

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

Date: Tuesday 9th February 2010
Venue: Parliament Buildings, Stormont (Room 152)
Time: 12:30pm

Attendees

Political Representatives:

Chair - Declan O'Loan MLA (SDLP), Billy Leonard MLA (Sinn Fein), Steven Agnew (Green Party), Catherine Curran (Alliance Party), Stewart Finn (PUP).

BME Sector Representatives:

Muhammad Al-Qaryooti (Belfast Islamic Centre), John Smilie (WDR and RT Taggart), Eddis Nicholl (NICEM), Sophie Romantzoff (NICEM), Chris McAfee (NICEM), Patrick Yu (NICEM), Frances and Phoebe Wong (World Wide Women @ North Down), Margaret Boyle (Derry Travellers Support Group), Margaret Donaghy (MCRC), Mrs Afaf Aly (Egyptian Society), Derek Hanway and Mark Donahue (An Munia Tober)

1. Apologies

Political Representatives:

Dawn Purvis MLA (PUP), Anna Lo MLA (Alliance Party).

BME Sector Representatives:

Moira McCombe (NICRAS), Ashok Sharma (Indian Community Centre), Kat Gelger (Kropka PL), James Holmlund (Baha'i Community), Javaid Naveed (NI Pakistani Cultural Association), Ivy Ridge (Ballymena Interethnic Forum), Eileen Chan (Chinese Welfare Association), Donald Bell (Indian Community Centre), Bobby Rao (Strabane Ethnic Community Association).

2. Minutes of the last meeting

The minutes of the previous meeting were agreed.

3. Matters arising from the last meeting

- Crisis fund motion and briefing paper update

Catherine Curran confirmed to the meeting that Jim Shannon MLA and Danny Kennedy had yet to sign the crisis fund motion debate. Catherine said that Anna Lo would follow up on this to get the remaining parties to sign the motion.

Catherine distributed copies of questions asked by Anna Lo to the deputy First Minister regarding the Migration Impacts Fund in Northern Ireland. The meeting noted the response confirmed the Northern Ireland Executive had received funding under the Barnett Formula that was "available to the Executive to spend in correspondence with local needs and priorities". Billy

Leonard said the information attained from Anna's question could be used in preparation for the motion debate on a crisis fund. The meeting heard that a letter from the All Party Assembly group to the Department of Finance and Personnel asking how the funding for the Migration Impact Fund was used in Northern Ireland would be sent today.

Patrick informed the meeting that NICEM had met with the Chair of the OFMDFM Committee. The OFMDFM Committee has written to the department and officials from OFMDFM have agreed to set up the Crisis Fund sub-group to be chaired by Law Centre (NI) now and will then be transferred back to the re-constituted Racial Equality Forum. Patrick said NICEM had met with Jim Shannon who was supportive of the motion and highlighted the need to ensure the crisis fund is not seen as a backdoor way to get benefits. Patrick said that it would be important to talk with political parties representatives and advisors to fully brief them before the motion debate.

Copies of the summary briefing papers prepared by the Law Centre (NI) and NI Human Rights Commission were distributed at the meeting and Chris McAfee informed the meeting the secretariat would continue to work on a summary of these documents. Chris said these documents could then be collated to provide information prior to the motion debate.

4. Presentation by the Belfast Islamic Centre on new cultural centre

John Smilie and Muhammad Al Qaryooti gave the meeting a presentation on the proposed new cultural centre for the Belfast Islamic Centre. A site for the proposed new centre has been identified in south Belfast and John outlined how the centre would be used for a multi-purpose room and a prayer hall that can be merged for any types of large events. There will be an Islamic school, a crèche, student accommodations, some sport facilities and would have space for businesses and shops. John told the meeting how the centre would be open to all communities.

Derek Hanway outlined the need to prepare the case for a new community centre before the proposal became public and highlighted the delays faced by the Chinese community centre in Belfast. Muhammad said they were keen to have support of political parties and the need for the new centre was due to the growing size of the Muslim community in Northern Ireland. Billy said there was a need to be proactive and to engage with community groups. Declan said this consultation could form part of the openness of the centre to all communities.

John said they had discussed a letter of support from OFMDFM for the new centre and it was agreed the secretariat would follow up this matter.

5. NICRAS – Issues regarding Tax Credits and Child Benefit claims

Chris informed the meeting that NICRAS were unable to attend the meeting and had sent apologies. It was agreed to discuss the matter when further information on these issues was available.

6. Group Presentation

- **Derry Traveller Support Group**

Margaret Boyle gave the meeting an overview of the work of the Derry Travellers Support Group that was established in 1990. Margaret highlighted how the group carried out work with Travellers in areas of education and training, based on the participation and ownership by members of the Travelling community.

Margaret said the Derry Travellers Support Group also works on advocacy, research and responses to consultations. Margaret informed the meeting the Derry Travellers Support Group is currently participating in the all-Ireland Travellers health study that is now in its second phase.

Margaret said that key challenges faced by the group in its current work are around issues of alcohol and drug abuse, mental health issues, isolation, domestic violence and children going into care as well as the poverty trap.

Eddis Nicholl asked if sites for nomadic Traveller families are being properly equipped. Margaret said that access to bins/toilets was quite well organised on the Derry site but the site in Strabane needed work. Billy asked about responsibility for transit sites and Derek confirmed the responsibility for Transit sites remains with the Northern Ireland Housing Executive and not with the local councils. Derek asked if there was a possibility to look at the Equality Commission standards for sites within the APAG to see if an accommodation committee could be set up under the Department for Social Development. It was agreed more information would be prepared on these matters that could be passed on the secretariat for discussion at later meetings.

7. AOB

- The meeting agreed to send a press release detailing the current office bearers of the APAG with accompanying photograph of some members of the APAG. Billy suggested that a more clear reference to the fact that all parties are represented on the APAG be inserted in the press release. The secretariat agreed to amend the press release before distribution.
- Derek asked if there had been discussion as to whether responsibility for equality would be moved to a new department for justice following the devolution of policing and justice powers.
- Steven Agnew informed the meeting he had not yet heard anything conclusive from Women's Aid regarding human trafficking but that he expected to find out more information this afternoon. Margaret Donaghy clarified that Women's Aid have a duty regarding sexual trafficking only and the MCRC and the Migrant Helpline having duties for labour trafficking.
- Steven Agnew informed the group he was aware that funds from the Dormant Accounts Fund could be made available to children groups

and faith groups, although there was no formal clarification yet. Declan said he would attempt to find out more information on this.

- Mrs Afaf Aly gave information about 'The Bridge' magazine and asked if the work of the APAG could be covered in magazines she wrote for. Declan said in principle this could be agreed to but would require further consideration a protocol to be agreed.
- Muhammad Al-Qaryooti distributed information the training Islam for Service providers.

8. Date of the next meeting

Tuesday, 9th March 2010, 12pm for 12:30 start (lunch to be provided) Venue: Room 152, Parliament Buildings, Stormont