

**Meeting of LGBTI+ Cross-Party Group  
6:30pm to 8pm, Tuesday 2nd March 2021  
Zoom  
Agenda**

**Welcome and apologies**

**Present:**

Jamie Greene MSP	(Co-Convener – chairing)
Patrick Harvie MSP	(Co-Convener)
Joe Fitzpatrick	SNP MSP
Rebecca Crowther	Equality Network
Ella Fisher	Equality Network
Tim Hopkins	Equality Network
Eleanor Sanders-White	Equality Network
Vic Valentine	Scottish Trans Alliance
Megan Snedden	Stonewall Scotland
Paul Daly	LGBT Youth Scotland
Maruska Greenwood	LGBT Health and Wellbeing
Kenny Stewart	EHRC
Alice June Polley	Dumfries and Galloway LGBT +
Nik James	NASUWT
Dom Miller-Graham	Pink Saltire
Gareth Buchanan	Out Scotland
Iain Campbell	Dumfries and Galloway LGBT+
Jim Hume	National Rural Mental Health Forum/Support in Mind Scotland
Rory Anderson	SX/Waverley Care
Liam Stevenson	Time for Inclusive Education
Nicola Richardson	Scottish Bi+ Network
Jordan Daly	Time for Inclusive Education
Colin Macfarlane	Stonewall Scotland
Hugh Torrance	LEAP Sports
Matthew Waites	Individual
Emma Cuthbertson	Individual
Stevie Maybanks	Individual

**Apologies:**

Rona Mackay MSP  
James Banner-Rall  
Connor Cochrane  
Fiona Donaldson Grounds

## **1. Introductions and new members**

No new members but some new attendees, also all MSPs were invited. This was the first meeting for Alice June Polley from Dumfries and Galloway LGBT Plus, Iain Campbell from Dumfries and Galloway LGBT Plus, Joe Fitzpatrick MSP SNP, Nik James from NASUWT, Rory Anderson from SZ/Waverley Care, Gareth Buchanan from Out Scotland, and Emma Cuthbertson.

## **2. Minutes of the last meeting (4th March 2020)**

Approved.

## **3. Matters arising from the cancelled meeting**

None.

## **4. Update on developing policy items**

- Hate Crime Bill

Tim Hopkins from Equality Network explained that the bill was nearly at its end of parliamentary development. Stage 3 is on March 10<sup>th</sup>, with a lot having changed at stage 2. He explained that the government's proposed new freedom of expression provision covers all protected characteristics equally, apart from that of religion which has a stricter protection. He noted that it was possible that stage 3 amendments might be lodged that would try to undermine trans inclusion in the bill. He stated that it would be good for the bill to gain unanimous support if the freedom of expression clause is finalised, as Patrick Harvie's 2009 Hate Crime Bill did.

Jamie Greene asked if there were any amendments published Tim was worried about or if it was just possible future ones that concerned him. Tim said it was mostly the future ones that concerned him. He pointed out that some of the already published freedom of expression ones do run the risk of making people think you always have the right to shock or offend which, dependent on circumstances, such as in the workplace, is not correct.

Patrick stated that he was disturbed some of the stage 2 amendments but was hopeful that now the process would be at a tolerable place. He also clarified that his 2009 bill did indeed have no amendments at stage 2 or stage 3 but was smaller in remit to the current bill.

Jamie agreed with Tim in encouraging people to write to MSPs after amendments are published both about the bill and about amendments.

Kenny Stewart checked if Tim expected the Government to move an amendment to remove sections 11 and 12 (sexual orientation and religion special freedom of expression provisions). Tim said yes because the new freedom of expression provision from the government covers all protected characteristics.

Jamie said that, in other contexts, this bill would have taken place with a rational normal debate but due to the context and discussions around gender reform it has become victim to the wider debate.

## **5. LGBT Health and Wellbeing**

- Digital inclusion and our Elder LGBT Community - LGBT Health and Wellbeing

This was an item that was meant to be addressed in the previous CPG meeting on digital exclusion in the community but which was delayed due to timing limitations. Maruska stated at the beginning that she would be mostly focusing on older people but also wanted to discuss asylum seekers and refugees. She explained the ways LGBT Health and Wellbeing had needed to adjust to moving online at the beginning of the pandemic. They were aware there would be some sections of the community who would be harder to reach and older LGBT people were included in that. They set up a tele-friending service to help reach older people. The biggest UK organisation working with older LGBT people is Opening Doors in London, and they announced that 1 in 5 people they supported didn't have access to phones or the internet, this agrees anecdotally with LGBT Health and Wellbeing's findings. She also pointed out that it is not just about access to equipment but also level of confidence and familiarity with it. They've found in their work through the telefriending service that people fell into 4 camps. 1. They would never have done anything digitally or on zoom before but have tried it and liked it and are doing more. 2. People who tried it but didn't like it. 3. People who know they're missing out but don't have the confidence to learn it. 4. Some people aren't interested in learning at all, although this is a smaller group than the others. Some don't want a computer because it reminds them of a stressful work life they've left behind, or they recognize it may have positive benefits but think social media is addictive and don't want it.

