



Response to the West Sussex County Council Equality Scheme

August 2010

BME Community Services' comment on the West Sussex County Council Equality Scheme, "*Treating People as Individuals*" and Action Plan

BME Community Services welcomes the opportunity to comment on the **West Sussex County Council Equality Scheme** and **Action Plan**.

BME Community Services (BMECS) is a registered charitable company, established in 2006 to address the gaps and needs in services for individuals, families and groups from the Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) communities, including refugees and asylum seekers in West Sussex.

Our mission is to be a "Support service for BAME groups, individuals and families; encouraging integration, community cohesion, reducing social exclusion and tackling inequalities in West Sussex and beyond."

Amongst our main aims include:

- Promote equality of opportunity and celebrate the value of the diverse communities in our area.
- Promote fair access to opportunities and services that responds to BAME communities needs in West Sussex.

BMECS is committed to equality and diversity which is in the heart of its values, work etc. BMECS will continue to promote equality of opportunity and good race relations between persons of different racial groups, eliminate unlawful discrimination and to provide culturally sensitive services that meet the needs of the diverse communities of West Sussex. BMECS will continue to represent the issues of the West Sussex BAME Communities with the following in mind.

- **Promoting accessibility**

BMECS will continue to increase BAME communities' ability to access support services and ensure through second tier organisations that services are culturally accessible.

- **Valuing cultural diversity**

BMECS will continue to raise awareness of BAME culture amongst the public and voluntary and community sector partners. It will support community representatives to advocate on behalf of their community so that policy development and decision making takes account of the distinctive needs of this community.

- **Promoting participation**

BMECS will continue to encourage participation and engagement of BAME communities in local decision-making.

- **Promoting equality of opportunity**

BMECS will continue to promote equality for all and advocate for BAME communities to be treated fairly with dignity and respect and be given equal opportunity to improve the quality of their lives.

- **Promoting inclusive communities**

BMECS will continue to increase awareness of BAME cultures, building understanding between BAME and mainstream communities.

- **Reducing disadvantage and exclusion**

BMECS will continue to develop and deliver programmes and models as tools to enable local partners to identify and tackle exclusion.

- **Promoting better community cohesion and integration**

BMECS will continue to work with communities and partners to ensure BAME communities are active and well integrated into mainstream society.

- **Promoting good practice**

BMECS will continue to encourage public and voluntary sector partners to show commitment to equality and diversity by adopting and implementing models of good practices that are implemented successfully.

- **Promoting better partnership working**

BMECS will continue to encourage and support partnerships initiatives that have positive impact on the wellbeing of BAME communities

BMECS is reassured that the West Sussex County Council (WSSCC) has taken steps to fulfil its statutory duties under current equality legislation including the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000. We welcome the West Sussex County Council Equality Scheme as it outlines how the County Council intends to meet its commitment to treating people as individuals.

BMECS recognises that that the scheme outlines important points relevant to WSSCC working towards meeting its statutory duties and providing better services. These include:

- The commitment to treat people as individuals
- The purpose of the scheme
- How it meets its legal requirements
- Its strategic objectives
- The County Council's values
- How it assess future policies and services
- Reviewing existing policies
- Monitoring the effect of the County Council's policies
- The County Council as an employer of choice
- The County Council recognition of the importance of training and developing its staff
- Meeting customer needs

With respect, BMECS believe that for the Equality Scheme to be comprehensive, the scheme needs to read like an equality document, which does not appear to do that at the moment. We believe that:

- The WSSCC Equality Scheme needs to outline the County Council's commitment to equality and diversity which will make the document simpler and straightforward.
- The Equality Scheme needs to highlight the equality intent and priorities of the County Council
- The County Council should make its commitment to equality and diversity rather than to "*treating people as individuals.*" This will ensure that equality areas, particularly race, are overlooked
- Such commitment could just be highlighted as an explanation of the method of the County Council in meeting its equality requirement

Additionally, the County Council's Equality Scheme needs to recognise and highlight that there is clear evidence that Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic (BAME) communities are among the communities that suffer disadvantage (see page 3 of the scheme) mostly because of racial discrimination. This is to ensure that such disadvantage is recognised and not overlooked.

