

THE SCOTTISH PARLIAMENT CROSS PARTY GROUP ON HUMAN RIGHTS

6th May 2014, Committee Room 6

Minute

Attendees: John Finnie MSP, Alison Johnstone MSP, Greame Pearson MSP, Roderick Campbell MSP, Siobhan Reardon - Amnesty International, Muriel Mowat - Scottish Independent Advocacy Alliance, Roisin Mckelvey – Scottish Independent Advocacy Alliance, John Welford – NO2ID, Chris Oswald – EHRC, Andrew Muir – Psychiatric Rights Scotland, Carole Ewart – Campaign for Freedom of Information Scotland, Gordon Reid.

1. Welcome

Mr Finnie welcomed the membership.

2. Apologies

Apologies were not read out however were received from:

Brandi Lee – LGBT Youth Scotland

Leah Granat – Scottish council of Jewish Communities

David Freeland – Information Commissioner's Office

Emma Gray – Scottish Public Services Ombudsman

Carol Young and Jatin Haria – CRER

Nareen Sood

Jean Urquhart MSP

Pat Elsmie - Migrant Rights' Scotland

3. Formal proposal of Secretary

Siobhan Reardon, Programme Director, Amnesty International, was formally proposed as Secretary by John Finnie, seconded by Chris Oswald, EHRC.

Carole Ewart questioned why there needed to be agreement as the Secretariat role was agreed at the AGM. John Finnie stated that the position was held in a personal capacity and the individual needed to be formally proposed and agreed due to staff changes at AIUK's Scottish office.

4. Minutes of the last meeting and matters arising

The previous meeting, which had been scheduled for 12th March 2014 had been cancelled, therefore no minutes to review and agree.

Clarification was sought by Siobhan Reardon whether the meeting previous to that (10th December 2013) had been a formal meeting or an event to launch the Scottish National Action Plan. She was advised by the membership present that it had indeed been an event and therefore no minutes had been produced.

5. Treasurer's report

There was no Treasurer's Report for circulation. However a verbal account was read which stated that there had been no change in expenditure since the AGM. Clarification was sought as to what this amount was.

Following correspondence with Pat Elsmie, the Group's Treasurer, the current balance is at £317.69.

Carole Ewart stated that at a previous meeting, the issue of provision of tea and coffee had been discussed. An action was agreed to investigate costs for future meetings.

Action: Pat Elsmie to look into costs for refreshments for future meetings.

6. Parliamentary Agenda – new item for discussion

John Finnie explained that this new item, proposed as a Standing Item, would ensure that the CPG had regard to the Parliamentary Legislative Programme and be an opportunity for scrutiny with regard to human rights promotion and protection.

When explaining the ethos behind the proposed Standing Item, John Finnie MSP reported to the Group that he had taken up a Rapporteur Portfolio, between the Justice Committee and the Scottish Human Rights Commission to ensure that there was human rights scrutiny and direct engagement with the Scottish National Action Plan.

Discussion at the meeting centred around the Procurement Bill which was currently at Stage 3.

Carole Ewart questioned whether there was an issue about Scottish Parliamentary Committees not having an understanding of human rights and whether this would not be addressed by a Human Rights Committee. John Finnie stated that this issue had been discussed at length in the past and there was no support for such a proposition amongst parliamentarians.

It was agreed by the membership that the Standing Item was a good idea and should continue – with no one in disagreement.

7. The Scottish Independence Referendum and Human Rights

Alison Johnstone MSP, Graeme Pearson MSP and Roderick Campbell MSP spoke with the membership regarding their respective parties' views on human rights within the context of the Scottish Independence Referendum.

There was then a Q&A session.

John Finnie explained that invitations had been extended to every political party represented at the Scottish Parliament.

NB. The minutes reflect that Alison Johnstone MSP, Graeme Pearson MSP and Roderick Campbell MSP left at this point and therefore the meeting is not quorate.

8. AOCB – these should be submitted in advance of the meeting if possible so that all pertinent issues can be discussed by the group.

John Finnie raised the issue of poor attendance at recent CPGs and how this may be improved at future meetings.

Carole Ewart raised the issue of asking members of the CPG to re-apply for membership, stating that this may reduce numbers of attendees at future meetings.

John Finnie explained that the re-application process was a way to re-invigorate attendance rather than eliminate individuals and organisations from membership and that the current low level of attendance reflected the need to re-invigorate and engage with members and potential members.

Andrew Muir - Psychiatric Rights Scotland raised an issue with regard to Mental Health Bill and the ramifications of the UNCRPD on this proposed legislation.

This prompted a discussion with regard to the remit and function of the CPG. John Finnie suggested that the CPG on Human Rights was not always the appropriate forum for issues such as those which Andrew Muir raised – and perhaps alternative CPGs were better placed.

Carole Ewart suggested to Andrew Muir that a more suitable way forward would be to contact organisations representing and campaigning on behalf of individuals with disabilities. It was suggested that Andrew Muir contact Inclusion Scotland – and that he share this information with Hunter Watson, who had raised similar issues in the past.

Action: Andrew Muir to contact Inclusion Scotland

Fiona Sinclair – Autism Rights:

- 1) How many individuals and groups in civil society in Scotland raise human rights issues with the parliament through the Human Rights CPG?
- 2) How much of this kind of correspondence does the Human Rights CPG receive?
- 3) Is there an expectation within the Scottish body politic that 'somebody else will deal with these issues', and so nobody ever does?

In answering these questions, John Finnie stated –

- 1) The group is open to everyone who has a professional or personal interest which is within the remit of the group.
- 2) Not a great deal.
- 3) There was a need to identify specific issues and how best to address them.

Maureen H Falconer - Information Commissioner's Office – Scotland

Offer to provide a relevant presentation by the ICO if you think that would be of interest to the CPG.

There was interest in the potential of a presentation or speakers from the ICO – Scotland and ICO – UK. Carole Ewart mooted the topic of FoI legislation and the relationship with freedom of the press and media freedoms in general.

Action: Carole Ewart to work up a proposal with regard to presenting / inviting speakers to a future CPG.

John Finnie suggested that we ask the membership for ideas on future events.

Action: CPG members to forward presentation / speaker suggestions.

Action: Siobhan Reardon to circulate past examples of topics / speakers to provide a framework for suggestions.

Future Events:

9th June – Amnesty International ‘The Reality of Rights at Home’

10th June – Human Rights Consortium: 6 month Reflection on SNAP

23rd June – Amnesty International ‘Scotland as a Good Global Citizen’

27th June – Conference ‘Constitution in Scotland’

<http://www.eventbrite.co.uk/o/human-rights-consortium-scotland-6281151423>

9. Date of next meeting

There was no future meeting date set – this will be circulated to the membership once identified.

Action: Siobhan Reardon to circulate future meeting dates.