

Information/Discussion Paper

Social and Community Overview and Scrutiny Committee - 8th September 2008

Update on progress and developments with the town's black and other minority ethnic communities

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** A request was made by the Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee for a briefing paper to be brought before the committee, to detail the progress and developments which have been made since the recruitment of Zareen Ahmed the council's new BoME capacity worker in October 2007.

This paper details progress to date, as well as some of particular successes, and also seeks to highlight future development projects.

1.2 The role of the BoME capacity worker

The council's BoME capacity worker was recruited by the community development team in October 2007 and has now been in post for just under a year.

1.3 Cheltenham's BoME priority areas include:

- supporting and building the capacity of BoME communities in Cheltenham;
- identifying and engaging with BoME communities to ascertain their needs and aspirations;
- raising awareness of the town's diverse BoME communities;
- supporting the council's equalities and community integration and cohesion agendas;

2. Summary of the Issue

- 2.1** There has been a positive response from communities to the establishment of this new post, and the post has helped a number of communities develop both their organisations as well as setting up new projects initiatives. The post has also been instrumental in helping raise greater awareness of Cheltenham's growing BoME communities and cultures.

- 2.2** Cheltenham Borough Council and its councillors have been very supportive in the implementation of its BoME work, and the challenge now lies in working towards the corporate and Local Area Agreement (LAA) priorities, whilst avoiding raising unrealistic expectations.

3. Summary of evidence/information

3.1 An Action plan was produced in November 2007 to help co-ordinate BoME work during the first year of operation, and this plan also sought to highlight some of the following concerns that:

- There are very few established BoME groups active in Cheltenham
- Cheltenham's Bangladeshi community is divided, and the Bangladeshi Association is currently all male.
- The Hindu Association includes a small number of women in the management committee, but their input is limited, and whilst the Association is very welcoming to visitors, it now needs to improve its partnership working, if it is to continue to develop.
- Cheltenham's Polish community falls generally into three groups. (1) the post war generation, who are settled and see themselves as self sufficient, (2) migrant workers who are here to earn money to send back to their families, and (3) families that have chosen to live permanently in the area. All have different needs.
- Work needs to be done to engage with a wider range of communities for example the Jewish, Irish, Portuguese, Brazilian, Turkish, Arabic, Lebanese, Libyan, Greek and Gujerati communities, as well as the growing Eastern European communities. In addition the Council needs to identify opportunities to engage and build trust with these communities, if it hopes to conduct representative and meaningful consultation exercises.

3.2 The action plan focused on four key areas:

- Community engagement, meeting individuals and groups from minority communities, to ascertain their views and needs
- Making contact with a diverse range of agencies, to raise awareness of the post, and to help generate referrals
- Setting up and facilitating a series of cultural events, to celebrate diversity
- Establishing a stakeholders group to co-ordinate BoME service delivery, and to deliver a major community cohesion event for all communities

4. Key achievements and successes to date

4.1 Bangladeshi Women's Group (Shapla) has been established as a result of an engagement exercise held by Zareen in January 2008. Thirty five women attended this event and subsequently Shapla was established. This project has been an important development as the Bangladeshi Association recognise that, due to social and religious barriers Muslim women can be isolated and excluded from taking part in healthy living programmes, and some learning activities

4.2 The Shapla Group's projects and initiatives to date have included:

4.2.1 Establishing an allotment gardening project for all BoME communities at Hayden road

4.2.2 An all female swimming pilot. Women from India, Afghanistan, China, Poland, and Finland took part in an all female swimming pilot project held at Cheltenham Ladies College. For some, this was the first time that they had ever visited a sports facility or been in a swimming pool. The next step is to explore opportunities to continue to provide these sessions in partnership with Leisure@

4.2.3 A training/education pilot project. Several members of the Shapla group highlighted that they would like the opportunity to work; preferably part time in order to fit in with school hours. It became clear that one of the major barriers facing the group and community as a whole was that their English speaking and understanding skills were

limited. When the group discussed potential training courses to help them address this issue, they were confused as to the level or type of course that would best help them. A four-week English pilot project was delivered at the Lower High Street resource centre. The aim was to help ascertain the level of knowledge, need, and potential barriers. Sixteen women took part in the sessions, which included using the Echo newspaper as a local source of community information.

The pilot evaluation has highlighted the need for pre English as Second Language (ESOL) classes. The women have also identified the need for classes to help prepare them for the UK Citizenship test.

4.3 Celebrating the Chinese New Year. The Council sponsored this joint initiative between the BoME capacity worker, the Gloucestershire Chinese Women's Guild and the University of Gloucestershire. The event attracted around 300 people. This cultural extravaganza was also a celebration of local talent. The performances began with the dramatic Lion Dance, followed by a traditional rhythmic fan dance, Mulan sword demonstration, Chinese folk singing and opera, as well as a Tai Chi demonstration. The participants were university students and members of the local community, and this event provided them with a rare opportunity to showcase their talents to a large and diverse audience.

4.4 Hindu Community Consultation Event. This successful consultative event was delivered in partnership with the Hindu Association. Over 80 members of the Hindu community engaged in discussions about healthy living, community safety, culture and festivals. The event consisted of a number of workshops, which had bi-lingual scribes. This encouraged interaction and feedback from the community. Note - this model could be adopted to engage with any community on a single or a range of issues.

