

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

Date: Tuesday 13th of October 2010
Venue: Parliament Buildings, Stormont (Room 135)
Time: 12:30pm

Attendees

Political representatives:

Chair - Anna Lo MLA (Alliance), Steven Agnew (Green Party).

BME sector representatives:

Margaret Donaghy (Multi-Cultural Resource Centre), Joan McGovern (Barnardos Tuar Ceatha), Muhammed Al-Qaryooti (Belfast Islamic Centre), Frances Wong (Oi Yin Women Association), Phoebe Wong (Oi Yin Women Association), Sophie Romantzoff (NICEM), Patrick Yu (NICEM), Justin Kouame (NICRAS), Nomzamo Mahlangu (NICRAS), Jim Holmlund (Bahai Council for Northern Ireland), Michael Rodgers (NICEM), Helena Macormac (NICEM).

1. Apologies

Political representatives:

Dawn Purvis MLA (Independant), Declan O'Loan MLA (SDLP), Billy Leonard MLA (Sinn Fein).

BME sector representatives:

Ashok Sharma (Indian Community Centre), Moira McCombe (NICRAS), Afaf Ali (Egyptian Society of Northern Ireland), Barry Fitzpatrick (NICEM), Paul Yam (Wah Hep Chinese Community Association), Maria Ellis (Women of the World), Miroslav Hosek (Czech and Slovak Association).

2. Approval of the minutes of the last meeting

Minutes of the last meeting were approved.

3. Matters arising from the last meeting

Terms of reference of the APG:

The secretariat revised the Terms of Reference of the group in accordance with the agreement to open the membership to groups with interest in BME issues, subject to MLAs approval.

Under the new Assembly rules for groups, it was clarified that BME groups in this Assembly Group do not have the same status as politicians; Politicians are members, BME groups are invitees. This appears in the new Terms of Reference.

Anna Lo explained that All Party Assembly Groups are only made of members of the Assembly whereas All Party Group offer the possibility to invite external groups to come to meetings.

Patrick Yu stressed that in All Party Groups, consensus is in the main guiding principle.

The revised Terms of Reference reflect the change of name of the group, from "All Party Assembly Group" to "All Party Group". NICEM will remain secretariat for the group.

Action Point: Billy Leonard to officially write to SEEDS.

Patrick mentioned that an update would be added to the Terms of Reference to include the CSI Strategy.

The revised Terms of Reference were formally adopted by the meeting.

Scoping paper on OFMDFM funding for BME groups:

As discussed at the previous meeting, NICEM will conduct a research on core funding for BME groups. The formal proposal was submitted to the OFMDFM. The research will consist of a mapping exercise and individual interviews and will be conducted by two external consultants from Scotland, Ashok O'Rea and Helena McKnight.

Anna asked what was the rationale behind this choice.

Patrick answered that the Scottish model is unique and very useful for us. Those consultants have an excellent understanding of the Northern Irish situation and it is good to have an outside perspective.

Anna asked why 2 consultants were appointed.

Patrick answered that this piece of work is very important. There are many groups to interview.

Anna asked how much this project would cost.

Patrick estimated the cost to £15 000 to £20 000 for around 40 days of work.

Anna asked what would be the timescale.

Patrick said it would depend on the OFMDFM, but hopes to start in November.

Anna asked if the core funding for next year has been allocated to groups yet.

Joan McGovern said that the OFMDFM usually wait until the end of the year to announce it as some groups will have under-spent.

Phoebe Wong said that she attended public meeting regarding the Peace III funding but that no BME groups were represented at all.

4. Annual General Meeting

Anna explained the need for an Annual General Meeting under new Assembly rules. This means the Annual Review report needs to be approved and office bearers appointed.

Patrick contacted the Assembly to explain that the office bearers for this group were rotating every 6 months.

The Annual Review and the current office bearers were formally approved by the meeting. The AGM was closed.

5. Consultation on the Programme for Cohesion Sharing and Integration (CSI) and future funding

The OFMDFM organised a meeting for the BME sector on Tuesday the 12th of October at the Indian Community Centre.

Very disappointing as only very few BME groups came to the meeting. Most of the attendees were government agencies.

