



## **Equalities Committee**

12 September 2017

### **Report from the Head of Equality and the Head of Strategy & Partnerships**

For Information

Wards Affected: ALL

### **Progress report on the Council's work with Eastern European communities**

#### **1.0 Background**

- 1.1 Brent is one of the most culturally diverse boroughs in London and the UK. Our long history of cultural diversity is one of our greatest strengths — an asset valued by those who live and work here. People from Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) backgrounds now make up 66 per cent of the total population. We continue to welcome new communities today, such as the growing Eastern European, Latin American and Filipino populations. We are proud of our historic ability to welcome different cultures, support their integration and create a context in which people from different backgrounds and cultures feel they get on well together. The cultural diversity of the borough and the cohesion between its different communities are major strengths and assets of Brent.
- 1.2 Eastern Europeans are the largest emerging community in Brent, with Polish and Romanian residents being the two biggest community groups. There is a high concentration of Eastern European residents living in Neasden, Harlesden and Wembley.

- 1.3 In September 2016 Brent Council established a Task and Finish working group to look at the socio-economic barriers and challenges experienced by Eastern European communities living in Brent. In November 2016 the Council held a round table discussion, with 15 external organisations, partners and community groups working with local Eastern European Communities being invited.
- 1.4 Based on the available data and shared information, the group agreed five draft recommendations that were subsequently endorsed by the Equalities Committee with one addition in recommendation 3 (schools):
1. Hold a round table discussion with organisations working with Eastern European communities. **(Completed)**
  2. In partnership with Volunteering Brent, community and voluntary sector and other local organisations, to provide support and training to capacity-build the voluntary organisations/charities working with local Eastern European communities. Additionally, to support the recruitment and training of Brent staff and other volunteers. **(Ongoing)**
  3. In partnership with organisations working with Eastern European communities, to hold at least two local drop-in sessions in local churches, cafes, schools and community hubs, across a wide range of themes including: residence rights, employment rights, employability, personal and social skills, housing, health and wellbeing (e.g. drugs and alcohol, smoking cessation, mental health). **(Autumn 2017)**
  4. Hold an Open Door event for Eastern European communities to provide information on relevant Council services and services provided by local organisations. **(Completed)**
  5. Working with Advice4Renters to offer tailored information, advice and assistance for Eastern European residents. Also, to design and translate into the main Eastern European languages a leaflet to be used by Advice4Renters when engaging with the target communities. **(Completed)**
- 1.5 There was one recommendation on carrying out an additional ethnographic research to inform the outreach work and the other work streams of the working

group, if required. After consulting with Eastern European organisations, it was agreed that there is sufficient information to commence with the outreach work and the implementation of the rest of the recommendations.

## **2.0 Recommendation**

2.1 The Equalities Committee is asked to note the progress update and next steps on the Council's outreach work with local Eastern European communities.

### 3.0 Detail

**Recommendation 1:** Hold a round table discussion with organisations working with Eastern European communities **(Completed)**

3.1 Since the first round table meeting at which 15 organisations and local groups were invited, an informal Eastern European network has been established and has been / is involved in delivering the rest of the recommendations.

3.2 During the Council's engagement and outreach work over the past four months, additional 13 organisations, community and volunteer groups have been identified and added to the Eastern European network distribution list. There are already some very positive examples of joint working between network members.

3.3 The Council will continue to meet with the expanded Eastern European network on a regular basis with the aim to develop a sustainable and self-sufficient social infrastructure for local Eastern European residents.

3.4 All 28 organisations and groups have expressed an interest in engaging with Brent Council on an ongoing basis and have identified capacity-building, particularly around governance and access to available training and funding, as one of their main needs.

**Recommendation 2:** In partnership with Volunteering Brent, community and voluntary sector and other local organisations, to provide support and training to capacity-build the voluntary organisations/charities working with local Eastern European communities **(Ongoing)**

3.5 As part of the work of the established and expanding Eastern European network, the Council is carrying out a service mapping exercise to identify the type of services and facilities available to Eastern European residents.

