceirs Whiden's policy document Minceirs Whiden does not condone or collude with any form of anti-social behaviour or violence.¹ Such matters need to be dealt with within the framework of the law. Minceirs Whiden does acknowledge there needs to be mechanisms for individuals and families that need support and intervention. However, under no circumstances can Minceirs Whiden be linked or associated with anti social behaviour in any form. When individuals are putting themselves forward for election onto the council, Minceirs Whiden would encourage those individuals to be mindful and respectful of our policy in relation to such matters and to avoid bringing Minceirs Whiden's ethos into disrepute.

Travellers and Conflict

The relationship between the Traveller community and the majority population in Ireland is characterised by hostility, prejudice, discrimination and conflict. Within the Traveller community, conflict also takes its toll. The causes of these conflicts are often deep and

¹ Minceir Whiden Policy Document 2010 Travellers and Conflict p21

complex and cannot often be solved quickly or easily. However, conflict can also present opportunities to bring about positive change depending on our ability and willingness to handle conflict situations in a way that results in positive outcomes for all concerned.

Impact of Conflict

Conflict within the Traveller community is a complex issue and has serious consequences for Traveller families and the wider Traveller community. The presenting problems in conflict situations have been identified by Minceirs Whiden as:

- Oppression due to racism and discrimination;
- Internalised oppression within the community due to the poor treatment and lack of recognition by the state;
- Lack of integration of Travellers in to the community reinforces isolation and social exclusion;
- High unemployment;
- Some of the conflict is geographically based - not all regions are facing the same problems.
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While work with Travellers to address conflict is taking place which is significant, a more focused and sustained response is required from stakeholders such as state agencies, the Traveller community and Traveller organisations.

Prohibited behaviour and responsibilities

Prohibited behaviour:

- Violence
- Threats of violence
- Harassment or intimidation of others
- Interference with an individual's legal right of movement or expression; or
- Disruption of the work or formal meeting place, or of Minceirs Whiden's ability to provide community development work and/or services to Travellers.
- Inhibiting of full Traveller participation in community development work.

Violent or threatening acts can include physical acts, oral or written statements, harassing calls, gestures and expressions or behaviours such as stalking.

Minceirs Whiden considers that all forms of verbal or physical aggression, intimidation, offensive, threatening or violent behaviour is unacceptable.

Organisational interventions

- Admitting that internal conflict exists and that violence (and some aspects of conflict) is not acceptable.
- Environmental focused: problems within the wider (working) environment with a view of prevention.

- Individual focused: reinforce the capacity of individuals to contribute to the prevention and resolution of conflict. This can be done through training, assistance and counseling.
- After-the-event interventions: to minimise the impact of the event. Includes: response plans by the management, reporting and recording procedures, debriefing, counseling, management support, grievance procedures
- Provide space within the organisation to talk openly about the issue and concerns and consequences relating to it.
- This issue should be included in organisation's remit, and thus to all programmes' remits, i.e. every programme should be aware how the issue of internal conflict is affecting its work, and what are the appropriate responses that each individual programme can have to tackle this.
- Encourage openness and discussion around the issue.
- Trying to engage other Traveller organisations to talk about the issue and to apply certain mechanisms where possible.
- Engaging with other relevant agencies and others like the Gardai, local authorities, Drugs task Force etc.
- Develop and promote alternative ways of responding to conflict situations.

Better communication by key parties (like the Gardai) in all levels. Support mechanisms in place. Breaking the taboos feeding to conflict. Identify key sectors and individuals. Co-ordinate actions taken by actors involved (interagency meetings). All this has to happen

in the context of community development, prevention as well, and especially hold onto regulations, laws and best practices, and not reward violence or intimidating behaviour.

Approach should be an integrated, participative, cultural/gender sensitive, non-discriminatory and systematic one.

Recording requirements

All Minceirs Whiden staff and council members should report to their supervisor or any member of council any incidents of prohibited behaviour. Those reports should be treated as confidential as possible.

Confidentiality is conditional! Some incidents are too severe to be ignored if the person reporting does not want to take the issue further. Organisational responsibility.

Disciplinary procedures

Management and council are responsible for the promotion of consistent and agreed codes of conduct and standards of behaviour within the organisation.

Individuals who engage in violent or prohibited behaviour may be subject to dismissal or other disciplinary action. This policy applies to all work locations including office, work sites, vehicles and field locations. It also applies to people in their free time, as representatives of Minceirs Whiden.

Actions:

- Warning (one verbal, two written)
- Meeting with the person in confidence
- Suspension
- Dismissal

The employee or council member has the right to proper and full hearing.

Evaluation

- Monitoring, on a continuous basis, and regular dissemination of the results of measures introduced
- Involving the workers in developing the criteria for evaluation and receiving regular feedback from them to check how well they are working and to make modifications as necessary
- Organising periodical joint meetings of management and workers to discuss the measures to put in place
- Reviewing the management plan on a regular basis including the assessment of policy implementation
- Re-assessing the workplace culture, work organisation and the quality of the environment to effectively respond to workplace violence