



Scottish Council of
Jewish Communities

Annual General Meeting, June 2012

Chair's Report

It is now 13 years since SCoJeC was established by the various Scottish Jewish communities as a representative body that could speak to the Scottish Government and other Scottish public bodies with a single, authoritative voice whilst still reflecting diverse views in the community. It has been hugely successful in that task, as well as reaching out to isolated Jewish people and supporting Scotland's communities, especially the smaller and more remote.

The amount and diversity of SCoJeC's activities are staggering. A huge amount of this work takes place behind the scenes, and is undertaken in a voluntary capacity by our Director, Ephraim Borowski, and by Deputy Director, Leah Granat, whose outstanding commitment and limitless dedication is admired by all. They meet regularly with Government ministers, officials, MSPs, and others, and attend countless meetings and briefings, ensuring that the interests of Jewish people in Scotland are always taken into account.

Last June SCoJeC's third annual briefing for communal organisations on changes to legislation that could impact on the community was attended by nearly 30 representatives from more than 20 communal organisations. Presentations provided information about the Protection of Vulnerable Groups Scheme, Charity Law, the Certification of Death Act and Scottish Charitable Incorporated Organisations.

Also in June Ephraim and Leah met the Minister for Community Safety and Legal Affairs, Roseanna Cunningham and Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning, Mike Russell, to discuss issues of concern to the Jewish Community, including the then Offensive Behaviour at Football and Threatening Communications Bill (now Act), and a number of serious incidents that had recently taken place in Scottish universities. They also held separate meetings with the Lord Advocate Frank Mulholland QC and Solicitor General Lesley Thomson QC, who reaffirmed the commitment of Crown Office to tackle antisemitism, and we arranged for the Lord Advocate to address a well-attended public meeting last October about 'Tackling Religious Hatred'.

Leah and Ephraim have also met the new leaders of all three opposition parties in the Scottish Parliament, and have meetings planned with the Church of Scotland, the STUC, and the Chief Medical Officer before the summer.

We have discussed communal concerns about the new Death Registration procedures with the Scottish Government. These are intended to prevent medical malpractice and incompetence, but would have the effect of delaying burials, conceivably for more than a week in some cases. The scheme will shortly be piloted before being rolled out Scotland-wide, and SCoJeC has a seat on the Scottish Government implementation group, which will enable us to continue to press for changes.

SCoJeC is currently participating in Scottish Government consultations about the implementation of new European Regulations relating to shechitah, and has also responded to a number of recent attacks on shechitah in the media.

Last September SCoJeC was delighted to receive a grant of £21,720 by the Scottish Government for "Being Jewish in Scotland", a short study of the varied experiences of Jewish people throughout Scotland, thereafter appointing Fiona Frank as Project Worker. Since then "Being Jewish in Scotland" events have been held throughout Scotland, including the first Jewish event of which we are aware in Dumfriesshire, the first in Inverness for more than half a century, and the first in Dunoon for around twenty years.

In November SCoJeC was pleased to be able to arrange the Chief Rabbi's first visit to the Scottish Parliament in six years. As well as meeting First Minister Alex Salmond for the first time, he led the Time for Reflection that opens the plenary meeting of the Parliament each Wednesday, and met the leaders of all the other political parties, MSPs, and church leaders.

This April SCoJeC was awarded Scottish Government funding for the next three years for our "Empowering and Connecting Communities" project. The grant will enable us to continue to produce MEMO, a weekly digest of information of relevance to ethnic minority communities, which is published jointly with BEMIS, the ethnic minority umbrella organisation. This is circulated by BEMIS and SCoJeC to more than 2500 people each week, who then cascade it to their colleagues; and it also receives around 3000 hits each month on the our website. The second strand of the grant is for SCoJeC's own outreach work to support the smaller Jewish communities, and isolated individuals outwith them, as well as to provide information to Government, public authorities, faith groups, the media, and others, about Judaism, the Jewish Community, and its concerns.

SCoJeC continues to have an active involvement with inter-community organisations such as Bemis, the ethnic minority organisation in Scotland, of which Ephraim is Convener, and the Scottish Interfaith Council (shortly to be renamed "Interfaith Scotland").

We have continued to publish our award-winning newsletter, *Four Corners* (<http://www.scojec.org/4cs/4cs.html>), and our website (www.scojec.org) continues to be the first point of contact with the Jewish community for government and other officials, visitors, ex-pats, and others. Traffic on the site continues to grow, with hits per month up from 19 000 in 2009 to almost 40,000 in 2011.

We also act as umbrella for the whole community for a number of legal purposes, such as child protection checks under the "Protection of Vulnerable Groups Scheme", confirming the *bona fides* of Jewish marriage celebrants from abroad after discussion with the relevant local branch of Judaism, and sponsoring visa applications for visitors to the community.

SCoJeC has submitted responses to a wide range of consultations on matters affecting the Community including "Offensive Behaviour at Football and Threatening Communications" (Scotland) Bill; "Ethnicity Information at Registration of Death"; "The Registration of Civil Partnerships; Same Sex Marriage"; "Assisted Suicide (Scotland) Bill"; "Your Scotland, Your Referendum". We have received praise from all sectors of the community for our concern to ensure that all views are properly represented in responses, especially when the subject is controversial and potentially divisive, such as same-sex marriage. All these responses can be accessed on our website at <http://www.scojec.org/consultations/consultations.html>.

In December SCoJeC became the first Jewish charity to be approved by the Scottish Charity Regulator as a Scottish Charitable Incorporated Organisation (SCIO), and we have also been advising a number of individual communal organisations that wish to follow suit.

I am frequently overawed at the immense amount achieved by Ephraim and Leah, and would like to thank them, my fellow members of the SCoJeC Executive and the Council for all their efforts on behalf of our organisation and the Scottish Jewish Community. For that reason we are about to face a difficult time when Leah makes aliyah in the autumn. After taking advice, we are delighted to be able to agree to retain her services as a part-time Research and Publications Officer, as well as retaining Fiona as our Outreach Worker. We have been gratified by the quality of applicants for a new Public Affairs Officer post, and hope to make an appointment very shortly. We wish Leah every success and happiness in the future, both personally, and as a continuing member of our growing team.

**Hilary Rifkind
Acting Chair**