

44TH BRITISH ISLES AND MEDITERRANEAN REGION ANNUAL CONFERENCE
(BIMR) - CARDIFF BAY, 27-30 MAY 2014

Report by Councillor Leslie Baldwin

Tuesday 27 May

My duties officially began with a meeting with 'The Funky Dragons' a Youth Parliament in Wales, who had taken part in a teleconference with Prince Andrew School on the last Commonwealth Day, 10 March 2014. I had referred to the need to engage youth in our political system prior to my election last year and Lauren and Darren from the Welsh Dragons had kindly agreed in their busy schedules to meet with me. I immediately expressed my concern at the poor level of engagement we have mustered towards re-establishing a youth parliament on St Helena. Simple question and answer sessions followed and it was soon established that we severely hamper our success by limiting members focusing on Prince Andrew School. The age range forming the Funky Dragons was 11-25 years and apparently many countries consider higher than that to be "youth", Commonwealth youth parliament allows up to 29 years. I felt instantly that this could have a huge impact on St Helena, as there would appear many who have left Prince Andrew who could, having gained some experience of the workplace outside of school have a huge influence in ideas leading to solutions to the problems or issues during their schooling and beyond.

At the BIMR Conference it was amazing how comfortable I was made to feel and a joy to re-acquaint myself with Mrs Claire Clancy, CPA Wales Branch Secretary and wife of the former Governor Michael Clancy, Joyce Watson CPA Wales Branch Chair and Barry Paint (Guernsey) from the CPA delegation that visited shortly after the election.

Wednesday 28 May

Following the opening ceremony Dame Butler introduced an outstanding harp performance by Claire Jones.

We then went to **Plenary Session 1: Women in Public Life** chaired by Dame Rosemary Butler, CPA Wales Branch President, and speakers included Professor Laura McAllister, Chair of Sport Wales and winner of 24 international football caps and Stephen Brooks the Wales Director of the Electoral Reform Society.

Although I was reasonably proud of the St Helenian statistics the emphasis of the debate centred around the encouragement of diverse decision making, ways to heighten the profile of being a local councillor, the fact that no member of the population should be without representation and extended to include an example; We were asked to look at "media" and the fact that the majority of air-time was given to "middle-aged" men especially in the coverage of sport and politics. Many speakers contributed to the debate with ranging opinions from the opinion of the Northern Ireland delegate who believed in "meritocracy" (he or she who deserves it will ultimately succeed!) but this

was countered by the argument that positive support has been provided for men by men for many years and it was to counter this, that positive discrimination to support women and others that are under-represented should be supported and the impatience for change had driven positive discrimination. The argument that all discrimination was wrong whether positive or not was well supported. But to counter this we should time-limit the potential discrimination. The data supplied for St Helena was in the higher areas of female engagement with 25% of Legislative council (Average was 30%) and with 66% of middle and senior management positions filled by women - St Helena was much higher than the average. It was noted that St Helena basically uses all of its available resources. The most outstanding for me was Malta who had 4 of 6 women members of European Parliament and the Chief political position (Prime Minister) was held by a woman. Luciano Busuttil MP explained that all encouragement is given to seek representation including free child care services to support women in office. Many other regions had a lot to achieve before equality would be accomplished.

The second session covered the topic **Bilingualism and the Role of Official Languages in Parliament** This was Chaired by Simon Thomas Assembly Member and it was stated that the session would be carried out in Welsh and we were encouraged to use the headphones attached to the translating machines (Computer terminal), which also doubled as voting terminals. Probably a good time to mention just how modern the Welsh Assembly truly is, modern architecture mingled among the historic buildings of when Cardiff was a booming Coal Capital. We were informed that 17 of 60 Assembly Members spoke Welsh fluently and around 50% understood it, so it was interesting to see so many of the Welsh contingent put on the head-phones. In Wales the policy is that either “official language” (English or Welsh) can be used according to personal preference. The major issue was that preserving Welsh was an important way of preserving a vital element of Welsh cultural identity. Some interesting statistics were quoted, for example Indonesia has 721 different languages or dialects but only 3 official languages, South Africa has 11 national languages and India has 18 that feature in the constitution but only one, Hindi, official language. The most used “official language” throughout the world is English with 59 nations far out-weighting any other language. Everybody seemed amused that the only concept of Bilingualism I could imagine was that our languages would be English and ‘Pigeon English’. Everybody seemed to agree that as long as everybody could understand proceedings, bilingualism and the support of native culture should be supported.

Following lunch and the official conference photograph we made our way to Workshop **‘More than a matter of numbers – How are women making a difference?’** Facilitated by Patricia Ferguson, Member of Scottish Parliament many of the issues raised in Plenary Session 1 were discussed in more detail at this workshop. Featuring in the debate was to consider providing services i.e. a crèche to serve both staff and Elected Members. It becomes apparent to me at this session that we have similarity to Guernsey and the Isle of Man in the sense that we stand as political “independents”.

