



# **Stratford-on-Avon Equality and Diversity Workshop**

**21<sup>st</sup> May 2009**

## **Workshop Report Methodist Church, Stratford-on-Avon**

## **PREFACE**

This report will enable those who were not able to attend the workshop event to get an opportunity to understand some of the issues raised from the day.

The event was a unique opportunity to engage with communities across Stratford-on-Avon. It was also to identify meaningful ways in engaging with diverse communities and to specifically raise awareness on gaps in service provision and the changing dynamics of BME communities and individuals living in the district of Stratford.

Specific public, community and voluntary sector organisations have since arranged further meetings to understand the complexities of diversity in the district. This information will have an impact on how organisations can encourage staff and service users to understand the diverse needs of BME individuals and communities.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

There were three key note speakers.

Steve Evon, Gypsy and Traveller Community

Lisa Phillips, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transsexual Community

Dr. Stanislaw Librowski, Polish Community.

## **INTRODUCTION**

The Equality and Diversity workshop was organised by Warwickshire Race Equality Partnership. Warwickshire Police kindly funded the event and offered their support by chairing the morning and facilitating one of the two

workshops. The workshop was held at Stratford-on-Avon Methodist Church on the 21<sup>st</sup> May 2009. Public, community and voluntary sector organisations were invited to attend. The specific aims of the workshop were to:

1. To give an understanding into the diverse culture of Stratford residents.
2. To help identify and overcome barriers in engaging with diverse communities and individuals.
3. To make people more aware of diversity in Stratford district.
4. To help organisations make connections with a diverse range of individuals including those from BME communities that can improve policy decisions in the future.
5. To help the local authority to better understand the needs and the concerns of diverse individuals and communities.

Over 40 participants attended from the district. These ranged from community, voluntary and public sector organisations, primary care trusts and criminal justice agencies.

## **WORKSHOPS**

1. Community Cohesion in a Changing Warwickshire
2. Racial Discrimination & Harassment

### **1. Community Cohesion in a Changing Warwickshire**

Workshops on diversity should be offered to the whole community as it is important to educate individuals and public agency professionals on the

diverse needs of communities such as the Gypsy and Traveller community. Gypsies and Travellers come from rich, varied and diverse communities such as Romany Gypsies and Irish Travellers. Some members of these diverse groups still live a nomadic existence; others may live on authorised sites or within housing. It can be difficult to meet the educational needs of transient communities, especially when schools may have long waiting lists. To support the learning of both families and children, educational classes could be held on Gypsy and Traveller sites. Support offered to families on sites should not be limited to one or two families as this can cause resentment and division within the rest of the community. Resentment is also felt from the established indigenous community in that resources are channelled to minority groups. The Darlingscott site residents in Stratford-on-Avon have for example, made great efforts to integrate with local residents and have been happy to receive support from local community and public agencies.

In order to effectively monitor hate crimes within the Gypsy and Traveller community, individual cases should be risk assessed rather than labelled as a high priority response. This will cause less friction within the community and enable responses to be effectively targeted. There are still high levels of racism in society which can manifest itself onto forums and sites such as Facebook.

A way of promoting social cohesion should be about both 'top down' and 'bottom up' approaches. A realistic way of breaking down barriers within communities could be one community, for example the African Caribbean community playing music at another, (Irish Club) communities' venue. This

will enable communities to acknowledge each others differences and learn about a variety of cultures and traditions. A minority of members from a community can spoil the reputation for the majority. It needs to be acknowledged that not all members of a community have negative intentions towards others. The workshop participants would prefer to tackle issues and look at cohesion collectively rather than individually as all equality strands in effect intersect with one another, for example faith, race, disability and gender. In this way partner agencies could work to reflect the diversity within the wider community. *Warwickshire Tension Monitoring Group* could be utilised to address cohesion issues.