3.6 The initial findings show that there is a range of support and services provided to one or more of the local Eastern European communities (see below). It should be noted, however, that not all organisations and services are based in Brent.

- Poverty and destitution:
  - welfare and housing information
  - advice and advocacy
  
- Immigration advice
  - temporary and permanent residence
  - citizenship applications
  - rights of EU citizens
  - refugee advice
  
- Employment rights
  - education and youth
  - work and retirement
  - bullying at work
  
- Children services and single parents support
  - language support
  - benefits advice
  - single parents support and childcare
  - domestic violence
  - social isolation
  - child abuse
  
- Health related advice and information
  - support, advice, guidance on sexual health matters
  - tackling health inequalities
  - mental health awareness
  
- Tackling loneliness and social isolation
  
- Education, cultural exchange and folklore (e.g. dance workshops, social dancing).

3.7 Members of the Eastern European network are either supporting one particular nationality or have a broader remit working with a number of different communities. A few of them are also working with communities outside of Eastern Europe (Greek, Cypriot, Italian).

- 3.8 Less than 25% of the Eastern European network members are registered charities and the others vary in size, funding and resources available to sustain and offer their services to a wider audience. This means that the networks' needs and capacity vary considerably.
- 3.9 All organisations have expressed an interest to participate in the capacity building programme designed specifically to support and assist these groups.
- 3.10 Organisations will be invited to complete a health-check audit covering governance, funding, charity registration, networking, project delivery etc. The results will help shape the bespoke capacity building training. The audit is due to be completed by the end of September 2017.
- 3.11 CVS Brent will deliver the capacity building training across a variety of areas which will be held at central and local venues.
- 3.12 Organisations will also be invited to the Voluntary Sector Forum meetings held each quarter.

**Recommendation 3:** In partnership with organisations working with Eastern European communities, to hold at least two drop-in sessions in local churches, cafes, schools and community hubs **(Autumn 2017)**

- 3.13 The drop-in sessions will be held in the autumn, with the support of the Eastern European network and other local partners. This will further embed the partnership built through the network and utilise the skills, knowledge and experience of the organisations. It will also widen our reach when establishing engagement and relationship with communities.
- 3.14 At the Eastern European Fair (see Recommendation 4) we carried out an anonymised mini survey to help inform our drop-in sessions and tailor our approach as required. Respondents' feedback indicated that they would welcome information

on ESOL classes, permanent residence and citizenship, voting and elections, welfare support, employment opportunities and training, health services. One of the drop-in sessions will be specifically targeted at the Gypsy and Roma communities living locally.

3.15 The planning of the drop-in sessions has commenced and an update will be provided at the next Equalities Committee meeting.

**Recommendation 4:** Hold an Open Door event for Eastern European communities to provide information on relevant Council services and services provided by local organisations **(Completed)**

3.16 Brent's first Eastern European fair was held on 17 June 2017 at Sudbury Primary School and was co-hosted by Cllr McLennan, Chair of the Equalities Committee and Cllr Davidson, Deputy Chair of the Equalities Committee. The free event included cultural entertainment, a traditional food market, advice and information stalls and workshops on different topics (housing, employability, family support, arts and crafts), and children's and families activities.

3.17 More than 600 guests attended the event, the significant majority of whom were from the Romanian, Bulgarian, Polish, Albanian and Hungarian local communities. The Mayor of Brent, Cllr Bhagwanji Chohan, the Leader of Brent Council, Cllr Muhammed Butt and a number of other Councillors joined Brent's celebration of the positive contributions and success stories of Eastern European communities living in Brent.

3.18 Barry Gardiner MP and representatives of nine Eastern European embassies including the Romanian Ambassador were also in attendance. All officials confirmed their willingness to be involved in future events and initiatives for Eastern European communities.

