

# **Information Paper**

## **Social and Community Overview and Scrutiny Committee - 11th April 2005**

### **Black and minority ethnic community support in Cheltenham update**

This note contains the information to keep Members informed of matters relating to the work of the Committee, but where no decisions from Members are needed

#### **1. Why has this come to scrutiny?**

- 1.1 The Chair of the Social and Community Overview and Scrutiny Committee Cllr. Mrs. Driver, has requested that information be brought before the committee regarding the actions which have been taken by the council in supporting Cheltenham's black and minority ethnic communities since the council decided to withdraw its funding support for the Gloucestershire Race Equality Council (GlosREC) in March 2003

#### **2. Summary of the issues**

- 2.1 In March 2003, following the review undertaken by the Social and Community Overview and Scrutiny Committee, which looked at the funding that the Council awards to community and voluntary organisations in Cheltenham, the Social and Community Overview Scrutiny Committee and the Cabinet agreed to withdraw the council's funding of the Gloucestershire Race Equality Council (GlosREC). This funding valued at £10,300 was awarded on the basis of a three year service level agreement, requiring GlosREC to provide equal opportunities and equalities support to Cheltenham's residents.
- 2.2 The recommendation approved by both the Social and Community Overview and Scrutiny Committee (5 March 2003) and the Cabinet (18 March 2003) being **"to use the funding (allocated to GlosREC) to appoint a consultant to carry out research into the best ways of meeting the aspirations of our minority ethnic communities. We would also like a worker to deliver a programme of capacity building and training within the communities and the public sector and to raise funding to support this work in the future"**.
- 2.3 In response to this recommendation, in February 2004 the Community Services division commissioned Linking Communities (Gloucestershire) to undertake an audit of Cheltenham's black and minority ethnic communities to assess its needs and aspirations and to help develop a possible action plan.
- 2.4 This audit, which has cost the council £10,000, was commissioned using the funding allocated by the council to support race equalities for the 2003-2004 financial year, this being the funding which would previously have been awarded to GlosREC.
- 2.5 Since making its recommendation, there has been a considerable delay in commissioning the audit as a result of a number of external factors, which at the time

of the Committee's review were still being developed, and which ultimately would play a major factor in determining any future direction that Cheltenham Borough Council might wish to take.

**2.5.1** These external factors included:

- the introduction of the Government's Community Cohesion Agenda and the Government's desire that all local authorities establish a local Community Cohesion Strategy.
- the introduction of the Gloucestershire Compact with the voluntary and community sectors, which was adopted in Gloucestershire in May 2004,
- the introduction of the black and minority ethnic communities code of practice which underpins the Gloucestershire Compact. This is still outstanding and is not planned to be introduced until May 2006.

In addition, there were also major problems encountered in recruiting a locally based external black and minority ethnic community organisation/agency to undertake the BME audit.

**2.6** An update of what has been happening during the last two years, since the council decided to withdraw its funding of GlosREC

**2.6.1 The Cheltenham Minority Ethnic Forum (CMEF)** closed in 2003-2004 as a result of the failure of the forum to obtain core funding needed to support the forum and the cost of its development worker and office accommodation.

**2.6.2 The Gloucestershire Compact** was adopted in May 2004 and introduced a positive commitment for local authorities in Gloucestershire to support, and to work more proactively with the county's voluntary and community sectors. The Gloucestershire Compact is underpinned by a number of codes of practices which includes one specifically aimed at supporting black and minority ethnic communities. This code is being developed at a countywide level, by the Gloucestershire Compact Steering Group and will be drawn up during 2005. It is proposed that this code will be introduced in May 2006.

**2.6.3 GlosREC** on-going discussions continued during 2003-2004 with all of the local authorities that were funding GlosREC. During these discussions it was suggested that a countywide review might be undertaken to look at the level of local authority funding allocated to support BME communities across the county. Ultimately this review was not progressed.

In 2004 GlosREC lost its Commission for Race Equality (CRE) funding valued at £51,000.

**2.6.4 Capacity working with the BME communities** initial discussions were held with the Cheltenham and Tewkesbury Primary Care Trust (PCT) to look at the possibility of the PCT and CBC recruiting a joint BME capacity worker to look at capacity issues and health issues within the BME communities. Ultimately it decided to wait for the results of the council's BME audit before progressing with the recruitment of such a worker.

**2.6.5 Corporate equalities developments** the council continues to support the Corporate Equalities Forum and the MacPherson Group in furthering and promoting the equalities agenda within Cheltenham Borough Council. Corporate developments to date have included:

- The adoption of the council's Comprehensive Equalities Policy and the new Race Equalities Scheme on 16 December 2003;
- The decision taken on 20 January 2005 by the MacPherson Group to establish a Corporate Racial Harassment Policy;
- The implementation of equalities training with CBC staff and Cheltenham Borough Homes staff on Friday 10 December 2004;

### 3. Next Steps

- 3.1.1** The findings of the black and minority ethnic communities' audit, which was finalised in December 2004, will be brought before the Cabinet in June 2005. The reporting of the reviews findings to the Cabinet has been delayed to enable some of the reports recommendations to be raised with the Cheltenham Strategic Partnership (CSP) on 24 March 2005.
- 3.1.2** The Community Services division will use this meeting, to establish the CSP's buy-in to this project, since a number of the audit's recommendations require a significant commitment from the town's statutory agencies, both in terms of future strategic direction and resource implications. In addition this meeting will be used by the Community Services division to request matched funding from the CSP's partners to support the proposed recruitment of a dedicated BME capacity worker for Cheltenham. The CSP response to these requests will be reported to the Cabinet in June.
- 3.1.3** Budgetary issues: an outstanding balance of £10,000 will be carried forward to the 2005-2006 race equalities budget allocation. The intention is that this funding will be used by the Community Services division to start implementing the recommendations coming out of the BME audit, and as a contribution, subject to gaining sufficient funding from the CSP and the statutory partners, to help support the cost of recruiting a dedicated worker who will work with the town's BME communities.

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<b>Background Papers</b>	Social and Community Overview and Scrutiny Committee report 'Funding of external organisations' – 5 March 2003
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<b>Scrutiny Function</b>	Social and Community Overview and Scrutiny Committee