

Greenwich BME Forum

Wed 6th June 2013, 11am – 1pm

Clockhouse Community Centre, Defiance Walk, Woolwich, SE18 5QL

Minutes

Present

43 people attended, representing 28 different BME organisations. (Attendee list available from GAVS.) Facilitated by Yasmin Rehman, Greenwich Inclusion Project (GrIP).

1. Welcome

- YR introduced herself and the role of GrIP, as the new strategic equalities and hate crime service in Greenwich.

2. BME Forum Action Plan 2013/14

- Item was initially moved, to come after Item 3; at this point, however, it was agreed that the Action Plan should be looked at in the next meeting, to allow for networking time and to enable people to continue their discussions from item 3.

3. Incident in Woolwich - a community response

- YR attended Greenwich Faith Leaders meeting previous night. A proposal on their agenda was organising a Peace Vigil. This will depend upon a number of factors, such as Local Authority and police permission and also, consideration of potential outside influences such as the EDL.
- YR reminded the Forum of the Hate Crime event taking place Friday 7th June at Royal Sovereign House, being coordinated by GrIP and other partners.

Superintendent Parm Sandhu

- Supt Sandhu stressed the importance of reporting all and any form of hate crime – all intelligence is being investigated. She also emphasised importance of reporting intelligence on planned marches and protests.
- This is a whole-community issue and it is important that different communities get together.
- Important for people to feel safe and secure

Det. Insp Charmaine Laurencin – Metropolitan Police Community Safety Unit

- There have been around 20 hate crime offences in RBG since the Lee Rigby incident, mainly EDL-affiliated. There may be more, unreported. These have been mainly at the lower end of the spectrum – public order and criminal damage
- Police in Greenwich are monitoring every piece of hate crime-related information coming in – it is absolutely vital that people are reporting. If individuals feel uncomfortable speaking to the police, they can speak anonymously to Stop Hate UK.
- There are a number of changes coming in – people arrested on suspicion of hate crime offences will be detained in custody overnight and appear in court the next day. If they are released on bail, there may be conditions attached which could prevent them from being in Greenwich borough until their hearing, therefore providing victim with peace of mind. There is a clear message to hate crime perpetrators – engage in this behaviour and you will be made to face the judicial process.
- It was raised by Stop Hate UK that there are three main reasons people don't feel comfortable reporting to the police – nerves around speaking to the police, fear of reprisal and importantly, the feeling that what they have experienced is too small to bother the police with

- CL explained that if perpetrators do not get reported, they will become increasingly cockier and crimes will escalate. No crime is too small to report. Important intelligence for police as alerts them to people who may also be behaving in an anti-social manner in other areas.

Impact on Greenwich BME Communities

Examples of the experience of Greenwich BME communities include:

- Verbal abuse
- Criminal damage
- Too afraid to leave house
- Missing of appointments for fear of going into Woolwich
- Muslim women considering going out in public without their head scarves so that they can avoid being identified as Muslim
- EDL marching close to their homes and in their communities
- Unwanted attention from media at homes

Points raised:

- Some religions are more accepted than others. Schools have a part to play in challenging this. YR stated that Denise Chaplin from the Local Authority, responsible for the RE component of the curriculum, is working with community groups and faith leaders to ensure that RE education is representative and reflective. She suggested that community representatives may wish to contact Denise Chaplin about becoming a contact for this area of work.
- Negative portrayal of young BME males in media. Fuelled by over-representation of young BME males in criminal justice system - some Forum members raised how lack of positive male role models/father figures may be contributing to this.
- Important not to generalise about communities. If there is going to be any division, it should be between 'good' and 'bad' and not related to factors of religion or ethnicity.
- Police relationship with BME young people – Tottenham, where young person was shot dead for carrying a weapon. Forum member raised that it is possible to disarm without causing a fatality and it is vital that police are mindful. YR explained that all situations need to be considered in context and Supt Sandhu asserted that it has never been the aim of her or any of her colleagues to set out to kill a black man.
- Communities coming together is absolutely fundamental to not only moving forward from this but importantly, staying safe. Dividing will weaken communities and encourage hate crimes.
- YR led on the community response to the 7/7 attacks. Context now, by comparison, is different though. The immigration discussion is now far more heated and controversial. Parties such as UKIP and the BNP and movements like EDL are gathering support and strength. Danger that BNP and UKIP will use Woolwich incident as material in forthcoming election
- There needs to be a focus in the Greenwich community on what unites us, not what divides us. YR mentioned that Faith Leaders meet together in the Multi-Faith Forum to look at this and a Forum member suggested that this should be open to people, not just leaders. YR stated that this was not a GrIP forum and those interested should make contact with Multi-Faith Forum directly.
- We need to be aware of our own behaviours. All religions are precious – and irrespective of faith, all religions teach that you should be a decent and gentle human being. We must be mindful of this and ensure that we set good examples to children and young people, promoting and demonstrating harmonious relations between all faiths groups.
- Gulten Fedayi, Principal Voluntary Sector Advisor at the Local Authority, stated that the Council, the police and voluntary and faith sectors are making a huge effort to demonstrate that any sort of hate crime is completely unacceptable.