It is common knowledge that BAME communities suffer disadvantage in all aspects of life. Even as the economy is getting deeper into recession BAME communities are the first to be hit hardest in losing their employment; particularly, the Bangladeshi, Pakistani and Black African & Caribbean communities, as indicated in the report, "*Monitoring update on the impact of the recession on various demographic groups*", by the Equality & Human Rights Commission. The report shows that even before the recession these communities were still disadvantaged.

We believe that the Equality Scheme should clearly indicate the County Council commitment to meeting its statutory requirements as under the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000:

- Eliminate racial discrimination
- Promote equal opportunity for the population of West Sussex
- Promoting good race relations between persons of different racial group.

And also to make race equality an everyday part of the way West Sussex County Council:

- Conducts its operations;
- Challenges institutional racism and discrimination in its services;
- makes decisions;
- Delivers its services;
- Employs and develops its staff;
- Develops and implements its policy-making;
- Plans its business;
- Communicates with West Sussex communities
- Commissions work; and
- Reviews its work, processes and practices.

BMECS believes that it is also important that the scheme includes the following as they are relevant to achieving racial equality:

- How it monitor its services and employment – all collected information tells a story
- How it impact assesses its policies
- The compilation of data against local population profiles to identify any differences as well as assisting services to understand any differences between the populations spread e.g. barriers to entry etc.
- The provision of mandatory diversity and equality training to develop cultural competencies for all staff to ensure that it commissions and provides services which are culturally competent and religiously sensitive. Additional courses such as Cultural Awareness for frontline teams are crucial.

Additionally, we believe that WSSCC needs to clearly highlight its functions to include the following as they could all have an impact on BAME Communities:

- Commission, procure and monitor services;
- Improve health and reduce health inequalities;
- Promote equality of opportunity;
- Consult with and involve communities, the public and staff;
- Allocate resources;
- Monitor and review standards and performance;
- Identify the needs of the population and respond to them efficiently; and
- Work in partnership to ensure a coherent approach to planning and community engagement

In addition to the progress made so far, WSSCC needs to clearly indicate the resources it has made available to comply with its statutory duties. These should include, for instance:

- The provision of appropriate Language Support Services within WSSCC or through various contracts with language service providers.
- An update of support provided to BAME communities to improve their quality of life

WSSCC should also make clear its equality intention to include:

- How it becomes an employer of choice in respect of best employment practices and promoting similar standards amongst other partner agencies and service providers
- How it engages BAME, faith-based organisations, groups, users and staff and how it involves them in the decision making process and delivering the equality agenda together

It is important that WSSCC takes into consideration how policies, programmes and services affect BAME communities. It is important to keep race equality distinct in the Equality Scheme, given the disproportionate negative impact that some policies, programmes and services have on BAME communities.

We understand the Equality Scheme to be a strategic document. Yet, it should clearly indicate its purpose to make it simpler and easy to understand by everyone.

As for the Equality Action Plans, we believe it is not comprehensive enough. As an equality document it should show each equality strand separately and indicate what is done or being done to meet the legal requirements.

This is transparency in action and we all understand what is being achieved. It gives everyone the opportunity to comment, to suggest, to contribute, etc.

To conclude, we are reassured that WSSCC has taken the necessary steps to meet its statutory requirements. However, we believe that:

- The scheme did not show enough commitment to equality and diversity and this needs to be clearly highlighted
- The scheme needs to read like an equality document, although we recognise the strategic context and the innovative aspect of the document
- The scheme needs to be simple in the way we are all capable of understand it.
- The document should talk equality to the reader and show WSSCC's commitment to embracing the cultural diversity of the community.
- The scheme should clearly show how WSSCC intends to eliminate discrimination, promote equality and good race relation
- The scheme needs to clearly show that equality impact assessment will be used to assess any positive or diverse impact of policies.

Key 3 areas we would like the West Sussex County Council to focus on going forward

- Resource allocation - WSSCC needs to address inequalities in BAME organisations accessing resources, primarily funding. Equal access to funding is vital for achieving equality in West Sussex
- Equal partners – BAME organisations needs to be treated as equal partners in all aspects and at all time.

We thank West Sussex County Council for giving us the opportunity to comment on the Equality Scheme. BMECS will continue to play a role in working with West Sussex County Council to ensure that any commitment to achieving race equality in West Sussex is not lost.

Ali Abdoul Wahidi Abdoul

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