

Roundtable Discussion on BME Representation in West Sussex

Wednesday 13 May 2009
06.30pm – 09.30pm
The Hawth, Crawley West Sussex



Introduction

The Crawley Ethnic Minority Partnership (CEMP), with support from Uni Network, organised a *'Roundtable Discussion on BME Representation in West Sussex'* on Wednesday 13 May 2009 at the Hawth in Crawley. About 20 people attended the event. Some of the delegates were representatives from the public and voluntary and community sectors; others were representatives from BME communities.

The purpose of the event:

1. To provide a platform in which BME groups, public and voluntary sectors could come together and start a constructive and informal debate on the issues of BME representation in West Sussex; as well as tease out how all partners could work together and take the relevant steps towards encouraging and increasing BME representation in the County.
2. To provide an opportunity for BME groups/communities to highlight the issues they face to public and voluntary sector delegates and together find a way forward to addressing them, through having a clear framework for effective representation of their communities and interests, as well as for effective contribution in local decision-making.

The event was moderated by Ali Abdoul, Uni Network Co-ordinator and Sharafat Hussain, Crawley Minority Ethnic Partnership Manager.

The event

Sharafat Hussain opened the event. He introduced the programme of the event which consisted of two sessions, two presentations and a discussion on the topic in question.

Session 1 - Presentation

There were two presentations, by Sharafat Hussain and Ali Abdoul. The purpose of the presentations was to set the scene for the discussion, as well as to highlight the work of CEMP and Uni Network in relation to the topic of the day and the reason why BME representation was an important topic for discussion.

Sharafat Hussain (CEMP)



Sharafat doing a presentation

Sharafat highlighted that an ongoing partnership work, '**LEGUP Partnership**', which consisted of CEMP, STAG, AiRS and CAB, was working together to tackle the marginalisation of minority communities in West Sussex. He explained the partnership's vision statement, and indicated that the partnership was *"committed to the principle of equal opportunities, and will work to strengthen and empower disadvantaged and marginalised communities across West Sussex through linking with organisations in the statutory, public and voluntary sectors to build solid foundations for effective provision, access to, and delivery of key community services."*

The objectives of the partnership are as follow:

- To support the needs of marginalised communities and to influence decision making, and develop collaborative partnership working between existing marginalised communities, and the wider population in West Sussex
- To identify the needs of marginalised minority communities through community profiling, and communicate these to partnership agencies to improve their service delivery for marginalised communities.
- To build community strength through empowerment, by improving management skills, capacity-building and infrastructure thereby enabling better management of front-line organisations delivering local services

- To improve the ability of ethnic minorities to access appropriate and culturally sensitive services, practice good governance, and obtain sustainable funding and resources
- To address and confront social exclusion and marginalisation

The **LEGUP Partnership's** work would support and build the capacity of marginalised communities to act as a voice to influence decision making through collaborative work.

Ali Abdoul (Uni Network)

Ali introduced Uni as a regional BME network dedicated to strengthening the black and minority ethnic voluntary and community in South East England to have a voice in major decision making in the region.

Uni Network's mission was to develop 19 local black and minority ethnic networks in South East England that meet the needs of their communities, and work together to influence public policy.

BME representation was a very important issues for Uni, and that it was emphasised in its vision, *"to champion the development of the South East region that actively pursues the equalities agenda by the participation and contribution of the black and minority ethnic voluntary and community sector and its communities in the social, economic, cultural life of the region"*; yet, this could be achieved by addressing the issues black and minority ethnic representation on regional and local agencies.

Furthermore, involving BME groups was crucial. BME groups as strategic partners can positively contribute to addressing many issues, including:

- Racism and injustice
- Promoting diversity and equality
- Promoting social inclusion
- Campaigning for social change
- Improving service delivery
- Strengthening partnership working
- Improving accountability
- Improving links between communities and decision-makers

However, there were some barriers that hinder BME engagement, such as:

- Poor access to mainstream funding streams
- Complicated application processes
- Impractical eligibility criteria
- Language barriers
- Short-term funding
- No or low BME representation
- Inadequate consultation processes
- Historical problems – narrow focus on specific BME communities
- Poorly resourced
- Time pressures
- Lack of feedback
- No evidence of mutual benefits
- Lack of effective infrastructure support

He closed his presentation by highlighting that there were legal requirements that placed duties on public authorities to inform, consult and involve communities and it was important that major partnerships like the West Strategic Partnership ethnically monitored its members to ensure that any under-representation was identified and tackled.



Ali doing a presentation

Session 2 - Discussion

The discussion started with the first question, ***“What is the status of BME representation in West Sussex? Gaps and Challenges?”***

A number of issues were raised in response to the question. There were a set of issues around funding. It was felt that proper funding would enable BME groups to develop the necessary skills and win their hearts and minds, thus, be good representatives for their communities.

A related view expressed that some BME groups find it difficult to access funding despite having attended all the relevant training events to develop their skills, and that fair representation should mean fair access to resources, particularly as most of BME groups' work involved working with young people to try to take them out of trouble, promote social inclusion, fair access to services, etc.

It was agreed that there was an important gap as far as BME representation was concerned in West Sussex. There were not many BME people in local authorities to champion BME needs and representation, and that in West Sussex BME communities were diverse, therefore, had different needs.

Similar views added that addressing the gap in BME representation in West Sussex was a challenge that local authorities were willing to address, and there was a need to revisit policies and focus on new and effective ways of engaging with the communities.