In order for this message to be taken seriously, key contacts from the '113' parish and district councils should engage in delivering community cohesion in Stratford and where possible link into the Local Strategic Partnership which covers national indicator 1 (Community Cohesion) and national indicator 4 (percentage of people who feel they can influence decisions in their locality).

## **2. Racial Discrimination & Harassment**

To work towards eliminating and reducing racial discrimination and harassment, educating young people and communities will be a key step in implementing this goal. This can be achieved by setting up local forums and to encourage young people to take ownership and development of equality and diversity issues. It is also important to action issues which may arise from discussions and to target young NEET (not in education, employment or training) people in Stratford.

It is critical to engage with all communities to develop understanding and tolerance between people. In some respects it is felt that the wider society does not understand minority groups which include individuals who are lesbian, gay, bi and transsexual. Again the media perpetuates negative stereotypes and low level racism is felt to be increasing. In an example a Sikh gentleman was called a Taliban in the street. Although this may be seen as harmless and instigated by young people because of peer group pressure, incidents such as these can escalate out of control. Issues are never one-dimensional but are multifaceted and therefore the community needs to work with the public, community and voluntary sector to improve communication with young people, between communities and in the indigenous population. As part of organisational equality and diversity initiatives, leaflets on equality should be distributed to new recruits.

Within Stratford District, engagement on equality and diversity should take place with the support and involvement of district and parish councillors. Often events which seek to promote better relations are 'preaching to the converted' and should in addition seek to work with perpetrators of racist values and attitudes, for example, initiatives combating racism should engage communities who vote for the BNP. Those who are marginalised should be given support and encouraged to stand as council representatives.

An idea is to have a peace bus which would go into the rural communities of Stratford. This may be a way to show off the 'public' face of minority groups

and people of different faiths and religions. Fear is real and unfortunately for some individuals, verbal and physical abuse occurs on a regular basis. Ideas regarding diversity need to be discussed openly and among families and children. Parental values have a huge impact on children and therefore education is key to supporting diverse communities in Stratford.

## **SUMMARY**

The workshop event highlighted a number of key factors. It is of primary importance that communication is improved between the public, community and voluntary sector and 'hidden populations' traditionally seen as 'hard to reach' groups. Another suggestion discussed at the event was for district and parish councillors to get involved and engage with equality and diversity initiatives. Delivering educational messages through leaflets, peace buses etc into the heart of Stratford's communities would also be welcomed.

## **IMAGES FROM THE WORKSHOP EVENT**



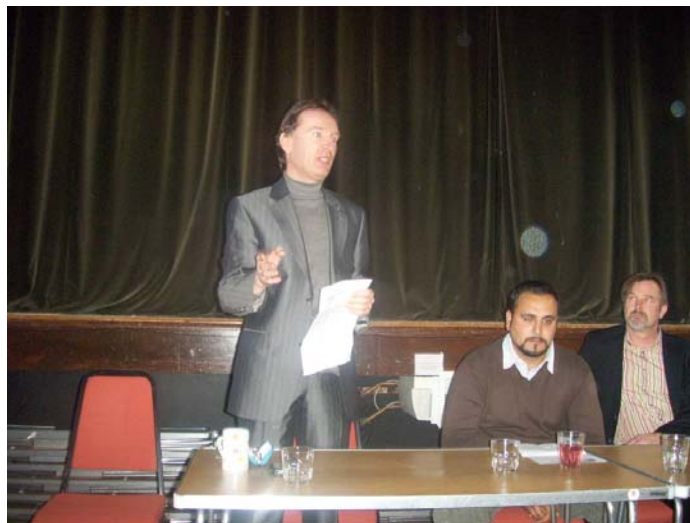
from left Steve Evons (Gypsy and Traveller Community), Martin Rone-Clarke (Warwickshire Police), Lisa Phillips (LGBT Community) and Helal Shahid (CEO WREP)



Participants at the event



from left Martin Rone-Clarke, Lisa Phillips and Helal Shahid



Dr Stanislaw Librowski (Polish Community)