

Scottish Council of Jewish Communities AGM 4th December 2005

Director's Report

This has been an incredibly busy and successful year, and the reports from our Chairman and Public Affairs Officer and the attached lists of consultation responses and events attended make clear. Our most important achievement is undoubtedly the inclusion of a provisions relating to religious divorce (a *get-out* clause?) in the Family Law Bill, and we are now within 10 days of the final vote which we hope will see it become law. But there have been many other highlights: the Chief Rabbi's second visit to the Parliament, trees and teas with the Cardinal, the anti-Semitism report to the General Assembly, the delegation from the Histadrut to the STUC are just a few.

We have also had some less publicised successes: our input resulted in an amendment to the Charities Bill to include interfaith activity explicitly as a charitable purpose, and we were the prime movers behind a radical rethink of the ethnicity questions in the next census. On more than one occasion we have been asked in confidence to comment on the final draft of advice to ministers on matters in which we have taken an interest.

We have also been extremely successful in obtaining external funds to support our work, and most particularly we have entered into a partnership with BEMIS under which we produce a weekly digest of material of interest to minority communities. The Ethnic Minority Grant scheme has also supported specific projects, and since these grants enable us to extend Leah's hours, there is an overall benefit to the Council. We are about to begin discussions with BEMIS about extending our joint working into other areas to our mutual advantage.

All networking is successful networking, and two of us can do twice as much as one! We have applied this principle to enhance the profile of the Jewish Community in all public arenas. It is a measure of our success that we are often invited to join small policy groups to advise the Executive and others. Recently I have been appointed to the Scottish Board of the CRE, and Leah has been invited to join the Scottish Equalities and Human Rights Reference Group, and the Scottish Churches Committee Child Protection Group.

That last relates to Disclosure which we took on as a service to the Community, but is now taking up a disproportionate amount of time, not least because of the unhelpful, incomplete, contradictory, and inefficient advice and service from the CRBS. There is no question but that we must comply with the regulations – one day soon the regulators will make an example of someone in the voluntary sector, and it would be disastrous if it were one of our organisations – but together with others we are pressing for a more efficient and robust system.

In this and in so many other ways the Council and the Community must be grateful principally to Leah, whose efforts and hours have often been beyond the call of duty. I can truthfully say that the work of this Council has been the most important and fulfilling of my communal activities – and also that that is due in no small measure to the dedication and commitment of Leah Granat. To her, and to our Executive and Council, my personal thanks.

Ephraim Borowski