

Meeting of LGBTI+ Cross-Party Group

7pm to 8pm, Monday 25th November 2020

Zoom

Agenda

1. Welcome and apologies

Present:

Jamie Greene MSP	(Co-Convener – chairing)
Patrick Harvie MSP	(Co-Convener)
Rebecca Crowther	Equality Network
Ella Fisher	Equality Network
Sarah McBride	
Megan Snedden	Stonewall Scotland
Paul Daly	LGBT Youth Scotland
Maruska Greenwood	LGBT Health and Wellbeing
Stevie Maybanks	
Dominic Miller-Graham	Pink Saltire
Jordan Daly	TIE
Jim Hume	Support in Mind
Sarah Skerratt	Royal Society of Edinburgh
Connal Cochrane	Rangers Charity Foundation
Hugh Torrance	LEAP Sports
Erika Schmidt	EHRC and LGBT Youth Scotland
Kenny Stewart	Equality & Human Rights Commission
Nate Darling	LGBT Youth Scotland/Schools Out project
Lukas Oliver Lee	LEAP Sports
Liam Stevenson	TIE
Matthew Waites	
Robin	Scottish Bi+ Network
Stuart Duffy	Pink Saltire
Jimbob	Individual
Stevie Maybanks	Individual
Christopher Ward	Individual
Apologies:	
Michael Richardson	Individual
Cara Spence	LGBT Youth Scotland

2. Introductions and new members

The Equality & Human Rights Commission was approved to join, represented at this meeting by Kenny Stewart and Erika Schmidt.

3. Minutes of the last meeting (4th March 2020)

Only comment was to change the date on the previous minutes to the 28th September.

4. Update on developing policy items

The developments surrounding the Hate Crime bill were discussed, and the oral evidence which has just been given was mentioned.

5. LGBT and online: The opportunities and difficulties for our community in a digital world.

The topic was introduced by Jamie Greene who mentioned that part of the meeting's focus was on positive impacts of the online world as well as negative, at the suggestion of Patrick Harvie. He also mentioned how good it was to see all attendants, and expressed a hope that next year we will have more MSPs and more parties represented.

- **Celebration of online spaces and the opportunity for worldwide platform:**

- Sarah McBride, State Senator-Elect, 2021, Delaware, USA.

Sarah began by saying she was pleased to be invited to the event, and mentioning that when she last visited Scotland two years ago she met Patrick and many other LGBTQ elected officials from different countries. She also expressed how nice it was that members of more than one party were present in the group. Giving a brief background she explained that she was elected three weeks ago to the Delaware state senate and was the first openly transgender state senator and is also the highest ranking transgender elected official in the US. She stated that her election allowed voters to send a message to young LGBT people, especially Trans kids that their voice matters and they can run and be voted on the state of their politics, not just their identities.

With regards to online spaces for the community, she said she had seen the power of those spaces for LGBTQ people as a candidate and as a former spokesperson for the Human Rights campaign in US. She said that she believed the election of trans candidates would not have been possible prior to the internet as it helped open hearts and minds. In small community spaces, she said online platforms have helped amplify a relatively small community of trans people, their voices, lives, and their identity.

Sarah agreed that online space can be 'a double-edged sword.' It allowed her team to get their campaign out and be heard as people, as candidates, and as elected officials with the message they want the public to hear. The traditional media around the candidacy was focused only around her gender identity, whereas online most the conversations were not about her gender identity, instead focusing on the key social and political issues that she was running on, such as healthcare, medical leave, and racial issues. She was grateful as a candidate to have a platform to ensure voters are hearing her message, where they would not through traditional media. It also makes it easy to target voters in her area. However, she also acknowledged that online spaces

allow for hate to spread and for 'fake news.' She thinks one of the fundamental questions as a society is 'how do we harness the democratisation of the microphone for good and not for ill?' How do we ensure it is endorsing hate-free speech? How do we make sure we are not perpetuating exclusionary practices that are present in traditional media?