3.19 The event was supported by members of the Eastern European network, Eastern European businesses and nine community volunteers (eight from the Romanian community).

**Recommendation 5:** Working with Advice4Renters to offer tailored information, advice and assistance for Eastern European residents **(Completed)**

3.20 Advice4Renters already have an established working relationship with the Council and receive funding to deliver housing advice and information services to local residents, including newly emerging communities.

3.21 A series of information and discussion workshops lasting approximately 1.5 hours are being offered called 'Just Renting' covering tenancy types, disrepair, rent, tenancy rights. Sessions will be run both daytime and evening in venues across the borough to ensure as wide attendance as possible. Organisations are also able to request and host a session for local residents. All sessions are facilitated by Advice4Renters.

3.22 The Council supported Advice4Renters with the design and translation of a tenants' rights information leaflet in five Eastern European languages to help them to engage more effectively with Eastern European residents.

3.23 The Private Sector Licensing team have also developed a more tailored approach to engaging with these communities and are now working more closely with Advice4Renters. Both organisations were present at the Eastern European Fair.

### **Summary of key findings and lessons learnt**

3.24 In December 2016 and February 2017, the Equalities Committee received two reports on the findings of the Task and Finish Group on Eastern European

Communities, and on the Impact from Brexit on EU residents. This report is focusing on work carried out since then.

3.25 The below findings are based on the information provided by network members and internal stakeholders, as well as quantitative and qualitative analysis of residents' feedback received at the Eastern European Fair (11% response rate).

#### Engagement with the organisations, groups and volunteers

3.26 At the meetings with the organisations, groups and volunteers supporting the Eastern European communities the following issues experienced by their clients were identified:

- Uncertainty about the immigration status of their service users
- Barriers accessing information or lack of information in Eastern European languages around nationality and citizenship, voting rights and registration, the UK voting system in general, benefits system and access to welfare support
- Difficulties accessing available training due to the lack of tutors teaching in the Eastern European languages
- Lack of a single point of contact at Brent Council that would facilitate easier communication between the local authority and the Eastern European communities
- Lack of regular events promoting certain services popular among the Eastern European communities, e.g. Employment, Nationality and Citizenship, Health Services
- Lack of available community area where they can socialise, exchange information about services available, and organise community events
- Gypsy and Roma communities present very specific needs and face distinctive access barriers so they require a tailored approach to address these.

3.27 Other engagement initiatives that the Equality and Policy & Partnerships teams were involved in:

- On 31 March Council officers took part in a conference organised by Law Centres UK on Access to services for EU citizens: barriers, opportunities and good practice. Brent also delivered a presentation on housing and EU citizens
- On 7 April and 6 June officers contributed to the Private Sector Licensing research on the effects of licensing on tenants and minority communities
- On 19 April officers were invited to attend Mayor's meeting with the Romanian Ambassador, the Head of Consular Services and Romanian Women in UK
- Officers have also shared good practice examples with the Greater London Authority, London Councils and the London Equalities Network

- On 19 July the Chief Executive of Brent Council was invited to participate in an expert panel discussion on EU nationals living in London and share good practice examples of the Council's outreach work.

### Key findings from feedback received at the Eastern European Fair (11% response rate)

3.28 The demographic, diversity and socio-economic profile of residents who responded to our anonymised mini survey was broadly in line with the information we hold for our Eastern European communities.

