

Minutes of Voscur Equalities Network Meeting

At St Werburghs Community Centre

Date: Wednesday 13 October 2009

Attending:

Name	Organisation
Gemma Mountford	Mental Health Matters
Helen Mott	Bristol Fawcett Society
Elinor Harris	Refugee Action
Mary Tibbett	Bristol resident
Celia Arthur	Right Track
Halina Pasiecznik	Vivid Regeneration
Simon Bale	Churches Council for Industry and Social Responsibility (CCISR)
Wendy Stephenson	Voscur
Ruth Pitter	Voscur
Emma Rice	Voscur

Apologies:

Name	Organisation
Jo McDonald	Bristol City Council
Sami Cheung	The Rainbow Project
Sarah-Louise Minter	Bristol LGB Forum

1. Hot Lunch and Networking

Ruth Pitter (RP) welcomed everyone for coming and there was a round of introductions.

RP explained that there had been some changes to the original agenda for this meeting. Jon House, Deputy Chief Executive from Bristol City Council (BCC) was due to attend and speak but has had to give his apologies. She thanked Ian Quaife for stepping in at the last minute to discuss Bristol's Community Cohesion strategy.

Wendy Stephenson (WS) and Ian Quaife (IQ) will talk about the Migration Impact Fund.

2. Ian Quaife, Bristol City Council: Bristol's Community cohesion strategy

Action

- Jon House (JH) is heading the Corporate Strategy Group.
- One of the catalysts for this has been the change in schools around community cohesion, prompted by a Government initiative
- The Government have given fifteen recommendations on how this should be achieved, the first being the forming of a strategy group
- The group will cover citywide issues and will involve the Council working closely with its partners. This is an ambitious move forward
- JH is keen that there be a meeting of stakeholders in the first instance and then perhaps this could be scaled down to a task group. There will be an open meeting – invitations will be sent out in November.
- IQ's team have taken on this piece of work and a graduate has been seconded to work with him around this work.
- Two members of IQ's team will work on the consultation around and it is hoped it will involve as many stakeholders as possible.
- BCC's key priorities on community cohesion are:
 - (a) The establishment of a community cohesion vision and a unified approach to development and delivery
 - (b) To improve cohesion and engagement across the city – the Neighbourhood Partnerships are the Council's main focus of this at the moment.
 - (c) To write a strategy taking into account the successful management of the demographic change across the city – as the city's demographics are always changing and the Council needs to plan around these changes.
 - (d) Successful delivery of community cohesion; such as training and learning within schools and focusing on the demographic make up of teachers, Governors, PTA members. Do these bodies reflect the diversity in the city?
 - (e) Preventing violent extremism agenda. This involves working with not just the Al-Qi-Eida influenced extremism, but about other forms of extremism.

Questions Invited

RP

The demographic change is sometimes more than just one dimensional, for example an increase in the number of some BME communities may bring about an increase in the number of disabled BME people, how will factors like this be considered?

IQ

We need to ensure a more sophisticated approach for example in the Somali community there are mental health issues, issues with older community members issues; we need to make sure all are considered.

Alex Raikes, SARI (Support for Racist Incidents)

There are still prevailing issues, for example Black African-Caribbean children who are underachieving. Although it is essential to support newly arriving communities we also need to keep our finger on the pulse of issues that already exist. It is very important not to mix up 'equalities' and 'cohesion' as these are two very different, very large issues.

IQ

Yes we need to look at all the issues and not just address each community separately. Cohesion is an issue for everyone who is living in Bristol, so we need to make sure everyone is involved in this initiative.

RP

Would the delivery of Community Cohesion training fall under the Migration Impact Fund?

IQ

It could do, but this will be discussed as a later agenda point.

WS

Where does BCC work end and Bristol Partnership (BP) work start? Equalities and community cohesion are two different issues, which are massively linked but very different.

The work that the Council hopes to undertake will produce great outcomes that we all want to see in terms of equalities but this is a major piece of work, and how will this be managed?

At the Voscur 'I'm a Bristolian, Who Are You' Community Cohesion event attendees fed back that there were three things that prevented community cohesion: transport, cash and class. Will this piece of work be built upon? It would be hard to imagine that these barriers have changed since that event.

IQ

There needs to be clarification on who has the responsibility for the strategy, at the moment this appears to be with John House at the Council but this needs to be clarified.

This plan will not happen overnight and this is an opportunity to work around the problems. The Equalities Action Group (EAG) could be a valuable contributor to getting things right.

Halina Pasiiecznik, Vivid Regeneration

I am glad to hear that there will be a written strategy; it is hard to believe

with all the changes that have happened in this city over the last 15 years that we are still getting our heads around an equality strategy. The role of the BP is also confusing.

Could we incorporate the work already undertaken and the good practice by organisations? There's been a lot of innovative work already, such as in Barton Hill for example.

We have been poor at welcoming people to our city in the past and I'm hoping that there is enough intelligence and budgets to make this strategy happen.

We need a better more honest discussion about who lives here and how we live together. Also we need to discuss what community cohesion means to people, it is jargon to some people! We need to better adapt to our changing neighbours.