LGBT Health realized that there were enough people not engaging for them to need to figure out how to reach them. Maruska is also concerned that digital exclusion may have more impact on older LGBT

people than other elderly people. This is because older LGBT people are more likely to be single, without children and other family. Often the connections they have are not in geographical areas but in interests so being digitally excluded affects that. Across Scotland lots of neighbourhood local support has sprung up but often LGBT people don't feel part of those communities. Opening Doors has researched it and said 1 in 5 of those they work with said they hardly ever receive support from the local community and neighbours, and 5% receive less support than normal from neighbours and the local community now than pre the pandemic. Older people often need to self-isolate due to underlying health conditions, which is also impacting mental wellbeing. LGBT Health quickly expanded the helpline at the start of the pandemic, this provides a service to those over 16, 2 – 4 days a week. All helplines across the UK are not just phone support, and also email and online support. The trend for older people is that across the UK 93% of over 65s are just using the phone helpline. Under 50 only about 50% are using the phone, the rest are using the email and online chat. LGBT Health have been recalibrating services and being aware of that trend from the start and trying to reach older people differently from the rest of the community. One way they did this was setting up an outreach phone service which helped those who may not feel able to reach out themselves. They have also gone back to sending a newsletter through the post as well as setting up a pen pal scheme.

Maruska wanted to flag that while LGBT Health and Wellbeing are aware that digital provision helps them reach some sections of the community they might have struggled to meet such as those who are geographically spread out, or who have social anxiety, which is great. However, it is not the answer for everyone. The other group they had to rethink service delivery for was asylum seekers and refugees. They set up the refugee project in March last year right before the pandemic, so all delivery has been remote. It was clear early on that the economic disadvantage that section of the community experiences is phenomenal, if you do not address digital exclusion you cannot interact with them at all. To be able to engage with asylum seekers and refugees they have distributed equipment, something which they had never previously done, this included help such as monthly phone top ups, etc. Maruska pointed out that without these it is very difficult for asylum seekers to contact lawyers or family members.

Jamie Greene thanked her for her work and mentioned concerns around how asylum seekers and refugees are accessing other services such as welfare, housing, etc. He went on to say that this year has been so hard and lots of groups have disappeared or moved online, and 'there's

only so much Zoom you can do.’ He is worried about people who have been disconnected from society for a year now. He ended by saying that hopefully the end is in sight but it has been hard.

Jim Hume said his charity (Support in Mind Scotland) has also moved online. He said mental health in communities, as seen from the EN Further Out report, showed LGBT communities have been badly affected, including young people in unsupportive households who are struggling to get the freedom to engage digitally. Refugees and Asylum Seekers have been disproportionately affected by Covid. The Scottish Government gave 25 million pounds to help 9000 people get online, there were enquiries of interest from 250,000 people. Jim pointed out that even if some were double counted it’s still a huge number. Some people don’t trust digital interaction and some struggle with capability. Jim wanted to ask Maruska if the getting people online drive was helpful and if it should be offered again.

Maruska said LGBT Health were aware of the fund but it never seemed to get around to the people she was supporting. Glasgow Disability Alliance set up a programme and got a lot of people online. LGBT Health didn’t have those numbers because their older LGBT group is only one of the numbers they have, sometimes they were able to help through the helpline through explaining zoom etc., however, this only works if people are already relatively confident digitally. She would love to see something, even post-pandemic, which helps all sections of society become digitally included. Jamie says all the programmes for this were very technical in nature and don’t necessarily address the issue of cost, i.e. laying cables doesn’t mean people can afford to pay for internet. He has sometimes written directly to internet providers on peoples’ behalf and had some positive response, such as through voucher schemes etc.

Vic Valentine had two questions. One was about older people who don’t want to be engaged online, and how you reach them to tell them about other schemes to keep them connected? The second was about refugees and asylum seekers. They wanted to know if there are issues about no recourse to public funds and is that something organisations should put pressure on.

Maruska pointed out that one issue with reaching older people was that LGBT Health operates on self-referral and therefore, at the beginning of the pandemic, had very little information through which to contact people. One method they did approach people was by contacting a variety of organisations across Scotland and asking them to point

people, who might benefit from LGBT Health and Wellbeing's work, towards their services.

Concerning the no recourse to public funds LGBT Health and Wellbeing has found it possible to get funding for phone top-ups and food vouchers for some for asylum seekers and refugees. However, it ends up being lots of work for little result. The money they do get is very 'month to month,' with no solid funding. This is an area Maruska definitely thinks needs looked at, it won't go away after the pandemic.

Jamie asked the group in general how people have moved services online to share their ideas.

Dom Miller-Graham said they use local radio and smaller radio stations who might be open to doing stuff charitably. He said older groups gave good feedback to radio work. They did the same thing to offer support for refugees and asylum seekers. He said part of the issue was trust on behalf of those they wanted to help that they were going to be reliant with their assistance. There was concern that they were 'just doing it for a photo opportunity,' he wondered if LGBT Health and Wellbeing found this.