With regards to party politics she says they are lucky in the US, in that the political left is united in favour of trans people unlike in some other countries. This helps with creating online spaces and she is so grateful to be able to use the internet to get her message out there. She stated that trans kids seeing a trans person be elected sends a big message, that kind of message can be life affirming and lifesaving. She is also excited for the connectivity it has provided for LGBT people and officials around the world. She had some young Scottish people phone banking for her during this election who she met several years ago but stayed in contact with due to social media.

The discussion was then opened up to questions for Sarah.

Patrick Harvie spoke first, beginning with the fact that he was the first out LGBT person who was elected to the Scottish Parliament. When he started someone told him not to go near civil partnership legislation in case he was branded 'the gay one'. He believes this was well-meaning to stop him from being pigeonholed. However, he does believe this kind of comment wouldn't have been said to members of other marginalised groups. He wanted to know how Sarah is dealing with that question as a newly-elected official? Does she lean into those issues or is she worried about being stereotyped by them?

Sarah said she indeed has had that advice lots before. She agrees people would never dream of saying that stuff to other underrepresented groups which is sad but she does have to grapple with it as a political reality. With regards to her work she says there are great current legislators in the US working on LGBT issues, and she wants to support them and be a resource for them and a voice in support. However, where there are opportunities, where her voice as a trans person should be at the forefront of the effort she will use her voice. In a current discussion about legislation which would be the first time a US body would adopt the kind of legislation under discussion the prime sponsor in the House of Representatives approached her about being the prime sponsor in the state senate which she agreed to. The first question she asked of them was about whether the legislation would be Trans inclusive. She pointed out that her first controversial discussion since she was elected was that the legislation must be trans-inclusive, even though the Democratic Party made that moral decision about 10 years ago. She finds it interesting that, even though she ran on lots of other controversial topics that were not related to her being Trans, the first controversial discussion she has had is related to trans issues. She also mentioned that in this election a black, queer woman and an LGBT drag queen were elected to the Delaware state legislature, where previously there had never been any elected LGBTQ members of the Delaware legislature. They have just had the first meeting of the LGBTQ caucus. They have also agreed to work together in partnership with the rest of the legislature on LGBTQ issues. Sometimes legislation can benefit from ally voices being prominent or predominant but together they can still influence the legislation as a block, even more if they act in a united front.

Following on from this Jamie Greene asked how they will get allies on board to work with the caucus. He pointed out that in Scotland the advocacy is not dependent on outwardly LGBT MSPs, lots of other MSPs work to help and are active allies. He wondered how they were planning to grow consensus?

Sarah pointed out that previously in Delaware all progress was made entirely through allied legislature (as in all support from legislature was from allies as there were no LGBTQ member of the legislature, not all of the legislature was allied). She says that the three LGBTQ members will be the co-chairs of the caucus but will also have allies as members of the caucus. LGBTQ equality has been very partisan in the US which is sad but has strengthened the Democrat standpoint and both chambers in Delaware are super-majority democrat. In addition, because of online visibility of decisions there is an incentive for allies to act as strong allies, as their successes can be shared online. She also pointed out that it is certainly different having the LGBTQ community be the one promoting voices rather than the other way around and that this is due to online accessibility.

Hugh Torrance of Leap Sports, then asked how she has prepared herself to handle the weight of expectation to be the community champion, the person who the community is looking to, to represent their interests.

Sarah said there were two ways she handled that. Firstly, by making sure she is not the last by making sure she does the whole job well, including non-LGBT-specific issues such as cleaning up the neighbourhood, fixing sewage systems, etc. Secondly, to recognize what we've talked about here. She wants to make sure she is passing legislation which impact intersectional issues: police reform, healthcare, etc. which affect everyone but which all disproportionately impact LGBTQ people. She wants to make sure the people who come after her are more representative of the whole community than a white, upper income, college educated, trans woman.

At this point Patrick Harvie had to leave and Sarah said it was lovely to see him and after the pandemic she would love to come and see him in person at parliament again.

