

Cross Party Group on Poland
Wednesday, 12 June 2019
Scottish Parliament, TG.20/21

Minutes

I. Attendance:

1. Conveners: Claire Baker MSP, Joan McAlpine MSP
2. Other MSPs: Alexander Stewart MSP
3. Members: Chris Sagan; Margot Sagan; Robert L Hodgart; Keith Mullins MacIntyre; Antony Kozłowski, Kiro Źabińska MacIntyre; Sylwia Spooner; Mark Lazarowicz; Dorota Peszkowska; John Bates; Beata Kohlbek; Agata Wozny; Izabela Czekaj; Violeta Ilendo; Krystyna Szumelukowa; Joanne Peters; Katarzyna Jajszciok
4. Invited speakers: Piotr Teodorowski; Catriona Kennedy

II. Meeting:

1. **Welcome and Introduction**
2. **Speakers from the Research Project Exploring the Impact of Brexit on Mental Health and Wellbeing of EU Citizens**

Prof Catriona Kenndy and Piotr Teodorowski, Robert Gordon University, presented on their research carried out in collaboration with Feniks. The report was due to be launched at Parliament on 12 June 2019.

- The research involved focus groups with 30 participants, of which 9 were Polish.
- Pre-Brexit opinion was characterized as Scotland being welcoming and considered home, although not a perfect state of wellbeing.
- The referendum result was deemed unexpected and resulted in emotional responses/shock and uncertainty
- Regarding community contribution, participants felt they were being pushed away and feared prejudice, highlighting media rhetoric and questions over their right to be here
- Wellbeing had reduced for some people as a result of the referendum result, which was seen as contributing to mental ill-health
- Support for the Polish community and other EU citizens was mentioned

Questions following the presentation covered:

- Plans to take forward the findings
- How best to support children and parents
- Potential for follow-up research
- Awareness of existing support systems including the role of Citizens' Advice
- Access to education in Polish language
- The positive reputation of the Polish community in Scotland
- How participants were selected
- The inclusion of questions on general mental health
- The robustness of the small study

Pietr agreed to provide a copy of the report for circulation and welcomed further comments or discussion directly.

3. Sub-group reports

Updates from sub-committees were provided:

Brexit and Beyond: Krystyna Szumelukowa provided a brief update and related report on the Polish-British Belvedere Forum 2019. The planned reopening next spring of the Polish Ex-Combatants' Club at 11 Drummond Place in Edinburgh was highlighted. Brief discussion covered the possibility of Scotland hosting the Belvedere Forum next year, or an interim meeting beyond the main forum. Further comments welcome.

Culture: Various events were highlighted, including - Robert Porteous exhibition was noted as visiting Inverness, Aberdeen and Perth and the possibility of also coming to Edinburgh; a delegation visit to Edinburgh including the President of Krakow 20-22 September with various related events proposed. Discussion also covered the Polish Cultural Institute in London and the possibility of an office in Scotland.

It was agreed the CPG could write to the PCI in London to ask about plans related to Scotland.

Education: A separate report was provided on the decision of the City of Edinburgh Council to stop running Polish classes which have been in place since 2005. Members were critical of the decision. Discussion highlighted the provision of language within Polish schools was not delivering an equivalent and was not SQA recognised. Ongoing representations to the Scottish Government on the need for a Polish qualification within the Scottish curriculum were noted.

The CPG agreed to write to the City of Edinburgh Council and a matter of urgency urging it to reconsider the decision.

Mental Health: Ongoing work on suicides was outlined, including a project with SeeMe on barriers to support and cooperation with the suicide prevention group; Details provided for EU Settlement Scheme Support upcoming activities (separate handout provided); Funding received by the Fife Migrants Forum was welcomed.

Business: A number of upcoming events were highlighted, details are available on the Polish Professionals Forum website <http://www.polproforum.eu/>

EU Citizens' Rights Project: Feniks Counselling, Personal Development and Support Services Ltd. in partnership with the EU Citizens Rights Project – Scotland have received funds from the Home Office to support vulnerable members of the EU27 community in the Lothians in making applications for the new “settled status.” The service will be available in Polish and will concentrate on Polish citizens in need. More information about this service can be found here:

<http://www.feniks.org.uk/project/eu-settlement-scheme-support-en/>

In the past year, EUCRP organised over 40 events, in urban and rural areas, in English and in a number of EU languages, and for a number of groups facing particularly many barriers, e.g. deaf, unemployed, homeless. We will be discussing our first year of activity 13 June at an event in Augustine United Church in Edinburgh: <https://www.facebook.com/events/384680369056571/>.

A report about Brexit and its impacts on EU citizens can be downloaded from here:

<http://citizensrightsproject.org/research/>

Information on future events was provided, in addition to a reminder to check the Facebook page:

<https://www.facebook.com/EURightsProject/events/admin/>

4. Approval of the Minutes from the meeting on 6 March 2019

The Minutes from the meeting were approved. Proposed by Antony Kozolowski and seconded by Kiro Źabińska MacIntyre.

5. Date of the next meeting

Claire Baker MSP agreed to book meetings in for the year ahead, with a mix of lunchtime and evening meetings. The meeting involving the Polish Consul will be an evening meeting.

6. Any Other Business

- RNIB Scotland work with Polish community members with sight problems, links with higher rates of diabetes
- Clydebank Gdynia friendship
- Jenny Milne exhibition *Fragments that Remain* in Fraserburgh – trying to bring to Scottish Parliament and elsewhere
- Commonwealth wargraves memorial

7. Close of Meeting

The meeting closed at 19:10