

CPG on Combatting Sectarianism in Scottish Society
Meeting
Wednesday 25th September, 6pm, Committee Room 4

Present

James Dornan MSP (Convener), Donald Cameron MSP (Deputy Convener), Duncan Morrow (Scottish Government Advisor on Sectarianism) David Duncan (Police Scotland), Paul Cameron (Police Scotland) , Iain McMenemy (Advisor to Grand Orange Lodge of Scotland), Simon Barrow, (Scottish Football Supporters Association), Lily Humphries (Scottish Liberal Democrats Research Office), Alan Russell (Supporters Direct Scotland), Andrew Westcott (North Kelvin Sports Development Group), Rod McKenzie (Scottish Professional Football League), Ian Maxwell (Scottish Football Association), Scott Spurlock (University of Glasgow) and Dave Scott (Nil by Mouth/Secretary)

Apologies

John Mason MSP, Neil Doncaster (SPFL), Agnes Tolmie (Scottish Women's Convention), Maureen McBride, Pauline Kelly (Community Safety Glasgow), Mark Adams (Sense Over Sectarianism), Richard Whitecross, George Whyte (Church of Scotland), and Anthony Horan (Catholic Parliamentary Office).

Item 1: Welcome, agreement of minutes and introduction of Prof Duncan Morrow

The Convener welcomed the group and members introduced themselves and their involvement/interest in the issue. The Convener introduced Prof Morrow who would provide an overview of his work chairing the Scottish Government's Independent Advisory Group on Sectarianism.

Item 2: Presentation from Prof Duncan Morrow

- 2.1 Prof Morrow (DM) began by drawing a distinction between situation in Northern Ireland and Scotland. DM reflected on his work as Chair of the Scottish Government's Advisory Group and the challenges faced with legislating on sectarianism and wider hate crime issues. Stressed the difficulties with treating these solely as a 'justice' issue – important to understand this is a 'cross-cutting' issue politically. There was also a need for the issue not to be seen as a 'political football' and the forging of some degree of political consensus across party lines about how to approach the issue.
- 2.2 His group, which was set-up post-introduction of the Offensive Behaviour at Football Act, met with key stakeholders and interest groups and advised on funding decisions to extend good practice across areas including looking into community-based activities. The advisory group commissioned quantitative and qualitative research into the subject including the Scottish Social Attitudes (SSA) survey in 2015.
- 2.3 DM reflected on the concept of sectarianism being seen as 'Glass Bottles', 'Glass Ceilings' & 'Glass Curtains' – the need for evidence to be correlated and the importance of monitoring data from outcomes from policy decisions and funded programmes.
- 2.4 DM spoke about issues around definition of what constitutes sectarianism and the need to look at where Equality Commission and other statutory bodies come into this debate as there was a feeling this was too often overlooked by them.

- 2.5 It was agreed that Sectarianism in Scotland is not immune from pressures of global political trends and events on these islands.
- 2.6 During the course of the group's enquiries the 'perception question' was a potent one. Football is seen as far and away the most visible form of sectarianism by 85% of society (SSA survey). Need for Cross-Party Group to reflect on why this might be and how might it be challenged. DM also highlighted how the issue is seen by different groups in society.
- 2.7 The Advisory Group looked at law and issues again around definition. They examined the scope for sectarianism to be framed within Hate Crime Law and consultations around this subject have been ongoing.
- 2.8 DM reflected on frustrations with football. The culture of the game seemed to imply that this wasn't an issue. Governing bodies didn't feel UEFA's 'Strict Liability' was the answer but little by way of answers from clubs and governing bodies – yawning gap between SL and what is 'happening'. Need to involve supporters. Reflected on NI experience through the 'Football for All' programme and how success there had been achieved. Scottish football seemed to have allowed a permissive environment to be created which allowed the problem to linger.
- 2.9 DM spoke about the issue of Parades and how his group had recommended this be located within the remit of Community Planning within local authorities as associated process and problem can manifest itself differently in different regions.
- 2.10 DM concluded his presentation with the message that the problem needed to be owned. Highlighted the success in Glasgow and other council areas of challenging sectarian attitudes through education in schools using resources such as 'Divided City' which have proved a way of helping young people find their own voice on issue. Success of 'Divided City' book in Glasgow. He also felt that the more we have to rely on law, the harder the challenges become. Education, at all levels across schools, colleges, universities, workplaces, youth work and community level is key to making progress.

Item 3: Moved to open questions

- 3.1 SS reflected on how the issue could be addressed through the curriculum. DM replied sectarianism is part of the ecosystem 'not cause and effect.' DM felt that this is a long-term project which can't be dealt with quickly. There was a need to look at how we tell the story of the people that live in these islands. There was also challenge with getting these issues mainstreamed within Education rather than taken forward by other drivers. DM felt there was great potential in investing time and resources in teacher training and a number of Universities were embracing this.
- 3.2 SB raised football issues and need to get wider range MSPs attending meetings to ensure broader political buy in. He also felt there was a need for policing within football with community consent. DM reflected on the uniqueness of the football environment in Glasgow and the culture of denial around the the problem within the game which he encountered during his group's investigations. There is innovation within the sport in Northern Ireland which could be adopted for Scotland and the sport can be a positive vehicle for change. Need to frame this a constructive conversation about what people can do rather than focus on what they can't. Strict Liability will remain on the table as an option although he would much rather clubs and bodies brought forward their own ideas.

- 3.3 IM reflected on the role that football clubs have in communities and the scope for them to do good. He raised a point about engagement with the media and how these issues are covered. How do we engage the media to cover issues more constructively? DM said he considered it might be a good idea to look at a research project into how Scottish media cover the topic of sectarianism. The Convener reflected on the wider membership of the group and that invites had been sent to a range of agencies, groups and communities in an effort to engage them properly in the debate.
- 3.4 DD agreed that this isn't a problem we can legislate our way out of and pointed to the success of the VRU approach as a potential blueprint for change. He posed the question on work focusing on 'lived experience' and was the scope for that to happen in Scotland? DM reflected on a number of projects which had included these approaches and agreement that they had a powerful impact on those who engaged with the concept.
- 3.5 DM reflected on how increasing numbers of young people encountered sectarianism online in line with broader cultural trends.
- 3.6 PC reflected on underreporting of hate crime and ways in which the police can encourage people to report it and role of third-party reporting centres.
- 3.7 RM reflected on parallels between social media and football and the challenges the game faces with introducing Strict Liability. Conversation took place over the merits of a strict liability option with DS expressing pessimism over how clubs and governing bodies deal with these issues. DM stressed this wasn't a binary choice – football was neither the cause nor the solution to sectarianism in Scotland. RM reflected on the club's position of Strict Liability.
- 3.8 AW spoke on what he felt his project was doing to tackle sectarianism in schools and after school clubs in west central Scotland.
- 3.9 DM summed up with thoughts on what Government can do to take this issue on and again stressed how a cross party consensus would be key to making sustained progress.

Item 4. Close

4.1 Convener thanked guests and Prof Morrow for attending. Circulated dates of future meetings and members were encouraged to forward any suggested topics for covering at future meetings.

Next meeting would take place on Tuesday 19th November.

Meeting ends.