

Public Affairs Officer's Report AGM 26th November 2006

Scottish Parliament and Executive

The Scottish Council of Jewish Communities (SCoJeC) continues to monitor activity in the Scottish Parliament and Scottish Executive on a daily basis and forwards relevant information to a wide range of organisations in the Jewish Community including Jewish Care, Cosgrove Care, Newark Care, Calderwood Lodge, Calderwood Jewish Education, the Board of Deputies, students and other interested bodies.

Thanks to the strong network of links SCoJeC has developed with Ministers and with MSPs from all parties we are able to respond quickly and effectively when the occasion demands.

Family Law

The Family Law Bill was passed by the Scottish Parliament in December 2005 and received the Royal Assent in January 2006 and, following lengthy and intensive discussion between SCoJeC and the Scottish Executive, includes a measure to permit the courts to take delay the granting of a civil decree of divorce when one party refuses to give or accept a *get*.

Several months ago we became aware that the wording of some Family Law secondary legislation (drafted without reference to SCoJeC) could potentially cause difficulties for both the Scottish Courts and the Catholic Church. We alerted the Scottish Executive and Catholic Church to the problems and have since been working with all parties to ensure that the necessary amendments are made, to ensure that the secondary legislation is appropriate for the needs of all concerned.

Because Family Law legislation currently under consideration at the European Parliament may impact on divorce procedure in the UK, SCoJeC wrote to the Justice Minister to highlight a possible negative impact on Scottish religious divorce legislation and also alerted the Board of Deputies to the proposed European legislation; as a result the Board of Deputies has written to UK Ministers drawing attention to its potential impact on Westminster religious divorce legislation.

Motions and Petitions

We continue to brief relevant communal organisations and the Israeli Embassy on matters raised in motions and petitions, and on the associated parliamentary procedures. We also continue to brief MSPs on issues concerning the Jewish community, and, where appropriate, put them in touch with other organisations, such as the Israel Information Office, who have been able to brief them on specific issues.

Consultation Responses

We have responded to consultations on a wide range of issues (full list attached). We would like to thank the many organisations and individuals whose expertise has contributed to these responses, particularly Jewish Care, the Chief Rabbi's Office, Rabbi Avrohom Weiss, Rabbi Nancy Morris, the Board of Deputies, Shechita-UK, and individual lawyers, health professionals and teachers.

All consultation responses are now available online at www.j-scot.org.uk and information about consultation responses in process of preparation are available on the Members page of the same website.

*Leah Granat
November 2006*

MEMO and MEMO+ (Minority Ethnic Matters Overview)

We continue to receive very positive feedback about MEMO, the weekly bulletin of information relevant to minority ethnic communities in Scotland which is compiled in response to a request from BEMIS (the Black and Ethnic Minority Infrastructure for Scotland). MEMO includes information about relevant activity in the Scottish and Westminster Parliaments, the Scottish Executive and Whitehall, organisations such as the NHS, Commission for Racial Equality, Equal Opportunities Commission, as well as details of relevant consultations and new publications.

Last month SCoJeC was awarded a grant from the Scottish Executive to expand MEMO, and have issued the first 'MEMO+'. There will be two series of MEMO+; '**Having Your Say**' will provide more detailed information about a relevant consultation and '**MEMO+Extra**' will be a series of background briefing papers on subjects such as parliamentary procedure at Holyrood and Westminster and on key issues and bodies such as the Scottish Parliamentary elections in May 2007.

Disclosure Scotland

SCoJeC continues to act as a Registered Body with the CRBS (Central Registered Body in Scotland) to enable communal organisations to meet the requirements of the Protection of Children (Scotland) Act. In addition we agreed to a request from the Scottish Interfaith Council to administer Disclosure applications on their behalf and have therefore also registered as an Intermediate Organisation.

We regularly attend meetings of the Scottish Churches Committee Child Protection Group (SCC CPG), which provides a forum for all of the Christian denominations and the Jewish community to share information and expertise about Disclosure and related issues.

We have also attended regular meetings with CRBS, sometimes jointly with the SCC CPG and others, in order to discuss issues around Disclosure.

The Scottish Parliament is currently considering a Bill to revise the Disclosure System in line with recommendations from the Bichard Report. We have a number of concerns about the Bill and have submitted responses to both the pre-publication consultation and the Education Committee call for evidence. Many of our concerns are shared by other voluntary sector organisations, and SCoJeC is currently working with both the SCC CPG and a voluntary sector coalition facilitated by the Scottish Council for Voluntary Services to ensure that both Scottish Parliament and Executive are aware of these concerns.