IQ

It has taken the Institute of Community Cohesion (iCoCo) report for Chief Officers and the Government to get on board with this and we have been slow to respond.

Any lobbying on the part of resources would be very welcome and we will definitely make use of some of the really good work that has been done. Even just understanding the demographics is a big job. It will not be perfect but at least we have some idea of what is going on.

Alex Raikes

We feel that there is a strong need for an EAG to be challenging the Bristol Partnership and to look at reports separate from Community Cohesion, for instance the EAG could equality assess this strategy. The current EAG re-launch group has done a lot of hard work and cannot stress enough how strongly we feel about the value of such a group being in existence.

Helen Mott, Bristol Fawcett Society

There is a 'Community, equalities and diversity' group in my children's school, it is not about overlap, equalities and cohesion feed into each other but do not overlap. The two issues cannot just be put together and expected to work.

IQ

Jon House needs to be informed.

It was agreed that Alex Raikes and other concerned parties would email IQ with their comments on the EAG and he will take this forward to Jon

House.

Simon Bale, CCISR

The EAG is about challenge and action and the Council are talking about writing a plan; these are two different things. We also need to explain the distinction between these two ideas. The EAG shouldn't be put on hold, or being kept waiting; they should be part of the decision-making process.

AR & IQ

RP

I am concerned about how strategic decision-makers are confusing the two issues of Community Cohesion and equalities.

IQ

The task group should work with people to ensure that this does not happen.

WS

Agrees with Simon Bale; we need a two-pronged attack. It would be good to make an approach on behalf of the EAG directly to the BP but also it would be appreciated if IQ would take the message back to BCC.

IQ

The BP does need to change, BCC needs to change, and they both need to mirror the diversity of this city.

RP

Is this a time-limited process? The EAG process is on hold at the moment, will we be kept waiting for the result of the Community Cohesion Strategy?

IQ

The graduate is assigned to this piece of work for three months. We need to have a discussion around the time scale and input into this will be requested at the first meeting. It is my view that the EAG should have a role possibly with Equalities Impact Assessment work.

Simon Bale

We (the EAG planning group) have done so much as individuals but we need resourcing and support from someone else. No one is saying that they are not servicing equalities but they just will not put their money where their mouth is.

IQ

Another issue is the rollout of the NPs and it does feel as though equalities issues have been tacked onto the end. The EAG need a lobbying role to make sure that this is not what happens.

Halina Pasiecznik

A huge amount of work needs to be done as in my NP – hardly anyone has even heard of equalities. We have a whole list of things that work and could be resourced at the same time as writing a strategy. A strategy is important but in the meantime we cannot stop what is already happening and need an immediate action plan to help the existing work.

Wendy Stephenson

Voscur was asked to work with Andrew McGrath (BCC) to draft some Terms of Reference for NPs, but was only given two weeks notice about this piece of work and its deadline. Voscur felt this did not give any time for consultation and the time limit has now been extended. Voscur will be making opportunities for people to feed in soon. We feel optimistic that BCC is open to listening.

RP

Will the equalities agenda get pushed further down the list if the Council feels community cohesion is more of a priority to them?

IQ

In terms of priorities, the NPs are number one as far as the Council are concerned and this agenda will be delivered asap. By-products such as equalities will be considered afterwards.

Alex Raikes

But equalities are linked to the law. Community Cohesion is not. Outside of the EAG planning group nobody is doing anything about equalities.

Simon Bale

We are very aware that things go up to a level and then get lost at the top as NPs seem to become the main priority.

WS

Can there be plenty of notice about the meeting due to happen in November about the Community Cohesion Strategy? Also please try to make sure that there are no other big events happening around the same time.

IQ

Agreed to try to and also to discuss this with Jon House.

Halina Pasiecznik

Strategically, equalities need to be considered by the Bristol Partnership as well as community cohesion.

RP

At the ICoCo Conference, establishing a community cohesion vision was something that was considered important. But the Council need to make it clear that it is not just about Race and Faith. How do you feel you can approach this?

IQ

IQ

There needs to be some work done around just the vision, because if the vision is sorted then the rest will follow.

Alex Raikes

Could the November meeting have an agenda item that discusses what other issues need to be considered for community cohesion, not just Race and Faith?

Wendy Stephenson

Asked for some action planning to be built in.

The group agreed to email Jon House with these ideas and to copy IQ in.

ALL

IQ

Intergenerational issues are important as well. We need to be optimistic about this and see it as an opportunity to get things on the agenda to be discussed at a higher level

3. ESOL Pathways

RP explained that Jane Taylor at BCC had asked for this and the following item (Migration Impact fund) to be put on the agenda as she felt it was an opportunity for people to apply for the Migration Impact Fund. Ian Quaife explained that:

- The way ESOL Training is delivered is being restructured, a key priority is to make the training more localised and so the people who should receive ESOL and other citizenship support are considered
- There is no new money but we need to identify local priorities and offer tendering
- The idea is to allow Local Authorities and their partners much more say in how they deliver ESOL and this will involve (a) assessing need (b) working with partners (c) a new LA Plan. This should happen by December

- A consultation ‘think tank’ session is being held on 22 October 2009. The results of this meeting will be help to decide who is prioritised.

