

Scottish Parliament Cross Party Group on Racial Equality in Scotland

Minutes of the Meeting held on 23rd January 2018

Attendance

Present:

| | |
|----------------------|--|
| Fulton MacGregor MSP | Member of the Scottish Parliament (Convener) |
| Anas Sarwar MSP | Member of the Scottish Parliament (Vice Convener) |
| Monica Lennon MSP | Member of the Scottish Parliament |
| Jatin Haria | Coalition for Racial Equality and Rights (Secretariat) |
| Carol Young | Coalition for Racial Equality and Rights |
| Angela Constance MSP | Cabinet Secretary for Communities, Social Security, and Equalities (Speaker) |
| Lesley Irving | Scottish Government – Equality Unit |
| Mohamed Omar | Mental Health Foundation (Speaker) |
| Khaleda Noon | Action for Children |
| Fiona Steele | Action for Children |
| Harriette Campbell | African Caribbean Women’s Association/WSREC |
| Arun Gopinath | Central Scotland Regional Equality Council (CSREC) |
| Nikhat Yusaf | City of Edinburgh Council – Additional Support for Learning Service |
| Naren Sood | Ethnic Minorities Civic Congress |
| Nazim Azad | Edinburgh Interfaith Association |
| Eileen Prior | Scottish Parent Teacher Council |
| Imran Khan | Standard Life – MOSAIC |
| Rabya Akhtar | Standard Life – MOSAIC |
| Khalida Hussain | Voluntary Action Fund |
| Zahra Hussain | Individual |
| Oluwatoyin Opeloyeru | Individual |

Apologies:

| | |
|---------------------|---|
| Bob Doris MSP | Member of the Scottish Parliament (Vice Convener) |
| Adam Tomkins MSP | Member of the Scottish Parliament (Vice Convener) |
| Jackie Baillie MSP | Member of the Scottish Parliament |
| Jeremy Balfour MSP | Member of the Scottish Parliament |
| Richard Lyle MSP | Member of the Scottish Parliament |
| Pauline McNeill MSP | Member of the Scottish Parliament |
| Sandra White MSP | Member of the Scottish Parliament |
| Safia Ali | CEMVO Scotland |
| Sandra Scott | City of Edinburgh Council – Additional Support for Learning Service |
| Martin Hayward | Equality and Human Rights Commission |
| Lynsey Blyth | Ethnic Minorities Law Centre |
| Naeem Khalid | Frae Fife |
| Mahdi Saki | Iranian Scottish Association |
| Gozie Joe Adigwe | RNIB/ STUC Black Workers Committee |
| Shaben Begum | Scottish Independent Advocacy Alliance |
| Faten Hameed | Scottish Iraqi Society |
| Aisha Malik | Shakti Women’s Aid |
| Trishna Singh | Sikh Sanjog |
| Davidson Chademana | STUC Black Workers’ Committee / University and College Union |

| | |
|---------------------|--|
| Rohini Sharma Joshi | Trust Housing Association |
| Nasar Meer | University of Edinburgh |
| Khalida Mohammed | University of the West of Scotland |
| Yasmeen Hussain | University of the West of Scotland |
| Mohammed Razaq | West of Scotland Regional Equality Council (WSREC) |
| Ghazala Khan | West of Scotland Regional Equality Council (WSREC) |
| Audrey Coltart | Individual |
| Anita Shelton | Individual |
| Sufraz Yousaf | Individual |

Welcome and Introductions

Convener Fulton MacGregor MSP called the meeting to order at 18.05 and welcomed members to the meeting.

Presentation: Angela Constance MSP (Cabinet Secretary for Communities, Social Security, and Equalities) and Lesley Irving (Scottish Government) – Race Equality Action Plan

The Convener introduced Angela Constance MSP, the Cabinet Secretary for Communities, Social Security, and Equalities, and Lesley Irving of the Scottish Government equality unit.

Angela Constance MSP provided an overview of the Race Equality Action Plan 2017-2021, which was published in December 2017. This action plan will further the agenda set out in the Race Equality Framework for Scotland 2016-2030.

The action plan has, in part, come from the work of the Scottish Government Race Equality Framework Advisor, Kaliani Lyle. The Scottish National Party set a manifesto commitment during the 2016 elections to appoint such an advisor. Ms. Lyle recently published a report entitled *The State of Race Equality in Scotland*, and laid out suggested priorities for action. The Scottish Government's action plan was informed by these priorities and recommendations. There are a total of 120 actions within the action plan.

Ms. Constance also acknowledged the extent of race inequality in regards of employment, pay, and poverty before she welcomed questions.