Maruska said word of mouth helped a lot so they found the opposite, She finds that some have engaged and look to them for support elsewhere (for most things) but they cannot support with housing or legal expertise etc. Many in this situation are provided food vouchers.

Jamie said these issues are very important and that we will probably talk about them again. He acknowledges that there is a separate CPG on digital inclusion for anyone who is interested.

## **6. LGBTI Manifesto**

The LGBTI manifesto is presented by Rebecca Crowther from Equality Network, Vic Valentine from Scottish Trans Alliance, Megan Snedden from Stonewall Scotland, and Paul Daly from LGBT Youth Scotland. These are the organisations that have collaborated on its creation.

The manifestos main asks surround: Gender Identity Services, Protecting and Progressing LGBTI Rights, LGBT Mental Health, Health and Social Care, LGBT Inclusive Education, Community Safety and Inclusion, and LGBTI Rights Abroad.

With regards to Gender Identity Services the manifesto asks for it be

ensured that NHS gender identity services are fit-for-purpose – now, and in the future. It asks for action to be taken to substantially reduce the lengthy waiting times for first appointments as a matter of urgency, by providing centralised crisis funding, and piloting new ways of delivering these services to realise their long-term sustainability.

For Protecting and Progressing LGBTI Rights, it asks the government to enshrine LGBTI human rights in Scots law, including taking measures to end “conversion therapy”, to improve trans equality, including through reforming the Gender Recognition Act, and to take action to further I/VSC equality.

The manifesto asks for LGBT Mental Health inequalities to be tackled by taking forward targeted work on mental health improvement and prevention and ensuring mental health services are equipped to support LGBT people.

With regards to Health and Social Care the manifesto asks that it is ensured that LGBTI people experience fair treatment when accessing all health and social care services, including equal access to reproductive and fertility services, and with staff trained to effectively support LGBTI patients and service users.

For LGBT Inclusive Education the manifesto asks for the continued implementation of LGBT inclusive education, ensuring all of the recommendations from the Report to the Scottish Ministers (2018) are fully realised, and that the progress made so far in the implementation pathway is further built upon in the 2021-26 parliamentary term.

When focusing on Community Safety and Inclusion they suggest improving community safety and inclusion for LGBTI people, funding LGBTI services and community groups, and ensuring that work on tackling issues such as hate crime, homelessness, and social isolation includes LGBTI-focused measures.

And finally, when discussing LGBTI Rights Abroad the manifesto asks the Scottish Government to show leadership in advancing LGBTI equality and the protection of LGBTI rights abroad, including through delivering LGBTI-inclusive and -specific international development work.

There were very few comments aside from Matthew Waites asking about whether refugees were included at all and it was confirmed they were included in the asks and the asks had been approved by both

LGBT Health and Wellbeing and the Scottish Refugee Council.

## **7. Proposals for Parliamentary Questions**

None.

## **8. Requests to join this CPG**

None.

## **9. Updates on other matters / AOB**

Colin MacFarlane said how pleased he was that the organisations involved in the manifesto worked collaboratively and it gives it some more power and reflects all the other collaborative work organisations do.

Jamie agrees it is a great achievement. He mentions that someone commented recently that one thing they liked about the CPG was having the chance to sit down and talk to others involved in the sector, this ability to come together is something he is very proud of the CPG, even when opinions diverge.

Liam Stevenson from TIE gave an update on how digital inclusion is working with teachers and students to help reduce any harm caused by the pandemic and to develop digital resources. Jamie acknowledged and congratulated them on all their hard work.

Patrick Harvie said that as this is the last meeting before parliament rises for the election he wanted to say thanks to everyone who has contributed to these meetings and the work, asked questions and challenged the group. He said he hopes there is appetite to reestablish the CPG after the election, and hopes in the break people can think about what they would want to discuss in the next session.

Tim Hopkins thanked Jamie for establishing the group nearly 5 years ago and to Patrick for supporting it. Quorum is 2 MSPs and we have reliably had them here. He also thanked other MSPs like Joe Fitzpatrick who come along.

Rebecca said it is important to consider what we want from the CPG and that we must make sure we get the best out of it. Do we actively get more MSPs along or do something else?



Jamie wanted to put on record his thanks to Patrick who always attended the CPG so reliably even with the responsibilities that come with being the leader of a political party. He also wanted to thank MSPs and Government Ministers who have come over the years. He agreed with Rebecca. He said it was a shame there was no representation from SNP and Labour MSPs, partly due to the number of CPGs there are. He wishes the CPG had been more of a political lobbying voice, and thinks sometimes it was good for discussion but that this did not always translate in to action. He wanted to thank Equality Network for being the CPG secretariat from day one and says he hopes they will still agree to take on the role in May. He asked people to show raised hands of agreement if they would attend a similar CPG. Everyone agrees. He said it's great to have 27 people at the closing meeting, which is about the same number of people as it started with, and maintaining numbers is hard for a CPG, even more so with the issues everyone has experienced this year.

These minutes will be distributed for approval digitally and hopefully after the election the attendees of the CPG will be contacted for reestablishment.