

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

Date: 11 September 2012

Venue: Parliament Buildings, Stormont (Room 144)

Time: 12:30pm

Attendees

Political Representatives

David McIlveen MLA (DUP), The Chair McCann MLA, Chair (Sinn Féin), Danny Kinahan MLA Vice-Chair (UUP), Kate Nicholl (on behalf of Anna Lo MLA, Alliance), Michelle Byrne (on behalf of Conall McDevitt MLA, SDLP), Gillian Smyth (work experience with David McIlveen).

BME Sector Representatives

James Holmlund (Baha'i Council for Northern Ireland), Afaf Aly (The Egyptian Society of Northern Ireland), Mr Aly (The Egyptian Society for Northern Ireland), Alfred Abolarin (ACSONI), Justin Kouame (NICRAS), Kanlaya O'Kane (Thai Northern Ireland Community Group), Eddis Nicholl (NICRAS), Lumturi Podrimaj (Belfast Migrant Centre), Angela Nakazava (World Wide Women @ North Down), Kristyene Boreland (World Wide Women @ North Down), Bobby Rao (Strabane Ethnic Community Association) Helena Macormac (NICEM, on behalf of Patrick Yu) Elizabeth Nelson (NICEM), Sophie Romantzoff (NICEM), Karen McLaughlin (NICEM), Paul Yam (Wah Hep Chinese Association).

Other Representatives:

Janet Wiseman and Bernadette Downey (UK Border Agency)

The incoming chair, The Chair McCann, opened the meeting by thanking the outgoing chair, David McIlveen, for all this hard work as previous, and stated that he hoped to meet as many people and groups as possible during his time as chair, and encouraged people to come to him with any issues.

1. Apologies

Political Representatives

Colum Eastwood MLA (SDLP), Chris Lyttle MLA (Alliance Party), Anna Lo MLA (Alliance Party).

BME Sector Representatives

Katy Radford (Belfast Jewish Community), Joan McGovern (Banardo's Tuar Ceatha), Frances and Phoebe Wong (Oi Yin Women's Group), Ivy Ridge (Ballymena Inter-Ethnic Forum), Mr Sandhu (Derry Sikh Association), Patrick Yu (NICEM)

2. Approval of the minutes from the last meeting

The minutes were approved.

3. Matters arising

a. Follow-up letter to Mike Golden, UKBA

Helena Macormac explained the APG on EMC's contact with the UKBA prior to the summer recess, including their presentation at the May meeting and several letters that had been exchanged since then. Much of this correspondence had been regarding the Larne detention centre, and the last letter the Secretariat sent to UKBA made reference to a specific case received by the Belfast

Migrant Centre. Lume Podrimaj explained the basics of the case, in which a student was detained at Larne and told he could not access a list of solicitors, but could phone a friend, and Helena stated that the Secretariat had relayed this to Mike Golden at the UKBA. Janet Wiseman, who was present to discuss the SERCO issue later in the meeting, said that there had not been enough details in the letter to initiate an investigation, but if the APG forwarded more details then they could investigate.

ACTION POINT

b. Follow-up to Parliamentary Question from Naomi Long

Helena read Naomi Long's question and the response received from then Immigration Minister Damien Green.

Naomi Long: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what steps she has taken to enable detainees in Larne Detention Centre to access legal advice. [110517]

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Damian Green: People detained at Larne House are advised of their rights from the outset of detention. They are given access to legal advice at any time during their stay at the facility. Assistance provided includes help from immigration and custody staff, and information leaflets and posters about how and where to access legal advice. Detainees also have free phone and internet access and private rooms for meetings with legal representatives.

Lume stated that she had a case that was contrary to this response and would provide the UKBA with more information on this.

c. Follow-up on actions arising from Questions that Matter

Helena reminded the group that this initiative took place in June, and said that over the summer the Secretariat has been working on following up on the 10 action points arising. She then detailed the actions and the progress made:

- 1. Jonathan Bell to write report back to the APG on when the Racial Equality Panel will next reconvene.*
- 2. Jonathan Bell to find out why the above panel was not convened after August 2011.*

A letter was written but no response yet received. It has now been forwarded to advisors

- 3. Following on from comments by Alban Maginness, APG to request report on victims from the Justice Committee and what actions have been taken to implement findings especially in relation to victims of Racial Hate Crime.*

The Secretariat wrote to Alban Maginness but had received no response.

