

Cross-Party Group on Challenging Racial and Religious Prejudice

Annual General Meeting
Wednesday 26th November 2025
Online via Teams

Present

MSPs

- Foyso! Choudhury MSP (Convenor)
- Fulton MacGregor MSP

Non-MSP Group Members

- Zara Mohammed (Secretary)
- Linsay Taylor (CEO, Muslim Engagement and Development)
- Mohammed Shahid Farooq (Multicultural Society & Muslim Council of Scotland)
- Parveen Ishaq (Edinburgh and Lothians Regional Equality Council)
- Shaukat Sultan (Muslim Council of Scotland)
- Nibal Saleh (Scottish Parliament)
- Alessandra Cecolin
- Cllr Nurul Hoque
- Farkhanda Chaudhry
- Naseem Anwar
- Mo Razzaq
- Mahdi Mosawi
- Nahid Aslam

Apologies

- Marilyn Gordon (Brahma Kumaris UK)
- **Bushra Riaz**
- **Hussein Raza**

Agenda item 1 - Welcome & Introductions

The Chair, **Foyso Choudhury MSP**, welcomed everyone to the meeting and thanked members for their ongoing work in challenging racial and religious prejudice in a particularly difficult context.

It was noted that the Group continues to provide an important cross-sector and cross-faith space for sharing concerns, coordinating responses and influencing policy.

2. Apologies and approval of Previous Minutes

Apologies

Apologies were received from (as mentioned during the meeting and via email/RVSPs), including:

- **Bushra Riaz**
- **Hussein Raza**
- **Marilyn Gordon**

It was noted that additional apologies were received close to the meeting time and that the **Secretary** will update the full apologies list from the RSVP records.

Approval of Previous Minutes

Two sets of minutes were considered:

1. **Minutes of the previous ordinary meeting**
2. **Minutes of the AGM 2024** (prepared by Peter Hopkins and previously circulated and available online)
 - Members confirmed they had seen the minutes.
 - Both sets of minutes were **proposed and seconded – Linsay Taylor, Shaukat Sultan**
 - It was agreed that the approved minutes would be uploaded and circulated.

3. AGM 2025

3.1 Approval of the Minutes of AGM 2024

- The **AGM 2024 minutes** were formally approved as an accurate record (proposed and seconded by members present).
- No amendments were requested.

3.2 Election / Continuation of Office Bearers

- Members discussed arrangements for office bearers for the remainder of the current parliamentary term.
- It was **proposed and agreed** that the **existing office bearers** would continue in post until the end of the term, with any formal confirmation to be handled via the MSP committee as required.
- This was **proposed and seconded**, and there were no objections.

3.3 Review of Last Year – Key Highlights, Feedback and Input

Members reflected on the work and wider context over the past year. Key points included:

- **Rising racial and religious hatred**
 - Increased hostile rhetoric, particularly **anti-immigrant** and **Islamophobic** discourse.
 - Attacks and threats against **places of worship** (including mosques and other religious sites), and a general sense of fear and vulnerability within communities.
 - Concerns about a possible rise of the **far right** and implications for the forthcoming Scottish elections.
- **Misinformation, disinformation and online harms**
 - Ongoing issues with **fake news**, disinformation and inflammatory content circulating online.
 - Links to increased polarisation, protests (e.g. around schools and education), and hostility towards minority communities.
- **Community impact and inequality**
 - Comments on **labour market inequality**, including references to long periods (e.g. 14 years) of disadvantage and discrimination in employment compared to white counterparts.
 - Ongoing challenges faced by **asylum seekers and refugees**, particularly in Glasgow and Edinburgh, and concerns about them being specifically targeted.
- **Local authority and civic initiatives**
 - An update on work within local authorities on **inclusive recruitment and diversity campaigns**, including attempts to improve representation in local government employment.
 - Reference to a **faith covenant** being developed with faith groups in at least one local authority, and an offer to share learning and information with the Group.
- **Role and impact of the CPG**
 - Recognition that the CPG is mainly an **influencing and recommending forum**, not a delivery body.
 - The Group brings together MSPs, councillors, faith and community organisations, academics and third-sector representatives; this networking itself has enabled mutual support and collaboration between organisations.

