

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

Date: Tuesday 14th of September 2010
Venue: Parliament Buildings, Stormont (Room 144)
Time: 12:30pm

Attendees

Political representatives:

Chair - Anna Lo MLA (Alliance), Billy Leonard MLA (Sinn Fein), Declan O'Loan MLA (SDLP), Stewart Finn (Office of Dawn Purvis MLA), Stephen Agnew (Green Party), Danny Kennedy MLA (UUP).

BME sector representatives:

Margaret Donaghy (MCRC), Katy Radford (Jewish Community Centre), Reginald Clark (ACSONI), Jennifer Collins (Barnardos), Mohammed Al-Qaryooti (Belfast Islamic Centre), Sophie Romantzoff (NICEM), Patrick Yu (NICEM), Eoin Rooney (NICEM), Eddis Nicholl (NICEM), Justin Kouame (NICRAS), Moira McCombe (NICRAS), Ashok Sharma (Indian Community Centre), Satya Roberts (Windsor Women's Centre), Eleanor Jordan (Windsor Women's Centre), Derek Hanway (An Munia Tober), Paul Yam (Wah Hep Chinese Community Association).

1. Apologies

Political representatives:

Dawn Purvis MLA (PUP), Micky Brady MLA (Sinn Fein), Dolores Kelly MLA (SDLP).

BME sector representatives:

Frances Wong (World Wide Women @ North Down), Phoebe Wong (World Wide Women @ North Down), Helena Macormac (NICEM), Joan McGovern (Barnardos).

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 APAG:

The meeting heard that no written submission was received from SEEDS, following their request to be part of the Assembly group. The group agreed that Billy Leonard would follow it up with SEEDS.

Ashok Sharma mentioned the difficulties for the Sikh Community Group in Derry to attend the APAG and said they could be represented through the Indian Community Centre. The Indian Community Centre could provide a

platform for smaller Indian groups and let them know what is happening at the APAG.

Patrick Yu informed the meeting that groups who cannot attend the APAG always receive minutes of meetings and are given the possibility to raise issues on the agenda before each meeting.

At the last meeting a detailed report has been presented with the list of members attending the meetings. The attendance at the last meeting was very low and it was not possible to reach an agreement on the membership issue. Under Assembly rules, the office bearers should be the ones making decisions. Therefore agreement should be reached by the MLAs.

The Assembly has codified new rules for All Party Assembly Groups that should be taken into account when drafting the new Terms of Reference.

The Chair and Vice Chair of the group previously met and agreed that the APAG should be as open and inclusive as possible. It should accommodate BME groups, umbrella groups, representatives and projects with an interest in the BME sector. Stewart Finn added that steps should be taken to ensure that participating groups are in direct communication with ethnic minority people themselves.

The secretariat will draft new Terms of Reference for the next meeting and the MLAs will ultimately agree the document.

Stephen Agnew asked the meeting if any update was provided on the Crisis Fund.

Patrick informed the meeting that Ken Fraser was originally due to join this month's meeting but was unable to. The Race Equality Forum sub-group on Immigration is currently working on the crisis fund issue.

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

The OFMDFM is currently running consultation meetings and all the members of the APAG are encouraged to attend the meetings and feed in as much as possible.

NICEM will be running additional consultations for the sector on the 22nd and 23rd of September. OFMDFM planned to organise a meeting specific for the BME sector in late October and NICEM's meetings beforehand would provide an opportunity to prepare a submission paper for that meeting.

The Green Party will prepare a submission paper as well, to which members of the group are welcome to contribute.

Patrick asked what are the views of the Ministers on the CSI document.

Anna Lo attended the Belfast consultation meeting. Few women's groups were attending and they were disappointed with content of the document. There is a clear lack of mention of community involvement in the document.

Billy Leonard advised that the lapse of time between the OFMDFM consultations and their response will be a critical time to get our views through.

The meeting agreed for the group to write a submission with all the key race issues.

Patrick said it is important to keep focusing on the Race Strategy. Anna confirmed that when asked during the consultation, she received no guarantee that there will be a continuation of the Race Strategy.

Patrick explained that the Race Strategy is the best model of all sectors and should be used as a model to develop an anti-sectarianism strategy. The CSI document is a very vague document with no practical action details and would benefit from that model.

Anna confirmed that there should be an action plan clearly mentioning who is responsible for what and with what resources.

Patrick agreed that the action plan should be SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Resourced, Time), with no jargon. The strategic impacts of the strategy have to be given careful consideration.

Anna explained that the Race Equality Strategy first year action plan was more a mapping exercise of already existing services rather than a constructive action plan.

Danny Kennedy mentioned that it is important to do a submission not only to the Departments but directly to the OFMDFM.

The meeting agreed that the secretariat will draft a document and will circulate it to all the members for approval. The deadline for the submissions to the OFMDFM is on the 29th of October.

Groups who have individual responses should send them to the secretariat as soon as possible to be incorporated to the document.