- 4. Following comments from Alan Skelton the APG are to write to the Policing Board regarding changes to the HIMLO arrangement*

The Secretariat wrote to the Northern Ireland Policing Board regarding the changes in HIMLO arrangements; Secretariat received a letter back recently and will circulate to the APG (**ACTION POINT**). The response referred to reference groups which had not met in a significant amount of time. David McIlveen stated that he sits on the NIPB and that in general the NIPB shares the concerns over HIMLO arrangements. He is no longer on the Community Engagement Committee, but suggested the APG should inform Sammy Douglas, who is also a member of the APG on EMC, about this issue as he is on the Community Engagement Committee of the NIPB. **ACTION POINT**

*5. Following comments from **Alan Skelton** the APG are to write to the Chief Constable regarding changes to the HIMLO arrangement and training provisions for Neighbourhood Police Officers*

The Secretariat wrote to Chief Constable also regarding HIMLO arrangements. There has been no response aside from an acknowledgement and statement that the CC was deputizing the issue to ACC Criminal Justice George Hamilton, who was also cc'd into the NIPB's response to the Secretariat.

*6. Following Comments from **Basil McCrea**, APG to request an update from **Jonathan Bell** following his meeting with Foreign Secretary and the proposed discussion on a derogation for NI regarding immigration requirements*

Again waiting for response from Jonathan Bell, see 1-2 above.

*7. APG to request an update following **Jonathan Bell's** pledge to suggest to the **Minister for Culture** that a cricket match between India and NI (organized by former international Cricketer and SECA Development Officer Bobby Rao) would be beneficial in fostering relationships and promoting inclusion.*

Awaiting for a response from Jonathan Bell.

*8. **Basil McCrea** agreed to take evidence on BME before the DEL Committee in September*

The Secretariat wrote to Basil McCrea regarding BME entrepreneurial business initiatives following on from Justin's comments; still waiting for a response.

*9. Following comments from **Anna Lo** regarding Travellers and Planning issues, the APG will invite the DOE to update the group on the findings of the consultation report on planning and what actions which will be taken as a result.*

The Secretariat wrote to Anna Lo as chair of the Committee for the Department of the Environment regarding planning law changes and how this will affect Travellers. We have not received a response, but Anna did ask AWQs which the Secretariat will circulate to the group (**ACTION POINT**). The Secretariat will also write to DoE and ask for a copy of the forthcoming planning report (**ACTION POINT**).

*10. **Basil McCrea** to write to colleges to ask them to offer free language courses for Asylum Seekers as their civic duty; if the numbers are too great a cap may need to apply, but this can be looked at as and when it is necessary.*

The Secretariat has written to Basil McCrea but has not yet received a response. Justin explained that some English classes are free, for example from BMC, but that there is a lack of information and it is not coming through Ethnic Minority organisations who can direct migrants to the classes. There is now a pilot ongoing between NICRAS and BMC in terms of the dissemination of this information; it will run until September 2013. Helena said the Secretariat will write to Basil McCrea again with this information, and ask him what could be done to extend the program or something like it when the pilot finishes, as well as invite a representative from DEL to an upcoming APG meeting (**ACTION POINT**). Alfred Abolarin (ACSONI) reiterated that the problem is that people simply do not have the necessary information. Justin said that NICRAS had found the information through BMC. Alfred said there was an express need to get that information out.

Helena stated that the Secretariat would contact DEL for the information and disseminate to the group (**ACTION POINT**). The Chair said he would raise this issue as a member of the DEL Committee (**ACTION POINT**).

d. Membership request from ArtsEkta

It was explained that the delay in considering the request was due to a packed agenda in the May meeting and the lack of a quorum in the June meeting. However the membership was discussed by office bearers over the summer,

ArtsEkta had applied for membership of the APG under the third membership category as a group with an interest in ethnic minority issues subject to approval.

