

RACE ADVISORY FORUM

5th February 2008 at 6.15 p.m.

PRESENT: Mr A.R. Malik – Pakistan Muslim Association
(Chair)
Mr A.R. Khan (Vice-Chair)
Mr S. Roy – Bengali Hindu Cultural Association
Dr N. Khanum OBE – Luton Multi-Cultural Women's
Coalition
Mrs A. Farthing – Victim Support (Racial
Harassment)
Mr F.R. Janjya – representing Khidmat

IN ATTENDANCE: Hazel Burgess (HR Manager, Children and
Learning)
Barry Timms (Park and Cemeteries Manager)
Fahim Qureshi (Art Development Manager)
Raj Nayer (Equalities Officer)
Mick Robinson (Democratic Services Officer)

1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE (REF: 1)

Apologies for absence from the meeting were received on behalf of Ms N Kellett (Luton Irish Forum), Mr. A. Abrahams (Luton Hebrew Congregation) and Mrs B Felson (co-opted member).

Apologies were also received from the Corporate Director, Children and Learning, and the Head of Equalities.

2 MINUTES (REF: 2.1)

In the list of those present, Mr A.R. Malik was shown as representing the Pakistan Kashmir Welfare Association; this should be the Pakistan Muslim Association.

Minute 38 – Mr Khan enquired when the following Resolved items would be reported to the Forum:

(ii) That consideration of the report on Workforce Composition in Schools 2005/6 be deferred until the next meeting to allow the relevant officer to attend.

(iii) That the Head of Human Resources be requested to send the data set out in the tables of the report, showing the numbers of employees, to Forum Members.

The Democratic Services Officer responded that (ii) was on the agenda for this meeting and (iii) was on the Work Programme for 2008/9.

Minute 40 – Mr Khan repeated his concerns over the independence of the employee skills audit.

Minute 43 – the Equalities Officer was incorrectly described as the Race Advisor. Also, Luton Equalities Agency was not a member of the Race Advisory Forum. The Equalities Advisor was requested to write to Luton Equalities Agency to enquire if they wished membership of the Race Advisory Forum.

Dr Khanum requested that the Chair be sent a copy of the draft minutes as soon as practicable after each meeting.

Resolved: (i) That, subject to Mr Malik being shown as representing the Pakistan Muslim Association and in the first paragraph of Minute 43 deletion of the words 'Race Advisor' and the substitution of the words 'Equalities Officer', the Minutes of the meeting of the Forum held on 3rd December 2007 be taken as read, approved as a correct record and signed by the Vice Chair (in the Chair).

(ii) That the Equalities Officer be requested to write to Luton Equalities Agency inviting them to apply for membership of the Race Advisory Forum.

(iii) That in future the Chair be sent a copy of the draft minutes as soon as practicable after a meeting.

3 WORKFORCE COMPOSITION IN SCHOOLS 2005/6 (REF 5.1)

The Human Resources (HR) Manager, Children and Learning, presented the report, which is a reference from the Performance, Resources and Assets Scrutiny Committee. The statistics in the report were compiled in January 2007 and reflected data supplied by schools for the autumn 2006 term. The Children and Learning Department was currently compiling the January 2008 data.

There was currently no statutory obligation on schools to supply this data to the Council. There had been a low response rate in 2007 with 14 schools out of the total of 74 schools not responding to the request for information. The HR Manager was able to report that the response rate for 2008 was higher with currently only one school that had not yet responded. Supply of this data to the Council was likely to become a statutory requirement on schools within the next four years.

The HR Manager reported that government policy on overseas-qualified teachers had changed. There was now a limit of four years for them to gain a UK teaching qualification although, as a transitional measure, the government had granted a one-year extension to the deadline. This four-year rule had caused some problems for the Council.

The Chair enquired if overseas-qualified teachers required additional training. The HR Manager responded that this depended on the individual.

