

CROSS PARTY GROUP on WOMEN IN ENTERPRISE

MINUTES OF MEETING HELD 25 SEPTEMBER 2019

This meeting is the AGM of the Cross Party Group.

Gillian Martin opened the meeting and welcomed all attending. Many members were late in getting to the meeting room as a result of enhanced security checks.

1. As this meeting is the AGM, the role of chair was taken by Bill Bowman MSP in order that the elections be held. Gillian Martin elected as convenor – nominated by Anne Meikle and seconded by Criona Courtney. Jackie Baillie elected as vice convenor – nominated by Gillian Martin and seconded by Morag Malloy. Carolyn Currie was elected as treasurer – nominated by Morag Malloy and seconded by Sandra Patterson. Anne Meikle was elected secretary – nominated by Chrissy Mackay and seconded by Sandra Patterson.
2. The minutes of the meeting held in May 2019 were accepted.
3. Attendees : Melanie MacIntyre; Nathalie Agnew; Winnie Johnstone; Paula Ritchie; Criona Courtney; Laura Birrell; Lisa Wardlaw; Wendy Edie; Carol Cooke; Claire Seaman; Yvonne Greeves; Monica Martins; Jo Macsween; Julie Grieve; Julie Hall; Karen Stevens; Moira Wilson; Gabrielle Blackburn (speaker); Laura Durand; Julia Watson; Sandra Patterson; Bonnie Lawson-Brown; Mandy Bailey; Lisa Thomson; Christina Mackay; Wendy Edie; June Geyer; Amanda Pickford; Morag Malloy (speaker); Anne Meikle (secretary); Carolyn Currie (treasurer); Lynne Cadenhead; Bill Bowman MSP; Gillian Martin MSP (convenor).
4. Apologies: Maggie Georgopoulos; Jo Chidley; Mairi Damer; Julie Ashworth; Ann Henderson; National Advisory Council Women and Girls; Jennifer Lyndsay-Finan; Laura Galloway; Heidi Carroll; Ann Marie Morrison; Gill Lawrie; Jackie Baillie MSP.

The key theme for the meeting was the proposal for a National Women's Business Centre. Presentations were made by Morag Malloy (Scottish Enterprise secondee to Women's Enterprise Scotland) and Gabrielle Blackburn (Midlothian Women's Aid).

The presentation made by Midlothian Women's Aid outlined a proposal for a centre to support women's economic empowerment. Such a centre would provide 'a space for change' in which women could develop confidence and skills within a peer supported environment with the possibility of developing skills for enterprise – leading to employment and income generation. The centre would sustain change in the longer term – providing well-being and a gendered approach to holistic support.

Morag Malloy on behalf of Women's Enterprise Scotland presented on the proposal for the development of women's business centres in Scotland. The women's business centre model of operation would have a national headquarters with a number of regional hubs that would ensure that services were embedded in local communities, flexed to local needs and work in partnership with existing business support services.

Discussion was held on what kind of services women would look for from such centres and what impact such a service could make to the development of women in enterprise, with women business owners commenting on the need for business support for women at the early stages of start-up; the importance of support for micro business; and the need for growth support. Examples were given of the huge success such centres have been in Canada and the USA.

Women business owners around the table contributed to the discussion –

- A business centre to help women scale is important – to help support and expand women’s businesses. Many women had no support other than Business Gateway.
- It is difficult for women in a range of sectors - women’s businesses can be more represented in the services sector, while some support is specifically aimed at other sectors not appropriate for many women. For many women’s businesses, not having a specific place for advice and support is a significant barrier – especially at a local level.
- Such a centre would be important too, as a place to be able to invite young girls to learn.
- Peer to peer support is very important – Scotland needs a centre to bring women together, to learn and to support each other.
- Many women’s businesses can be dismissed when they are viewed as ‘lifestyle’ businesses but the economic impact of all those “lifestyle” businesses together is significant. A national women’s business centre gathering data on the impact of such businesses can really drive forward economic insight and change.
- One woman stated how lucky she had felt to be in Glasgow when she started a business where the first national women’s centre was located in the 1990s. What is currently on offer is too terrifying for many to walk in through the door. A women’s centre would be so valuable for everyone.

The meeting closed at 13.45 with thanks from the chair.