It was reiterated that the objective of the APG was to provide a forum for dialogue between Political parties and BME groups. The Chair said that as the group was already fast becoming too large there was a worry that voices would be lost. It was suggested that ArtsEkta could advance ethnic minority related policy concerns through the BME led groups which they work with who are members of the APG. It was acknowledged that whilst membership would not be granted at this stage but the APG is supportive of the work of ArtsEkta and would happily distribute material or inform the groups of any events.

The Chair stated that he was concerned if the membership category was expanded beyond ethnic minority groups that there would be more difficulty in getting things done. This was also the reason for the sub-committee proposal which the previous chair had put forward.

James Holmlund agreed and said that if there was a sub-committee, there should be representation from each category of membership, including statutory; Helena reminded the group that statutory agencies cannot belong to the APG, but the APG can invite them to present at meetings in order to hold them to account as required.

e. APG Sub-Committee

The Chair had stated at (d) above that one of the reasons for the sub-committee proposal was to create a forum where more voices were heard and where there was a smaller number, so that actions could be taken more efficiently and fed back to the larger group.

David McIlveen said that it could be chaired by the chair of the group. Michelle suggested that the minutes of the sub-committee be brought to the larger groups so that politicians could be made aware of issues that they could be pushing as well. The Chair stated that his experience has shown that sub-group work allows more work to get done.

Alfred Abolarin suggested that a draft proposal be drawn up so the APG could see how the sub-committee would actually work, and see what the benefits might be. Helena suggested that the meeting would take place every 4th Tuesday, and that the Secretariat would liaise with the Chair in terms of deciding a suitable location. Members should contact the Secretariat if they are interested in becoming members. The Secretariat would also draw up a proposal regarding the function, etc of the sub-committee, and circulate to the group. At the first meeting the sub-committee can draw up a draft Terms of Reference and then circulate. The Chair suggested that the group may even decide to have more than one sub-committee to look at different issues if this one worked well.

7. ACSONI and comments by Edwin Poots (moved from AOB)

Helena stated that since Alfred from ACSONI had to leave early, it was suggested that he speak now on Edwin Poots' comments that is listed in the agenda under 'AOB.'

Alfred explained the comments made by Edwin Poots, and that the leaders of the various African communities had met in the wake of it. They felt that the statement was unfair, and that while his intention may have been right – that there is a necessity to screen for certain things and that HIV is increasingly an issue – the way the statement was put was inflammatory and insensitive. There is already a stigma attached to Africa and this further stigmatized that community. Statistics show that HIV is prevalent in sub-Saharan Africa, but the Minister should have considered sensitivities before speaking. He then read the Minister's comments verbatim, and reiterated that it was the context with which ACSONI and the community had a problem. Thus the community decided to write to the Minister to explain their concerns. There was no response from OFMDFM as of yet. Alfred stated that it was important that there was a response in order to avoid resentment from the African community.' The Minister should clarify his remarks.

Helena explained that there had been a letter written to OFMDFM, which has been drafted by a few concerned groups and circulated to the APG mailing list for endorsement, it asked for action in light of the Minister's comments breaching the Ministerial Code; several organizations had signed it as well. There has been an acknowledgement of the letter, but no response.

The Chair said he would try to find out why there was no response, and suggested as well that he could put forward an Assembly question on the matter. Michelle stated that she seconded that; Conall McDevitt had also issued a letter and signed the group letter, and would have no problem putting his name to another letter on this issue. Michelle would forward Conall's letter to the group.(ACTION POINT).

Alfred stated that he would like to hear comment from David McIlveen given that he is from the same party.