A discussion followed the presentation. The following issues were raised:

- *Youth employment*
 - Ms. Constance stressed that the recommendations in this area were based on the report from Ms. Lyle and noted that the work was also linked to the wider employability agenda and the workplace equality fund. She also highlighted the effects of underemployment and the importance of quality work. The Scottish Government's work around social enterprise was also raised, including capacity building programmes and work on BME women returning to the labour market. Ms. Constance stressed the need to ensure that the labour market strategy tied into the race equality agenda and work to progress Developing Scotland's Young Workforce.
- *Race equality not improving despite previous commitments*
 - Ms. Constance stated that the failure of previous initiatives and commitments to providing lasting change is the reason behind the framework and action plan, as this will ensure that delivery is undertaken and is accountable to the Scottish Parliament. She noted that the

Scottish Government is aware of the need to put in serious effort to affect change and is determined to ensure this is not just rhetoric.

- *Disadvantaged and disenfranchised BME young people*
 - Ms. Constance stated that the action plan would offer more person-centred approaches to careers advice that is tailored to the needs of young people. Work will also be taken forward more broadly on subject choices, etc. in schools. She also noted the important role of youth work, including through the arts, heritage, and sports, which can all help to engage and support young people. It was argued by some members that mainstream services are not equipped to adequately meet the needs of BME young people regarding race equality concerns.
- *BME young people leaving Scotland to find jobs and opportunities elsewhere due to barriers in the labour market*
 - Ms. Constance agreed that the 'brain drain' is a significant issue and that the Scottish Government was seeking to engage employers to make the case for advancing equality, as it both the right thing to do and good for business. She cited international and UK evidence illustrating the benefits of a diverse workforce. She noted the Scottish Government funding of the Bridges Programme which helps refugee doctors seek requalification and stated that this is a good example of how the government can help keep talent in Scotland. She stated that the Scottish Government itself has to do more as an employer, as well as engaging with other employers. There is a real need to increase workforce representation, as this will also help the government engage with other employers as exemplars of best practice. She agreed that all Scottish public sector bodies should raise their game to become exemplars of equality in employment.

Ms. Constance and Ms. Irving then departed the meeting.

Presentation: Mohamed Omar, Mental Health Foundation – Mental Health and Refugees

The Convener then introduced Mohamed Omar of the Mental Health Foundation. He spoke to the group about his project working with refugees. Topics addressed in the presentation included:

- The right to asylum and how the asylum system operates in the UK and Scotland
 - Recent changes to the asylum-seeking system due to the Syrian Vulnerable Persons Relocation Scheme
 - How asylum seekers and refugees are now in each local authority in Scotland, whereas previously these groups were concentrated in Glasgow; there are an estimated 20,000 – 25,000 asylum seekers and refugees in Scotland currently
- How refugees struggle to access their rights, despite having the same rights as others once they receive refugee status
- Mental health issues commonly experienced by asylum seekers and refugees, such as:
 - Trauma related to experiences of torture, warfare, grief, and persecution
 - Depression related to having left family behind, struggling to reunite with family, and guilt
 - Anxiety related to cultural and language barriers
 - Isolation and loneliness
 - Stress due to waiting for an asylum seeking claim to be approved
- The negative impact on mental health by experiences such as:
 - Racism and racial discrimination
 - Poverty and a subsequent loss of identity and purpose

- Unemployment, which is affected further by additional barriers due to status and life experiences
- Gender based violence, domestic violence, female genital mutilation, and human trafficking

Mr. Omar also discussed some of the projects undertaken by the Mental Health Foundation, including:

- Sawti – This project seeks to raise awareness of the mental health and wellbeing of refugees using the arts, as well as develop a mentoring scheme among refugees and asylum seekers.
- Musawa (Equality) – This is a pilot project run in partnership with Freedom from Torture which addresses the lack of voices and visibility of refugees across public services, and aims to influence policy and strategy with the views of asylum seekers and refugees. It uses an evidence-based approach with an equality focus, and uses community mapping to learn more about local priorities for health and wellbeing. The plan is to extend the reach of this pilot to other refugee groups in Scotland and engage with more stakeholder groups.

Mr. Omar also noted that mental health is very important to asylum seekers and refugees, but that it is hard to focus on this when they are also seeking to rebuild their lives and have problems that can't be easily addressed, such as leaving family behind.

A discussion followed the presentation. The following issues were raised:

- How to refer individuals to the Mental Health Foundation
 - People are referred by local authorities and the foundation works with COSLA to encourage participation
- The potential for a drop-in advice service to provide information and peer support
 - Mr. Omar said he would be interested in discussing this further and could recommend approaches to local authorities
- Linkages with WSREC and other groups
 - The foundation is in touch with the Refugee Council about engaging with WSREC and starting a pilot project
- How to ensure that the engagement work has a positive impact on policy and practice
 - The foundation is keen to further develop this civic engagement work going forward and is looking for best practice examples to help with this
- How to encourage refugee groups to access the mainstreaming services in the voluntary sector, such as through link workers, especially for those who have no recourse to public funds
 - The foundation recognises that funding for local work is stretched, but more engagement and dialogue could be a good start

Approval of the Minutes of the Previous Meeting

The Convener then introduced the minutes of the meetings held on 26th September 2017. The minutes were approved by the group.

Close

The Convener brought the meeting to a close at 19.30 and thanked everyone for their attendance, especially the speakers. He stated that the date of the next meeting would be announced shortly.