Jamie Greene then followed up with his own perspective on the previous question. He stated that politics in the UK is 'quite gay,' he had lots of 'gay role models' and friends in politics. However, even so the first thing his mum asked him when he went into politics was how he would deal with being gay in politics. When he joined Parliament he thought carefully about the CPG before he set it up because he had to go before the standards committee to ask for permission, he was concerned about whether it would pigeonhole him. However, he doesn't feel it has. It has had members of the community from all parties who were allies, they haven't all been LGBT. Some of those who had connections to the cause or an interest in what they were doing have also been champions in debates and took part in meetings etc. Ultimately Jamie says he is 'a politician first and gay second, the two are not necessarily linked.' He said he believes that this is easier for him than for Sarah, pointing out that every result for her name in traditional media is about her trans status and not her politics. He says he embraces the position and the responsibility, and that it is a privilege to be able to bring these issues to the public domain. It is something he'll be proud of after he leaves politics.

Sarah Skerratt of The Royal Society, Edinburgh, then spoke. She thanked Sarah McBride for speaking at this event and being an inspiration. She wanted to ask her view on social media. She was especially interested in, if Sarah McBride had been running 20 years ago how would the lack of social media have affected her campaign?

Sarah McBride said that, because in the US, elections are not a parliamentary model, the votes are often for the person not the party. The social change that has occurred over the past 20 years was really necessary for her to win in a system like they have, because voters are endorsing you as an individual. She is confident that without social media the social change would not have occurred for the trans community in the USA, because of their social size. She believes there would have been people 20 years ago who agreed with her policies and would normally have voted Democrat, who wouldn't have voted for her because of stigma and a lack of social change. The social change allowed a foundation for her to be heard and judged on her merits. 20 years ago, a much higher percentage of voters received all of their information from traditional (print) media. That coverage still today focuses on her trans identity and gender identity?, not her policies. Social media allowed her to run a successful campaign. Prior to the election she was convinced she was going to significantly underperform previous elections. Her area is a very Democrat district. When he ran there, Joe Biden got 74%. She thought she'd get 20/10% less, in fact she got 73%.

The final question came from Jim Hume of Support in Mind Scotland. He congratulated Sarah and mentioned the National Rural Mental Health Forum and the recent Equality Network report on rural inequality and mental health for LGBT people. He wondered if, in the USA, because it has a very high rural percentage, some of the issues of connectivity during Covid 'ring a bell?'

Sarah agreed that this was something they are also struggling with in the US. With reference to school she said that obviously for some, school was a place of safety and for some, home is a place that is dangerous or lacks acceptance. She said that being out of school has been particularly hard for them. She did point out, however, that for some children home is a place of safety and school is where they face ridicule and for them, this period has been one of relief. She thinks it is probably 50/50 in terms of the dynamic between safety in one place and lack of safety in the other. On top of that, isolation has compounded the mental health issues many are facing. One area of policy she thinks Scotland has done a great job on that the US hasn't is combating bullying in schools and making schools safe for LGBTQ young people. In Delaware, which is in the top 20 states for LGBTQ equality in the US, there are no policies to speak of for LGBTQ young students. This is one of the big questions she'll be facing when she goes back to the legislature.

At this point Sarah McBride had to leave but encouraged people to stay in touch with her.

- [Heids Together – Youth Link and LGBT Youth Highlands \(Podcasts and youth-led knowledge\)](https://www.youthlinkscotland.org/resources/heids-together-a-wellbeing-youth-work-resource/)

Nikki (Nate) Darling spoke on behalf of Heids Together. Heids Together is funded by