It was important to have a legitimate BME voice, and to do so everyone needed to work better. The county was changing in terms of its population; before BME issues used to be seen as Crawley issues but this had changed as BME communities were moving to the coast. So, it was no longer a Crawley issues but a countywide issue.

Crawley CVS had funding specialist who could help any BME group apply for funding. Small grassroots grant was available, as well as capacity building support.

There was only one black politician in Crawley and that black representation was very low, and among BME communities, Black Caribbean communities were more marginalised than Asian communities. There was also the issue of accountability: in the boards of major funding organisations and in local authorities there should be fair representation to ensure fair allocation of funding, other resources and consultation.

In sum, it was generally felt that BME representation in West Sussex was low and presented a huge challenge to all, communities and local authorities alike. Yet, it was important that it was addressed to ensure all BME voices were heard and their needs addressed.



Participants discussing the topic

The second question to the discussion was ***“How can BME groups influence major decisions in West Sussex”***.

The West Sussex LAA was one of many platforms where BME groups could influence major decisions in West Sussex. Yet, the LAA did not seem to highlight BME issues enough. The LAA should enable BME who live in the most deprived wards to have influence on issues such as health provision, poverty, education attainment, etc.; however, it was not the case. In order for the LAA to be effective, GOSE should scrutinise it to ensure BME issues were highlighted.

The percentage of BME people in the councils was low; therefore did not have much influence on policies linked to community issues, particularly BME issues.

The police had already a strategy to engage with communities, particularly on community safety issues – tackling crime and anti social behaviour. Yet, there was a lot to be done and the police were committed to doing more to tackle the issues. Services needed to be tailored to meet local needs, and all partners needed to come together to first understand the communities and the main issues they faced. It is important to answer the following questions:

- How well do we know our communities?
- How well do we know their issues?

Additionally, there was a need for local authorities to show leadership, to know our communities and to open more and proper dialogue. To help small BME groups did not need to do a great deal; for instance, having community centres open for young people as a way of trying to help them getting out of crime.

For BME communities to have influence there needed to be openness and inclusiveness within the BME communities themselves. It was important to break these barriers and work together as a united voice to help the police and local authorities understand the issues and together address them. To have influence, BME groups need to be organised as they seemed fragmented. There were some elements of complacency amongst BME groups and a lack of engagement.

It was important to be aware of what was happening in the communities, which would enable the West Sussex County Council to learn and shift towards doing things differently; focus on local communities and ensure that BME groups were included. Improved funding could make partnership stronger now and in the future, and that the relationship with funders should be looked at.

Another aspect that hinders BME engagement, was that fact that important meetings were held at inconvenient time for BME groups, which would not facilitate having an important

BME representation. The cultural aspect was also seen as a barrier for some BME communities to engage.

The last question to the discussion was ***“What is the way forward.”***

The way forward to improving BME representation, thus better way of addressing BME issue included:

- Better communication between BME groups themselves, and between local authorities and other partners
- Broaden focus to all BME communities we represent, rather than focusing on certain BME groups, as it is counterproductive.
- BME groups should have a look at themselves first before pointing fingers
- Moving towards working together
- Change ourselves (BME)
- Change our thinking (BME)
- Make information available to BME groups
- Engage proper and open dialogue at all levels – grassroots and strategic – was key to moving forward and addressing the issue.
- The focus should on action rather than more meetings, as well distil information for BME so that they know where to go who to contact.
- Local authorities were working towards improving their mechanisms to ensure effective service delivery, as well effective representation. However, it was important to get BME communities to be proactive rather than reactive.

In sum, it was agreed that a bottom-up approach should be the way forward; recognise what was happening in our communities was also important to ensure better engagement. Yet, communities needed to understand who to speak to, and to bridge the gap the voluntary and community sector has a big role to play.

CEMP – to run 3 monthly meetings to take the issue forward

Conclusion and Recommendations

The roundtable discussion has enabled to initiate a proper discussion on the issue of BME representation. All delegates agreed that the status of BME representation was low and needed to be addressed.

Yet, for BME groups to have a strong voice and be well represented in West Sussex they need:

- To come together as a united group.
- To establish a strong BME network in West Sussex to enable:
 - BME issues to be effectively discussed
 - Effective feedback
 - To come as united and stronger voice
- BME frontline and infrastructure organisations to collaborate in their work
- Find ways to gather and disseminate relevant information to communities



Networking after the event

Participants

Name	Organisation
Steve Curry	Chief Inspector, Sussex Police
Seth Gotteman	West Sussex County Council Adult Services
Bekithemba Mhlanga	West Sussex County Council Adult Services
Ian Vinall	West Sussex County Council Children Services
Lindsay Adams	Crawley Borough Council, Community Development
Safder Mohammed	VOLG
Tracy Olckers	Crawley CVS
Lenney Walker	Crawley Borough Council Councillor
Sharafat Hussain	Manager, CEMP
Temba Chofamba	Well - being Community Development Worker, CEMP
Jamil Khan	Health Through Support
Rubina Khan	Health Through Support
Nawaz Ahmed	LEAP
Rubina Shamim	Kashmir Women Welfare
Dr Sukhen Chatterjee	CEMP
Bal Shukla	Rethink BME CDW
Queenie Hopcroft	CCAR / Interfaith
Maureen Andrews	Maureen's Hair & Beauty
John Hopcroft	CCAR
Terence Mutongerwa	Carib Aid
Ali Abdoul	Uni Network

Contacts

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