

All Party Group on Ethnic Minority Communities

Date: Tuesday 21st April 2015.

Time: 15.30

Venue: Room 106, Parliament Buildings, Stormont

In attendance:

Political Representatives:

Anna Lo MLA

Chris Lyttle MLA

Speakers:

Pauline Mooney PSNI

Community Representatives:

Frances Wong Oi Yin Women's Group

Kristyene Boreland BMEWN

Nick Cassidy OESG

Claire Choulavong NICEM/BMEWN

Judite Pina ACSONI

Joseph Ricketts ACSONI

1. Apologies

Maria Lourenco (Ards & Down BME Network)

Phoebe Wong (Oi Yin Women's Group)

Dr Singhal (Indian Community Centre)

Edwin Graham (Ba'hai Council)

David McIlveen MLA

2. Approval of the minutes of the last meeting

Minutes approved.

3. Matters arising from the last meeting

(i) Common Platform event on Racial Equality Strategy

Patrick Yu (PY) – NICEM attended this event last Tuesday – run very well, 80-something people on the day. Agenda the same as usual– a brief introduction and then separated into workshops – one looking at racial inequalities, one at local council issues/new super councils and third on coordination and governance – I chaired that one. We are awaiting the report, which I will circulate to this group. Any comments from people who attended?

Joseph Ricketts (JR) – Just that the groups made the same point that has been made before – need to see a RES that represents the interests of the community – want to see it implemented soon – must be robust and serve the people, challenge hate crime.

PY – One of the key concerns from NICEM is that people didn't focus on priority issues at workshop, people brought up general issues, which doesn't help – people

were trying to discuss racial inequalities at the workshop I attended, which wasn't relevant. I asked two chairs from other two workshops and they noticed the same problem. This can delay the whole process, as we can't find the best solution. Other than that, good in terms of attendance et cetera.

Anna Lo (AL) – That's a lesson to be learned for next time – groups need to have more preparation.

PY – Also, these problems arise because of the agreement between the Community Relations Council (CRC) and the Office for the First Minister and Deputy First Minister (OFMDFM) – this event was initially an attempt to continue the consultation. It used to be that an expert would help to facilitate these events, but this isn't the case anymore.

AL – That kind of meeting is supposed to drill down and gain more detail, it seems like this may not have been achieved.

JR – One of the key points we were discussing was the future makeup of the racial equality panel...

PY – Yes, that was my workshop. We were discussing whether it should be a public appointment process with criteria, but there was a lack of understanding and focus on this issue.

AL – What's our next step from that workshop?

PY – CRC will publish a report. I don't see that the report will diverge much from OFMDFM's position already.

AL – My worry is that this process of developing the RES will drag on into next year – OFMDFM are still consulting in a way, here.

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

AL – This question has still not been answered. We will continue to press OFMDFM on this. I have a list of six questions that I have submitted to OFMDFM that have still yet to be answered, some from as far back as last year. This is unacceptable.

PY – Could you give us the document you have of unanswered questions you have submitted to OFMDFM, so that we can see it?

AL – Yes. **ACTION POINT**

(iii) Minority Ethnic Development Fund (MEDF)

PY – Despite what OFMDFM indicated to AL previously, there will be no extension of the MEDF and a new funding cycle has begun instead. Consequently, organisations

receiving funding previously must bear the consequences of OFMDFM's delays and employees will be made redundant.

AL – What will happen when employees who do gain new funding come back after the two month gap where funding is not offered? Will the funding be backdated?

Nick Cassidy (NC) – We inquired about that ourselves and the response was that each organisation will be able to use reserve funds, which will be compensated for by backdated funding.

PY – Yes, but very few organisations would have such funding in reserve.

NC – Yes, an organisation would be lucky to be in this position. We have had this problem before – funding being delayed from April until July – we couldn't pay employees, but we also couldn't make them redundant.

AL – This is a breach of their (OFMDFM's) contract.

PY – I have raised this before with OFMDFM - as employers, we need to have financial certainty and we have to take on the risk and blame when the funding is so significantly delayed.

AL – It is ridiculous to expect organisations to continue for four months without funding. The MEDF started having troubles in 2011?

PY – Well, for the past five years it has been issued on a year by year basis.

NC – From 2012-2013 there were two 6 month extensions - from April-September 2012 and from September 2012-March 2013.

AL – Then two years funding started from April 2013 until March 2015?

NC – Yes.

PY – From 2009-2012/13 funding was on a year by year basis. Prior to 2009, all funding cycles were three years – starting from 2000. Until 2012, where it was 2 years, due to the extension.

AL – Essentially, from 2009 up until March 2013, it has really been a year or 6 months? That's ridiculous. Chris, (addressing CL) this last funding cycle ended in March and they were told that there would be a new round of funding for one year only and all the organisations funded stopped receiving funding on 31st March pending the next round. The next round will possibly start some time in May.

PY – Application process closes at end of April. There's no way that OFMDFM will be able to deal with this volume of applications in such a short period. There will be delays, during which organisations will receive no funding.

AL – All of the organisations receiving funding will have to make staff redundant.

Chris Lyttle (CL) – There have been two Committee sessions – I chaired the first, representatives from the Common Platform attended and the OFMDFM Race Unit followed. The Race Unit gave an indication that there would be an extension. The next session with the junior ministers was last week and the junior ministers announced a bizarre system, whereby funding stopped and groups are required to submit applications by 27th April and those who are successful will be given backdated funding for the gap – I’ve never heard of such a convoluted approach. However, our suggestions that this arrangement is undesirable were dismissed.

