

Notes of Meeting of

Scottish Parliament Cross Party Group on Racial Equality

held on 13th June 2012

Present:

Bob Doris	MSP (Convener)
Hanzala Malik	MSP (Vice-Convener)
Humza Yousaf	MSP (Vice-Convener)
Patrick Harvie	MSP
John Mason	MSP
Jatin Haria	CRER (Secretary)
Carol Young	CRER
Hugh O'Donnell	BEMIS
Graham Campbell	BEMIS
Naren Sood	Edinburgh Partnership
Geoff Palmer	ELREC
Foyso Chaudhury	ELREC
Arun Gopinath	ELREC
Shami Khan	ELREC
Naeem Khalid	Frae Fife
Jock Morris	Glasgow Campaign to Welcome Refugees
Lorraine Kennedy	Glasgow Campaign to Welcome Refugees
Audrey Coltart	Individual
Nahid Aslam	Individual
Pat Elsmie	Migrants' Rights Scotland
Lian Selby	Migrants' Rights Scotland
Jamie O'Neill	Positive Action in Housing
Suki Sangha	Positive Action in Housing
Shaben Begum	SIAA
Meg De Amasi	Stirling Multicultural Partnership / CeSAU
Davidson Chademana	UCU / Black Workers Committee
Khalida Hussain	Voluntary Action Scotland
Mahmud Al-Gailani	VOX / Mental Health Foundation
Jonathan Ssentamu	Waverley Care African Health Project
Mohammed Razaq	WSREC
Harriette Campbell	WSREC / ACWA

Keith Wimbles	Voluntary Action Scotland (Guest Speaker)
Patrick Mbullu	Voluntary Action Scotland (Guest Speaker)

Apologies:

Drew Smith	MSP
Annabelle Ewing	MSP
Christina McKelvie	MSP
Siobhan McMahan	MSP
Chris Oswald	EHRC
Naseem Anwar	Strathclyde University
Eleanor McKnight	CEMVO Scotland
Rohini Sharma Joshi	Trust Housing Association

Welcome

Convenor Bob Doris MSP welcomed attendees to the fifth meeting of the Parliamentary session.

Minutes of the Previous Meeting and Matters Arising

The minutes of the previous meeting (25th January 2012) were noted. Due to a tight time schedule, Bob Doris MSP advised that points of accuracy or enquiries relating to the minutes should be submitted to Carol Young by email. In relation to matters arising, Carol Young provided a written update of work undertaken by the Secretariat as a result of actions agreed.

Following matters arising, Bob Doris MSP welcomed Jock Morris of the Glasgow Campaign to Welcome Refugees to lead the meetings' first discussion.

Discussion Item: Destitution of Glasgow Asylum Seekers

Jock Morris provided an overview of the situation facing an estimated 83 asylum seekers in Glasgow being made destitute during the hand over process of the asylum dispersal housing contract from YPeople to Serco, and the efforts being made by Voluntary Sector, community and faith groups to campaign against this.

Jock Morris then invited Jamie O'Neill of Positive Action in Housing to present information on the impact the situation is having on asylum seekers who use

their services. Powerful and distressing case studies were provided regarding increasing hardship, destitution, lack of food, risk of suicide and impact on family and child welfare. Positive Action in Housing's service is becoming stretched as concentration on basic survival needs hampers the ability to cope with wider problems faced by refugees and asylum seekers. The organisation is seeking continued donations of time and money to assist in managing demand.

MSPs in attendance offered supportive views, speaking about action taken so far by MSPs, the particular need to protect children from the impacts of hardship and destitution and the need for Scottish Parliamentarians to make their concerns clear to the UK Government. Comparisons were made between this situation and welfare reform – the law is reserved to Westminster, but the Scottish Parliament can still plan to mitigate the impact it will have in Scotland. Humza Yousaf MSP offered to keep CPG members updated on his forthcoming work in this area.

Overall, non-parliamentary members were strongly of the view that current UK policy on asylum is unjust. General discussion indicated that all in attendance were in favour of as much action being taken as possible to mitigate the current situation in Glasgow. There is some difficulty for MSPs in that asylum issues are reserved to the UK Government, however action has been taken to reach out to MPs and the Minister for Immigration in light of the impact this will have in Scotland. One of the main suggestions finding favour amongst attendees was around setting up a special fund to mitigate the impact of the forthcoming evictions.

Additional concerns were raised by Non-parliamentary members about the difficulty of engaging with the UK Border Agency overall, and the lack of respect shown by UKBA representatives in these instances.

A written overview of details provided throughout the main part of this discussion item will be provided separately for future reference.

Bob Doris MSP introduced the next agenda item, inviting Keith Wimbles and Patrick Mbulu of the Voluntary Action Fund to address the meeting.

Guest Speakers: Keith Wimbles and Patrick Mbulu, Voluntary Action Fund
Scottish Government Equality Unit funding for Race Equality Projects

Keith Wimbles provided an overview of the history of the Voluntary Action Fund (VAF) and explained its previous and present roles in the distribution and management of grant funding. The current Equality Unit funding stream will run from 2012-2015 and the majority of approved funding will be managed by VAF. This management will include support for monitoring and self-evaluation to ensure quality processes are followed. VAF does not control the approval of funding but does use its expertise to advise the Scottish Government as to areas of need and opportunities for best use of funding investment. This helps to set the broader outcomes that would be prioritised. It also provides support to enable projects to work more effectively, on issues such as governance, human resources, financial systems, networking, sharing good practice and developing social capital. Keith Wimbles offered to establish whether VAF are permitted to share the results of their last evaluation of Scottish Government funded projects and, if so, to pass this on to members via the Secretariat.

Patrick Mbullu explained the new Equality Unit funding stream, which brings all previous 'strands' of Scottish Government equality funding together and recognises interlinked equalities issues. Of the 200 applications for the total £3 million funding pot, 59 projects were funded at varying levels (up to a maximum of £100,000 per year over a maximum three year term). A small selection of further projects were funded as strategic intervention projects or intermediary projects; these are controlled directly by the Scottish Government without involvement of VAF. The remit of VAF with regard to the remaining 59 funded projects is to support them to achieve, measure and evaluate progress on their outcomes. The current three year funding model is a positive step in many ways as it allows projects to plan ahead and build progress successfully, however the drawback of this is that it locks projects in to particular outcomes and may lack the flexibility to deal with changing needs and demands. Furthermore, unsuccessful applicants are likely to be without another opportunity to access Scottish Government funding for equalities projects over the three year period.

Attendees had the opportunity to seek further information and clarification on the points made. Information was provided in this discussion primarily relating to the robustness of self-evaluation mechanisms.

Bob Doris MSP moved to introduce the next item, apologising that it would be cut short due to time restraints.

Legislative Process Monitoring and Forthcoming Consultations

Carol Young explained that Graham Campbell and Hugh O'Donnell had offered to lead the final items and thanked them for this, however given the time constraints, suggested that any information could instead be forwarded in writing to members. This was agreed. Within the small amount of time remaining, Hugh O'Donnell spoke briefly on some of the more pressing consultation processes including the Community Empowerment and Renewal Bill, the Welfare Reform (Further Provision) (Scotland) Bill and Integration of Adult Health and Social Care proposals.

Actions

- Members with involvement in asylum issues to inform the CPG of any further developments on the situation in Glasgow
- Keith Wimbles to identify whether evaluation results can be shared and, if so, provide a copy to the Secretariat for distribution

Dates of Future Meetings:

The next meeting held will be the Cross Party Group on Racial Equality in Scotland's 2012 AGM. Members will be notified of the date (likely to be in September, following the Parliamentary Recess) as soon as possible.