

All Party Group on Race and Community AGM 2011: Summary and minutes
7pm – 8.15pm, Monday 11 July
Committee Room 12, House of Commons

Parliamentary Attendees: David Lammy MP (Labour), Baroness Hussein-Ece (Lib Dem), Heidi Alexander MP (Labour), Gavin Barwell MP (Conservative), Lord Sheikh (Conservative), Andrew Stunell MP (Liberal Democrat, Race Equality Minister)

Speaker: Trevor Phillips (Chair, Equality and Human Rights Commission)

AGM Elections

- **David Lammy MP** elected new chair of group, **Diane Abbott MP** has stood down as chair due to shadow ministerial responsibilities.
- **Baroness Hussein-Ece, Baroness Whitaker, Lord Sheikh** and **Lord Lester** were elected vice-chairs of the group.

Trevor Phillip's speech - summary

- He began by saying there have been a lot of positive changes relating to race equality over the past 45 years, adding that the race equality sector has been bad at recognising what it has achieved over the years.
- He highlighted that the centre ground has now moved, with all parties recognising the importance of race equality. He praised the membership of the APPG as being genuinely cross-party, adding that in the past such a group would have been entirely Labour and Liberal Democrat. He also highlighted that public attitudes on race has changed for the better.
- Moving on from this he argued that the situation is “no longer a division of aims but instead a division of means”, adding that whilst some things change, “race still matters”.
- Phillips then went on to highlight that whilst the situation for some ethnic groups has improved dramatically, other groups are “anchored at the bottom”. He highlighted in particular pay gaps in the labour market, high rates of infant mortality for some groups, and unequal educational attainment facing many groups, particularly Gypsy and Traveller children.
- Moving on to the issue of the recession, Phillips argued that the economic recovery need to be an equal one, pointing out that following the economic downturn of the early 1990s, some ethnic groups fell out of labour market and never got back in. Given this, one of the future priorities of the EHRC will be the issue of employment. He also mentioned that the EHRC will be looking at the Comprehensive Spend Review in more detail.
- Phillips then went on to speak about the Equality Act 2010, stating that whilst the final piece of legislation is not “exactly what he would have wanted”, the act represents a “watershed moment”, and will make a big difference to people's lives in the UK.
- He also clarified some concerns regarding the Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED), adding that even if some local services are outsourced to the private and voluntary sector, the local authority commissioning these services are still required to ensure the legal requirements of the PSED are met.
- Highlighting the difficulties ahead, Phillips drew attention to public sector reform and localism. Adding that whilst he is in favour of localism, he expressed concerns around unequal service provision in different localities.

- Ending his speech, Phillips said that new models of funding need to be looked at in order to ensure the survival of the race equality sector. He added that the sector has made things better in the past by “looking for opportunities rather than problems.

Questions from parliamentarians and external observers:

- Leander Neckles, (Equanomics UK) asked for the definition of “due regard” in the Public Sector Equality Duty and called for guidance from the EHRC on the issue. In response, Phillips answered that the EHRC will address the issue in guidance in the autumn, but added that the ultimate decision will be made by the courts.
- Both **Heidi Alexander MP** and **Gavin Barwell MP** drew attention to issues relating to stop and search and criminal justice. Members of the youth group of StopWatch (a stop and search action group) also asked a number of specific questions around the issues of Section 60 and Schedule 7. Phillips responded to these questions by drawing attention to research and guidance put together by the EHRC on these issues, in particular mentioning that levels of disproportionality in stop and search differed in some police force areas which have similar demographics. The EHRC has therefore signed agreements with two forces to ensure that the work they do is consistent¹.
- Following the large number of questions asked on stop and search, **David Lammy MP** suggested that the APPG should hold a separate meeting on the issue to discuss the concerns of non-parliamentary members of the group.
- **Gavin Barwell MP** asked for Phillips’ view on the balance between legislation and cultural change. Responding, he said that whilst legislation is important, the law is unable to solve everything. He argued that the Commission’s Good Relations Duty is particularly important in helping to achieve cultural change, and added that whilst this duty should be modernized, he does not agree with those who think it should be scrapped.
- **Baroness Hussein-Ece** made a number of points on ethnicity and education, in particular highlighting the issue of “white flight” from inner-city schools with large numbers of BME students. She added that a more systematic approach is needed to tackle educational inequalities.
- Councillor Rabi Martins (Lib Dem) pointed out that a lot of positive developments in race equality happened during a period of economic growth, and also asked how parliament can address the problem of race inequalities in employment, adding that many BME small businesses are not getting support. Phillips reiterated his point about the need for an equal economic recovery, adding that it is important that the business case for equality is made. On employment, he argued that some “upskilling” of particular BME groups is needed, and suggested the need for more supplementary schooling.
- Patrick Vernon (Afiya Trust) highlighted that there is still not enough understanding about race equality and mental health, and mentioned that the former Commission for Racial Equality put a compliance notice on the Department of Health regarding the issue. In response, Phillips acknowledged that the EHRC has only done a small amount of work on mental health, adding that they are only now “really getting stuck in” to the issue.
- In response to a question on race inequality and agency employment, Phillips suggested that more work needs to be done on this issue.

¹ A number of detailed questions on stop and search were asked throughout the session. For a fuller summary of these questions and Trevor Phillips’ answers, please contact vicki@runnymedetrust.org

- Closing the meeting, chair **David Lammy MP** acknowledged the attendance of Race Equality Minister **Andrew Stunell MP**, and invited him to address the group at a future meeting.