

CROSS PARTY GROUP on POLAND

Scottish Parliament

DRAFT MINUTES – ZOOM AGM + CPG MEETING

8TH OCTOBER 2020

MINUTES :

AGM

The meeting will be chaired by Claire Baker MSP

1 Attendance

1. Apologies for absence
Martin Stepek, David Worthington, Elwira Grossman, George Rubiensi, Krystyna Szumelukowa , Chris Sagan, Margot Sagan, Sylwia Spooner,
2. Minutes of last meeting 16th June 2020 attached
3. Matters arising
4. Election of Co-Conveners and Secretariat – confirmed
5. Invited speakers : Consul Renata Wasilewska-Mazur, Feniks Kiro Zabinska-MacIntyre, Bemis Scotland Jenni Keenan ,EU Settlement Scheme Dorota Peszkowska, Aberdeen Polish Association Mateusz Lagoda , Police Liaison Officer Kirsty White

11 Meeting

Focus : Consequences of Covid -19 restrictions for mental health in Polish communities and details of support available

- **Consul Renata Wasilewska-Mazur** outlined aspects of her role at the Consulate .
- The main duty is to protect the interests of Poland and Polish nationals within legal limits .
- Consular assistance covers assistance for Polish nationals in many situations . EG Arrest, accidents , serious illness, violation of rights, loss of passport or ID card , Providing financial assistance for returning Polish nationals, assisting in repatriation of bodies or ashes to Poland .
- Due to the pandemic , many Poles have become unemployed, and anxiety and isolation contribute to increased stress .
- Part of the Consular role is to support initiatives which respond to the many needs and interests of Polish nationals and to promote positive links between Poland and Scotland .
- renata.wasilewska-mazur@msz.gov.pl

- **FENIKS Kiro Zabinska-MacIntyre** outlined the many strands of support available to support the Polish community in Edinburgh and Lothians
- These include mental health support, domestic abuse victim support, providing access to services eg GPs, CAB, work benefits, childcare support, psychotherapy counselling, SMART recovery, supporting people in isolation , suicides , depression supporting networking and many other practical measures aimed at reducing mental stress incurred as a result of present restrictions help is also offered in dealing with the impact of Brexit on mental health .
- Feniks is partnered with a number of supporting organisations PPN , PPSS, See Me , BEMIS, ELREC, Citizens Rights Project and others in an effort to provide emotional support through providing single or group sessions .
- Feniks report a sharp rise in the need for mental health support due to changes in work and relationship challenges , and financial difficulties faced by many people as a result of the restrictions imposed due to the pandemic.

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- **Jenni Keenan spoke on behalf of BEMIS and PKAVS**
- BEMIS are committed to empower diverse ethnic minorities and promote inclusion
- (Perth and Kinross Association of Voluntary Services) .PKAVS (chaired by BEMIS) believe people of all backgrounds should have opportunities to flourish and contribute to a fairer more equal Perth and Kinross.. The largest local community is Polish .
- The organisation works closely with the Race Equality Framework for Scotland and runs thematic workstreams , in addition to supporting people to apply for the EU settlement Scheme . Employability and education ,housing and income, participation and representation for health and families form a part of the support offered .
- Key support during the pandemic include a free helpline in community languages including Polish, a telephone befriending service, conversation cafes and work clubs, now online , housing, income, employment and similar issues are supported via phone or video calls
- Signposting to vital local services such as food provision and support services, Women's Aid, and welfare rights advice is readily given .
- The organisation carries out Third Party Reporting
- Up to date advice and guidance (translated) related to Covid is readily available .
- PKAVS also work strategically on data, health and social outcomes to tackle the root causes of inequalities faced by minority ethnic communities .
- **BEMIS** <https://bemis.org.uk/contact-us/>

Citizens Rights Project and FENIKS Dorota Peszkowska

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- **EU Settlement Scheme**
- When the UK finally leaves the EU ,the right to live ,work and study in the UK previously enjoyed by people from the EU (among them many Polish people),will cease to exist from January 1st 2021.
- All EU citizens who haven't applied for "Settled Status" by 30th June 2021 will have no right to reside in the UK after this date . The Scottish Government has been supporting the EU Settlement Scheme since 2019 .
- Citizens Rights Project is chaired by Mark Lazarowicz
- FENIKS and the Citizens Rights Project deliver a joint project covering the Lothians and Borders with 1-2-1 specialised advice about the Settlement Scheme for EEA nationals and their family members .
- Citizens Rights has a network of volunteers across Scotland who can help with Settled Status Applications. They also produce leaflets , which can be sent all over Scotland .
- Citizens Rights have been holding information sessions regularly to inform communities of the need to apply for Settled status to ensure their continued residence in Scotland .
- Further information can be found on info@citizensrightsproject.org ,and the Polish Consulate Edinburgh (Edinburgh @msz.gov.pl) or polishconsulateinv.org in Inverness

Polish Association Aberdeen Mateusz Lagoda <http://www.paaberdeen.co.uk/>

- A registered charity since 2010 founded by the Polish combatants in 1993 . Have stated their aim to integrate Polish communities living in the UK . The organisation aims to advance democratic freedom, human rights, with a focus on the rights of ethnic minorities. Working towards co-operation with other communities creating European Open Society
- The organisation works influence the cultural and social life of the Polish community in Scotland .
- They work towards promotion of educational and health promoting activities .
- The PAA also organise a voluntary sector .
- The Association runs a library and free information service
- A staff of 10-15 volunteers include members of the Ethnic Minorities Law Centre, Regional Equalities Council, Aberdeen Council of Voluntary Organisations, Shelter Scotland, Money Advice Service of Aberdeen City Council, NHS and the Polish Consulate Edinburgh .
- Service provided for 400-500 people per year .
- Free counselling services are available -details of staff are on the website .www.paaberdeen.co.uk /porady ,and further information available on their facebook page ,www.facebook.com/polscotfest

- Additionally Polish language classes ,English classes were run along with story-telling .
- Also support the “Great Orchestra of Christmas Charity “ along with many other organisations .

Police liaison Officer PC Kirsty White

- PC White is based at the National Safer Communities, Equality and Diversity Unit And is happy to assist and signpost where possible , for example in abuse cases ,where it can be difficult to identify an appropriate local officer , ideally not matters which a call to “101” could resolve .
- PS are involved with a multitude of scenarios , from birth to death, and link in with many organisations and won’t refuse genuine calls for help .
- It is possible that Polish victims of domestic abuse ,are unwilling to make a complaint; supporting agencies need to adopt a “best practice ” surrounding sharing of disclosures, noting “risk” to individuals including the agency ,if no reporting takes place , as abuse can place victims and children at great physical and mental risk .
- If PS become aware of a particular incident following a referral ,Social Work are contacted to ascertain whether intervention has taken place, a “safety plan” involving monitoring of the victim/family via health and education
- If a victim does not wish to make a complaint to the police, but they are contacted as per “a risk assessment “ PS can signpost to alternative support agencies and counselling and support can be accessed in this way .
- In particular incidents ,PC White can help to identify the most appropriate local officer to assist .

Kirsty.White@scotland.pnn.police.uk>

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