Office of the Scottish Charity Regulator

The Office of the Scottish Charity Register has begun a process of removing charities with which it has completely lost touch from the Register. To date three lists have been issued together with a warning that the organisations concerned had only three weeks to contact OSCR before their charitable status would automatically be lost. We regularly monitor the activities of a wide range of organisations, including OSCR, and were therefore able to alert several communal organisations to the fact that they appeared on one of these lists. As a result five active charities have contacted OSCR and have therefore been able to retain their charitable status.

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Links with other organisations

SCoJeC has continued to develop good links with a wide range of organisations. It holds regular bilateral meetings with the Church of Scotland and STUC and also attends regular meetings of both the Scottish Churches Committee and its Child Protection sub-group, the Voluntary Sector Scottish Equalities and Human Rights Coalition, BEMIS, the Lanarkshire Ethnic Minority Action Group, the Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations Policy Officers' Network, Communities Scotland and several NHS Spiritual Care Policy Steering Groups.

Website

SCoJeC's website (previously only two pages) has been expanded and now includes copies of all consultation responses submitted since late 2003 together with associated papers, Four Corners, MEMO and MEMO+, and links to the websites of each of Scotland's Jewish Communities. It is hoped that it will soon also include a photo gallery of SCoJeC events and information about future events. Minutes of SCoJeC meetings and information about current consultations are available on the Members pages. (SCoJeC members should contact Leah Granat if they wish to be allocated a password to access the Members page of the website.)

Events

SCoJeC has organised several events during the past year in Glasgow, Edinburgh and Dundee, and will be holding a Chanukah event in Lochgilphead next month.

Bill Speirs (STUC) and Brian Monteith MSP joined teams of adults and teenagers from the community to debate the motion 'The Scottish Parliament has not lived up to expectations' for a debate organised by SCoJeC during the Glasgow Jewish Representative Council's J-Fest programme in March 2006.

SCoJeC also held two briefing sessions about the Scottish Parliament, in Glasgow and Dundee (March and May 2006 respectively). The head of the Scottish Parliament's Outreach Service was joined by members of the Scottish Executive and the Scottish Interfaith Council to discuss ways in which individual people and small communities can have their voice heard at the Scottish Parliament.

Because of concern at the Report of the All-Party inquiry into Antisemitism, and at media reporting of the war in Lebanon, SCoJeC held three briefing sessions for secondary school pupils to discuss their experiences of antisemitism and how best to respond to it. The sessions, held in both Glasgow and Edinburgh during September 2006, were organised in association with UJIA, and included, amongst others, sessions facilitated by speakers from the Israeli Embassy, the Israel Information Office and Scottish Friends of Israel.

Four Corners

Four Corners continues to receive a very favourable reception, particularly from people living in the smaller Jewish communities or outwith any Jewish community. In addition to the paper copy, sent to members of Scotland's smaller Jewish communities, several synagogues now circulate it in electronic copy to their mailing lists and it is also available on the SCoJeC website.

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Public Resource

SCoJeC continues to respond to a wide variety of enquiries which this year have included a late erev Shavuot query as to the time and venue of the tikkun leil Shavuot in Inverness and urgent requests to know the whereabouts of the local minyan in Tarbet and of the kosher butcher in St Andrews.

During the Lebanon War in the summer SCoJeC responded to a large number of enquiries from the police who were anxious to provide support and reassurance to the Jewish community following a series of antisemitic incidents. We also responded to a large number of calls from people particularly in the smaller Jewish communities who were anxious about the possibility of becoming a target for antisemitic attacks.

Finally I would like to thank the Management Team for their ongoing support during the past year, and Ephraim Borowski who is unfailingly generous in sharing his time and expertise, and who seems to enjoy drafting, redrafting and re-redrafting consultation responses nearly as much as I do!

Leah Granat
November 2006

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Meetings, Briefings, Conferences etc attended by Director and Public Affairs Officer

Regular/on-going meetings

Church of Scotland
STUC
BEMIS Board
Churches Parliamentary Officer meetings
Scottish Executive Core Liaison Group
CRE Scottish Advisory Board
EOC Scottish Advisory Committee
Policy Officers Network
Scottish Churches Parliamentary Office briefings
Scottish Equalities and Human Rights Coalition
Scottish Churches Committee Child Protection Group
Lanarkshire Ethnic Minority Action Group
Communities Scotland Minority Ethnic Communities Steering Group
Faith in Communities Scotland
NHS Spiritual Care (various Health Boards)