5. The budget and the impact of proposed cuts

Patrick informed the meeting that in the last couple of months there have been a number of meetings about the public finance cuts. What will be the impact on ethnic minority communities? Ethnic Minority communities are always the first casualties, whether it be in terms of service provision or community development funding. Early indicators on where the cuts will take place are needed.

The impact on funding for ethnic minority communities development is worrying. This year, out of over 20 groups only 9 received core funding from the OFMDFM.

Ashok confirmed that the Indian Community Centre has been suffering greatly from the absence of core funding this year. The uncertainty about the future of the group is the same every year due to having to apply for funding on an annual basis. The Indian Community Centre managed to keep the centre in operation with some reserves but for new groups it is extremely difficult.

Anna mentioned that it would be interesting to map out which projects and groups suffered from the absence of core funding.

Patrick told the meeting that NICEM did an important scoping exercise a few years ago in order to secure core funding for groups from the OFMDFM. It is certainly time to redo the exercise. The Scottish model might be valuable in this task. In the next 4 to 5 years we can probably expect a cut of one third of the current total amount available.

Billy asked how long would it take to get the mapping exercise done.

Patrick replied that NICEM will try to have it done by early next year. Each organisation will have to be interviewed.

Derek Hanway welcomed that piece of work and underlined that another issue was the diversity of groups, of purpose and of services they offer. Depending on their area of work groups should be able to get funding directly from Departments.

Anna told the meeting that this issue has been recurring for many years. Groups should be able to go to different pots of money but Departments will not be willing to take any decision on core funding and will refer BME groups to the OFMDFM.

The logic says that if groups are working in community development they should be funded by DSD but it has never happened (only once with the Strabane Ethnic Communities Association).

Patrick confirmed that the point of the mapping exercise will be to see who is funding what projects. It will also be useful to underline the duplication of funding between BME groups and local groups, which has been an issue for years. As there are three levels of funding in the CSI programme, the mapping exercise needs to be very detailed.

Billy said that the core question is what can you achieve in a very difficult market. Funding has to be very well targeted.

Patrick said that the research will only focus on the OFMDFM funding as they are responsible for the race issue.

Paul Yam welcomed NICEM's initiative and stressed that it is very important for groups to be able to secure new sources of funding as well as preserving existing ones. The sector needs to continue with lobbying as even with the cuts, groups will still be expected to provide the same level of services they currently provide.

Paul asked if anyone is aware of the extent of the cuts.

Anna replied there has been no clear information about it.

Patrick explained that according to the CSI document's areas of priority, the next financial year should have an increased budget as the resources are reallocated internally. The main issue will be for groups getting funding from the Health sector and particularly Trusts. It is very likely that the first casualties will be small BME projects. The groups are advised to individually talk to their Trust in order to acquire more details about the future of their projects.

Paul said it is important that the consultation responses emphasise the need for funding to follow the ideas of the document.

Anna stressed the importance of not exposing the sector to the mercy of the Departments.

Billy raised the issue of timing. Some organisations are already going in front of the committee to raise concerns about their sector.

Stewart said that the group should keep the draft as a working document so information can be used as soon as it is collected.

Patrick said that NICEM will try to do the work as fast as possible and will inform the meeting in October of a clearer timeframe.

It might not be sustainable in the future to have four or five different groups representing one community.

NICVA has been publishing good information on their website about the cuts. They will also be holding consultations on the CSI programme.

Anna said that the message has to be clear: do not cut vital services.

6. Group presentations

Windsor Women's Centre Multicultural Group

The Windsor Women's Centre is at the crossroad between the women's sector, the children's sector and the Ethnic Minority sector.

The services for Ethnic Minority women started in 2000, as a one-year project under the Peace and Reconciliation fund. As Northern Ireland became a more diverse place, there was a clear need to create a full time post in the centre.

The services provided in the centre are offered to all women. The centre recognises the special needs of women from ethnic minority backgrounds and it is a challenge to address those needs in mainstream services.

The purpose of the centre is to enhance women's development, education and training. The aim of the centre is to increase participation of the women and their involvement with the local community. Integration is a major part of the work.

Part of the work is to refer women to other programmes and agencies such as the Law Centre, Women's Aid and social services.

Windsor women's Centre works to reduce isolation, address issues of domestic violence and provides immigration advice referrals.

It is a challenge to provide for different needs when they appear. The centre is committed to pushing the integration agenda and working with as many organisations as possible.

The centre provides service such as cultural awareness, English classes for women and children, and a free crèche. It also works in partnership with special needs schools and social workers, in order to provide counselling services and a mentoring programme for women who are keen to get involved in the community work.

The current main concern is funding as the post is only funded until March.

7. AOB

The Belfast Migrant Centre, a joint initiative with the Irish Congress of Trade Unions, Unison, Polish Association Northern Ireland and NICEM, is open and running. The project is based in NICEM office on Shaftesbury Square, 3rd floor, until their new offices on the 2nd floor are available.

The centre provides a wide range of services (welfare advice, immigration advice, advice for victims of racial harassment and discrimination etc.).

8. Date of the next meeting

12th of October 2010