- Long standing work on Islamophobia and recommendations still to be implemented especially growing tide of hate
- **Group diversity and representation**
 - It was noted that the Group's membership is diverse and includes a range of faiths and backgrounds.
 - Concerns were raised about ensuring **better visibility and inclusion**
 - Members emphasised the need for **unity across faiths and ethnicities**, particularly given the current climate.

Overall, members agreed that while the Group has achieved some important networking and agenda-setting, there is more that could be done to sharpen its **strategic focus**, influence and visibility.

4. Members' Updates & Suggestions

Members shared brief updates and reflections:

- **Local and regional work**
 - Updates from councillors on events such as **Islamophobia Awareness Month**, local **hate crime reporting sessions**, and partnership work with Police Scotland and local authorities.
 - Reports of low community attendance at some events despite significant effort, and a request for ideas on how best to **engage and energise communities**.
- **Networking and collaboration**
 - Several members highlighted practical examples where knowing each other through the CPG has helped:
 - Signposting to specialist organisations (e.g. MEND, SCOJEC, CRER and others).
 - Joint work on events, training and policy responses in councils and community settings.
 - Members agreed that the CPG should continue to function as a **hub for connections and signposting**, particularly for local authority work and community initiatives.
- **Clarifying the Group's role**
 - Members stressed the need for **clear priorities**, and an agreed understanding of how the CPG can **influence policy** and public debate.
 - Suggestions included clarifying:
 - What the Group aims to influence (elections, legislation, local authority practice, media discourse, etc.).
 - How often the Group meets and how themes are chosen.

5. Recommendations for 2026 (within Members' Updates & Discussion)

As part of the discussion, members began to shape **recommendations and priorities for 2026**, including:

- 1. Developing a short strategic “action plan” or guidance document**
 - a. To summarise **key concerns and priorities** for tackling racial and religious prejudice in Scotland.
 - b. Possible focus areas:
 - i. Online hate and misinformation
 - ii. Anti-migrant rhetoric and scapegoating
 - iii. Protection of places of worship and community safety
 - iv. Recognition and definitions (e.g. Islamophobia and other forms of hate)
 - v. Support for asylum seekers and refugees
 - c. This document would be aimed at **MSPs, parties, local authorities and other decision-makers**, particularly in the run-up to Scottish elections.
- 2. Planning thematic meetings**
 - a. Building on previous work, members supported a plan for **thematic sessions** (e.g. far-right extremism, online harms, community safety, local authority practice), with contributions from specialist organisations and communities.
- 3. In-person / hybrid event at the Scottish Parliament**
 - a. There was support for holding an **in-person (with hybrid option) event at the Scottish Parliament** in early 2026 (e.g. March).
 - b. The event would:
 - i. Present the Group’s **reflections and recommendations** from the past term.
 - ii. Invite a **range of MSPs and prospective candidates** to engage with the issues raised by communities.
 - iii. Provide a visible signal of cross-party commitment against racial and religious prejudice.
- 4. Partnership with local authorities**
 - a. Members emphasised the need to reflect **joint responsibility between the Scottish Parliament and local councils**.
 - b. The CPG should continue to draw on **local authority practice** (e.g. inclusive recruitment, faith covenants, community safety work) and share learning across Scotland.
- 5. Improving engagement and attendance**
 - a. Members acknowledged challenges in getting community members to attend events and meetings.
 - b. Suggestions included better **promotion, hybrid formats, and targeted outreach** through member organisations.

The **Secretary** offered to help draft a short recommendations / strategy document and to gather input from members between meetings.

6. Next Steps

The **Secretary** will:

- Finalise and circulate the minutes.
- Update the list of apologies from RSVP data.
- Begin work on a **draft recommendations / strategy document** for 2026.
- Coordinate dates for:
 - A **thematic meeting in January**, and
 - A potential **in-person/hybrid event at the Parliament** in early 2026 (e.g. March).

Foyso Choudhury MSP thanked everyone for their contributions and the Secretary for coordinating the meeting. He emphasised that the Group remains open and inclusive to all communities, and encouraged members to reach out with ideas and to stay actively involved.

Meeting Closed

Date of Next Meeting: TBC