

All Party Group on Ethnic Minority Communities

Date: Tuesday 17 June 2014

Time: 15:30

Venue: Room 29, Parliament Buildings

In Attendance

Political Representatives

Anna Lo MLA (Alliance – Chair), Stephen Agnew MLA (Green – Vice Chair), Pam Cameron MLA (DUP)

BME Sector Representatives

Kristyene Boreland (WWW@North Down), Maria Lourenco (WWW@North Down), Justin Kouame (NICRAS), Luke Kelly (NICEM), Paul McGlinchey (NICEM), Helena Macormac (NICEM – Secretariat) Frances Wong (Oi Yin Women's Group), Phoebe Wong (Oi Yin Women's Group), Paul Yam (Wah Hep), Brenda Skillen (NIMFA), Nick Cassidy (OECSG), Eddis Nicholl (NICRAS) Lume Podrimaj (NICEM), Tak Sun Poon (Wah Hep) Ivy Goddard (BIEF), James Holmland (Bahai NI)

Other Representatives

Virginia McVea (NIHRC), Leanne Cohrane (NIHRC), Jenny Knox (NIHRC), Dr Muhammad Saleem Tareen (Chairperson of Belfast Islamic Centre), Anwar Mady (Project Coordinator at Belfast Islamic Centre)

The Chair welcomed Pam Cameron MLA (DUP) and David McNarry MLA (UKIP) as new members

Apologies

Bobby Rao (SECA)

Political Representatives

David McIlveen (DUP), Danny Kinahan (UUP MLA)

Speakers

Ken Fraser (OFMDFM), Ricky Irwin (OFMDFM), Denis McMahon (OFMDFM)

1. Apologies

2. Approval of the last meeting – approved (update attendance list)

3. Matters arising from the last meeting

Helena Macormac (NICEM) provided a brief update on recent press releases and letters issued by the APG, to which there has not been a response.

- PSNI press release on Operation Reiner
- press release regarding hate crime – no response to date
- letter regarding Together: Building a United Community Programme – no response to date
- letter regarding concerning delay in the Racial Equality Strategy – no response to date

Patrick Yu (NICEM) provided an introduction on the role of Operation Reiner as a new PSNI task force dedicated to tackling hate crime and providing a greater amount of rigour to investigations,

with the current priority being placed on addressing racial and religious hate crime. Reference was made to new helpline for victims of racist hate crime and the importance of building the confidence of victims to report incidents to the police. The Chair mentioned recent arrests which provide a positive signal in the context of a low clearance rate for racist hate crimes. A press release was circulated to attendees.

Need to publicise helpline for victims of racist hate crime – letter to PSNI – how to raise awareness of hate crime – clarification on operation reiner – improve reporting of racist hate crime (ACTION POINT)

4. Annual Report

The Annual Report of the APG was circulated and discussed. There was a show of support from invitees for the body of work undertaken by the Secretariat. The Chair expressed her thanks for the contribution of invitees and BME sector representatives.

Paul Yam (Wah Hep) indicated that the attendance list be updated. (ACTION POINT)

It was agreed that the Annual Report would be uploaded to the APG Section of the NI Assembly website. The Chair also suggested that the report be shared with OFMDFM. (ACTION POINT)

Members approved annual report.

5. AGM

Composition of Newly Constituted Officers of APG:

Chairperson - Anna Lo

Vice Chairperson - Stephen Agnew

Secretary - Claire Sugden

Treasurer - David McIlveen

Group Members: (MLAs) Steven Agnew (Green), David McIlveen (DUP) Fra McCann (Sinn Fein) Danny Kinahan (UUP) Colum Eastwood (SDLP), Anna Lo (Alliance), Alex Maskey (Sinn Fein), Chris Lyttle (Alliance), Bronwyn McGahan (Sinn Fein)

New Members: Claire Sugden MLA (Independent) and David McNarry MLA (UKIP) and Pam Cameron (DUP)

Stephen Agnew (Green) communicated the competing pressures in terms of attending the APG and Assembly debates as the sole member of the Green Party. He forfeited the Chairmanship available under the 6 month rotation procedure for office bearers, and nominated Anna Lo MLA to maintain her position as Chair and carry forward the work she has pursued to date in progressing the Racial Equality Strategy. Anna Lo expressed her thanks, and stressed the need for concerted effort to ensure the next RES is robust and adequately resourced.

6. March Against Racism Initiative and Update on Hate Crime

Representative from Belfast Islamic Centre

The Chair welcomed representatives and expressed sympathy and outrage at the remarks of Pastor McConnell and the response of some Northern Ireland politicians.