David explained that the situation was difficult for him, as Edwin Poots is both a colleague and a friend. He felt that there was a problem with the context in which the comments were made, and that the word choice was unwise. However he stated that if he felt Poots was racist or the comments were racially motivated he would speak out on that. Edwin Poots is committed to African causes. David further explained that sometimes when in front of cameras, ones 'brain and mouth don't match up.' However he did feel that the comments deserved to be clarified. He stated that the ban on gay blood donation came from medical advice, so if there was medical advice for this too then the public needs to hear it. This was needed as well in terms of clarity of context, though he was satisfied the Minister was not trying to create animosity. He stated as well that he had no problem with the actions proposed going forward.

Alfred thanked David and stated that he was not questioning the motives, just asking for clarification of the remarks. The Chair summarized that the APG needed the response.

4. NISRA Evaluation report and OFMDFM proposals for the future of the Minority Ethnic Development Fund 2012 - 2015

The Chair deferred to Helena who would detail the concerns NICEM had over the MEDF, and the actions of the Secretariat leading up to the APG meeting.

Helena explained that the group would have received the proposal and evaluation from OFMDFM on 16 August 2012. Shortly after this Patrick Yu and Anna Lo both wrote emails to OFMDFM expressing concern over the timing of the consultation, as the fund comes to a close at the end of this month and the proposed fund will run for 3 years; there is also a lack of consultation dates (at that time). We now know that the dates are 17-18 September, which is after the deadline for written responses (which is the 14th). There is concern over rushing this through.

In advance of the meeting the Secretariat has:

- Met with both the incoming and outgoing Chairs;
- Met with senior advisors to the First Minister and Deputy First Minister;
- Spoke to Ken and Fergus at OFMDM; they were both invited to the meeting today but were on leave. They wanted to send an official in an observer but it was decided that, as the APG had previously rejected an offer from OFMDM to send an official to observe every meeting, that it would not be appropriate in this case; this was explained to Ken.
- Will meet with Denis McMahon, Head of Equality and Strategy at OFMDM later today and will feed back concerns raised by the APG.
- Invited officials from NISRA, who had responsibility for the evaluation, to come to the APG; unfortunately the relevant person was in Brussels and his colleague had a personal emergency to attend to at last minute
- Spoken to Chris Lyttle, member of APG and Deputy Chair of OFMDM Committee who said that OFMDM Committee had just received the evaluation, but that there hadn't been much discussion to date he was keen to work with us on it.

Helena also reiterated that the Secretariat does not want a delay in funding, but just wants to ensure that there is equitable distribution of the funds which will address the needs of the most vulnerable ethnic minority communities, because it is to be for three years. Helena then went through the points laid out in the email the Secretariat circulated to the APG members prior to the meeting.

1. The fund is to be delivered before publication of the Racial Equality Strategy (RES) and without a functioning Racial Equality Forum (REF)

- Jonathan Bell had said at Questions that Matter that the Racial Equality Strategy would be out for consultation in the autumn; Ken Fraser recently said it would be out in 6 weeks. There is a big concern over the delivery of the Fund before the RES. Ken had also said applications for the Fund would be out in early October and that there would be a gap in funding. If this is so close to the RES consultation, they should be able to be delivered together.
- The Racial Equality Forum hasn't met since August 2011. This was also discussed at QTM. Ken has said the REF will be reconvened after the RES consultation is out, but if the REF is to be a key vehicle in taking forward the fund this will be too late to convene a meeting.

2. The proposal document is not clear about the role of OFMDM and other departmental funding streams

- There are concerns that the evaluation document and the proposal document are not clear about the role of OFMDM, it is the responsibility of OFMDM to focus on issues of Racial Equality and policy
- There is a lack of clarity of the role of OFMDM and the role of other Departments, particularly in terms of providing English classes (DEL) and cultural activities (DCAL, councils). Departments shouldn't shy away from their own equality responsibilities because of the existence of the Fund.

3. OFMDM does not have adequate mechanisms in place to ensure adequate delivery of the fund

- There isn't a proper mechanism within OFMDM to deliver the Fund. There is concern that since the evaluation has existed since November 2011, why is there now a rush to deliver the Fund? Once the RES is in place each Department must create Action Plans, and it is the function of the Race Unit in OFMDM to oversee this. The consultation should address this issue of capacity, and not be rushed.

