

Meeting of the All Party Assembly Group (APAG) on Ethnic Minority Communities

Date: Tuesday 8th of June 2010
Venue: Parliament Buildings, Stormont (Room 274)
Time: 12:30pm

Attendees

Political representatives:

Chair – Declan O’Loan MLA (SDLP), Anna Lo MLA (Alliance), Billy Leonard MLA (Sinn Fein), Peter McClenaghan (SDLP).

BME sector representatives:

Javaid Naveed (NI Pakistani Community Association/ NI Muslim Family Association), Sophie Romantzoff (NICEM), Louise Higgins (NICEM), Patrick Yu (NICEM), James Holmlund (Bahai Community), Ivy Ridge (Ballymena Inter Ethnic Forum), Margaret Donaghy (MCRC), Joan McGovern (Barnardos), Simon Ling (Chinese Welfare Association), Eileen Chan-Hu (Chinese Welfare Association), Mohammed Al-Qaryooti (Belfast Islamic Centre).

Tim Losty (Head of Equality Directorate, OFMDFM)

1. Apologies

Political representatives:

Dawn Purvis MLA (PUP), Stewart Finn (PUP), Danny Kennedy MLA (UUP).

BME sector representatives:

Moira McCombe (NICRAS), Mrs Khan (Al Nisa), Katy Radford (Belfast Jewish Community), Barry Fitzpatrick (NICEM), Helena Macormac (NICEM), Derek Hanway (An Munia Tober), Bobby Rao (Strabane Ethnic Communities Association), Mandarin Speakers Association.

2. Approval of the minutes of the last meeting

It was requested that a piece of information be corrected from the minutes of the previous meeting. At the end of the Mandarin Speakers Association’s presentation, it was agreed the paragraph “*Anna asked if the organisation considered working with other groups such as the Chinese Welfare Association. It was answered that yes but they were refused the possibility of renting a room there*” should be removed from the draft minutes as the accuracy of the fact was refuted by the Chinese Welfare Association.

3. Matters arising from the last meeting

Crisis Fund

The meeting heard that there was still no response provided from the remaining parties to support the motion. Without full support it will be difficult to move the motion forward. The meeting agreed to wait for the Race Equality

Forum Sub-group on Immigration propositions to decide on next action. An update on that matter will be given at next meeting.

Anna informed the meeting that when asked, the Minister of Finance and Personnel confirmed that the Migration Fund was a one-off and will not be available again next year. Under the Barnett Formula, last year's Migration Fund was included in a larger pot as it was up to the Departments to bid for it and none did. It was agreed Anna would ask more questions on that issue.

4. OFMDFM update on restructuring

The meeting welcomed Tim Losty, Head of the Equality Directorate, OFMDFM. Tim gave the meeting an overview of the restructuring process at the OFMDFM. He explained that part of the restructuring is to bring policy areas together and regroup economic and social policies. The process started over 18 months ago with discussions at the political, ministerial and stakeholder level. The restructuring proposed to create a more strategic directorate, rather than a reactive one as it was initially.

There were 9 or 10 branches, based in Departments, a structure that was not ideal at developing policies and the workload was very unbalanced. The branches will now be replaced by Policy Project Teams, with Ken Fraser remaining the contact for the Race sector.

Tim said it was crucial to extend and broaden knowledge throughout the directorate. Ministers make policies and the role of the directorate is to implement them and work closer with organisations. Feedback from stakeholder organisations will help the directorate to concentrate on strategic priorities.

The skills that are required in some areas are also required in other areas. That might seem to dilute the concentration of resources in the sector but it most importantly means that skills and expertise will be better shared and more easily accessed.

The Ministers will ultimately decide strategic priorities and the role of the new Directorate is to advise them. Those priorities will have an impact on the internal funding and it may mean some delay in certain work areas. The OFMDFM want to engage with the stakeholder groups and share their expertise. This could mean secondments, or paying services to help the directorate get the work done.

It is essential to make sure that objectives are followed and that ways of measuring this achievement are found. And if the Directorate fails to deliver their objectives, it is important that alternatives ways can be found quickly. In terms of restructuring, matrix management will be employed. This is being used in other governments in the Republic of Ireland and in Whitehall, and OFMDFM are watching them closely to see how effective matrix management is. Restructuring should lead to a more effective and efficient service.

Anna welcomed the initiative of the OFMDFM to work closer with the groups, as one of the complaints over the years was the lack of accessibility of the Directorate. Anna stressed the importance of having the Cohesion, Sharing and Integration Strategy urgently implemented with corresponding Action Plans.

Regarding the economic impacts of social policy, Billy asked how in practical term is it going to help the groups that are represented here today.

Tim answered that the economic aspect of a successful CSI strategy is essential, particularly in terms of Community Relations. If the objectives are right, there will be less discrimination, and less money will be spent into countering its effects. Where it doesn't work, there will be negative economic consequences (no investments, businesses and people moving out). Failing to attract investments is a failure to raise people to their full potential.

Billy asked if the budget would be flexible, to follow the needs of community groups.