Dr Tareen, Chairperson of the Belfast Islamic Centre, provided a brief summary of recent events. It was stated that in the aftermath of the comments from Pastor McConnell, the media continued to make inquiries, seeking an official response from the Centre. The Belfast Islamic Centre spoke out on issue and condemned the remarks as unacceptable and offensive. He also issued invitations to Muslim community representatives through the (NIMFA) NI Muslim Families Association networks, from Enniskillen to Coleraine, to discuss the situation and decide the course of action.

Dr Tareen emphasised the importance of communicating an Islamic response to show values of faith, pardon and forgiveness. He also stated importance of striking a balance with responding to the needs of community members and safeguarding the Muslim community at large from hate crime, verbal and physical abuse. The press release issued by the Centre was endorsed and supported by a broad cross section of groups and individuals across Northern Ireland.

Dr Tareen expressed his gratitude for hundreds of emails, letters, and visits to the centre showing support and solidarity. He noted that he has settled for 7 years and that racist hate incidents are not characteristic of his experience which has been largely positive. He noted the support from senior figures in different faith communities including the Church of Ireland, Methodist, Presbyterian and Catholic Church, as well as many politicians.

The **March Against Racism** was commended for its success. Dr Tareen expressed the encouragement and strength coming from the public show of support and solidarity. The Islamic Centre also passed on their support for the Chair in her efforts to combat injustice and racism.

The Chair also expressed her gratitude for the volume of good will messages she has received, and reiterated that the vast majority of Northern Ireland residents are hospitable and welcoming. She also noted that the actions of a small minority can cause a great deal of harm.

The Chair raised a query over whether the Belfast Islamic Centre is receiving sufficient funding and support to build a fit for purpose mosque that can accommodate more than 200.

The Chair - Education and awareness-raising was stressed as a priority in order to combat misconceptions over Islam, particularly the targeting of schools, PSNI, health and social care professionals etc.

Paul Yam (Wah Hep) stressed the need for informational resources on Islam and for improved educational and awareness raising efforts to promote positive images of Islam. It was suggested that such measures target schools, religious communities and different fields.

Patrick Yu (NICEM) drew attention to limitations in existing religious curriculum. Over-emphasis on Christianity (i.e. severely limited inter-faith coverage). Failure to recognise that Islam, Judaism and Christianity all based on same Bible and follow a common Abrahamic tradition. Need to address deficits in religious curriculum to deal more effectively with underlying prejudice to combat hate crime. Need to look into formal and informal educational system. Need for hate crime/racist bullying guidance to be mainstreamed into school curriculum and educational resources should be produced

Write letter to Minister of Education on religious curriculum (ACTION POINT)

Virginia McVea (Director, NIHC) – Update on Racist Hate Crime Report

Virginia McVea (NIHRC) expressed her thanks for the ongoing process of accountability afforded through the Hate Crime Delivery Group and the monitoring role of the APG on the implementation of measures to address racist hate crime. Attention was drawn to the previous update to APG on the

recommendations in the NIHRC report, “Racist Hate Crime: Human Rights and the Criminal Justice System in Northern Ireland (September 2013)” and the “4P model” in December 2013.

Virginia (NIHRC) shared a quote from an address delivered by the Secretary General of the UN, Ban Ki Moon on the International Day Against Racism calling for leadership in tackling racism, which speaks to the role of members of the APG:

‘I call on all people, especially political, civic and religious leaders, to strongly condemn messages and ideas based on racism, racial superiority or hatred as well as those that incite racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance. On this Day, let us acknowledge that racial discrimination remains a dangerous threat and resolve to tackle it through dialogue inspired by the proven ability of individuals to respect, protect and defend our rich diversity as one human family’

In reference to recent events, Virginia (NIHRC) drew attention to the Durban Declaration arising from the World Conference against racism, racial discrimination and xenophobia.

It was noted that the NIHRC have taken proactive measures to seek clarification from the UN Committee on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination in relation to incitement to racial and religious hatred and freedom of expression.

A brief update was provided on the NIHRC involvement in activities of the Department of Justice Hate Crime Delivery Group. The NIHRC have been coordinating closely with Chair of the Delivery Group, Sinead Simpson (DoJ) and are represented on the Delivery Group when required, and have delivered separate training and undertaken follow up activities across criminal justice agencies.

Virginia (NIHRC) emphasised the importance of joined up working and the dangers of working in silos, particularly in the context of information rights for victims at every stage of criminal justice proceedings.