Dr Khanum enquired about EU-qualified teachers. The HR Manager replied that teachers from the EU could apply to the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) for Qualified Teacher Status (QTS). Dr Khanum enquired about the cultural awareness and the English language skills of EU qualified teachers. The HR Manager replied that this was difficult to answer, as the evidence was only anecdotal. Dr Khanum commented that this was an equalities issue as teachers from English speaking countries outside the EU might have fewer cultural problems than non-English speaking EU teachers. The HR Manager responded that the principle of free movement of labour within the EU was enshrined in the Maastricht Treaty.

The Chair enquired if an English language degree was a requirement for teachers from the EU. The HR Manager responded that the DCSF was concerned about the teaching qualification and not language skills. In some cases staff were recruited specifically for their skills in community languages, such as Polish.

Dr Khanum commented that Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) pupils had a strong cultural identity and that this needed to be recognised. The HR Manager responded that the latest pupil data indicated that there were similar numbers of pupils from Eastern Europe as those with an Asian heritage.

Dr Khanum commented that some data was heartening such as increased number of BME trainee teachers in 2005. However the numbers of BME trainees was still low. She enquired what steps the Council was taking to address this. The HR Manager responded that teacher-training places were allocated by the Training and Development Agency for Schools (TDA), which had its own targets. The Council ran 'taster' sessions to encourage potential entrants into teaching. Locally there was a good proportion of BME trainees. She commented that Luton had insufficient training capacity to supply sufficient teachers to meet the requirements of Luton schools.

Mr Khan commented that the proportion of BME teachers had fallen between 2005 and 2006. The proportion at Leadership Grade had fallen by 7%. The HR Manager responded that the 2006 figures were skewed by the lower response rate. If all schools had responded it was likely that figures for the two years would be similar.

In response to a question, the HR Manager informed the Forum that schools supplied these statistics as anonymous data. Schools were autonomous and, if a school did not supply the data, the Council had no other source from which it could be obtained. Luton had a high response rate, even in 2007, as many other authorities had response rates below 70%

Dr Khanum commented that standards in Tower Hamlets had improved after there had been an increased emphasis placed on the cultural needs of pupils.

The Chair asked why there were relatively fewer females at Leadership Grade than in the general profile of teachers. The HR Manager replied that there was no firm data on the reasons.

Dr Khanum asked for information on the Luton Teacher Training Partnership. The HR Manager responded that the Partnership provided local on the job training as an alternative to university. The training was inspected and accredited by Ofsted. Participants came from an encouraging diversity of backgrounds. They were not paid but received a grant. Mr Khan commented that the proportion of ethnic minority participants had not changed significantly over the last four years. The HR Manager responded that the proportion depended on who applied for training. Mr Khan asked if the Council expected an improvement and if there was any action that the Forum could take. The HR Manager responded that the Council regularly wrote to providers; she could send a letter on behalf of the Forum, to which the Forum agreed. The Chair asked if participants subsequently obtained employment locally. The HR Manager replied that relatively few went to other local authorities. She pointed out not all participants lived in Luton.

Mr Khan requested that when the 2006/7 figures are presented to the Forum, Tables 1 to 5 should show numbers as well as percentages.

Dr Khanum enquired about encouragement to school leavers to train as teachers. The HR Manager responded that in previous years this had been done through Connexions. From 1st April 2008 this provision would be brought in-house as part of the integrated youth service.

Resolved: (i) That the Report (Ref: 5.1) be noted.

(ii) That the HR Manager, Children and Learning, be requested to write to local providers of teacher training to advise them of the Forum's concerns over the proportion of BME trainees.

(iii) That tables in the report for 2006/7 should show numbers of staff as well as percentages.