Youthlink and brings together projects all over Scotland that are working with young people. Nate's LGBT Youth group works in Inverness and the Highlands. Over the lockdown period they have gone from meeting in person to meeting online, using the platform Discord. Online platforms were utilised effectively given how much everything has changed, Different organisations took part in Heids Together and produced different resources for Youthlink to send out to anyone who wants them. LGBT Youth Highlands were working on a podcast previously so made a podcast for mental health. This was recorded using Discord. They tried to approach the production of this positively, i.e. discussing things that can boost mental health. Nate mentioned that groups like LGBT Youth's sub-groups are vital regardless of where you live. They are very proud of what the young people have achieved, lockdown was hard for everyone in so many ways and the young people they work with had said that they wanted to produce something positive that would help others, which Nate thinks is great. For taking part in the project they received £5000 from Youthlink which has gone to LGBT Youth's work in the highlands. Link to podcast: <https://www.youthlinkscotland.org/media/4784/lgbt-youth-scotland-podcast.mp3>

Jamie asked how Nate found people to participate, given that previous community hubs where they may have previously advertised projects like this are not currently being used.

Nate said that LGBT Youth Scotland have been great at using online outreach such as twitter, tech support website, etc. When lockdown 'hit' they made sure to reach out through Facebook and have now moved to discord as lots of people aren't on Facebook anymore. The groups have mostly maintained contact through social media. Youth Link got in touch with them through their work twitter account.

- **Barriers, toxicity, danger and exclusion with online engagement:**
 - Online in Lockdown Report – TIE

Time for Inclusive Education (TIE) is a Scottish charity using education to challenge biphobia, transphobia, and homophobia in school. The Online in Lockdown report looks into bullying which took place online during Covid, and how this bullying was conducted. The research tells us that online bullying has a different impact to in person bullying. It is harder to address it when it's not in the classroom, especially if it's from an anonymous account.

52% of those asked within TIE's survey said that they had witnessed more online prejudice during lockdown. LGBT young people saw different types of prejudice at a higher rate than their peers. TIE has experienced lots of online abuse as a result of being an LGBT charity working with schools. This online harassment included one member having a photo of his daughter shared online alongside the tagline "Lets Protect Our Children".

Liam Stevenson said that what worries him is that those who are more vulnerable and less robust at handling such online abuse are seeing this online. He finds the tone of the conversation around trans rights, and the wider climate towards LGBT people, to be very alarming. He wants all of us, especially those with young people in their lives,

to understand what social media can be like. According to TIE, this report is currently the only research like this in the UK. Without these harms being addressed trans people are being excluded from many aspects of public life. Link to TIE report: <https://www.tiecampaing.co.uk/reports>

Paul Daly said he wanted to express solidarity with TIE. He said LGBT Youth get these abuses too across all their staff, not just the public facing ones. Sarah McBride mentioned children being relieved not to be near bullies in school, have TIE seen that?

Jordan responded saying LGBT kids' opinions on school closures are overall negative about being away from school, but a significant percentage felt good about being away from school than non-LGBT kids. The qualitative data showed kids being pleased to be away from bullies and at home but some people mentioned being with unsupportive parents/siblings at home. Some kids said lots of times the bullying just moved online and actually became more encompassing because it was online and thus not limited to specific classes.

Nate Darling said some of the young people they work with who have a supportive teacher at school have not coped so well away from school, but if they've not had support at school they've been ok being at home. It's highlighted how important it is to make sure that individuals who have impact on young people are being educated on LGBT issues. This suggests work needs to be done to upskill some teachers. Previously they worked with teachers in Moray to upskill teachers on these issues.

Liam agrees with this point, it is a key cornerstone in the 33 recommendations of the Time for Inclusive Education Campaign set out in 2018 that all teachers in Scotland are fully skilled to deal with LGBT issues in all areas and classes. Jamie Greene says it's vital to hold the Government to their word on these recommendations and on Inclusive Education Implementation, if in some areas there are still teachers who are struggling to be reached. Linking people up in order to do this is very important. He also mentioned that TIE receives no funding from the Scottish Government which slows progress.

- [Digital inclusion and our Elder LGBT Community - LGBT Health and Wellbeing](#)

Moved to next meeting to give it proper focus as we were running over schedule. Agreed by group and Maruska Greenwood. This segment will be at the beginning of the next meeting. It was discussed that this will be in February 2020.