The NIHRC facilitated a visit from the Sir Keir Starmer QC, former Director of Public Prosecutions at the Crown Prosecution Service (GB) who shared information on pilot projects and good practices, including the CPS forum where victims worked alongside officials to look at improving policies and procedures. Discussions addressed issues including early guilty pleas, the involvement of victims, and definitions of sectarianism. The NIHRC are exploring opportunities for replication in Northern Ireland.

The NIHRC have undertaken follow on activities to progress recommendations from its report, including the provision of training and engagement with the Probation Board NI, Youth Justice Agency NI, Public Prosecution Service and crucially the PSNI. Malcolm McKibben, head of the Northern Ireland Civil Service (NICS) has advised on delivery work, with a forthcoming meeting scheduled with the OFMDFM civil service later in the week.

The NIHRC have also undertaken an investigation with the PSNI in analysing best practices and common challenges encountered by police forces in Kosovo and New South Wales in Australia in addressing hate crime, with an emphasis on preventative measures.

It was stressed a robust and fit for purpose Racial Equality Strategy was the key foundation to making progress on tackling racist hate crime and progress recommendations in the report.

The Chair expressed her agreement that the Racial Equality Strategy should form the cornerstone or foundation for future work in tackling racist hate crime.

Patrick Yu (NICEM) provided update on meeting between NICEM and the Minister of Justice to discuss review of hate crime legislation. Two primary issues remain whether the Attorney General should provide further guidance on incitement to racial and religious hatred under the Public Order (NI) 1987 and the whether the PPS should seek to develop guidance on incitement to racial and religious hatred in line with specific guidelines adopted by the CPS in GB. It was also noted that the Code of Conduct for public officials and Ministerial Code provides less stringent standards than in Wales, Scotland and England. (ACTION POINT)

Stephen Agnew (Green) noted that the Ministerial Code was being subject to review before the Standards and Privileges Committee. Patrick Yu (NICEM) recommended that a robust clause on equality and non-discrimination be included in the revised Code. (ACTION POINT)

7. Racial Equality Strategy / Minority Ethnic Development Fund

There were discussions over the absence of three government officials from OFMDFM (i.e. Ken Fraser, Ricky Irwin & Denis McMahon) invited to present an update on the Racial Equality Strategy and Minority Ethnic Development Fund. Following a suggestion from the Chair, it was agreed the APG put on record the displeasure of members at the tone of email correspondence from invitees, the failure to provide an adequate explanation for their absence or submit a written statement to update the APG. This is of particular note, given the failure of OFMDFM officials to respond to a series of letters issued by the APG seeking clarification on the timeframe for public consultation on the long awaited Racial Equality Strategy. It was noted that this may form a potential breach of code of conduct.

James Holmland (Bahai NI) Need for organise meeting with OFMDFM Committee over the failure to progress the RES. He highlighted the need for robust engagement and need for clear objectives.

Justin Koame (NICRAS) provided brief reference to comments made at the OFMDFM Committee. He communicated the need for community groups to relay issues to OFMDFM committee directly. It was noted that there was a persistent lack of political understanding of racial equality issues. It was also emphasised that political understanding should improve on the specific issues and needs of different ethnicities/BME community groups.

The Chair noted that it would not be feasible for BME sector representatives to address the OFMDFM Committee directly.

The Chair requested the APG write to complain to First and Deputy First Minister about the absence of key public officials at the APG and failure to provide adequate explanation or provide written statement. (ACTION POINT)

Patrick Yu (NICEM) noted OFMDFM Committee previous calls for formal inquiry into racial inequalities to inform the evidence base in the updated RES. It was noted that the APG was under-resourced to undertake formal inquiry into racial inequalities in Northern Ireland. The OFMDFM Racial Equality Panel should draw direct attention to the recent Equality Commission NI position paper on racial equality.

Justin Koame (NICRAS) expressed his thanks to MLAs from APG who had attended the motion debate on asylum seekers and refugees in NI as part of Refugee Week.

Kristyene Boreland (WWW@North Down) communicated the need for consistency in exerting pressure on OFMDFM to release the Racial Equality Strategy for public consultation.

Maria Lourenco (WWW@North Down) need to target broad cross section of MLAs. Helena indicated that all MLAs were invited to attend March Against Racism rally.

8. AOB

Charity Commission and Electoral Commission Seminar

Use of banner campaign to push for release of updated RES by end of June. invitation to all MLAs members of APG to attend photocall to raise visibility of the issue, with suggestion of use of countdown of days until release of RES. (ACTION POINT)

9. Date of next meeting

NI Assembly in Summer Recess

16th September