Patrick said that one of the key points raised was the status of the Racial Equality Strategy. CSI will not replace the Racial Equality Strategy. The racial Equality Strategy is currently being updated. There is a general agreement that this strategy is the way forward and should be used as a template for other strategies (sectarianism for example).

Anna circulated documents after questions were raised by the Alliance party to the OFMDFM, where it was also stressed that the Racial Equality Strategy will not disappear. A consultation will be organised with the BME sector on the extension or update of the strategy.

Joan said that it is really important to tell people about the Racial Equality Strategy. The CSI document is very confusing because there is no action plan attached to it.

Steven Agnew said his party asked the OFMDFM if they were planning to attach an action plan to the document and it was answered no.

Patrick explained that the submission drafted by the APG to the OFMDFM emphasises the need for an action plan and implementation mechanisms, as well as a clear relationship with the RES.

CSI is an overarching framework and was designed to accommodate other strategies.

CSI includes only 7 of the 9 grounds of Section 75 (carers and marriage are not in the document).

The aim of the CSI strategy is to tackle racism and sectarianism. The Hate crime section includes all Section 75 grounds but many of the vulnerable groups feel excluded. This has been demonstrated in all the public consultation meetings, with many complaints from sexual orientation groups, women's groups or disability groups.

Minority religions are absent from the document too.

CSI should be a platform of policies.

DIY policy papers from the government: our role is to fill in details into it.

RES fits in under the CSI framework.

Strategy against Homophobia worked on since 2006 but nothing has been published: frustration.

Carers have a strategy.

Other policies should be coordinated and different departments should work together to implement the policy.

If we have our own strategy and structure of implementation.

Champions and working groups worked well until they were suspended. Only one is left working.

Patrick raised the issue of defrosting the Race Equality Forum.

Anna said the current Race Equality Strategy finishes this year.

Patrick confirmed and said that the BME sector should ask for an extension of the current strategy or a second strategy to be put in place.

Joan said that all the groups and individuals should stress this into their submissions to the OFMDFM.

Justin Kouame said that NICRAS looked at the CSI document but could not see anything on immigration. There should be more about it in the document and feel quite concerned about it.

Patrick answered that the document mentions the "immigration exception" in the first chapter, which is a very positive thing as groups have been working on this issue for the past 20 years.

Patrick encouraged very groups and individuals to fill in the template submission and include all the issues that are relevant to them.

The template submission only focuses on racial issues. Groups and individuals can add all the issues under the chapter "Racial Equality issues".

Margaret Donaghy asked if anything was said in the template about funding.

Patrick answered that this issue hasn't been touched yet.

Joan said that to fill in the official submission you have to tick "no" to all the boxes and then write your comments underneath so they can be taken into consideration.

Patrick explained that there is no obligation to fill in the official document, as all the issues have been framed and do not reflect the real issues. Submissions can be done on a separate document.

Steven suggested to fill in both and answer "no" to all the questions on the official document.

Phoebe Wong said she has been contacted by external consultants who offered to voice groups concerns.

Patrick advised not to let consultants express views on the behalf of groups. Every group and individuals should write their own submission. If groups have any difficulties doing so, NICEM is happy to provide help.

The meeting agreed on the draft submission for the All Party Group.

Margaret said it is a very comprehensive document.

6. Group presentations

No group was available to do a presentation this month.

7. AOB

Patrick mentioned a piece of research that was published this month by Queen's University's Human Rights Centre: *Opting-out of religious Education*.

The meeting agreed to invite them to present their work at the November meeting.

Muhammad Al-Qaryooti mentioned that the Islamic Centre would be organising training son the Muslim Faith in Ballymena, Omagh and L/Derry in the coming months.

Joan mentionned that Barnardos are currently working on a piece of research for Asylum Seekers' children, to be published before Christmas.

Barnardos and the National Children's Bureau have developed a joint project, Diversity in Action NI and recently published a piece of research on education.

Helena Macormac mentioned that NICEM is organising a fundraiser in the John Hewitt that evening, in aid of destitute migrants.

8. Date of the next meeting

9th of November 2010