4. Time for adequate consultation on the proposals has not been allowed

- Adequate time for consultation; there are only two meetings organized in a short period of time and after the consultation deadline, and this is inadequate. Also, the fact that the meetings are only in Belfast and Derry/Londonderry is problematic, as this will likely mean that vulnerable groups outside this catchment area will not have their voices heard. NICEM had offered to assist with organizing a meeting in Mid-Ulster but they were waiting to hear back from Fergus on this proposal.

There are further concerns in the longer document circulated via email previously.

Recommendations:

1. Request extension for 6 months: This would allow time for adequate needs assessment, adequate consultation, for the RES and Action Plans to be in place before delivery of the 3 year fund. The Chair would write to OFMDFM on this matter **ACTION POINT**
2. APG could write to Public Accounts Committee, as this is an issue of legitimacy and the expenditure of public money, the secretariat had spoken to both the outgoing and incoming chairs on this action and the vice chair stated that he would also advance the case as Chair of the Audit Committee. **ACTION POINT**
3. Based on the group's discussions today the secretariat could draw up and circulate a group consultation response which would be sent to OFMDFM **ACTION POINT**

Helena went on to detail further issues:

4. The Crisis Fund should be kept separate, it is for a different purpose than the MEDF and requires a different delivery mechanism. It is essential that a crisis fund is established as soon as possible. There is a proposal by the APG Chair and the Junior Minister Jennifer McCann to hold a separate roundtable discussion with key stakeholders on the Crisis Fund given the urgent and serious nature of this matter. The Secretariat is coordinating this. There is currently a CFNI meeting on this issue, and the Secretariat will update the APG on the progress of the Crisis Fund discussion once more details of the event have been organized. **ACTION POINT**
5. Issue of the key informants and how they were chosen: There is only one named individual from a BME group in the evaluation as a 'key informant,' Dr Strange (ACSONI). Ken said this was due to random sampling by statisticians. Fergus said he would investigate but so far there has been no response, Alfred said that he had attended meetings with Dr Strange and didn't know why Dr. Strange was the only named individual.

Helena also relayed that although Katy Radford was unable to attend the meeting she was in agreement with the above points.

Bobby Rao stated that because the funding is so important for BME groups, the proposals must be more robust and must be delivered within the framework of a new RES. Because many BME groups are small and struggling, every BME group should have the chance at securing three year funding, otherwise we might lose groups. The proposals should ensure that the right groups receive funding. As regards the crisis fund, he agreed that it should be kept separate from the MEDF so it can be delivered to the most vulnerable when they need it.

Justin Kouame stated that NICRAS also wants the Crisis Fund to be separate, and that they agreed with the points as circulated by the Secretariat in that the RES should be in place before delivery of

the funds, especially in order to identify the needs of those most vulnerable. He said that NICRAS work with many vulnerable individuals who are in urgent need for such funds.

Eddis Nicholl stated that she also agreed with the Crisis Fund stance; if it becomes part of MEDF we'll never know who the populations are who need it, and be able to look at the reasons why and possibly prevent further destitution.

Alfred stated that he also endorsed Justin's statement, and endorsed the six-month extension as well. He also explained that when he initially spoke with Ken about the extension, Ken said that it couldn't be given without application. An extension would be very beneficial to the sector. An extension allows a robust and systematic Fund to be established instead of something ad hoc.

Paul Yam also stated that he endorsed the six-month extension, as without an extension there would still be a two month gap at least, which should be devastating for groups as many depend on the MEDF for core funding; they would be unlikely to secure a loan and this would be a crisis for management. He explained that he believed an extension would be there would only be 2.5 years of funding, but that OFMDFM should support projects for another three years after this. He also strongly agreed with the reasoning around the Crisis Fund. If you use the MEDF for the Crisis Fund it would reduce the amount of money available. He also felt there was a problem with the locations of the consultations as mid-Ulster will miss out and that this must be remedied.

