

JOINT CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEE WITH ETHNIC MINORITY ORGANISATIONS
22 JULY 2009

(7.15pm – 9.15pm)

PRESENT: Councillor Henry Nelles (in the Chair); Mr M S Sheikh, Mr N Islam, Mr A Savage, Ms P Anderson, Ms J Mintah-Seu, Eula Valentine and Mr S U Sheikh.

ALSO PRESENT: Evereth Willis (Diversity and Community Cohesion Manager), Maureen Branch-Davis (Diversity and Community Cohesion Officer), Angela Chu (Housing Strategy Manager), Kaleem Hussain (NGDP-Management Trainee) and Lynne Hartley (Democratic Services Officer).

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Tariq Ahmad, Agatha Akyigyina, Edith Macauley and David Simpson; Revd. Mrs H Neale

1 CHAIR OF MEETING

In the absence of Councillor Tariq Ahmad the meeting was chaired by Councillor Henry Nelles.

2 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST (Agenda Item 1)

No declarations were made.

3 ELECTION OF VICE CHAIR (Agenda Item 3)

After rejecting the option of deferring this item until the next meeting when there might be more members present it was moved by Mr A Savage, seconded by Ms P Anderson and -

RESOLVED: That Mr S U Sheikh be appointed as Vice Chair of the Committee for the municipal year 2009/10.

4 MINUTES (Agenda Item 4)

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting held on 29 April 2009 are agreed as a correct record, subject to the reference to Saleem Sheikh in paragraph 7 of the item on Voluntary Sector Funding being amended to read Mr M S Sheikh.

5 NOMINATION OF JCC MEMBERS TO OTHER BODIES (Agenda Item 5)

RESOLVED: That (1) Mr S U Sheikh be appointed as the Committee's representative on the Housing Partnership Board for Vulnerable People; and (2) Ms J Mintah-Seu be appointed as the Committee's representative on the Schools Forum with Mr N Islam as substitute.

Mr S U Sheikh asked that reports from members representing the JCC on other

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bodies be reinstated as a standing agenda item.

6 DEVELOPMENT OF MERTON'S ETHNIC MINORITY HOUSING STRATEGY
2010/13 (Agenda Item 6)

Angela Chu introduced the report and Kaleem Hussain expanded on the research which had been undertaken in preparation for developing the strategy. Ms Chu referred to a paper setting out Merton's initial responses to questions put by MUN and Merton's BME Forum and agreed to make this paper available to members.

The Chairman confirmed that following the vote in favour of Housing Stock Transfer tenants and leaseholders of Merton housing would transfer to Merton Priory Homes in March 2010.

In response to questions about some of the initiatives referred to in the appendix to the report Angela Chu referred to the workshop being held in September where the key topics would be explored in detail and urged members to attend. She agreed to provide Mr S U Sheikh with a copy of the report which had reviewed the progress of the 2006/09 action plan and to provide all members with a copy of the dvd produced as part of the BME Video Research Project.

Commenting on the development of Pathway Lodge as a key achievement since 2006 Mr S U Sheikh recommended that such facilities be developed for other ethnic groups too.

In reply to a question about initiatives around extremism Maureen Branch-Davis advised that a community leaders group had been set up to determine how to spend the three years funding available and there had been a number of seminars and workshops to engage with faith groups and other groups in the community. The leaders group had received a report it commissioned to look at key local issues and the next stage would be to establish the process for groups to bid for funding for community cohesion building activities. Ms Branch-Davis apologised for recent delays and advised that the leader's group would meet again in August or September. Mr S U Sheikh expressed concern that the bidding process might be rushed as a result of the delays.

Replying to questions about policies to tackle domestic violence and forced marriages Ms Branch-Davis advised that these issues came up in the work of a number of council services and would be addressed in the Corporate Equality Scheme.

It was noted that the second draft of the Strategy is due to be published at the end of January 2010, not January 2009 as stated in the report. The first draft of the Strategy would be completed by the end of September and would be brought to the JCC for comments on 21 October 2009. In the meantime any further comments on the proposed timescales and process for developing the Strategy could be submitted

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in writing to Angela Chu.

RESOLVED: That (1) the achievements and progress made since the implementation of Merton's Ethnic Minority Housing Strategy, as set out in section 2 of the appendix to the report, are noted; and

(2) any further comments on the proposed timescales and process for developing the new Ethnic Minority Housing Strategy and Action Plan for 2010/13 to be submitted in writing.

7 REVISION OF THE CORPORATE EQUALITY SCHEME (Agenda Item 7)

Maureen Branch-Davis introduced this report, drawing attention to the timescale and urging members of the JCC to participate in the consultation process. The consultation document was available on the Council's website and the MertonConnected website run by the Merton Voluntary Services Council. It was also available in hard copy and on audio tape in all libraries.

The next stage would be to develop an action plan to support the priorities which had been agreed after visiting groups around the borough representing all sections of the community. The feedback received from community groups so far included –

- Section 7, Achievements and improvements since 2006, should also reflect Merton's equality journey including the challenges faced and hindrances to progress.
- Section 9.2, Race Equality - the priorities should include health inequalities.
- Section 9.3, Disability Equality – respondents were keen to see support for businesses and organisations.

Other comments made had suggested some lack of trust in the Council's ability to deliver actions and in particular there was a view that more should be done to tackle race hate crime, which was considered to be underreported.

The action plan would be drafted during the consultation period and would be brought to the JCC in October. After that the draft Scheme and action plan would be submitted to the Overview and Scrutiny Commission for pre-decision scrutiny on 5 November 2009, not 11 October as stated in the report, and finally to Council for adoption on 25 November 2009. It was hoped the document would become live in January 2010.

In reply to a question from Mr N Islam about dialects and language courses Ms Branch-Davis advised that the Council was committed to providing a full and accessible translation service and that it was also a priority to continue to make classes available for those with English as a second language through Merton Adult Education services.

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On other points raised Ms Branch-Davis acknowledged that some groups had not yet been approached but gave an assurance they would be contacted during the consultation period. She agreed also to make reference in the Scheme to the role of Merton Unity Network's as a key partner.

Responding to comments from Mr S U Sheikh Evereth Willis advised that the Council is required by statute to make certain commitments and these were reflected in section 6 of the draft, that the action points would be achievable and reflect the views of the community and that the Scheme would be brought to the JCC for future reviews and suggestions for improvements. She undertook to provide clarification on the percentage of targets achieved in the 2006/09 Action Plan outside the meeting and agreed to ensure that the draft document had been made available as widely as possible.

Summing up, the Chairman asked officers to address points raised about clarity and the use of abbreviations in the report and emphasised the importance of developing action points which are achievable, manageable and capable of showing progress.

It was agreed that an update on employment figures would be included on the agenda for the meeting in October.

RESOLVED: That officers are asked to incorporate the JCC's comments on the draft Equality Scheme.

8 MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES

The Committee agreed that matters arising from the minutes of the previous meeting should be a standing item on the agenda and that there should be a method of monitoring whether actions had been completed.

The Committee received the following information on the issues discussed at its last meeting on 29 April 2009 –

Outcome of the Scrutiny Review on Democratic Engagement and Electoral Services – the report had been considered by Cabinet, an action plan would now be drawn up and reported back to the Corporate Capacity Overview and Scrutiny Panel.

Revision of the Corporate Equality Scheme – most members would have already received a full version of the scheme in other arenas.

Voluntary Sector Funding – Mr Savage informed the meeting that the meeting took place on 13th May and he found it very useful. The outcome of the meeting was that he was supported to bid for funding from the Migration Fund. He also stated that he was happy with the meeting.