

JOINT CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEE WITH ETHNIC MINORITY ORGANISATIONS
19 OCTOBER 2010

7.15 TO 9.15 PM

PRESENT: Councillor Edith Macauley (chair), Councillors Stan Anderson, Logie Lohendran, David Simpson.
Rev H Neale, Mr M S Sheikh, Mr M Rahman, Mr A Savage, Mr Ali, Ms P Anderson, Mr S U Sheikh, Dr P Arumugaraasah.

ALSO PRESENT: Ms E Valentine
Evereth Willis (Diversity and Community Cohesion Manager), Kris Witherington (Consultation & Community Engagement Manager), Keith Richmond (Census Area Manager for Merton and Sutton), Susanne Wicks (Democratic Services Officer).

1 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations were made.

2 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Laxmi Attawar, Councillor Agatha Akyigyina, Mr Hassan, Mr Islam, Mrs Ahmed, Mr Karim, Ms Poku, Ms Moseley and Ms Mintah-Sem.

3 MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 9 JUNE 2010

Mr Rahman stated that he was present at this meeting, but not listed among the attendees.

RESOLVED: That subject to the amendment shown above, the minutes are agreed to be an accurate record of the meeting.

4 MATTERS ARISING

Attendance at JCC meetings: Evereth Willis outlined the actions taken by officers to update the JCC membership and to encourage attendance. She reiterated her previous offer for JCC members to put forward agenda items.

5 CENSUS 2011

Kris Witherington introduced this report. He highlighted the importance of ensuring that as many people as possible participate in the Census, since local authority funding is based on Census data, so Merton will lose out if residents do not complete the Census. Furthermore, the data that emerges from the Census will be used as a basis for serviced planning by the council and other agencies such as health and the Police. Kris Witherington advised that local people are being encouraged to take up the jobs on offer, as their local knowledge will prove invaluable.

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Kris Witherington asked all present to take the key messages relating to the Census back to their groups, and disseminate them among the community, to encourage participation in the Census as much as possible.

Keith Richmond supported the comments made by Kris Witherington. He offered to attend local group meetings and centres in order to assist people who wish to apply for jobs, and also to give information about completing the Census. Keith Richmond assured the Committee that information given by participants remains confidential and is not released to any other party.

Councillor Edith Macauley emphasised the importance of getting as many people as possible to complete the Census, and asked all present for their support in locating and assisting hard to reach groups and those who may be unwilling to complete the questionnaire.

In response to questions, Keith Richmond advised that the questionnaire will be available in English and Welsh, but the online help and advice will be available in a number of languages. He also offered to bring Census staff along to "completion events" for those people who may require additional support. Mr Savage explained that the EMC has offered assistance with interpreters, and Keith Richmond will be attending the AGM of the EMC to discuss this matter in further depth.

Keith Richmond acknowledged that potential employees for the Census may be discouraged by the online training methods. However, he offered to support applications and assist with IT support where required.

In response to a suggestion from Patricia Anderson, Keith Richmond undertook to supply members of the Committee with information on the rate of returns as soon as it becomes available, and in particular to flag up areas of low response.

Keith Richmond left his contact details and encouraged Committee members to contact him if he could provide any assistance to their organisations.

Report received.

6 UPDATE ON RACIAL INCIDENTS APRIL – AUGUST 2010

Chief Inspector Mark Lawrence introduced the report and broke some of the data down into further detail. He advised that the incidents are recorded in the Police IT system as race and religious crime, and noted that is a concern, but that it is often difficult to determine if a crime is motivated by either race or religion. Chief Inspector Lawrence also noted his concern that such crimes are not being reported, and described the importance of the Police working with community groups and local authorities to improve community cohesion.

Chief Inspector Lawrence invited comments and questions from the Committee.

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In response to a question, Chief Inspector Lawrence confirmed that victims of crime are asked if they believe an attack to be based on race or religion, and their view is recorded. However, the two categories are not separated on the Police database. It was requested that a way is found to split the two categories.

Dr Arumugaraasah described his concern that a football tournament organised during Peace Week had been cancelled at a late stage by a senior Police officer. Chief Inspector Lawrence explained concerns over public safety had arisen, following violence that had occurred at an event of a similar nature a while ago, and following a risk assessment, it was deemed necessary to cancel the event.

In response to comments made about the work being done by council officers to develop and further community cohesion in the borough, Evereth Willis outlined actions taken and work being done with partner agencies.

Mr S U Sheikh asked for data on "stop and search" in the borough. Chief Inspector Lawrence offered to supply some statistics to the next meeting of the Committee.

In order to address the concerns of the Committee around the dual reporting issues, Councillor Edith Macauley explained that in the Magistrates Courts, racially and religiously aggravated crimes are treated separately.

Report received.

7 REFRESH OF MERTON'S BAME STRATEGIC PLAN 2010-2013

Patricia Anderson introduced the report. She outlined the consultation process and reminded the Committee that they still had an opportunity to ensure the plan reflects the views and needs of their organisations before consultation closes at the end of October. Patricia Anderson urged the JCC to ensure that they monitor the implementation of the plan once agreed, and to ensure that they look at any major issues causing concern.

Evereth Willis explained that the Plan has been considered by the Merton Partnership and the thematic partnerships will be tasked to deliver the plan, but noted that the Plan can and should be used by all statutory agencies when considering how to deliver services. She noted that the JCC should consider any gaps in the delivery of the plan, particularly where those gaps have already been flagged.

Revd Neale stated that voluntary and community groups also have a role to play in the process, and should offer practical solutions wherever possible.

Dr P Arumugaraasah repeated some of his concerns about the cancelled football tournament and Evereth Willis echoed the comments made by Chief Inspector Lawrence. She also advised that a lesson has been learned and in future, senior Police officers will be involved in events at an early stage.

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Evereth Willis endorsed the work done by all statutory agencies in informing the Plan, and thanked everybody for their input. These comments were echoed by Councillor Edith Macauley.

RESOLVED: That the Joint Consultative Committee with Ethnic Minority Organisations agrees to support the implementation and monitoring of key actions within the Plan.

8 FEEDBACK ON PEACE WEEK 2010

Evereth Willis introduced this report. She thanked all members of the Committee who were involved in the activities that took place during the week, and advised that the focus was put back into the community this year, and will continue to be so as council resources decrease.

Councillor Edith Macauley thanked Evereth Willis and all officers and members of the Committee for their work and participation in Peace Week.

Report received.

9 REPORTS FROM OUTSIDE BODIES

Mr S U Sheikh advised that the Accommodation Steering Group for Adults has not met since the last meeting of the JCC.

Evereth Willis distributed a written report from Jennie Mintah-Sem about the most recent meeting of the Schools Forum.