IQ had four questions that people could answer on ESOL provision and these questions will be sent out after this meeting.

The Questions are:

1. How could we use ESOL to help improve local communities in Bristol (e.g. raise attainment; improve community cohesion; improve community safety; enhance employability, etc?)?
2. Are there any priority groups or communities that you feel are not currently engaging or progressing in English language that could benefit from specific focus (e.g. young women or men from a specific minority ethnic community?)
3. How could we improve the links between ESOL and other community activities and services to benefit learners and communities?
4. Any other comments or suggestions about refocusing or improving ESOL services in Bristol?

4. Information about the ‘Migration Impact Fund’

- This money has been centrally collected from migrant communities e.g. by way of Visa payments and has been made available for services provided for migrant communities in the city.
- The BP has been successful in bidding for £700,000; it has to be spent by 20 December 2009. The commissioning process is happening as we speak and is on BCC’s e-procurement system. The deadline for tenders is 13 November 2009.

RP asked if this deadline was set in stone as details of this had been released fairly late; some people are still unaware of it, it required more promotion and enough time to allow people to apply.

WS

Explained that because of this short time-scale there was no expression of interest, instead there was a simple application process, which includes a questionnaire on BCC’s baseline standards. Targets for the project included:

- (a) Getting 10 community champions
- (c) Have 100 migrants involved in informal learning opportunities
- (d) Providing support for public sector organisations training migrants.

BCC is looking for creative and innovative bids to make the process work.

- £400,000 is being offered for support to schools the plan is to employ 12 learning assistants particularly in areas where there has been significant migration.
- Also training for teachers by investing in a school link service. This is not being commissioned in quite the same way as other services.
- The support for schools element is not as far down the line as the other elements of the change in ESOL provision.
- Voscur is running a training session on 3 November 2009 on outcomes and the Migration Impact Fund to help small organisations bid.
- Also at <http://www.voscur.org/resources> there are statistics that may be helpful to those making bids to demonstrate evidence of need.
- Voscur needs to think of a structural way to make sure that there is representation on the assessment Board agreeing who receives funding.

5. Equalities Representation on the Bristol Partnership update

Discussion around an email sent to Wendy Stephenson from Linda Prosser, Director, Bristol Partnership. Simon Bale outlined the history.

- Simon Bale was part of a group of six considering the re-launch of the Equalities Action Group (EAG)
- After the re-formation of the BP the group felt it was necessary to continue the successes of the EAG that had been a sub-group of the previous BP.
- 40 people attended a consultation meeting earlier in the year to discuss the vision and future of the EAG.
- In mid-August the EAG planning group met with Linda Prosser and were keen to go ahead with offered support to continue the work of the group. At this point the group felt positive and optimistic, it felt as though things were now moving forward and a proposal was to be put to the BP as an agenda item. Unfortunately this did not make the last BP Exec meeting due to deadlines.
- An email was received from Linda Prosser over the past week stating that she had been advised to put the proposal on hold due to the establishment of the Community Cohesion strategy group.
- What was thought by the group to be a going concern now feels as though it is an issue that is being put on the back burner for the wrong reasons.
- The two separate issues of community cohesion and equalities are

being confused

- The challenge is what we do, as a group, in response to this situation.

Helen Mott, Bristol Fawcett Society

Suggested a strongly worded public complaint to the BP Executive Board.

Wendy Stephenson

Because it has not been discussed at all by the BP, for PB executive members it would come as a bolt out of the blue. As there has been a working group working on this issue the Executive Board should expect a report.

Helen Mott

The BP Director's email suggests that she has been advised by someone to put this on hold.

Alex Raikes

Could a meeting could be requested with Jon House?

Halina Pasiiecznik

We need to unpick who is making these decisions and who needs to be challenged. When a Partnership has a Chair, any issues should be taken to that Chair. This decision shows a lack of understanding about the role of this group and how important it is. The role needs to be described to the right people, that is the way to go.

WS

The issue of who makes the decisions is one I have been trying to raise. As a member of the BP Executive who made a decision to work with this group, I want to know how it has been overturned outside of the decision making structure.

Alex Raikes

We should make an assertive statement to the Chair, copied in to all BP Exec members.

Helen Mott

The tone and content of the email needs to be considered to convey our surprise and disappointment.

Halina Pasiiecznik

We must think through what the fears are so they can be answered.

The group agreed that a response should be drafted; Simon Bale volunteered to draft and send a response to the group.

SB will send out the draft tonight for Voscur to send out to all present in the next couple of days.

SB

The group will respond with ideas of to whom this should then be sent.

ALL

6. AOB

RP reminded people about Voscur's Annual General Meeting at St Pauls Sports Academy on 21 November 2009, this will have a 9.30am registration.

There was no time to discuss the ESOL document. Voscur will put it on their website, and promote in their ebulletin.

7. CLOSE