The Chair stated that the Secretariat could follow up on these issues and report back to the group. Helena asked if there was agreement from the APG that the Secretariat could move forward with the actions, and it was decided that there was agreement.

5. Procurement and accountability; appointment of SERCO

It was stated that the UKBA had been invited to the group to respond to recent concerns regarding the procurement by the UKBA of SERCO, a private company that has been found in breach of the European Convention on Human Rights, to provide accommodation for asylum seekers.

Janet Wiseman, UKBA: I will focus on the procurement process and accountability going forward. The Compass contract [held by SERCO] has been operational since 1 July 2012, and has had a seamless transition. Most asylum seekers were able to stay in their current properties, just the leases were transferred to SERCO as there was a desire not to move people. There was a very long procedure before the contract was awarded, and this was in line with EU Regulations and UK Regulations. There were several stages: information, proposals, delivery of solutions and e-auction. I was also part of the evaluation process. SERCO was identified as the successful bidder, measuring the quality of the solution (60% of score) against the cost of the solution (40% of score). The operational contract is for 5 years with the possibility of extension for 2 years. There is a Statement of Requirements (SOR) between the UKBA and the provider, which is in the public domain, and I can forward a copy to the APG (**ACTION POINT**). SERCO is held to account to this document, which contains details like the minimum size of bedrooms, how to move people, etc. There is a Contract manager within UKBA whose job is to make sure service and specification being met. The UKBA has been transitioning people from one contractor to another; in Scotland NI 2,500 people have been transition over 3 months. We are also setting up a Stakeholder Advisory Group like the one that already exists in Glasgow. SERCO is eager to work with local communities.

Lume Podrimaj, BMC: SERCO has been found in breach of Articles 3&8 of the ECHR, so there are questions about the actual services they are providing. The standard of housing in NI was quite high in comparison with the rest of the UK, so why was there the need to transition providers? The breaching of human rights is a major concern.

JW: There were a limited number of bids, and I can't say who bid for contracts, but we compared each bid for quality. We expect the standard of housing to be the same as it is now, or better. The SOR does not downgrade the acceptable quality of housing.

LP: That is fine if the SOR is monitored and met obligations, but it's difficult to see how it will work with vulnerable people. The reasons why people seek protection is difficult to reconcile with a private company that breaches human rights. It's unacceptable.

JW: The contracts are examined with regards to the EU Process Regulations. There was nothing put forth by SERCO that was a matter for concern, we did practice due diligence. In a lot of areas users will probably not even perceive the difference in staff changeover.

LP: How and what staff are being transitioned? Was there a selection process, given that this is a new contract? Home Office Ministers are also concerned.

JW: It differs from region to region. We encouraged the provider to keep people in the same place when possible. Some concerns were raised in other regions, like Northern England, that aren't relevant here. There are 5 year contracts, and we encourage involvement in the Stakeholder Advisory Group. I can provide the contact details for setting that up. **(ACTION POINT)** They may decide to do it differently in NI than in other regions.

The Chair (FM): Is there a possibility for direct communication between the APG on the UKBA on the makeup and timeline of the Advisory Group? Did the previous 'blackmark' of the court case in violation of Articles 3&8 go against SERCO in its bid?

JW: We were looking at the solution being put forward in the bid. There was also quite a bit of digging into companies' reputations, financial security and viability, etc. The recent court case is involving a different type of contract – for detention – where as the NI/Scotland contract is for housing and accommodation

FM: And is there a set housing standard?

JW: Yes, the SOR sets out the standards. They will possibly be even better than before.

FM: How often will you evaluate SERCO's performance and progress?

JW: There are housing inspections, oversight and a complaints procedure. Also complainants have a direct line to UKBA if they are not satisfied with the complaints procedure. We can also refer to One Stop Service.

