

**FULL COUNCIL
15th September 2003**

**REPORT FROM THE DIRECTOR OF COMMUNICATIONS AND
CONSULTATION**

BLACK AND MINORITY ETHNIC SERVICE USER CONSULTATIVE FORUM

1 SUMMARY

- 1.1 This report requests Members to agree an amendment to the Council's Constitution in order to incorporate a new Service User Consultative Forum, the Brent Black and Minority Ethnic Service User Consultative Forum.

2 RECOMMENDATIONS

Members are recommended to:

- 2.1 Agree the establishment of the Black and Minority Ethnic Service User Consultative Forum as a Brent Service User Consultative Forum.
- 2.2 Agree the terms of reference of the Brent Black and Minority Ethnic Service User Consultative Forum in Appendix 1 for inclusion in Article 10 of the Council's Constitution.
- 2.3 Appoint Councillor Izaharul Halder as Forum Chair.
- 2.4 Agree that an allowance be paid to the Forum Chair at the same rate as the allowance paid to the Chairs of the other Forums, namely £4,340 for a full year, and that the Council's Member's Allowances Scheme set out in the Constitution be amended accordingly.
- 2.5 Appoint an additional Labour Councillor and an additional Conservative Councillor.

3 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 3.1 Under the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000, the Council has a general duty and specific duties. The general duty is that in carrying out its functions the Council must have due regard to the need to:

- Eliminate unlawful racial discrimination;
 - Promote equality of opportunity;
 - Promote good relations between people of different racial groups.
- 3.2 The specific duties imposed under the Act include a duty to produce a Race Equality Scheme, which states the Council's arrangements for:
- assessing and consulting on the likely impact of its proposed policies on the promotion of race equality;
 - monitoring its policies for any adverse impact on the promotion of race equality;
 - publishing the results of the assessments and consultation.
- 3.3 The Council's recently published Race Equality Scheme 2003/2004 states that a forum specifically to cover black and minority ethnic views is to be established to improve the representation of the views of these groups to the Council. The establishment of the BME Forum as proposed in this report will fulfill that commitment.

4 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 Current estimates for supporting service user forums, including staffing costs, (but excluding costs associated with members allowances and support from Legal and Democratic Services), are approximately £20k per forum per year. This amount covers costs associated with running eight meetings per year - four substantive meetings plus four additional planning or steering group meetings.
- 4.2 Costs associated with recruiting and running steering group meetings to date have been met from the Consultation Team budget.
- 4.3 Funding for the forum launch and meetings for the rest of the financial year will be found from the Diversity Team budget.
- 4.4 For the financial year 2003/04 the part year costs of the additional allowance for the Forum Chair will be met from within the Communications and Consultation budget.
- 4.5 For the financial year 2004/05 onwards growth bids have been made as part of the current budget round for the costs of supporting the forum and the additional Member allowance. In the event the growth bids are unsuccessful the costs will need to be found from the Human Resources and the Communications and Consultation budgets respectively.

5 STAFFING IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 The establishment of a BME forum will increase the number of existing Service User Consultative Forums to eight. Support for this additional forum will be met from existing resources in the Consultation, Diversity and Democratic Services teams.
- 5.2 The Diversity Team will provide a forum Lead Manager and overall strategic direction. The Consultation Team will assist with forum event management and provide technical support for initiatives undertaken with this Service User Consultative Forum.
- 5.3 Democratic Services will attend forum meetings and provide a minute of proceedings.

6 BACKGROUND

- 6.1 The Race Relations Act imposes a wide general duty on the Council to make the promotion of racial equality central to the work of public authorities. Brent Council has a major role in actively promoting equality of opportunity, good race relations and the prevention of unlawful discrimination in the areas of service delivery and employment.
- 6.2 Effective consultation is a recurring factor in this process. Under the Act, the Council has specific duties around consulting on, and monitoring the effectiveness of policies and their effects on race equality, as well as publishing the results of consultation.
- 6.3 Brent Council has an established system of consultation mechanisms. This includes five Area Consultative Forums, seven Service User Consultative Forums and a Brent Citizens' Panel of some 2,000+ local residents.
- 6.4 Issues of particular interest or concern to members of Black and Minority Ethnic communities have traditionally been mainstreamed into these mechanisms. Despite this, there is some evidence of disengagement from the consultation process by members of these communities.
- 6.5 Ethnicity of people attending area consultative forums has not been routinely monitored. However, the Area Forum satisfaction survey conducted in July 2001 indicated that a majority of attendees were white, (70%). The satisfaction survey will be repeated in 2004. Empirical observation of forum audiences still bears out the conclusion that a majority of attendees come from the white community, although there may have been an improvement from the 70% figure.

- 6.6 Recent evidence gathered from three workshop sessions, 'Consulting with Black and Minority Ethnic Residents in Brent – January 2003', suggests that reasons for not attending forums included amongst others, 'exclusivity and formality of proceedings'.
- 6.7 Brent Citizens' Panel is managed on behalf of the Council by Market Opinion Research International, (MORI). MORI have advised the Council that all panels tend to suffer from an 'attrition factor'. This is an early falling off of interest from panel members who have previously given some commitment to take part in panel research. Evaluation by MORI of the Brent panel undertaken since the beginning of the year shows that attrition is most marked amongst members of the black and minority ethnic communities and young people.
- 6.8 The establishment of a service user forum to consult with members of Brent's black and minority ethnic communities is not intended to provide a complete solution to the problems associated with low levels of engagement, but is an additional mechanism in Brent Council's range of opportunities for consultation with local communities.

7 ESTABLISHMENT OF A BME FORUM

- 7.1 An interim steering group was recruited from existing Area Forum, Service User Forum and Local Strategic Partnership contacts and set up by the Consultation Team earlier in the year. The interim steering group has met twice: 12th June 2003 and 14th July 2003 respectively.
- 7.2 Councillor Izaharul Halder has been identified as the Chair designate for the BME Forum. It is proposed that as this forum has the same status as the other Service User Forums set out in the Constitution, the Chair should be paid an equivalent allowance of £4,340 per year.
- 7.3 The interim steering group has had some preliminary discussion on structure and role of the forum and has been consulted on draft terms of reference for the forum. The draft terms of reference are attached at appendix 1.
- 7.4 The forum will be formally launched at an event during Black History Month in October 2003.

Toni McConville
Director of Communications and Consultation

For information about the BME Service User Consultative Forum, contact Owen Thomson, Head of Consultation – Tel: 020 8937 1055

Appendix 1

BME User Consultative Forum

Draft Terms of Reference

- To raise and/or respond to issues and concerns, and make representations and recommendations to the Executive and relevant Council Committees concerning the needs of black and ethnic minority communities.
- To provide a vehicle for effective BME communities input into Council policy development and to promote more active working partnership between the Council and the BME voluntary and community sector.
- To present suggestions to the Council as to how services and programmes can be developed or changed to meet the needs and aspirations of black and ethnic minority communities.
- To promote community cohesion by promoting the development of strong and positive relationships between our diverse communities.
- To consider and participate in arrangements for public participation regarding Council services and policies which directly or indirectly affect BME communities e.g. the Council's Race Equality Scheme, the Community Plan and relevant Best Value service reviews.
- To encourage and identify opportunities for the Council to work in partnership with other agencies and voluntary groups on issues relating to BME communities.