

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

Date: Tuesday 9th of November 2010
Venue: Parliament Buildings, Stormont (Room 135)
Time: 12:30pm

Attendees

Political representatives:

Chair - Anna Lo MLA (Alliance), Billy Leonard MLA (Sinn Fein), Declan O'Loan MLA (SDLP), Stephen Agnew (Green Party)

BME sector representatives:

Margaret Donaghy (Multi-Cultural Ressource Centre), Eileen Chan-Hu (Chinese Welfare Association), Patrick Yu (NICEM), Eddis Nicholl (NICEM), Moira McCombe (NICRAS), Paul Yam (Wah Hep Chinese Community Association), Helena Macormac (NICEM), Agnieszka Wlodarska (Belfast Migrant Centre, NICEM), Joan McGovern (Barnardos Tuar Cethea), Ivy Ridge (Ballymena Inter Ethnic Forum).

1. Apologies

Political representatives:

Dawn Purvis MLA (Independent)

BME sector representatives:

Mr Sandhu (Sikh Cultural Centre, Derry), Frances Wong (Oi Yin Women's Association), Phoebe Wong (Oi Yin Women's Association), Muhammad Al-Qaryooti (Belfast Islamic Centre), Edwin Graham (Bahai Council for NI), James Holmlund (Bahai Council for NI), Sophie Romantzoff (NICEM).

2. Approval of the minutes of the last meeting

Minutes of the last meeting were approved.

3. Matters arising from the last meeting

- **SEEDS Submission**

Billy Leonard received a submission from SEEDS and will forward it to the secretariat to be circulated to members of the All Party Group.

It was noted that at the previous meeting that the Terms of Reference were amended to allow a wider participation to the All Party Group.

- **Presentation of Queen's University Human Rights Centre**

The secretariat contacted members of the research team of QUB Human Rights Centre to do a presentation of their report "Opting-out of Religious

Education". The team members were unable to attend this month's meeting but will be available to come to January's meeting.

January's meeting will be rescheduled as the Assembly is not back on the second week of January. The meeting agreed to reschedule to the 18th of January. The secretariat will re-arrange the room.

- **Update on NICEM's proposed research on Core Funding for the sector**

No indication has yet been received from the OFMDFM if the proposal will be funded. The budget required for the research is around £18,000- £20,000 for 40 days of work, this will include travel expenses and related costs.

Anna Lo suggested approaching the Community Foundation Northern Ireland as an alternative funder for the work.

The rationale behind the choice of Scottish consultants was motivated by the need to have independent researchers and the added value of having the Scottish perspective as they had administered a similar programme. Patrick explained that this is a substantial piece of work and would require particular skills from the consultants. The research will evaluate the impact upon those who have received funding from the OFMDFM over the last 3 years. It will also look at what skills and expertise exist within the ethnic minority sector as well as what the gaps are. If OFMDFM does not provide funding for this research, NICEM will consider using their own resources.

The last evaluation of funding done by the OFMDFM was in 2003, since that report, the proportion of BME groups accessing core funding has been drastically reduced. This financial year no information is provided on the OFMDFM website as to who received funding. NICEM agreed to provide a briefing paper on the proposal.

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

Anna asked which groups had sent their submission to the OFMDFM on the CSI programme;

NICRAS, Ballymena Inter-Ethnic Forum, Chinese Welfare Association, Multi-Cultural Resource Centre, Barnardos, Wah Hep Chinese Community Association and NICEM, who were all represented at the meeting said that they had all sent their submissions.

Anna suggested that it might be useful if each political representative spoke a little about the response from their party:

- SDLP: Declan O'Loan said he was disappointed in the document as it lacks vision and definition in terms of a reconciled society and a cohesive community.

- Sinn Féin: Billy stated that whilst his party was aware of all the fuss and politicking that had surrounded the document, his party was not as down beat as others. He recognized that the document was one of a family of measures.
- The Green Party deplored the lack of action plans in the document. This should have been an inspirational document but it is more aspirational and these aspirations fall short of what should happen. This document would not lead us on the right path.
- The Alliance Party believes the document hasn't gone far enough in tackling division in society.

From NICEM's perspective, when the Assembly came back into function in 2007 all parties unanimously supported the Racial Equality Strategy document and made efforts to contribute to it but all this work has disappeared. Currently the Racial Equality Strategy's future is uncertain.

Billy Leonard said the Racial Equality Strategy was a very important part of the family of documents under CSI.

Anna asked if anyone had further detail on the timescale. No one had certainty on this point.

5. Group presentations

The Belfast Migrant Centre:

Agnieszka Wlodarska made a presentation to the group on the new centre;

The Belfast Migrant Centre came to life in June 2010 in a partnership with UNISON, ICTU, Polish Association and NICEM. The project is funded by the Big Lottery Fund under the Welcome House project and is initially funded for 3 years.

Since July, most of the work has concentrated on putting all previously existing activities in a more organised and secure form, the project has installed a new more efficient database system to assist with this.

The Migrant Centre has two full-time bilingual advisers, a project manager and a bi-lingual administrator, these positions are funded by the Lottery. NICEM has also used their own resources to appoint a racial harassment support adviser and they have used resources from the Atlantic Philanthropies programme to appoint an immigration adviser (OISC level 3). The Centre helps migrants through casework on various issues such as employment, housing and education, benefits, health, immigration, racial harassment, racist attacks and racial discrimination.