4.4.1 Key outcomes and issues from the Hindu Community Consultation event included:

- The council demonstrated their commitment to engage and work in partnership with BoME communities;
- a BoME database is now being established by Zareen using contact details registered at this and other events;
- An atmosphere that encouraged people to have their say was generated, as cultural practices were taken into account. This provided an opportunity for agencies and service providers to discuss some of the problems and barriers that the community face when accessing services;
- Both the community and professionals gained a greater understanding of some of the different cultural practices, e.g. many of the women were busy preparing the lunch, and were surprised, and pleased that the agenda was adapted, so that they could take part. Several professionals noted with interest how members from the community rearranged the seating arrangements so that they could all congregate together. Initially, 27 women sat together and had to be encouraged to split up into different workshops
- The need to engage proactively with young people was highlighted, as they did not attend. As a result, Gloucestershire Youth Service has employed a sessional worker, to engage with BoME youths to provide a snapshot view of their needs and aspirations and make practical recommendations to the Youth service.

4.5 **Arabic Women's Group** a group of fourteen women from Syria, Jordan, and Egypt was identified. These women were taking turns to host meetings in their own homes and wanted to apply for funding to help establish themselves as a group. Zareen organised meetings with Adult Education, who provided training, and with

Cheltenham Voluntary Community Action, who have supported the women in developing their group and form a constitution. The group now meets regularly at the Springbank community resource centre

- 4.6 Cheltenham Interfaith group** invited Zareen to talk about her work to forty of their members. Following this meeting the group have agreed to be contacted when the council are consulting with Faith groups. The group will be invited to attend events as they hope to recruit members from BoME communities

5. Current BoME work and initiatives

- 5.1 Community stakeholders group** the success of the initial community engagement exercise has generated interest, and work from the communities, agencies, and Cheltenham Borough Council. This group has been established to help co-ordinate community events, share information on a range of community issues, including BoME related matters, and promote opportunities for greater community involvement, integration and community cohesion

- 5.2 The Community stakeholder group is supporting the 2008 Citizen's Day event** (It's all about You - celebrating Cheltenham its citizens and communities). The concept of this event, which is a government initiative, is that it should be celebratory and interactive, appeal to the whole family and most importantly it should be fun. In addition to information stands and demonstrations and family fun activities, the event will be used to help celebrate and raise greater public awareness of the town's BoME communities through a diverse range of workshops, including dance, drama, story telling, singing, and art.

- 5.3 The development of a Cheltenham Welcome Pack** is being co-ordinated through the stakeholders group. The aim is to provide a range of useful information for residents of Cheltenham. There will be a need to identify additional information which will be required by the town's growing range of BoME communities.

- 5.4 Working in partnership with Brazilian group Capoeira**, and Springbank community resource centre to promote a three day festival in October. The group celebrates culture through a non-contact martial arts dance (called Capoeira) The event will begin in the town centre, and hopes to encourage onlookers to join a "pied piper" procession to the Springbank community centre, to continue with the cultural extravaganza.

- 5.5 Drop in session for the Polish community** this will be a partnership pilot with Gloucestershire County Council, which will provide a weekly bi-lingual information and signposting service in Cheltenham.

6. Next Steps

- 6.1 Future BoME projects and initiatives:**

- 6.1.1 The Expert Patient Programme** this is a six week course for anyone that has a long-term illness or condition. It will equip participants with the skills to manage their condition and to also enable them to combat tiredness, isolation and depression.

- 6.1.2 Pre English as Second Language (ESOL) class** Zareen intends to apply to Adult Education for funding to deliver pre ESOL courses which are planned to be held at the Hester's Way community resource centre.

- 6.1.3 Community Ambassadors** this is an ambitious project which aims to actively

promote the concept and benefits of volunteering. The project will identify and train two or three members of different communities to work together as a group. The training will include confidentiality, community engagement, and event planning.

Once trained the group will be able to work with the community stakeholders group to help promote and disseminate information to their respective communities. The community ambassadors will also be a valuable resource when Cheltenham Borough Council needs to identify members for focus groups.

6.1.4 Hate crime Zareen is a key stakeholder in the development and implementation of the council's response to hate crimes – reporting, response and monitoring.

7. Future issues and concerns impact on the BoME role

7.1 BoME statistics Cheltenham's BoME community profile has changed dramatically since the last 2001 census. As a result there is a lack of up to date figures and information which makes it difficult when completing funding applications.

7.2 Managing expectations the positive response to the successful delivery of the action plan has generated considerable interest, and this has in turn raised greater awareness and expectations from communities as well as from Cheltenham Borough Council and its partners.

7.2.1 The main challenges are:

- Identifying needs of a diverse range of communities
- Ensuring that the council and its partners are made aware of the identified needs, and to facilitate appropriate responses.
- Working in partnership with the Cheltenham Strategic Partnership and Stronger Communities Partnership to deliver activities that support the integration and cohesion agendas.
- Providing practical advice and support to Cheltenham Borough Council's forums, e.g. equalities, hate crime, human resources, housing, and welfare benefits.
- Identifying and targeting new BoME communities. Not all communities can be accessed through a community group. We need to explore what can be done to establish robust communication networks and mechanisms
- Contacting communities and organising meetings for consultation exercises.
- Challenging perceptions, and assumptions of both professionals and BoME communities to influence change

7.3 Equality impact assessments the need to complete these assessments corporately will be time consuming, as it will require service providers to consider how they delivery their services, and how they interact, consult and engage with all of the equality strands. It is likely that the BoME worker will be required to assist and support other departments complete their assessment, and also help them identify problems, look at possible solutions and identify future opportunities

7.4 Funding for this BoME work future funding of this area of work will become an issue, since the majority of the work to date has been supported using £9,000 of funding awarded to the council in 2007, by the LAA, to support BoME and equalities work in Cheltenham. This funding will have been spent by the end of the current financial year

Future commitments and developments will therefore be dependent upon securing either additional corporate funding, as part of a budget growth bid, or alternatively by trying to identify potential projects which partners and external funders.

Background Papers	None
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Accountability	Cabinet member community development and housing
Scrutiny Function	Social and Community Overview and Scrutiny Committee