4 INTRODUCTION OF 7-DAY CREMATION SERVICE

The Parks and Cemeteries Manager presented the report. He reported that there were different legal procedures for funerals and cremations. The documentation required for a cremation was more complicated than for a funeral. To ensure that any queries could be resolved in time, documentation for a weekend cremation had to be submitted by noon on the preceding Thursday. Crematorium staff required special training that involved witnessing 50 cremations. To allow sufficient time for training, weekend cremations would start in June 2008. The cremators needed time to reach operating temperature and it was a requirement that all the processes associated with a cremation had to be completed before the end of the day. For this reason, weekend cremations would only be available between 9:45 am and noon. In response to a question, he reported that the proposed £665 cost for a weekend cremation was the total cost and not a surcharge on the weekday £390 charge.

The Equalities Officer asked about the difference in costs between cremation and burial. The Parks and Cemeteries Manager replied that cremation was more expensive because of the higher costs involved.

The Equalities Officer commented that the Council had proposed an explanatory booklet for service users. The Council policy was a general presumption against translating documents. However he believed that the proposed booklet should be treated as a special case because it would be read at a particularly traumatic time.

Resolved: (i) That the report (Ref: 7) be noted.

(ii) That it be requested that the proposed explanatory booklet be made available in community languages.

5 LUTON CARNIVAL – QUARTERLY REPORT (REF: 8)

The Art Development Manager presented the report on Income and Expenditure for Luton International Carnival.

Dr Khanum commented that this report gave a better picture than previous reports. She asked about the relative investment in the Carnival and Mela. The Art Development Manager replied that the Carnival had been in existence for 32 years and had a budget of £236k in 2007. Because of increased security costs, the cost of the 2008 Carnival was likely to be £400k. Mela had been in its present format since 2003 and had an annual budget of £60k until 2006, which was mainly from grants, and Arts Council and EU funding.

The Chair read out an email from Mobeen Qureshi, who was unable to attend the meeting that commented on relative amounts spent on Luton Carnival and on Mela. In the email Mr Qureshi commented that the Carnival attracted thousands of people from outside Luton. He questioned how many weapons Bedfordshire police had collected last year

The Art Development Manager reported that the application to the Arts Council for funding for the Mela had been rejected, as the Arts Council did not fund outdoor events and festivals. The Arts Council preferred to fund capacity building and development programmes. The Council contributed £15k to the running costs of Mela. The Home Office had contributed £8k towards a Mela Youth Arts development programme, this year. He also reported that in 2007 Mela had been held on St George's Square as part of Luton's Summer Festival. Attendees had expressed a preference for Wardown Park as a venue.

Dr Khanum commented that the Carnival and Mela should be the subject of an Equalities Impact Assessment, bearing in mind the demographics of Luton.

The Equalities Officer commented there should be increased support for Mela, not decreased support for the Carnival. He asked about attracting external funding. The Art Development Manager replied that a Mela Development Trust was being set up, which would aim for charitable trust status. This would allow access to other funding streams.

Dr Khanum commented that the disparity in funding and emphasis between the Carnival and Mela was causing tensions between communities. She asked about the involvement of African and east European communities in the management of the Carnival.

Mr Khan commented on the disparity between figures previously supplied and figures in the current report. The Art Development Manager responded that the figures previously supplied had referred only to the parade. It was estimated that about 25% of the total costs of Carnival security and policing could be attributed to the parade. The current report referred to the Carnival as a whole. He reported that some figures in the

report were provisional, as some final invoices had not yet been received. Mr Khan commented that he would like to see the finalised accounts.

The Chair asked what was the total cost of Carnival. The Art Development Manager replied that £236k had been budgeted for 2007. The budget for 2008 could increase to £400 because of increased security costs. This was the subject of negotiation with bodies such as the British Transport Police.

The Chair asked if the Race Advisory Forum was represented on the Carnival Management Committee. He was informed that two members of the Committee were also members of the Race Advisory Forum but there was no representation specifically from the Forum. It was suggested that the Carnival Consultation and Visioning Group could be asked to invite the Chair of Race Advisory Forum to the Group's meetings.

The Art Development Manager advised the Forum that the Arts Service would transfer to the Cultural Services Trust, when this was established. The relationship between the Race Advisory Forum and the Cultural Services Trust would be similar to that between the Forum and Active Luton.

