

Combatting Sectarianism in Scottish Society CPG

First Meeting

20th November 2018, 6pm, Committee Room 5

Minutes

1. Welcome and introduction of office bearers and members

The convener, James Dornan MSP, welcomed everyone to the first full meeting of the Cross-Party Group. Mr Dornan then invited everyone present to introduce themselves and the organisation they were representing.

2. Present and Apologies

Present

MSPs

James Dornan MSP, Donald Cameron MSP, John Mason MSP, Tom Arthur MSP and Patrick Harvie MSP.

Non-MSPs (organisations named)

- Scottish Women's Convention
- Supporters Direct Scotland
- North Kelvin Sports Development Group
- West of Scotland Regional Equality Council
- Police Scotland
- Nil by Mouth
- Victim Support Scotland
- Scottish Football Supporters Association
- Community Safety Glasgow
- Church of Scotland
- Supporters Direct Scotland

Apologies

MSPs

Sandra White MSP, Jackie Baillie MSP and Joan McAlpine MSP.

Non-MSPs

- Catholic Parliamentary Office

Plus, three others attending in an individual capacity.

3. Minutes of Initial Meeting

Minutes of the initial meeting of the 27th June, which was only attended by MSPs and staff, were approved.

4. Welcome address from convener, James Dornan MSP

James Dornan MSP gave a speech on the motivations for establishing the Cross-Party Group. Mr Dornan reflected on how football has been a passion throughout his life – from going to football games in his younger years to now representing the area of the Nation Stadium, Hampden. He highlighted the well evidenced link between football and sectarianism, referencing his personal disappointment of the repeal of the Offensive Behaviour at Football and Threatening Communications (Scotland) Act 2012, but stressed that sectarianism isn't confined to the sport, and neither should the Cross-Party Group limit its work to the game.

Mr Dornan mentioned how the CPG, thus far, has representatives from different faith groups, from equality organisations, charities, solicitors, Police Scotland, football stakeholders, and individuals with an interest in the subject.

Mr Dornan stated his that sectarianism won't be eradicated through the work of politicians alone, and that its only through wider society working together that we can build on the progress made over the past few decades. He also highlighted a number of recent high profile events which underlined the need for the Cross Party Group.

Mr Dornan suggested potential future themes for discussion including examining the work taking part on schools, the debate on definition of terms and how relevant date is recorded and the way in which football clubs and governing bodies could be encouraged to take part fully in public discourse.

5. Discussion with attendees regarding future work of the CPG.

James Dornan MSP invited those in attendance to enter into an open discussion.

A representative of the **Church of Scotland** spoke first and welcomed the opportunity to attend the CPG. **Scottish Women's Convention** then spoke of the effect of sectarianism and football on women – highlighting work the SWC has carried out on the issue with women across west central Scotland. **North Kelvin Sports Development Group** then followed with a contribution about their work in after school clubs.

Community Safety Glasgow raised their remit and how they monitor trends in Glasgow of crimes committed with a religious element associated with it. The representative of Community Safety Glasgow also recommended that we discuss sectarianism in the workplace, and suggested we possibly invite trade unions to future meeting.

A **Police Scotland** Chief Superintendent discussed how 'Safer Communities' is his portfolio – which includes hate crime, sectarianism etc. **Victim Support Scotland** then spoke of how victims may feel they haven't been taken seriously by the police, which may result in the person feeling their identity has been marginalised. Furthermore, he added Victim Support Scotland's priority is to make a lasting change on the victim. The Chief Superintendent added that Police Scotland have undertaken work to ensure more people report such crimes, and said it's not just hate crime which is underreported. The representative of Victim Support Scotland said non-reporting can be linked to the reception the victim may expect from the people they speak to. He added that a lot of good work going on at the top of the police to tackle this, however this may not fully be the case on the ground.

Supporters Direct Scotland raised Strict Liability in football. This is a concept which is in place in European competition whereby their football clubs are held directly liable for their supporters' behaviour. It was noted, however, that this is in place in a number of countries due to problems with homophobia – not religion.

West of Scotland Regional Equality Council (WSREC) then spoke of their interest and work in tackling sectarianism. The representative on behalf of WSREC discussed the role of Scotland's four regional equality councils.

Patrick Harvie MSP said he spoke as someone who is not religious nor has any particular interest in football, but he stressed that it was an issue which impacted upon many aspects of society, for example, violence against women, social class, race (anti-Irish racism), etc. Mr Harvie said that MSPs have a responsibility to steer debate in Parliament to one which is more unified and less polarised than it has been in previous years. Mr Harvie added that as the topic can be polarised, the CPG and tone of debate can't be. He said the CPG should potentially have a meeting focussing on wider issues around freedom of speech.

Tom Arthur MSP added to Patrick Harvie MSP's comments. Mr Arthur said a rise in identity politics has potentially exacerbated the rise of existing problems associated with sectarianism. He added that it may be worthwhile looking into how sectarianism ties in with political identities.

John Mason MSP said his constituency is often mentioned alongside such issues. Mr Mason referenced how his constituency is the home of Celtic Park and areas like Bridgeton. He added that the CPG shouldn't rush matters, i.e. with any proposed legislation.

Nil by Mouth spoke of how people struggle to define sectarianism, and that it would be worthwhile inviting Professor Duncan Morrow, the chair of the Scottish Government's **Independent Advisory Group** which was tasked to look at the scope of establishing a legal definition of 'sectarianism'.

James Dornan MSP said it may also be worthwhile inviting people who have direct experience of sectarianism along to discuss these experiences.

It was agreed by the CPG to invite Prof Morrow to the next meeting. It was also agreed that a future meeting could include contacting teachers, councils, Education Scotland, etc., to see best practice of how sectarianism is tackled in their teaching environments.

6. AOCB

Nil by Mouth was chosen to be the CPG's secretariat.

7. Time and Date of Next Meeting

The plan was to hold the next meeting on the 22nd January 2019 – room permitting.

8. Close