

## All Party Group on Ethnic Minority Communities

**Date:** Tuesday 17<sup>th</sup> February 2015.

**Time:** 15.30

**Venue:** Room 370, Parliament Buildings, Stormont

### **In attendance:**

#### *Political Representatives:*

Danny Kinahan MLA (Ulster Unionist Party)  
Anna Lo MLA (Alliance)  
Bronwyn McGahan MLA (Sinn Fein)  
Claire Sugden MLA (Independent) (Chair)  
Sophie Eden (Attendant to Claire Sugden MLA)

#### *Speakers*

Geraldine Scullion

#### *Community Representatives*

Maria Lourenco (Ards and North Down Ethnic Minorities Network)  
Dulce Belo  
Kristyene Boreland (BME Women's Network)  
Nick Cassidy (Omagh Ethnic Community Support Group)  
Joseph Ricketts (African and Caribbean Support Organisation Northern Ireland)  
Judize Rina (African and Caribbean Support Organisation Northern Ireland)  
Michall Albiona (NANI/NICEM)  
Patrick Yu (NICEM)  
Luke Kelly (NICEM)  
Paul McGlinchey (NICEM)

Claire Sugden welcomed as new Chair.

### **1. Apologies**

David McNarry MLA (United Kingdom Independence Party)  
Steven Agnew MLA (Green Party)  
Bobby Rao  
Frances Wong (Oi Yin Women's Group)  
G.S. Samdhu  
Manprat Samdhu  
Edwin Graham  
Dr. A. Abdelrahman (Sudanese Community Association Northern Ireland)  
James Holmland

## **2. Approval of minutes from last meeting**

Minutes approved.

## **3. Matters Arising**

### **(i) Proposed motion debate on Racial Equality Strategy**

Patrick Yu (PY) – (circulates copy of motion debate proposal previously approved by APG). All Parties have signed off except DUP. In response to the recent DUP Party comments, he had circulated again the draft motion debate outside this meeting, but had only received from David McNarry MLA of UKIP who supported the motion.

Anna Lo MLA (AL) – The APG does not have standing to issue a motion for debate, but it can be issued by an individual party and approved by the other parties individually. There is apparent willingness in the Alliance Party to co-support the motion, but the party has yet to officially confirm this. The idea was for Sinn Fein to submit this motion debate - Bronwyn? Patrick pointed out that in the past the APG could proposed Motion for debate so far as it must be signed off by all parties. The reform of the race relations law is a good example to illustrate that.

Bronwyn McGahan MLA (BM) – According to Paul Gill, the Clerk of Standards, without 5-party buy in, the only way is for one of the signature parties to offer to select the motion when it is their turn to pick. We have issued the motion to the Sinn Fein business committee for selection. The Sinn Fein Business Committee will make decision on any further wording requested.

Claire Sugden MLA (CS) – To clarify, your business committee may still amend the wording of this motion?

BM – Yes.

AL – Do let us know if this is changed.

BM – Yes, absolutely.

### **(ii) AQW to the First and Deputy First Minister on “Vote! You are at Home” campaign**

PY – (circulates draft AQW) I was absent from the last meeting when this was raised, note that no person or organisation is named in this proposal.

AL – She apologised the mistake made due to no response from the administration. She submitted the AQW on the 12<sup>th</sup> of December, the same day she put forward a question on the crisis fund, but we have yet to receive an answer for either question. This week, on the 10<sup>th</sup> of February, she submitted a question again asking why these questions have yet to be answered and haven't received a response.

### **(iii) Minority Ethnic Development Fund (MEDF)**

PY – The budget has yet to be adopted for OFMDFM, which is linked with this issue. The current MEDF programme of work expires at the end of the financial year and there is no clarity on whether Core funding programme (Tier 2 and Tier 3) will continue, be subject to certain conditions or if there will be a new round of applications for 1 year. There is lots of unease on the ground. As the employer must have advanced notice of 6 months to inform their staff the possibility of ending the funding by end of March 2015. For the very least one month notice must be issued on redundancy by the end of February. Organisations have already had to send out redundancy notices to their workers. The application process for new funding usually begins

in January, yet it is February and we have still heard nothing. The Departmental budget for OFMFM is not as substantial as that of other Departments on the Programme Fund.

AL – The final stage of the budget process is on Tuesday the 24<sup>th</sup> of February.

CS - We will wait for the final stage of the budget and pursue this issue afterwards. We will draft a letter to OFMDFM in the name of the chair, requesting more information on the MEDF.

