

**All Party Group
on
Ethnic Minority Communities

Annual Review 2010-2011**

Introduction

This report details the work of the All Party Group on Ethnic Minority Communities (APG on Ethnic Minority Communities) for the 2010-2011 session. The purpose of the report is to highlight the key issues raised during meetings of the APG on Ethnic Minority Communities and to demonstrate the actions taken by the group in this period.

The All Party Group on Ethnic Minorities became an officially constituted group of the Assembly in June 2008. The group was established as a mechanism for representatives of ethnic minority communities to discuss and lobby with politicians on issues of specific concern.

There are four positions of office bearer in the APG on Ethnic Minority Communities: Chair, Deputy-chair, Treasurer and Secretary. These positions are held by the political representatives in the group and are rotated on a six-monthly basis. The following positions were held over the past year:

September – December 2010

Chair – Alliance (Anna Lo MLA)
Vice-chair – Independent (Dawn Purvis MLA)
Secretary – Green Party (Steven Agnew for Brian Wilson MLA)
Treasurer – DUP (Robin Newton MLA)

January – March 2011

Chair – Independent (Dawn Purvis MLA)
Vice-chair – Green Party (Steven Agnew for Brian Wilson MLA)
Secretary – DUP (Robin Newton MLA)
Treasurer – Sinn Fein (Billy Leonard MLA)

1. Issues discussed by the All Party Assembly Group on Ethnic Minority Communities 2010-2011

AGM

The Assembly codified new rules for All Party Assembly Groups. Under those new rules, it was clarified that BME groups do not have the same status as politicians. Politicians are members and BME groups are invitees. The group name was also changed from All Party Assembly Group (only constituted of members of the Assembly) to All Party Group (members of the Assembly and external participants). Under the new rules, the APG conducted its Annual General Meeting at the October meeting, where the Annual Review report was approved and office bearers appointed.

Terms of Reference and Membership of the APG

Following a request to join the APG by SEEDS, and to reflect the changes in the Black and Minority Ethnic sector, the Terms of Reference and the invitee criteria

of the APG were interpreted to include organisations providing services to Ethnic Minorities. It was agreed that the invitees should include BME led groups, umbrella groups, representatives and projects with an interest in the BME sector. It was agreed that steps should be taken to ensure that participating groups are in direct communication with ethnic minority people themselves. Each new membership request will be subject to the MLA's approval.

Political Participation at meetings

The low level of attendance to meetings from the 2 main unionist parties has been noted at several meetings. The secretariat has made important efforts to get all the political representatives involved. All have been given opportunity to participate and feed in to the agenda even if they could not attend the meetings. In February 2011 the DUP confirmed that they would be very happy to nominate new members following the elections. Once the new Assembly will resume work after the elections, the secretariat will renew its efforts to encourage all individual representatives to attend meetings.

Crisis Fund/Persons with Limited or No Access To Public Funds

This has been a regular item on the APG agenda for the past year.

At the December meeting, Anna Lo reported asking a supplementary question to the Finance Minister on the necessity to establish a crisis fund and was told the Racial Equality sub-group on immigration was working on the issue.

At the January meeting, Anna Lo reported on the Minister of Finance's statement to the Assembly regarding the transfer of £0.4 million on the Migrant Impact Fund. Anna asked if this new amount of money was a second round of Migration Impact Fund money. Anna had previously asked a question on the transfer of the Migration Impact Fund under the Barnett Formula and was told that since no department had put bids on the fund, the money was the money was used for general expenditure.

At the February meeting, the secretariat circulated the written reply received from the Minister of Finance to Anna's question. Sammy Wilson confirmed that "this transfer was due to a recalculation of the NI Executive Barnett Formula consequential in relation to this fund. This recalculation followed the UK Coalition Government's announcement on 22 July that the Migration Impact Fund would end on 1 October 2010. The Minister reminded that all Barnett allocations made to the NI Executive are unhypothecated and are available for allocation in accordance with local needs and priorities." At the February meeting, the group agreed to keep this issue as a priority area of work.