Actions to promote cohesion - points raised

- Peace vigil proposed by Multi-Faith Forum a good idea – although it was suggested that this should not just be restricted to faith groups but should be extended to include BME communities as a whole.
- Media – national, local and ethnic media, use to demonstrate cohesion. Naomi Goldberg added that there is clearly a commitment to community cohesion in Greenwich due to the sheer turnout at the Forum. The national press are currently focussing on Woolwich; this attention can be exploited to demonstrate how strong the community is. Peace vigil would be an opportunity to showcase this.
- Faith group leaders are not representative of the Greenwich BME Communities/Faiths
- Importance of men as role models should not be underestimated. Identify BME male role models in the community and connect them with young BME males at grassroots level. Too many BME men in criminal justice system.
- A Forum member witnessed a large scale fight between two sets of young people, around 50 people on each side, a mix of boys and girls. A number of Forum members acknowledged that there is a gap in service provision for young people, at grass roots level.
- Young people will grow up however we bring them up. It takes a whole community to raise a child. Our behaviours and attitudes will impact upon how the children and young people in our communities develop. It is up to us how the children around us are raised. Point raised that we have to work hard in order to earn equality.
- Multi-faith walk, which began in 2004, has been a success in bringing different faiths together, where the walk stops off at 6 different places of worship in Greenwich. Balbir Singh Bakhshi informed the forum that if their community is not represented on the walk to please contact him.
- Using community centres as a means to promote integration – cultural celebrations
- Getting young people directly involved in planning sessions such as this Forum – getting them interested, asking them directly what we can do to promote equality and diversity among young people
- More transparent support structures for organisations working with young people. Can the Council make it easier for groups to find out about available funding, therefore allowing them to become more robust and better support the communities they serve?
- Need to work harder to identify ways of reaching out to the core groups who do not attend these meetings
- Outreach in youth detention centres/prisons, suggested partnership between GrIP and GAVS to coordinate this. Having continual meetings does not do anything, need to be out there on the ground.

Summary from YR

- Overwhelmingly encouraging start
- GrIP as an organisation has been established in order to deal with issues raised today
- YR has had a meeting with the Prime Minister, Mayor of London and Police Commissioner. They have a real interest in what can be done.
- All adults have responsibility for the children in their community. We do not want to parallel the American trend of so many BME young people ending up in the criminal justice system.
- Positive BME role models are needed both male and female – community leaders should become active mentors. Help in schools, help teach young people to read, etc. There are not enough BME Mentors. Also need to look at BME representation in public positions such as magistrates, etc.
- Share information
- Community engagement – need to work hard to bring together as many communities as possible and strive to engage the more difficult to reach, as opposed to having the same communities engaging all the time.
- The media holds potential to demonstrate what a strong community Woolwich is – we need to capitalise on the fact that the National press is focussing on the community.
- Peace vigil – needs to be for everyone, not just faith groups. There is a meeting to discuss further next week – anybody wishing to feed in should contact YR
- Cultural integration events – need to see what is already planned and get involved.
- Youth engagement and youth events, such as the one Isaac Attram is organising on 20th July. Things like this can be used as a tool to deter youth violence.
- Hate Crime event – open to all

- Important to take away positive messages from this meeting – there is a commonality of purpose and commitment.

5. Steering group Elections

- JC outlined role of Steering Group
- Present candidates introduced themselves and provided some background on their relevant experience
- Dorothy Ghanekar was not present. A colleague from HER Centre advised that DK will not be re-standing – KP confirmed she had not heard anything to this effect from DK and would clarify.
- Some discussion over the election and voting process 1. Should numbers be restricted, therefore necessitating a voting process or 2. Would it be better to assess each candidate on individual merit and ratify all those deemed suitable for the Steering Committee, with no upper limit. Second option opted for. It was also agreed that interested persons could put themselves forward for a place on the Steering Committee on an ad-hoc basis throughout the year.
- It was acknowledged that everybody on list had something to bring to the Committee, by way of experience and specialism. Full list was ratified. List of representatives available from GAVS.

6. BME News, Updates and AOB

- GrIP and other partners running Hate Crime sessions Friday 7th June, Royal Sovereign House. Two sessions – 10am-12 and 2pm-4pm.
- Life Changers Awards – numerous categories, recognition of achievement. Email awards@life-changers.org.uk to nominate
- Road to Discovery auditions – discovering talent event for young people – Saturday 15th June. Contact Life Changers Foundation for more information.
- Well London running the Woolwich Dockland Festival on 20th July – carnival, confidence building and community cohesion
- Greenwich Employment Forum Wednesday 19th July
- Recruitment for second round of BME ICT project to commence shortly. Contact Kirsty at GAVS (Kirsty.purnell@gavs.biz) to register interest.

BME Forum dates for diary:

- *BME Forum meeting: Wednesday 11th September 11am-1pm*