

Scottish Council of Jewish Communities Annual Report 2003-2004

The Scottish Council is the representative body of all the Jewish Communities in Scotland. It was established five years ago when the Scottish Parliament came into existence in order to provide the Community with a single voice in dealings with government and other statutory and official bodies. In the run up to the elections for the Scottish Parliament last May, we made contact with each of the candidates, in order to make them aware of issues which concern us and to provide them with a reference point should they wish to consult us. The response was excellent.

In the past year, the Council has responded to several consultations issued by the Scottish Executive including Religious Observance in Schools, Civil Partnership Registration, the Sexual Health and Relationships Strategy, Post Mortem Examination in Hospital, Organ Retention, the Anatomy Act and Hate Crime. In all these cases, we have consulted with members of our community and organisations with special expertise in the field and been informed by both orthodox and reform Rabbis locally as well as finding out how equivalent consultations in England were being dealt with by the Board of Deputies and other national communal organisations.

In November 2003, Leah Granat was appointed to the position of Public Affairs Officer and works closely with the Director, Ephraim Borowski, in attending to the day to day activities. These include examining daily the Scottish press and relevant web-sites, checking what the Scottish Parliament and Scottish Executive are doing, monitoring consultation papers and other Executive documents, and preparing briefing and background papers on relevant matters. [They](#) also attend large numbers of meetings with representatives of other faiths, communities, and voluntary sector bodies.

The Council was in receipt of a grant from the Ethnic Minorities Grant Fund and we are extremely grateful to them, and to BEMIS (the Black and Ethnic Minority Infrastructure in Scotland) for their assistance. This grant is primarily intended to support the provision of information to others about the Jewish Community and to brief the Community about legislative and other policy developments, and to implement this, the Council [has organised](#) a series of briefing sessions for various groups such as doctors, lawyers and teachers in order to update them on recent changes to legislation.

The first of these was held at the end of February, when a group of some 30 accountants and treasurers of Jewish organisations in Scotland heard from a member of the Scottish Executive and a member of the McFadden Commission, about proposed changes to Charity Law. In August, the Council held an open briefing session for Medical Professionals and others, to discuss with the relevant Civil Servants the Jewish position on recent Scottish Executive consultations on medical and ethical issues. Both these meetings were welcomed by all parties, and others are now being planned for other professional and interest groups. The advantage of briefings such as these is that the Scottish Executive can be informed about our views at an early stage, sometimes even before the issuing of a consultation paper.

We were consulted by the Scottish Executive on their response to the Farm Animals Welfare Council (FAWC) Report on the welfare of farm animals at slaughter. As this could have far reaching consequences on the future of Shechita in the UK, we consulted extensively before producing our response.

At the time of writing, the Scottish Executive has announced its intention of producing a new Family Law Bill during the next session of Parliament. We are at present in consultation with the Scottish Executive proposing a change in the law which would have the effect of enabling the Sheriff to ask questions in a case where

there is a civil divorce in which there has been no religious divorce (get) granted. A similar change in the law has been in effect in England and has helped to ease the plight of Agunot.

The Council appointed Rabbi David Rose of Edinburgh to be the Jewish Chaplain to Her Majesty's Prisons in Scotland.

The Council usually meets four times a year in either Glasgow or Edinburgh to decide matters of policy, but on 23rd November 2003, I had the privilege of chairing our first meeting outside the Central Belt when we met in Dundee by courtesy of the Dundee Hebrew Congregation. We were joined by members from Dundee, Aberdeen, Argyll and the Highlands and of course Edinburgh and Glasgow as well as by Jerry Lewis, Senior Vice President of the Board of Deputies, who travelled from London for the occasion. This was our most successful meeting to date and we hope to have more meetings out with Edinburgh and Glasgow in future years. As a result of this meeting it was decided to produce a newsletter providing news and views of the various Jewish Communities in Scotland. The first [three editions appeared in January, June and September](#) with the title "Four Corners", and can be obtained on the web or from Leah Granat. We are indebted to Jacqueline Speyer, a leader of the Argyle Jewish Community and now of Jerusalem for arranging the layout and design of the newsletter. Despite losing her to Israel, the wonders of electronic mail have enabled her to continue her work for us with much help from Leah at this end. Our web page is maintained by ***** of ***** to whom we are grateful. The web site is [www.*****](#)

We are grateful to those who support us financially, especially the Glasgow Community and Bloch Trusts, the various Scottish Synagogues, the Board of Deputies and the Glasgow Jewish Representative Council. Thanks are due to our Director Mr Ephraim Borowski who gives his services on a voluntary basis. I have

been greatly assisted by my predecessor Dr Kenneth Collins, and vice chairmen Mr Stephen Kliner and Dr Philip Mason. The community is indebted to these dedicated individuals who give freely of their time and experience.

John A. Cosgrove (Chair)