Following the February meeting the chair suggested that a letter should be drafted to the Minister of the Department of Social Development asking if the proposed Social Protection Fund under the draft budget would provide assistance to migrants who find themselves destitute through no fault of their own and are unable to access public funds. This letter would be circulated at the March APG.

Consultation on the Programme for Cohesion Sharing and Integration (CSI) and Future Funding

The OFMDFM presented the new programme on Cohesion, Sharing and Integration and ran public consultation meetings throughout the month of September. A BME sector consultation was organised at the end of October.

The CSI programme was a major topic of discussion at meetings and concerns were expressed at the vagueness of the document and the lack of action plan accompanying it. The relationship between the CSI programme and the Race Equality Strategy was also unclear.

Many of the groups represented at the APG have sent individual submissions to the OFMDFM. At the October meeting, the All Party Group agreed on a group submission highlighting key race issues, the Racial Equality Strategy and the need for clear action plan for future funding. The submission was adopted and sent to the OFMDFM.

OFMDFM Restructuring And Core Funding

At the June meeting, Tim Losty, Head of the Equality Directorate for the OFMDFM, gave an overview of the restructuring process at the OFMDFM.

Tim explained the OFMDFM restructuring proposed to create a more strategic directorate, bringing policy areas together and regrouping economic and social policies. The process started over 2 years ago with discussions at the political, ministerial and stakeholder level. Policy Project Teams will replace the former branches and the new Directorate will be advising Ministers who ultimately decide strategic priorities. The group welcomed the OFMDFM efforts to work closer with the community groups but mentioned concerns with the CSI strategy and the need for a clear action plan. The group also stressed the necessity to improve the delivery system and monitoring of the Departments that will be implementing the OFMDFM decisions.

Budget and Impact of the proposed cuts

The group strongly felt that ethnic minority communities and individuals would be the first casualties, both in terms of service provision and community development funding. Groups have all expressed concerns and real difficulties they are faced with, in the absence of funding.

The OFMDFM Ethnic Minority Development Fund (EMDF) has been a particular worry as every year groups have to reapply for funding, this has made it difficult to make long term plans. Furthermore, only a small number of BME led groups were granted core funding last year in 2010, concern has been expressed that core funding is not ring-fenced for BME led groups.

Proposed Scoping Exercise on the OFMDFM BME Core Funding

NICEM conducted a scoping exercise in 2003 to scope the needs regarding BME core funding from the OFMDFM for BME community groups. Year upon year, the proportion of BME led groups accessing core funding has been reduced. The group agreed that a mapping exercise was necessary to see who was receiving funding and for what purpose. At the October meeting, NICEM presented their project to conduct a scoping exercise on BME funding in early 2011. A funding application was submitted to the OFMDFM in November.

New Racial Equality Strategy and Racial Equality Panel

The first meeting of the Racial Equality Panel took place in November. There was a general concern regarding the under-representation of BME groups in the panel and the All-Party Group agreed to send a letter to the OFMDFM stressing the issue. It was also agreed that the Shadow Forum should be re-established.

At the January meeting, Dawn Purvis agreed to put a question to the Assembly on a timetable for the new Racial Equality Strategy. She received an answer on the 18th February 2011, it stated that OFMDFM hoped to publish a draft of the Strategy towards the end of 2011, with a view to the draft going to the Committee in March or April 2012 and to the Executive in April or May 2012 for final approval.

Larne Detention centre

Following concerns by the group regarding the detention of families and children for immigration matters at the November meeting, the group invited Michael Golden, Assistant Director of the UK Border Agency, to clarify the UK Border Agency's position and project of a new short-term holding centre in Larne.

Michael attended the December meeting and explained the proposed alternative to the current detention arrangements in Northern Ireland. He explained that immigration detainees are currently held in custody cells at the police stations and that the new proposals would provide more appropriate accommodation.

Much criticism was made regarding the way in which the UKBA had planned the new arrangements, this included lack of consultation with local people. The group noted with great concern that the BNP had produced and disseminated misleading propaganda about the centre.