Karen McLaughlin, NICEM: The fact that there were different types of contracts in the court case as opposed to now is irrelevant. The issue was around the treatment of detainees by SERCO staff, not the conditions of the detention facilities. Are there any extra safeguards in place given the previous black mark on SERCO's record? There are obviously serious obligations under the Human Rights Act, the ECHR, and international treaties as well. Are any of these things being heightened for SERCO?

JW: We always ensure the provider's staff have security clearance and are delivering the service. We are now engaged in an education process with SERCO staff around asylum seekers, why they are seeking protection, etc.

LP: It's difficult to picture how the service would work if the staff are not familiar with the issues. I can't see how this will work with this provider. If the provider hasn't dealt with these issues before, how will they even know how to handle complaints?

JW: They have dealt with this before. We are not new to having private companies. The issues are not standards of provision, and we are educating new staff. For example in Scotland, they are erring on the side of recognizing that service users will not understand their own responsibilities.

LP: This company has a bad reputation. These are very vulnerable people, by the time they have understood their rights they will probably already have been moved.

JW: We are funding voluntary groups to provide us with briefing material; we are currently working with the Refugee Council and Bryson house, and these contracts will be up for tender in 12 months.

Justin Kouame, NICRAS: I would like to see evidence of why SERCO was chosen instead of the Housing Executive. And if, as you say, asylum seekers 'wouldn't notice the staff change anyway,' would there need to be a change?

JW: Most people get to stay in the same property; they were sent a letter to tell them that SERCO now held the lease to their property.

JK: SERCO is splitting up the process of getting housing.

JW: These are legitimate concerns. We are very closely involved in the transition. There are difficult financial negotiations but 90% of people have not been moved in NI. You have to remember that the economy has changed as well, and there are demands on the private housing market that didn't exist before. This is affecting the UKBA provision.

Paul Yam, Wa Hep: The fact that weighting is 60% quality and 40% cost is worrying. I would ask for demonstration that the service would protect basic need and how will you monitor this? These are very vulnerable people, they need special advocacy for them to be able to speak out. Bids must answer with policies of how they are going to deal with these specific issues.

JW: The Partnership Manager has lots of experience working with asylum seekers, and will be involved in advocacy. SERCO has also brought in people with experience.

PY: Would the Stakeholder Advisory Group have refugees and/or asylum seekers on it?

JW: I've answered this before, the groups are still to be determined.

FM: We only have this room until 2pm; obviously there are quite a few questions here, and the makeup of the Stakeholder Advisory Group is crucial, especially for those who want to be active in it. I would draw attention to the official statement on SERCO as well, which you all have a copy of.

Helena Macormac, NICEM: We will be organizing a seminar on human rights and procurement at 5pm on 22 October, and would like to invite yourselves or another representative from UKBA back to comment. This debate would be a bit more structured, and would also link to wider debates on human rights, accountability and procurement.

JW: I would like to send a procurement specialist to that, as this would be more useful.

HM: Would we be able to see the briefings given to Home Office Ministers?

JW: Their concerns are regarding the number being transitioned, not quality of accommodation.

Eddis Nicholl, NICEM/NICRAS: I would suggest looking at the possibility of ‘independent visitors,’ as is done in other closed institutions to safeguard individuals. Prisons and young offenders centres often do this.

JW: The problem would be how this is finance and oversight, UKBA is not in a position to do this.

FM: If an MP or staff wanted could they even go at their own expense?

JW: We certainly don’t inhibit people.

LP: Does UKBA actually investigate accommodation and the actual treatment of people? Are there complaints procedures?

JW: Yes there are complaints procedures. We encourage people to make complaints if the standard isn’t there.

FM: We are obviously 2-3 months behind any Stakeholders Group, and we need to know the criteria, remit, etc. The makeup of this is crucial as to whether or not it is successful.

JW: I can come back to the APG with details and we can do a sort of ‘health check.’ **ACTION POINT**

FM: Should review in 3 months time.

6. Group Presentations

Fra McCann explained that Balmoral Filipino had to give their apologies as they were unable to make it to present at the APG.

7. Date of Next Meeting

Tuesday 9 October, 12pm for 12:30pm, Room 144