The Centre will be moving to new premises at the end of the month of November. The official launch will take place on the 8th of December (2nd Floor, Ascot House, 24-31 Shaftesbury Square).

The advice activities fit directly under the wider policy shaping the activities of NICEM. The Migrant Centre will also have a capacity building function, working with new emerging communities and offering free English classes. The centre is closely working with the Belfast Trust on issues of alcohol and drug abuse that link into mental health and homelessness.

The centre would not deal with Asylum seekers and Refugees, Bryson House and NICRAS currently have responsibility for Asylum seekers and refugees so the centre would not be taking on this function. Both EU and non-EU nationals will have access to the centre, regardless of their immigration status.

The development of the centre came out of joint research organised with the ICTU, UNISON and other major trade unions five years ago. The logic behind the centre being based in Belfast was due to the fact that the research showed that most migrants arrive in Belfast before moving to other areas. Part of the project will also allocate work outside of Belfast. The Racial Harassment support advice services of the centre and the Immigration advice services are Northern Ireland wide.

The centre is already very busy with over 215 new cases over the past few months. There is a waiting list system unless cases are urgent. The advisers are available for the drop-in clinic twice a week (at the Polish Association and in Duncairn Complex).

In many cases if service users were informed about their rights they wouldn't need to come to the Centre. Therefore NICEM encourages migrant community groups to organise information sessions. It is important to increase the capacity of these groups as this would benefit everyone. Currently specific capacity building work is taking place with the Filipino, Portuguese and Mainland Chinese communities. Under the lottery requirement there is a robust data monitoring system and indicators will be provided to show the impact of the project.

Anna said she was concerned about not duplicating work in times when funding is such a difficult issue. Anna asked if the Migrant Centre is working in partnership with GEMS. Patrick said we can help people with sign posting them to local training opportunities.

Eileen Chan-Hu said the Chinese Welfare Association welcomes the project. The Chinese Welfare Association has a bilingual advocate who has been trained and works in partnership with the Policing Board. Eileen said it would be important to work together, share resources and cases with the Migrant Centre.

Billy Leonard suggested that CWA and NICEM discuss further cooperation after the meeting. Anna said in the current economic context, inter-dependant work needs to be promoted. Anna noted that the centre would have a huge burden of work, Patrick confirmed that yes there was a huge demand for such services and that as an organisation the centre needs to know its limitations as there is only have a small team of staff to serve such a huge population.

Eileen asked that if it were a 3-year project, how would it become sustainable. Eddis commented that it was important to bear in mind that the centre came about as the work of a consortium between the trade unions and NICEM, and other organisations

Patrick also mentioned that NICEM's 15th anniversary AGM will take place on the 9th of December and will be followed by an international conference on migrants' rights. The theme of the conference will focus upon the International Labour Organisation convention and international standards and the Convention on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination. Specialists in European Law will be present and there will be 2 panel discussions looking at the impact of the economic downturn and the effect of the public finance cuts towards migrants. Trade Unions and the Human Rights Commission will be present alongside individual migrants speakers.

6. AOB

Billy Leonard asked people's views on detention centres. He noted that he had already spoken to NICEM on this issue.

Moira McCombe said she previously raised questions on the detention of families. Margaret said that the UK Border Agency had told her people would only be held at the holding centre for four hours but then there was an upstairs part of the proposed centre that was unaccounted for.

The group stated concern that children should not be detained but that it had happened in the past and this was worrying. It was also felt that families should not be split up

Stephen stated that he was aware that the BNP were circulating leaflets in Larne that may create a false perception. It gave the impression to the general public that the centre was for accommodation. Patrick highlighted that these people are Immigration detainees, they are not criminals. They only breached administrative law.

Action Point: Invite Michael Golden from the UK Border Agency to come to clarify the issue at All Party Group meeting.

- **Racial Equality Panel**

Patrick noted that the first meeting of the REP would take place on Thursday 11th of November. Anna and Margaret stated that they will not be attending on that day.

It was suggested that MCRC, NICEM and CWA should re-establish the Shadow Forum.

Patrick raised concerns with the nomination process. The Panel members are nominated by ethnic minority organisations who are full members of the Racial Equality Forum, but in this instance everyone got the letter inviting them to nominate irrespective if they are ethnic minority organisation or not.

There are under-represented groups that are missing from the panel such as Muslim and Traveller communities. This raises issues of accountability and transparency.

Out of 9 or 10 groups on the panel only 6 are BME groups. NICEM has been raising this issue repeatedly over the past 6 months without adequate clarification from officials.

Paul said it is difficult if groups don't nominate, they have the responsibility to do that themselves. Margaret proposed to organise a pre-meeting and discuss on how to move this issue forward. The pre-meeting will take place in Stormont Hotel on the 11th of November at 12.30pm.

Action point: the All Party Group will send a letter to the OFMDFM expressing concerns at under-represented groups on the Racial Equality Panel.

Eileen raised concerns over the absence of DUP and UUP representatives on the All Party Group. The Green Party said that this is publicly recorded and is now available to public on the Assembly's website.

9. Date of the next meeting

14th of December 2010