#### **ACTION POINT**

#### **Presentation from Geraldine Scullion on “Voices for Change: Mapping the Views of BME People on Integration and their Sense of Belonging in Northern Ireland**

PY:

- This report emerged from the INTEGRO Project, a cross-European project, focusing on the integration needs of third country nationals.
- Sheila Rogers and Geraldine Scullion undertook this research on behalf of NICEM

Geraldine Scullion (GS)

- This research was undertaken in the context of developing the Racial Equality Strategy for Northern Ireland, therefore it focused on the issue of developing a sense of belonging and attempting to define what this might mean.
- More information on sense of belonging and definitions
- Diverse origins/settled/recent migrants - ethnic minorities
- 650 responses to the survey underlying the research, although this is only a first step towards uncovering the barriers facing BME communities – more detailed research is needed
- Methodology – used NICEM members groups and non-member groups, focus groups, engaged with community leaders and used consultation meetings in Craigavon, Lurgan and Belfast. An online survey was used to gather views.
- 16 detailed questions were asked on the survey regarding indicators and key areas for change, with space being left for people to highlight their own priorities

#### **5 indicators on integration/sense of belonging**

- Based survey questions on EU indicators on integration – employment, education, social inclusion, active citizenship and welcoming society
- Research broken down by region - Belfast, North East and Mid-Ulster and Down

#### **Employment: Barriers to integration of BME workers**

- Under-utilisation of skills – lack of recognition of existing skills and qualifications
- Airline pilot, medic, engineer working as cleaner
- Shortcomings with NARAC – right technical level, recognition of voluntary and work experience, verification difficulties
- Need for better English language skills and for access to vocational English language education
- Requirement that applicants have a Northern-Ireland based referee for employment can be problematic
- Process of application, forms etc., can be unfamiliar to third country nationals
- Lack of affordable, accessible childcare

- Large number of respondents receiving unfavourable treatment at work
- Lack of BME people in management level position
- Trapped in undesirable jobs – occupational segregation in low skilled fields of work
- Refused training opportunities
- Lack of support from Trade Unions and lack of knowledge amongst third country nationals of what their rights are

### **Education**

- High level of satisfaction with children's education
- High proportion in adult education
- Crisis of racist bullying in schools
- Lack of additional support for BME pupils
- Lack of choice regarding where children are to be educated – complexities of the school system in a divided society

### **Social Inclusion**

- Tokenistic attitude to multiculturalism – need for mainstreaming diverse values into school life and curriculum
- Healthcare – GP registration and access to interpretation an issue, with receptionists and GPs acting as gatekeepers to access to interpretation, lack of knowledge on entitlement amongst third country nationals
- Housing – living in a divided society – struggle with being identified as Catholic or Protestant just by living in a certain area

### **Active citizenship**

- Participation through voting and involvement in community
- High levels of voting amongst those who were registered to vote
- High levels of mixing from people with different ethnic backgrounds
- High levels of participation in local community associations (e.g. gym)
- Negative views on politicians – lack of canvassing and direct engagement and lack of prioritisation of BME issues

### **Welcoming society**

- High levels of trust in PSNI
- Focus groups felt that the tolerant nature of NI society had changed in recent years – worsening attitudes (attributable in part to a hostile media, fed by politicians)
- Politicians worsen xenophobic attitudes
- Large volume of physical/verbal attacks on street or differential treatment at work
- High level of under-reporting of hate incidents – mistrust, with some people reporting that experiences had worsened after reporting to the police. Fear of being targeted again, of not being believed and poor English language skills were all barriers to reporting hate crime to the police.

### **Summary of findings**

#### **Employment:**

- Need to improve methods of qualifications (technical expertise, experience abroad)

- Affordable English language tuition for professional language
- Improving knowledge of employment rights

#### Education:

- Need to address racist bullying in schools, language support, information for parents and pupils

#### Healthcare :

- Need to improve awareness of barriers, knowing where you fit and clear guidelines on access to information on housing, health and social security, as required under EU law

#### Active citizenship:

- Political leadership important
- Positive media messages must be encouraged
- Need for politicians to listen to voices of BME people

#### Welcoming Society:

- Need to address racial prejudice
- Need to prioritise hate crime
- Recognition must be made of the information deficit/under-reporting

#### Q & A

CS – I am quite shocked by these findings, ethnic minorities in my constituency have always reported positive experiences. Are there any specific things we can do to tackle these problems?

GS – There are myriad recommendations in the report, The Racial Equality Strategy is the framework within which our recommendations may be tackled. However, there is a need for the Strategy to be robust and accountable. There is also a need for a joined up approach with parallel anti-discrimination strategies, such as Together: Building a United Community.

CS – Do you feel that the Racial Equality Strategy is a foundation for change? For these recommendations to be implemented, will it need to happen first?

GS – It is important, however it may also be delayed or less comprehensive than we expect, so it would be imprudent to rely solely on this Strategy. There are actions that individual Departments can take to tackle these issues – for example, the Department of Education could take steps to address issues of racist bullying.

