

Title: The relationship between the BME Community and Voluntary Sector and the Council.

What are the main issues? *what is the policy background?, how does it link to the councils corporate priorities?*

Officers have had feedback from members of the Steering Group of the Black and Minority Ethnic Consultation User Forum that they would like to explore the relationship between the third sector in Brent and the Council.

It is the intention of the Steering Group and chair, Cllr Daniel Bessong that the Forum will meet to discuss this topic at a public meeting in February 2007, but members of the Steering Group would also welcome a review by elected Members.

Why are we looking at this area? Have there been recent legislation/policy changes? Are there any performance or budgetary issues?

A piece of consultation undertaken by the council's Consultation Team in October 2002 entitled "Consulting with Black and Minority Ethnic Residents" highlighted the need for the council to invest more in developing local BME voluntary and community groups.

The report which was published in January 2003 was based on three workshops held with representatives from the local BME community, entitled "Listening to the Community". Feedback from these workshops envisaged an important role for the voluntary sector in improving communications with the council, and cited a lack of support and inadequate funding as being problematic, and preventing better relations.

Among the recommendations, the reported cited more council support for community led developments and the development of a directory of BME voluntary and community organisations in the borough.

A further piece of consultation undertaken by the council's Voluntary Sector Team also highlighted the persistent difficulties in the relationship between the council and the voluntary sector and with the grants process itself. The report, "From Patronage to Partnership, building a new relationship with the voluntary and community sector" published in July 2003, invited comments on funding arrangements and suggested that the council was keen to modernise its relationship with the voluntary and community sector improving the effectiveness of partnership working.

What should the review cover? Give brief outline of what members could focus on, which partners to engage with, how residents/public can be involved.

The review should focus on obtaining feedback from key local voluntary and community groups (including those who took part in both original

consultations with the council) which provide both formal and informal services to members of the Black and Minority Community to gauge whether the relationship between the council and voluntary and community groups has indeed improved since 2003 (Members could also usefully review the feedback from the minority ethnic community from the BME Consultation Forum to be held in February 2007).

Any review should also include an examination of the council's main grants programme to ensure that BME voluntary and community groups are receiving their "fair share" of council resources (a recommendation which came out of the July 2003 report by the Voluntary Sector Team).

Finally, the review should also look at how well local BME voluntary and community groups are represented on the council's partnership groups, to ensure that groups representing the BME community locally have in fact access to strategic statutory functions i.e. the council, PCT etc.

What could the review achieve? - influence policy change?, improvement to service delivery?, budget savings?, develop partnerships?.

The review would demonstrate that the council values the contribution made by the BME third sector in Brent. By engaging with and listening to the views of these community groups the council is signalling it's commitment make sure that there are better relations between the two sectors.

The review could also lead to the setting up of a directory of BME voluntary and community groups, as recommended by officers in their report "Consulting Black and Minority Ethnic Residents" in January 2003.

The review could check whether BME voluntary and community groups are indeed receiving their share of funding, thereby ensuring that certain groups are not being indirectly discriminated against.

And, finally, the review could lead to better representation on partnership working groups thereby helping to transform the relationship the council has with this sector, into one which is more mature and equitable.