- In terms of their nationality, Polish, Romanian, Bulgarian, Albanian and Hungarian groups represented the significant majority of respondents, and the majority of them had lived in Brent for more than 5 years
- 60% of respondents were women
- Three quarters (75%) of respondents were working age adults. The majority of them were working full / part time (55%), 10% were students, just below 3% were unemployed but looking for work and further 3% were unemployed and unable to work
- 48% held a degree (Bachelor's, Master's or PhD), 21% have done college / vocational training, 12% had high school education and 10% were educated to secondary school level
- 75% were Christian (62% Orthodox and 13% Catholic), followed by 7.3% with no religious beliefs and 2.9% were Muslim
- 61% of respondents did not have dependent children aged 18 or under, while a quarter of them (26%) had
- 79% of respondents said that they did not look after dependent adults (i.e. did not have caring responsibilities)
- 35% of respondents were single, 30% were married and 7% were living with a partner
- 65% of respondents were renting a property (44% in a single occupancy and 21% in a shared occupancy) and 15% were owners or shared owners; 1% lived in social housing and 0% identified themselves as homeless
- 29% of residents had a permanent residence, 20% were naturalised (British Citizens) and 22% identified as temporary residents / qualified persons. 13% did not answer this question
- 63% of respondents said that they would like to remain in the UK, 13% were likely to leave the UK and 12% were not sure
- When asked if they have experienced unfair treatment on the grounds of their nationality or ethnicity, the great majority answered No (80%), 11% were not sure and 7% answered Yes.

### Access to services

3.29 When asked which Brent services respondents had accessed, the top six answers were:

- None (22%)
- Schools (16%)
- Libraries (10%)
- Employment and Training (9%)
- Housing (4%)
- Births, Marriages or Deaths (3%)

3.30 When asked what services and support they would like to have access to, the most desirable services were ESOL, permanent residence, citizenship and voting advice, and employment support.

3.31 Of respondents who answered the question related to health services, 37% were registered with a GP, 24% had visited a walk-in centre or had used Ambulance or Emergency services in the past year. 10% had not registered with a GP yet.

## **Next Steps**

- 3.32 The targeted outreach work and engagement initiatives carried to date provided the Council with a better understanding of the challenges experienced by Eastern European residents and the organisations, groups and volunteers supporting them.
- 3.33 The proactive engagement enabled the Council to set up a network of partners via which they can receive and share useful information, identify and realise synergies of joint working. Members will also be able to access a range of capacity building opportunities and apply for grants, with the aim of developing a resourceful and sustainable social infrastructure for Eastern European residents.
- 3.34 Last but not least, the Council has started building trust and an ongoing relationship with the Eastern European communities living in Brent thanks to its engagement initiatives. In order to further develop and maintain this relationship of trust, the Council will have to continue investing time and resources in the work with Eastern European communities. Brent will be submitting a bid for available funding through the Department of Communities and Local Government (DCLG) and will also be exploring opportunities for joint working with other Local Authorities and partners.

## **4.0 Financial implications**

- 4.1 The Task & Finish working group had access to a small pot of money from the Brent Partnerships and Engagement budget to support projects, services and initiatives targeted at emerging communities living in Brent based upon evidenced need. This has been instrumental in delivering the recommendations identified by the working group, along with sponsorship such as free water bottles and cakes for attendees provided by local Eastern European business and groups. Thanks to Eastern European network members, the Council sourced nine volunteers to support officers at the Eastern European Fair.
- 4.2 There will be minor costs associated with the delivery of the drop-in sessions and the regular network meetings but these will be absorbed within the current budget.

However, the ongoing work with Eastern European groups and other emerging communities such as Latin American residents will require an ongoing financial commitment by the Council. It is therefore looking to utilise and tap into available funding opportunities to continue to build on and enhance the good work done so far.

## **5.0 Legal Implications**

5.1 There are no direct legal implications arising from this progress report at this stage.

## **6.0 Equality Implications**

6.1 The aim of the project is to engage and support the new and emerging communities in Brent. In delivering the actions as per the recommendations of the Task and Finish working group, consideration has been given to the needs of disabled residents, people whose first language is not English, parents with children and carers, older residents and young people. Equality considerations and diversity profiling will continue to be monitored as part of the delivery of this project.

## **7.0 Staffing/Accommodation Implications (if appropriate)**

7.1 There are no staffing and accommodation implications other than those highlighted in the main body of the report.

## **Background Papers**

None.

## **Contact Officers**

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