Occasional and one-off meetings

Office of the Scottish Charity Regulator consultation events
Equal Opportunities Commission 30th Anniversary at the Scottish Parliament
Voluntary Action Fund
Testimony Exhibition Launch for Holocaust Memorial Day
Community Voices Network
Protecting Vulnerable Groups consultation event
Equal Opportunities Commission: Gender Equality Duty
One Scotland Many Cultures (Scottish Executive)
Forum on Discrimination
Glasgow Anti-Racist Alliance
CRBS
Sikh Interfaith Event Conference
Equalities Review
Review of Support Services for the Voluntary Sector
Church of Scotland General Assembly
Moderator Church of Scotland
Roman Catholic Church
Faith Communities Forum with Hilary Benn MP
Commission for Equalities and Human Rights stakeholder conference
Scottish Refugee Council seminar
George Weigel lecture
Moving on Up: Ethnic Minority Women in the Workplace (EOC)
Association for Scottish Public Life reception (Scottish Parliament)
Scottish Refugee Week reception (Scottish Parliament)

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Occasional and one-off meetings (continued)

Scottish Interfaith Council
Scottish Parliament Futures Forum
SCPO Annual Lecture (Elish Angiolini)
Hansard Democracy Forum
Israel at War
Women and War (Scottish Interfaith Council)
Ethnic Minorities and the Labour market
CEMVO (Council for Ethnic Minority Voluntary Organisations)
Scottish Parliament Young People's Debate on Peace Education
Conflict and Terror: Does the Media Make it Worse? (Scottish Parliament)
Faith and Regeneration Conference: 'What's faith got to do with it?'
REACH Community Health Project
Scottish Human Rights forum
Cosgrove Care Conference: 'Peel Back the Label'
Islam and Judaism lectures (Glasgow University)
Scottish Women's Convention Faith forum
Newly Appointed Chaplains Conference
Ethnic Minority Civic Congress
Protecting Vulnerable Groups consultations
Tackling the Diversity Deficit (CRE)
Press Complaints Commission Question Time
Routine Religious Circumcision (Scottish Executive)
Association of Kindertransport and Holocaust Survivors
Scottish Executive Breatfeeding Strategy Steering Group
Joint Advisory Board on Criminal Justice
Centre for Theology and Public Issues, Baillie Lecture

Consultation responses submitted by SCoJeC since the AGM 4th December 2005

December 2005

Proposed Draft of Revised Disclosure Scotland Application Form (Disclosure Scotland)

Possession of Extreme Pornographic Material (Scottish Executive)

Forced Marriage, A Wrong not a Right (Scottish Executive)

Charity References in Documents (Scottish Executive)

January 2006

All-Party Inquiry into Antisemitism (Parliamentary Committee Against Antisemitism)

Establishing an Accurate Register of Charities in Scotland; Meeting the Charity Test; Consents and Notifications (Office of the Scottish Charity Regulator)

What in the World (International Association of Community Development)

February 2006

Protection of Vulnerable Adults Bill: Partial Regulatory Impact Assessment (Scottish Executive)

March 2006

Charities and Benevolent Fundraising Regulations (Scottish Executive)

Scottish Charity Appeals Panel (Scottish Executive)

May 2006

Adoption and Children Bill (Scottish Parliament)

Age and Experience (Scottish Executive)

Protecting Vulnerable Groups: Scottish Vetting and Barring Scheme (Scottish Executive)

June 2006

Getting Equal: Proposals to Outlaw Sexual Orientation Discrimination in the Provision of Goods and Services (Women and Equality Unit)

The Equalities Review: Interim Report for Consultation (Equalities Review)

July 2006

Scoping Exercise on Religious Hatred and Religious Prejudice in Scotland (Association of Chief Police Officers in Scotland)

October 2006

Proposal for a Council Regulation amending Regulation (EC) No 2201/2003 as regards jurisdiction and introducing rules concerning applicable law in matrimonial matters (European Union)

November 2006

Protection of Vulnerable Groups Bill (Scottish Parliament)

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Scottish Council of Jewish Communities

Public Events during 2006

March 2006

J-Fest Debate: 'The Scottish Parliament has not lived up to expectations' (Glasgow)

Scottish Parliament Briefing (Glasgow)

May 2006

Scottish Parliament Briefing (Dundee)

NHS/BEMIS focus group discussion: Monitoring Ethnicity in the NHS (Glasgow)

October 2006

'Jew Bashing? Israel Bashing?'

Three briefings for secondary school pupils to discuss ways of responding to antisemitism (two events in Glasgow and one in Edinburgh)

Still to take place in 2006:

17 December 2006

Intercommunal Chanukah event in Lochgilphead

Events planned for early 2007:

Visit by Elish Angiolini, Lord Advocate, to synagogue

Visit by Rabbi Dr David Rosen to Parliament

Purim event in Dundee