Many questions were raised on general immigration issues and it was agreed that Michael Golden would be invited back to a later meeting.

Queen's University research report: Opting-Out of Religious Education

Dr Alison Mawhinney, Dr Ulrike Niens and Mr Norman Richardson were invited to the January meeting to present their research report and findings on the right of opting-out of Religious Education.

The researchers emphasized that the right to opt-out of Religious Education classes was one of the oldest Human Rights, and unlike schools' common practice, the subject should not be presented as compulsory.

The researchers made recommendations on 3 levels: Human Rights and legal level, General or national level and Northern Ireland level. Following the presentation, the group agreed that questions should be asked to the Minister of Education, based on the research recommendations. At the February meeting, Brian Wilson (Green Party MLA) circulated the questions he asked to the Minister on behalf of the group and the answers he received. The answers stated that prior to receiving the questions the Department did not have any knowledge of the research, it was decided that follow up questions closely following the Northern Ireland recommendations would be asked. The researchers had these finalised by the March 2011 meeting.

Letter from the Immigration Minister, Damien Green, to MLAs

At the December meeting, the secretariat circulated a letter from the Immigration Minister stating MLAs should not forward on immigration related

correspondence they receive to the Minister, this should only be done by MPs. The group agreed to write a letter to the OFMDFM asking them to make representation to Westminster to challenge this issue. It was noted that other devolved administrations have also been challenging this issue.

All Party Group Election statement

In light of the NI Assembly elections in May 2011 the group developed a statement to ask all political parties in Northern Ireland to express support regarding 4 key issues. These were firstly to seek renewed political commitment to the group as it provides a much needed voice for members of ethnic minorities to discuss issues of importance and concern with their elected representatives. Secondly commitment to a new Racial Equality Strategy, thirdly commitment from all political parties to ensure that action will be taken to provide support for those migrants who find themselves destitute with no recourse to public funds and fourthly that the Race Relations Order (NI) 1997 is amended to afford the same level of protection from racial discrimination as is enjoyed in GB. The secretariat contacted all political parties to seek endorsement for the statement.

MBEs

During the 2010-2011 session, two members of the APG on Ethnic Minority Communities received MBEs: Bobby Rao, Chair of NICEM and Development Worker in Strabane Ethnic Communities Association and Katy Radford, Researcher and representative of the Belfast Jewish Community.

2. Actions taken by the APG 2010-2011

In the 2010-2011 session, the APG on Ethnic Minority Communities has taken actions following discussions during meetings to invite a number of organisations and departments to present to members. The list of presentations given to the APG on Ethnic Minority Communities is detailed in section 4 of this report. A summary of other actions is listed below;

- Revised terms of reference agreed by the group
- All Party group CSI submission sent to OFMDFM
- November letter to the OFMDFM regarding the representation and the nomination process to the Racial Equality Panel
- Letter to the OFMDFM on MLAs' role in immigration matters
- APG pre-election statement produced

Assembly Questions asked by MLAs in the interest of the group

- December 2010 Anna Lo asked a supplementary question on the Crisis Fund for those with no recourse to public funds.
- January 2011, 4 questions from Brian Wilson following QUB Opting-out of Religious Education presentation

- 18 February 2011, Dawn Purvis asked an Assembly question on the future of the Racial Equality strategy (AQW 4289/11).
(Citations and text of all questions to be added)

3. Presentations made by APG member groups 2010-2011

During each meeting of the APG on Ethnic Minority Communities time is allocated for member groups to give a short presentation about their work and the main issues they are currently facing. Presenting groups have also answered questions from other members of the APG about their group. In this session there have been presentations by 6 members of the APG on Ethnic Minority Communities:

Date of Meeting	Group Presentations
8 th June 2010	No group presentation
14 th September 2010	Women's Windsor Centre Multicultural Group
12 th October 2010	No group presentation
9 th November 2010	Belfast Migrant Centre
14 th December 2010	Women of the World
18 th January 2011	No group presentation
8 th February 2011	SEEDS ACSONI
8 th March 2011	World Wide Women @ North Down

4. Presentations made to the APG 2010-2011

The following organisations and departments have given presentations to the APG on Ethnic Minority Communities during this session:

Organisation/Department	Presentation Subject	Date of meeting
Equality Directorate, OFMDFM	Restructuring of the OFMDFM	June 2010
UK Border Agency, Michael Golding	Larne Detention Centre	December 2010
QUB School of Law and School of Education	Opting Out of Religious Education	January 2011

5. Events organised by the APG

There have been no events sponsored by the APG on Ethnic Minority Communities in the 2010-2011 session.