Tim answered that they need to help stakeholders realise that money available need to go to areas where it will have a major impact. It means that funding in other areas will reduce, to be concentrated in areas that need it most. There will be no more silo approach where the money is diluted. The overall pool of money will be smaller but it will be used more effectively. Resources will be concentrated where they are needed.

Margaret asked if the CSI strategy would still be ready for consultation at the end of June. Tim said yes and the consultation will last for 12 weeks.

Eileen asked for clarification on the Community Relations term, does it only include the 2 main traditional communities?

Tim answered that it includes all the communities living in Northern Ireland.

Eileen explained that our sector is targeting racism but also sectarianism. Ethnic minority communities are not left untroubled by the troubles. When the OFMDFM think of interface areas, it also has to think of the minorities living in those areas.

Tim answered that feedback from those communities is very valuable.

Patrick welcomed the restructuring but mentioned that even with the right strategy put in place, the OFMDFM would have to rely on Departments to implement it. How can we improve the delivery system and how can we monitor it?

Tim answered that over the past 3 years, with the Programme for Government, they learnt they need to improve in some areas. Departments need to collaborate with each other and they will be accountable on how each spend happens. Stakeholders have to be more involved and consultation exercises have to be more meaningful. The Directorate needs to know if what they offer is efficient.

Patrick asked if the Executive would consider a service agreement with the Departments so it cannot be argued in the future that some issues do not fall under their responsibility.

Tim said that the programme cannot be done *to* stakeholders but *with* stakeholders. More evidence-based information is needed.

Muhammad asked if the same standards will apply to the private sector and if anything can make them abide by those standards.

Tim replied that the business sector is also part of the CSI consultation and that good practice is promoted. Section 75 is one of the guarantees for the private sector to respect standards.

James stressed the importance of communication with the groups.

Tim agreed that they do not only need to inform but listen to stakeholders. Tim also stressed the importance of managing expectations to avoid disappointment. The main communication will come from the Ministers and it is important to seize any opportunity to communicate with them, such as this Assembly Group.

5. Review of APAG 2009-2010 and Terms of Reference

Declan presented a Review Report that was compiled by NICEM and sent to the group earlier this month. He stated that the group can take credit and pride in what has been done over the years. The quality of the linkage between the stakeholders and the members of the Assembly is very good. The attendance and the quality of engagement were noted as very positive.

Patrick mentioned that as the group has been established for 2 years it is time to decide what the future direction of the group should be. This group started with the Race Strategy in mind. Over the years it dealt with many individual issues but needs now to focus on the Race Strategy again. He posed the question do we need a new Race Strategy as the current one expires in 2011, what should be its content?

Javaid thanked NICEM for their work as secretariat. The Pakistani Association has no staff and cannot be represented at each meeting so the communication between meetings is essential for the organisation.

Jim mentioned that the group has a challenge both in terms of the sector engagement and political engagement and shouldn't be too drastic in reviewing the membership. The sector is enlarging and the membership should reflect that.

Mohammad thanked NICEM and the group for offering the opportunity to voice their concerns and issues. The Belfast Islamic Centre wishes to remain a member of the group.

Eileen asked if the list of groups on the review document could be moved from page 10 to page 2.

Declan said it might not be necessary to rewrite the document.

Patrick said that only the 2 past years were reflected in this review, the whole process started in 2006 as an agreement between ethnic minority groups and faith groups.

Declan said there are issues in terms of engagement with some political parties. The group needs to find how to engage better with those parties.

Patrick said the group needs to clarify the representation of Unionist parties. By September Anna Lo MLA (Alliance) will be chairing the group for 6 months. The list of official representatives and office bearers needs to be updated. Patrick also suggested that the group put its activities in the public domain for the general public to understand better its actions and be more transparent. The meeting approved this initiative and it was suggested to put the minutes of the meetings on the Assembly website. The group needs to write to the Committee of Standards and Privileges (Paul Gill) for practical arrangements.

At the previous meeting it was decided that the organisation SEEDS would provide a written submission to the group in order to get their request examined. It was confirmed that no submission was received. SEEDS are a service providing group in the L/Derry area rather than an umbrella organisation and some concerns were raised on the membership criteria as the APAG would rather encourages direct participation from the BME groups themselves. Exceptions were made for the MCRC and Barnardos as they were deeply involved in working with ethnic minorities and were present in the early stages of developing that group.

Joan confirmed that attending the APAG has been very helpful in Barnardos' work with Travellers and ethnic minority families. Barnardos have now been member for a year. The sector changed dramatically over the past years and it is important to tie up with what is going on.

Jim stressed the need to redefine the purpose of the group to create a more integrated community of people living in Northern Ireland.

Patrick said that there is no problem opening to new members but we will need to change our terms of reference to accommodate this.

Eileen confirmed that a specific definition of eligible groups is needed.

The meeting agreed that the Terms of Reference would be reviewed at the next meeting as time was running out. Whilst she was unable to attend, Katy Radford had submitted an email that had been distributed to the group which stated her views on this matter.

6. AOB

The meeting thanked Declan. This is his last meeting as Chair of the group.

7. Date of next meeting

14th of September 2010