Danny Kinahan (DK) – I'm currently vice chair of education committee. The Racial Equality Strategy will likely face delay, so we need to find other ways of bringing these issues forward. The Bullying Bill is being considered in next year, so this could be addressed through that. **ACTION POINT**

CS – Bronwyn and I sit on the Committee of Employment and Learning, we could raise this issue there. **ACTION POINT**

AL – Excellent report. We need to use this research and its recommendations and push them through the Committees and Ministers. We also need to press OFMDFM on the publication timeframe for the Racial Equality Strategy. We could write to invite OFMDFM to appear before the APG? **ACTION POINT**

DK – I could contact a member of the Committee for OFMDFM and raise the issue that way. **ACTION POINT**

PY – Further regarding the INTEGRO Project, there are regional workshops occurring in Derry, Mid-Ulster and Belfast. These will address the main issues raised by participants in the research, which are: the glass ceiling, working conditions - particularly discrimination – and the recognition of work experience and qualifications.

AL – What problems are people facing in getting their qualifications recognised?

PY – Some qualifications from particular universities are not recognised – this is a particular issue for asylum seekers and refugees.

AL – I know of an economist whose degree was not recognised.

PY – Some individuals with Masters degrees and PhDs are not being accepted for employment because they don't have a Northern Ireland-based GCSE in English – this exhibits a total lack of common sense.

AL – I have been approached by a Filipino physiotherapist who was told by the NHS that she would have to volunteer 1,000 hours of work to be recognised as qualified.

CS – So her existing work experience was not recognised at all?

AL – No.

PY – Another problem is that overseas students are now being differentially charged for ESOL classes because this no longer comes under 'essential skills'.

BM - My constituency is the Fermanagh/South Tyrone area. Dungannon has fastest growing population, largely due to the growing BME population. We have a good working relationship with our BME communities and have been proactive in producing multi-lingual literature and soliciting voters amongst these communities. However, while working on a District Policing Partnership, I noticed that there was difficulty in getting some BME people to drop their barriers due to previous bad experiences with police forces.

CS – This report is a starting point – 650 responses is incredible, but does not cover the entire BME community in Northern Ireland. This report is setting out the generalities, though we would like to see some more specific work in this area.

GS – One of the issues highlighted in the research is a lack of confidence in elected officials as regards prioritising BME interests.

CS – How do these findings compare with indigenous population? I wonder how much the local population trusts politicians (!)

GS – We didn't set out to conduct a comparative between local and BME communities, although the research touched on some issues that are inherently experienced by BME individuals and not locals – such as the recognition of overseas qualifications and work experience.

Paul McGlinchey (PM) – It is also notable that disparity persists within our own educational system. Those leaving school without GCSEs is 44x higher for non-white population than for the white population in Northern Ireland.

PY – BME groups are often at the very top and the very bottom of educational statistics. Black African and Black Caribbean face the lowest educational outcomes.

DK – I find it concerning that there is a general feeling that people nowadays can blame BME communities for problems and job losses, with the Muslim population being particularly targeted.

AL – I know of a family who were advised by the police not to buy a house in North Belfast because it was considered too dangerous.

Maria Lourenco (ML) – There is real fear and confusion amongst BME individuals on where to live and there is a lack of recognition of the contribution that BME individuals are making, particularly in light of an emigrating youth population and resultant skill gaps.

Kristyene Boreland (KB) – Politicians need to make racial issues more visible, or else this negative response will continue.

Joseph Ricketts (JR) – Promoting positive images of BME communities and skills they bring was a recommendation arising from the consultation on the Racial Equality Strategy. There is a misconception that thousands of migrants are entering Northern Ireland and 'taking jobs'. In reality, we are losing a lot of young talent to the rest of the world, with much of the talent that remains coming from those who migrate here. We should be encouraging people to stay.

DK – The opening up of migration in Ireland has been recognised as a key factor in its economic upturn.

AL (to GS) – if we suggest to the Committee on Employment and Learning that you could do a presentation of your findings, would you be willing to do so? **ACTION POINT**

GS – Yes.

## **AOB**

UK Government draft Report to the UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination:

PY – The sections on Northern Ireland in the current draft of the State Report are not really relevant to the prior concluding observations. For example, regarding the UN Committee's request that the Race Relations Order 1997 be reformed, the State Report simply refers to the Racial Equality Strategy consultation document's consideration of potential legislative reform. I suggest that we wait for the finalised State Report before making a response to the Committee.

AL – Why not challenge the State Report at this stage?

PY – It is better to make a comment on the finalised report, as the State Report is unlikely to take our views into account at the consultation stage.

CS – Any other business?

KB – The Ards Intercultural Forum will be relaunching in Bangor Tech.

Date of next meeting: **24<sup>th</sup> of March, Room 106**