6. Dates of meetings in the period 2010-11

8th June 2010
14th September 2010
12th October 2010
9th November 2010
14th December 2010
18th January 2011
8th February 2011
8th March 2011

Participation in the APG Since June 2008

Based on postal and email mailing list of APG since June 2008. The current mailing lists consists of 55 groups representing the BME sector and 8 political parties. Since June 2008 there have been 27 meetings.

Group	Meetings Attended	Apologies
ACSONI	14	1
Al-Nisa Association	1	4
Alliance of Filipino Communities in Northern Ireland	0	0
An Munia Tober	11	8
Armagh Travellers Support Group	0	6
Baha'i Council For NI	19	6
Baha'i Community of Belfast	0	0
Ballymena Inter Ethnic Community Forum	10	10
Bangladeshi Welfare Association	4	4
Barnardos Tuar Ceatha	12	3
Belfast Chinese Christian Church	0	0
Belfast Islamic Centre	20	3
Belfast Jewish Community	9	8
Bulgarian Association NI	1	1
Chinese Chamber of Commerce	0	0
Chinese Welfare Association	7	11
Craigavon Travellers Support Group	5	5
Czech and Slovak Association NI	1	2
Derry Travellers Support Group	1	2
Egyptian Society NI	12	3
Hare Krishna Community	0	0
Hungarian Community Association	0	0
Indian Community Centre	14	3
Indonesian Association NI	0	0
Latino America Unida	0	0
Mandarin Speakers Association	2	1
Mid Ulster International Cultural Group	0	0
Multi Cultural Resource Centre	18	4

Multi Cultural Group Windsor Women's Centre	1	0
Newry and Mourne Traveller Support Group	0	0
NI Multicultural Association	3	0
NI Muslim Family Association	4	1
NI Pakistani Cultural Association	1	6
NI Sikh Association	2	0
NICEM	27	0
NICRAS	16	7
Northern Ireland Filipino Association	0	0
Northern Ireland Filipino Community in Action	0	0
Oi Kwan Chinese Women's Group	0	0
Oi Wah Chinese Women's Group	0	0
Oi Yin Chinese Women's Group	2	3
Omagh Ethnic Community Support Group	2	3
Omagh Traveller Support Group	0	0
Pakistani Community Association	0	0
Polish Association NI	1	4
Portuguese Speakers Association NI	0	0
Romanian Community Group	1	0
Sai Pak Chinese Community Project	0	0
SEEDS	1	2
Strabane Ethnic Community Association	5	10
Sikh Cultural Centre, Derry	2	2
Sikh Women and Children's Association	0	0
Wah Hep Chinese Community Association	12	8
Women of the World	2	3
World Wide Women @ North Down	7	8
Alliance	22	2
DUP	3	6
Green Party	18	4
PUP	15	4
SDLP	18	5
Sinn Fein	22	2
UUP	7	1
Independent	1	6

Meeting Date	Attendees	Apologies
June 2008	16	3
September 2008	16	9
October 2008	15	5
November 2008	11	9
December 2008	9	9
January 2009	15	6
February 2009	16	7

March 2009	12	11
May 2009	13	11
June 2009	9	4
September 2009	16	7
October 2009	17	4
November 2009	19	6
December 2009	16	4
January 2010	16	7
February 2010	12	8
March 2010	17	5
April 2010	15	9
May 2010	12	5
June 2010	15	11
September 2010	22	7
October 2010	14	10
November 2010	14	8
December 2010	13	9
January 2011	18	13
February 2011	16	6
March 2011	19	14