PY – As we have Pauline here, we could take some action – a couple of organisations affected could produce a collective complaint to the ombudsman’s office, asking for compensation.

AL – I agree. **ACTION POINT**

CL – You made a request to the junior ministers for an extension, how was their response?

AL – The junior ministers said that they would talk to the Race Unit and appeared understanding.

CL – The first you heard of their change of approach would have been after their second appearance before the Committee, then?

AL – Yes.

CL – This is very poor practice. Would it be too late to bring another delegation to meet with OFMDFM, or are we beyond this?

AL – I think we are beyond that at this point – we require legal action, or some other kind of serious complaint.

JR – The groups affected by this are groups working on the frontline, dealing with BME issues such as hate crime. Groups like NICRAS, who deal with asylum seekers, are facing serious problems. When all these groups are gone as a result of this, the current hate crime problem... I don’t know what will happen. This decision won’t affect the big groups, it will be the small groups – but these are the most important ones, dealing with issues like hate crime on the ground.

CL – This was one of OFMDFM’s justifications - that larger groups would not be so badly affected. It seems ridiculous, as you rightly point out, considering the context of race hate crime. Normally Departments extend to cover gap periods, is my understanding...

AL – Yes, this was what we were expected. To say that funding will end so abruptly and make people wait for two months to even hear back about applications is unreasonable.

Kristyene Boreland (KB) – This makes groups very vulnerable.

AL – You want us to sponsor you to write to the Ombudsman?

PY – Yes **ACTION POINT**

AL – APG need to write a very strong letter to OFMDFM about this. I will draft and circulate a letter. **ACTION POINT**

CL – Yes, you could also do a press release.

AL – Indeed, I have already done this regarding OFMDFM's failure to answer six of my AQWs presented to them.

CL – Is there a way for a deputation of affected groups to request a meeting with the First and Deputy First Ministers? This proved successful recently for NICVA, with the media putting pressure on OFMDFM for such a meeting.

PY – Part of the problem with the sector is that it is too quiet – people are reluctant to appear to be making trouble and thus become targets.

CL – Organisations, jobs and projects have been put at unnecessary risk because of this delay. This should be made public. It should be communicated to the First and Deputy First Ministers. There is no other budget for racial equality work. Organisations affected must step up and speak.

AL – Will members agree that if I draft a strong letter to OFMDFM, requesting an urgent meeting with the FM and DFM, they will support this? **ACTION POINT**

CL – I agree. I must excuse myself, apologies. (CL exits)

4. Presentation from Inspector Pauline Mooney, Inspector dealing with policy on Domestic and Sexual Violence, PSNI

Pauline Mooney (PM) – Domestic abuse is indiscriminate – it affects people regardless of age, sexual orientation, race etc. receive a report of domestic violence every 19 minutes of every day. The Human Rights Act 1998 places positive obligation on officers to safeguard victims – positive action must be taken at all instances. The DASH risk assessment incorporates indicators associated with many crimes relevant to BME communities, including honour based violence – police officers must undertake an honour based violence risk assessment where that kind of crime is apparent. Multi-agency risk assessment conferences (MARACs) are also part of the PSNI approach to this issue – the primary focus of MARACs is to safeguard the adult victim and there is a working assumption that no single agency/individual may have a complete insight into the risk facing the victim. The PSNI acknowledges the existence of additional obstacles facing BME victims – language barrier, fear of police etc. – we are aware of these extra barriers and attempt to reach these victims through publication of domestic abuse leaflets, the holding of conferences on female genital mutilation and cultural/ritual abuse, the production of public service procedures on female genital mutilation and honour based violence. We have also

undertaken awareness raising amongst the military community on domestic violence and amongst members of commonwealth countries.

5. Question and Answer Session

AL – You said you were doing training with BME organisations, groups, raising awareness? How do you do this?

PM – The training is for specialist officers dealing with particular offences – we have dealt with NICEM in the past – we have had domestic abuse training for our interpreters, for example.

AL – I think it is important to raise awareness in BME communities that this is a crime that the police take seriously – women from some countries may fear that this crime will not be taken seriously and all of the information on what to do and where to go may not be available. Would you be willing to go to organisations to talk to women?

PM – Absolutely. Again, we have leaflets et cetera for information and we have the Safe Place Initiative, which produces posters in minority languages. If any organisation would like us to speak, we would be happy to attend.

AL – Through the All-Party Group, we could have a training session.

PY – We could run a separate seminar, so that people could attend. It would be good if we get a separate seminar, as we could bring the DOJ and DHSSPSNI together. Originally, we attempted to get the DOJ to come, but because there is a new Strategy coming on domestic and sexual violence, we will invite them in June.

AL – Where would you like to have this seminar?

PY – Here.

AL – OK, let me know of the date in advance. **ACTION POINT**

JR – ACSONI is currently doing Africa Week 25th-31st May, we are working on an event here on the 27th of May on FGM, to link in with DOJ and DHSSPS, agencies and practitioners. We are hoping for participation from All-Party Group also.

AL – Send us the programme and we will let the All-Party Group know. **ACTION POINT** One issue regards women who fear leaving their husbands who may lose their status if they do so. We can work with DOJ and NICEM to maybe have an awareness-raising session here in June.

Luke Kelly (LK) – Has the service procedure on forced marriage been updated in line with the recent change in the law on this issue?

PM – Service procedure for forced marriage will be updated within the next 2 months - there has been a slight delay due to restructuring.

6. AOB

None raised.

7. Date of Next Meeting

Tuesday, 19th May 2015 Room 115