

Notes of Meeting of

Scottish Parliament Cross Party Group on Racial Equality

held on 25th January 2012

Present:

Bob Doris	MSP (Convener)
Hanzala Malik	MSP (Vice-Convener)
Jatin Haria	CRER (Secretary)
Carol Young	CRER
Davidson Chademana	UCU
Eleanor McKnight	CEMVO Scotland
Alina Mirza	Hanzala Malik MSP's Office
Rohini Sharma Joshi	Trust Housing Association
Meg De Amasi	Stirling Multi-Cultural Partnership
Harriette Campbell	ACWA
Mahmud Al-Gailani	VoX
Shaben Begum	Scottish Independent Advocacy Alliance
Mohammad Razaq	WSREC
Kim Scott	WSREC
Jonathan Ssentamu	Waverley Care African Health Project
Prof. Geoff Palmer	Guest Speaker

MSP Apologies:

Jackie Baillie	MSP
Drew Smith	MSP
Jim Eadie	MSP

Welcome

Bob Doris, MSP welcomed everyone to the third meeting of the group in the 4th Session of the Scottish Parliament.

Minutes of the Previous Meeting and Matters Arising

The minutes of the previous meeting (6th October 2011) were noted and lodged. A point of clarification was made that current practice is to record in the minutes only those apologies submitted by MSP members due to the parliamentary nature of Cross Party Groups, however apologies from other members are also welcomed.

There were no matters arising.

Work update

An overview of work undertaken on behalf of the CPG since the previous meeting (6th October 2011) was provided by Carol Young.

Information had been requested from Skills Development Scotland regarding race equality in Modern Apprenticeships. Some statistical data was provided but did not present a clear picture. It was agreed that further aggregated information would be requested, and that a meeting would be arranged with relevant officials to explore the issues. Hanzala Malik raised concerns about maintaining employment following completion of Modern Apprenticeships and how employers can be encouraged to ensure employment is maintained. Bob Doris suggested that the Cross Party Group on Skills would be an appropriate group to raise this general issue, and it was agreed that this suggestion would be submitted to them in writing.

Information had been requested from the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body regarding equalities monitoring and training for staff employed directly by MSPs. A new system for equalities monitoring is being introduced and further updates will be provided to the CPG when available. Regarding training opportunities, general equality training appears to be available along with a selection of more specialist subjects (although no specific race equality training was identified in the response from SPCB). MSP members welcomed this, however have some reservations about the practicalities of arranging for staff to attend training, feeling that further advance notice and planning would be of benefit. It is not known to what extent MSP's staff are taking up the training opportunities offered. Bob Doris agreed to work with the Secretariat on writing

to Party Managers of the groups in Chamber and SPCB to explore these issues further.

Information had been requested from the Minister for Housing and Transport regarding appropriate social housing for BME older people. A response was received which outlined general strategy for meeting older people's social housing needs and explained housing allocation responsibilities, which lie with Local Authorities. The group felt that there was a lack of emphasis on race equality in the response and, more broadly, in housing strategy as a whole. Rohini Sharma Joshi raised the fact that the new housing strategy does not mention race equality issues, although the housing charter has equality as a separate outcome. Mahmud Al-Gailani pointed out that the housing strategy was not developed using co-production techniques which have been used to increase engagement and inclusion in other processes such as development of the Mental Health Strategy. Hanzala Malik pointed out that lack of representation of BME individuals on Housing Association Boards (and, in some cases, insufficient community engagement with BME people) contribute to lack of visibility of race equality issues in housing. It was suggested that exploratory work on how needs can be better reflected would be welcome, as would a national strategic view of how Government engages with the Local Authorities and Housing Associations which it funds to provide social housing and how it could encourage better community engagement and representation of race equality issues in housing policy. It was agreed that appropriate further exploration would be undertaken, including contacting the housing regulator.

Prof. Geoff Palmer OBE – Different but the Same

Bob Doris welcomed Professor Geoff Palmer OBE as guest speaker. Prof. Palmer presented an item with the theme 'Different but the Same'.

This presentation began with an update on the work of the Caribbean Cross Party Group, which aims to advance the mutual interests of Scotland and the Caribbean in areas such as trade, investment, tourism and in representing the interests of people with a Caribbean background living and working in Scotland.

Prof. Palmer explored the relationship between worldwide economic development and Scotland's treatment of its overseas students, and the importance of encouraging such students to maintain links with Scotland in their future careers. Perceptions of Scottish social attitudes, created in part by global media coverage of race equality issues in Scotland, were also identified as impacting trade and educational decisions overseas.

Prof. Palmer provided an insight into the social construction of race and racism. Political and community engagement within BME communities in Scotland was felt to be relatively good in comparison to some areas of the UK; however the continuing importance of raising aspirations and ability to self-determine future career paths for young BME people was stressed.

In respect of this CPG meeting being held on 25th January, Burns Night, Prof. Palmer quoted Robert Burns' statement that 'The rights of women merit some attention', extending this concept to a call for equality for all protected characteristics.

Discussion arising from Prof. Palmer's presentation included balancing acknowledgement of progress on race equality with the need to progress further; keeping race equality high on the agenda in Scotland (and in particular in the Scottish Parliament); the need to focus on race equality in education and particularly in regard to overseas students, who now have more options for study outside of the UK; the importance of leadership within organisations to ensure race equality is adequately addressed in policy and practice; the challenges of maintaining a focus on race equality in the absence of a statutory body dedicated to race equality (such as the former Commission for Racial Equality); the long-term nature of the drive towards equality; and the difficulties posed by public bodies' focus on entrepreneurialism in BME communities when the high level of self-employment and community businesses is partly a reflection of race discrimination within the wider labour market.

Other business

Jonathan Ssentamu updated members on a new research project being launched by Waverley Care and the Terrence Higgins Trust on HIV related discrimination in housing.

Actions

Questions are to be raised with appropriate Ministers / departments regarding:

- Further aggregated information on Modern Apprenticeship participation and completion monitored by ethnicity
- Job retention for Modern Apprentices (raise with CPG on Skills)
- Uptake of equality training opportunities provided to MSPs and their staff
- Race equality in social housing policy and strategy

Dates of Future Meetings:

An evening meeting has been arranged for 21st March 2012, and a lunchtime meeting for 14th June (NB: time of 21st March meeting subsequently rescheduled to 1.30pm).