- **Utilising the positives, reducing barriers, and making the most of online participation: Digital inclusion, equality and moving forward**

No discussion due to lack of time.

6. Proposals for Parliamentary Questions

Gender reform legislation was raised by Jamie Greene. Lots of parliamentary bills have been dropped from the parliamentary program due to COVID?. Jamie wanted to ask if there was any appetite to write to the Government for an update or to invite a minister to speak at the next meeting. He wanted to leave it up to the group, he understands that Covid complicated things and there is restricted time in this Parliament but iterated that this is still important.

Jordan Daly spoke saying, while not specifically related to this, politicians may not be aware that on any consultation relating to LGBT rights there is a swathe of online vitriol which everyone who works in, or is involved in, this area has to face. He wanted to know to what extent the Government consider that when thinking about the consultations they are putting out?

Jamie Greene agreed that this was a good question and asked how the group would want to pose it, and asked whether this would be as a group or through politicians such as himself or Patrick Harvie? He also said he could ask questions about anything people would like. He stated that lots of MSPs would be happy to submit parliamentary questions if there are things people are not getting answers to. The parliament have to respond to MSP quickly. If people have any questions send them to the secretary, rebecca@equality-network.org, and she can forward them to Patrick and Jamie.

Jamie then asked with regards to Gender reform legislation, how do people want the CPG to proceed? He stated that? It currently looks like it won't be looked at until after the election.

Megan Sneddon from Stonewall said that while nothing seems likely to happen related to the GRA pre-election, it might be useful to hear about the consultation analysis. She said, this was meant to happen in March and stalled because of Covid and we have still not heard anything. This information is important for people to lobby individual parties etc. She also pointed out that it feels a bit like we've gone back five years to still be talking about it in the manifesto discussions.

Jamie agreed and also mentioned that it is now a much more divisive issue than it was 5 years ago. He implored everyone to make their best lobbying efforts, to engage appropriate spokespeople and make the case for a firm commitment.

Actions:

- Get ball rolling on letter for question on safeguarding around consultations.
- Give Jamie Greene a question around consultation analysis.

7. Requests to join this CPG

Equality & Human Rights Commission, already approved.

8. Updates on other matters / AOB

Hugh from LEAP Sports brought it to the CPG's attention that there was a global philanthropy project report released earlier in November that showed that between 2013-2017 the anti-gender movement globally received \$3.7 billion compared to LGBTI movement funding which was \$1.2 billion

<https://globalphilanthropyproject.org/2020/11/12/meet-the-moment/>

Stuart Duffy shared the details on Pink Saltire's study into the impacts of COVID on LGBT people in Scotland. You can read the report and evidence at the mini-site here: www.pinksaltire.com/rainbow-responders/

9. Consideration of main discussion items for the next meeting

At the beginning of the meeting we will revisit digital inclusion among older people and hear from LGBT Health and Wellbeing.

Next meeting will be right before the election and it would be good to do it before purdah (pre-election period) kicks in. If possible, by then it would be good to do the meeting in person, or in a hybrid (online/offline) manner.

One suggestion for topics was how moving from online to offline affects the community. Jamie works a lot with schools as the Conservative Education Lead and for a lot of people not going to school has been a blessing due to bullying, lots of people have apprehension going back out regularly, some people have become institutionally stuck at home, and mental health is a huge issue. He said, we would have been locked down for about a year by then so social spaces will have disappeared, some organisations have gone. The same is true for bars, and the 'gay scene' will have shrunk etc.

It would also be good to have something positive on post-Covid recovery. Police Scotland might be able to come along, would be good to hear what they've been doing over the past year about hate crime, domestic abuse, etc. Jamie suspects some of those numbers have gone up this year. They've gone up in wider society so he imagines this is the same in the LGBT community.

Any other ideas please email rebecca@equality-network.org

Finally, Jamie said welcome again to any new members, no matter where you live. Members do not need to be LGBT to participate. He also said it would be nice to get someone for the Government to come to our last meeting.