

“BAME VOICE” is the new independent voice of Merton’s minority ethnic communities.

It’s key aims and objectives are:

- To advocate on behalf of Merton’s BAME communities in their dealings with public sector agencies and other statutory and non-statutory organisations.
- To provide a unified and strategic voice within the Borough ensuring that the BAME communities are actively involved in strategic decision making and that services provided meet the needs of these communities.
- To identify commonalities, but recognise the need to work through the issues a particular community might have.
- Reach out to newly settled minority ethnic communities and assist them in setting up structures and gaining access to services as well as delivering good quality services to their members.
- To promote and encourage mutual cooperation, assistance and the sharing of resources, expertise and information between members.

Formally launched on 4th February, the event attracted over 125 guests. This included a strong contingent from Merton Council led by the Mayor, Leader of the Council, Cabinet members, Councillors, the Chief Executive and heads of department. Statutory agencies, local and neighbouring voluntary/community groups, representing the breadth of Merton’s ethnic diversity attended and put up stalls to promote their services.

Guests were given a traditional African welcome by the pulsating drums of local musicians. This was followed by a resume of the origins and significance of BAME Voice for Merton and Merton Council’s response to its formation.

The Guest Speaker, an international consultant /trainer, specialising in community development and social policy issues, stressed the importance of giving recognition and support to grass roots community groups who make a significant difference to the way in which statutory policies and services are received by BAME communities.

The afternoon was taken up by workshops on a variety of issues of concern to BAME communities. Feedback from these workshops will form the basis of discussions BAME VOICE will be having with various stakeholders and the wider community. The event ended with a cultural show put on by dancers from different ethnic groups in Merton

With a Grant of £40,000 from Merton Council, spread over two years, the key areas of focus over the next two years will be:

- Identifying suitable BAME grass roots residents and providing training where necessary to represent BAME VOICE on various strategic, decision making bodies.
- Marketing culturally appropriate training programmes to the various sectors working with BAME communities e.g Social Services, NHS, Schools, the Police.
- Run workshops/programmes to encourage intercultural communications particularly between the more established BAME communities and the newer incomers to the area.
- Securing additional funding to develop and extend awareness of the heritage of the various BAME communities in Merton as a legacy for future generations.
- To preserve the BAME contribution to Merton's growth and development through the production of written and oral publications/DVD's.
- BAME VOICE to be a visible, contributing presence through joint community action in the disadvantaged areas of the Borough. e.g Community gardening, creation of 'harmony' spaces where people of different ethnicities can meet.

We hope that all BAME organisations, groups and communities will come behind BAME VOICE and make it truly representative of Merton's diverse communities.