The BIMR Annual General Meeting

Having had a fairly informative day I headed into an unforeseen situation at the regional Annual General Meeting. Prior to leaving I had council agreement to ask for a delay in our acceptance of a position on the Executive Council of the CPA, due to the fact that access would be easier in 2016. The representative from Guernsey and current BIMR representative Mike O'Hara requested that St Helena forfeit the first year of its three year term in office in order to allow continuity in the follow-up and requirements as a result of Internal Auditing of CPA accounts where it was reported that a "recent case of a lack of internal scrutiny and enforcement of internal procedures had led to some improper expenditure not being picked up". The importance and power within the CPA over this first day had hit home and forfeiture of such a coveted position on the Executive Council became very painful and one I tried to share with other Councillors. I had no real option I was aware how difficult it would have been to fulfil our obligation to ExCo and equally aware that Mike O'Hara was probably the best man to understand and ensure that such weaknesses are dealt with, the continuity made sense. Agreement was dependent on the consent of Barry Elsby of the Falkland Islands who had to waive right to the option as first substitute and next regional member of the Executive. Mike declared his interest and left the chamber and a free and frank discussion followed where I stated the logistical problems St Helena would have but how reluctant I was to "forfeit" a year of focusing the CPA on issues directly relating to St Helena. Following the chance to consult with my colleagues overnight the only logical solution was to accept forfeiture of one year of Executive Council membership. In discussion later Mike conveyed his dismay and surprise that the entire meeting was being broadcast live outside to the general public and he heard every word of the debate. This was my first brush with just how open and transparent British politics had become.

Barry and I sat in our designated position next to one another throughout the seminar and had many interesting conversations of shared resource issues or lack of and these have now resulted in a motion in Formal Legislative Council on 11 August. Having mentioned to Barry that one of our biggest problems currently was raising the finance to provide a reasonable standard of hotel to cater for the expected increase in tourist numbers following airport development, Barry interjected that the Falklands were in a completely different position where income generated from oil exploration, the fishing and tourist industries had meant that potentially a pool in excess of £200 million could be available to suitable investment. Having expressed how dependent the Falklands were on their St Helenian workforce and an interest in more regular updates my estimated £8-10 million pound required funding did not appear to raise concern as long as substantiated by an in depth business plan. I was beginning to feel excited at the prospect of maybe assisting a mutually profitable association and vowed to follow this up on my return.

The meeting inevitably ran late and hardly allowed time to wash and change before sailing off on a 30 minute boat trip inland from Cardiff Bay to Cardiff Castle for a drinks reception and Official Dinner where Delegates were able to socialise with each other while listening to speeches by Patricia Ferguson MSP and Sir Alan Haselhurst Chair of the CPA International Executive Committee.

Thursday 29 May

Today saw **Plenary session 3 entitled Engagement of Young Citizens in the democratic Process**. In the first part delegates witnessed a debate by the Wales Schools Debating Championship Participants titled **“This house believes that political parties are currently failing to engage young people”**. The proposers debated that education cuts in 2010 had engaged the youth but they were simply ignored as proved when Boris Johnson, Mayor of London, decided to hose the young marchers who had gathered to fight the cuts in education expenditure and student fees. The opposers argued that youth turnout at the 2005 election was 37% which had risen to 44% in the 2010 elections showing growth. There were initiatives to encourage party membership and the recent election of Bethyn Jenkins aged just 24 that engagement was improving.

The proposers continued that only 14 of 65 assembly members were under 30 and that we are currently experiencing the highest graduation statistics but lowest employment rate. During the Q & A session delegates from Guernsey and the Isle of Man reported that they had reduced the voting age to 16. That a concerted effort is made to engage children from 11 years when they are given a pack explaining how the system works and another program at 15 years to enable the knowledge to vote. Councillors visit schools regularly and Scotland had introduced voting for 16+ years for the independence referendum. Generally most agreed to a reduction in age dependent upon the implementation of education programs that naturally follow. The many that argued that the knowledge of 16 year olds was insufficient were defeated by those who felt far too many adults have similar lack of knowledge!

The second part was titled **Creating the Voter Generation: Getting on the Right Track** presented by Kyle Thornton a member of the Scottish Youth Parliament (SYP) who explained that there are 150 members of SYP and to have a strong youth parliament it was important to establish:

- **Democracy:** Majority of votes win providing accountability and fairness.
- **Inclusion:** Meet at least 3 times a year and seek membership.
- **Passion:** All volunteers in a 10 person support team, a little about politics a lot about you.
- **Political Independence:** Fiercely independent views voted on by young people, supported by but independent of Government.

These things coupled with the fact that all of this should be youth led.

The next item on the programme for me was the Workshop D entitled **The Case for Youth Parliaments – What influence do they have in informing Public Opinion** which I had agreed to facilitate. The time was shortened but felt like just five minutes as conversation and debate was free flowing. As with most of these sessions time did not allow for all the delegates wishing to contribute to take part but it was interesting to learn that amongst Europeans young British are the least likely to vote (38%) with Italy topping the table with 71%. Education, health and sport were considered the major influence areas of public opinion by the youth. 80% of young Scots have registered to

vote in the upcoming independence referendum. It was noted that there was a mentoring scheme in Northern Ireland where Youth Parliamentarians shadow members of Legislative Council. The experience was something not to be forgotten but passed by in a flash, making pre-workshop nerves seem a total waste of time.

Friday 30 May

The final Plenary session was **Report back from workshops** Chaired by Joyce Watson where basic summaries were presented by the respective Rapporteurs.

The Farewell Gala Dinner was another first as the first time such an event had been hosted at the Senedd hosted by Dame Rosemary Butler with some outstanding entertainment and inspiring, motivational and emotional speeches. A very rewarding seminar had reached a rather hasty conclusion. Many good friendships were established and the party, pretty much led by Alfred Cannan (IOM) went on until late in the night. The final hung-over day allowed time for packing and for a private tour of the Millennium Stadium.

Saturday saw the need of further taxis to and from the stations another couple of hours of travelling back to Paddington and eventually back to the Imperial Hotel, Russell Square. I had learnt the Welsh word for welcome which is croeso (croyso) but not for goodbye so maybe that is a sign that I will one day return? I thoroughly enjoyed Cardiff and praise should be heaped on the organisers.

August 2014