Resolved: (i) That the report (Ref: 8) be noted.

(ii) That the Art Development Manager be requested to request the Carnival Consultation and Visioning Group to invite the Chair of the Race Advisory Forum to future meetings of the Carnival Consultation and Visioning Group.

(iii) That the Chief Executive be requested to attend a future meeting of the Forum to discuss the differences of funding between the Luton International Carnival and Luton Mela.

6 DRAFT DEPARTMENTAL EQUALITY ACTION PLANS FOR 2008/09 (REF: 9)

The Equalities Officer presented the report of the Head of Equalities. He reported that the format of the Actions Plans had been revised as requested by the Forum. He also reported that Action Plans were classified as 'Draft' until they have been reported to the Executive.

Mr Khan asked for more information on Objective A.5 in the Action Plan for the Chief Executive's Department:

'Work in partnership to reduce divisions and tensions within the community and promote inclusion and cohesion'

The Equalities Officer responded that this referred to actions to unite Luton's communities rather than divide. Following a series of riots in towns in the north of England, the Council had commissioned a report on community cohesion in Luton. This action was a result of that report.

Mr Khan requested more information on the first Action point of Objective D in the Action plan for the Housing and Community Living Department:

'To review Departmental targets, in line with Corporate targets, the recruitment, retention work staff profile'

The Equalities Officer that there would be a series of reports produced on this topic.

Resolved: (i) That the report (Ref: 9) be noted.

(ii) That the Equalities Officer be requested to send copies of the report on community cohesion in Luton to Mr Malik and Mr Khan.

7 NEW MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION (REF: 10)

The Equalities Officer reported that an application for individual membership had been received from Mr S Abbass.

Resolved: That the application from Mr S Abbass for individual membership of the Race Advisory Forum be approved.

8 MEMBERSHIP REVIEW OF THE RACE ADVISORY FORUM (REF: 11)

The Equalities Officer presented the report of the Head of Equalities. He reported that in early 2007, at the Forum's request, he had written to those member organisations and individuals that had not attended any recent meetings to enquire if they wished to remain members of the Forum. Two letters had been returned as undeliverable. Eighteen other organisations had not responded.

At its meeting of 4th June 2007, the Forum had resolved (Minute 23/07) that the Equalities Officer should write to the 18 non-responding organisations and individuals advising them that if they did not respond to this second that the Equalities Officer was about to send, their membership of the Forum would be withdrawn.

He reported that none of the 18 organisations had responded to the second letter. The Forum was therefore requested to withdraw membership for the following organisations and individuals:

(Letters returned as undeliverable):

Friends of Bright Eyes
Luton Educational & Cultural Centre

(Non-responding organisations):

- Bangladesh Welfare Association & Advice Centre
- Beds Congolese Community Links
- British Muslim Welfare
- Bury Park Street Festival
- Chief Trustee, Jamia Al Akbaria
- Ghar Se Ghar
- Grassroots
- Lewsey Muslim Cultural Society
- Luton All Women's Centre
- Luton Community Housing
- Luton Educational Cultural Centre
- Luton Law Centre
- Mitalee Youth Association
- Mr M Khan Anwar
- Mr M Khan
- Pakistan Kashmir Welfare Association
- Saheyli Group
- Sangam Women's Group

The Chair advised that he represented Luton Law Centre in addition to representing the Pakistan Muslim Association.

It was noted that although Luton Community Housing had not responded, a representative had attended the meeting of 3rd December 2007.

Resolved: (i) That the report (Ref: 11) be noted.

(ii) That under the provision of D.7 of the Terms of Reference of the Race Advisory Forum, membership of the Forum be withdrawn from the following organisations and individuals:

Bangladesh Welfare Association & Advice Centre
Beds Congolese Community Links
British Muslim Welfare
Bury Park Street Festival
Friends of Bright Eyes
Chief Trustee, Jamia Al Akbaria
Ghar Se Ghar
Grassroots
Lewsey Muslim Cultural Society
Luton All Women's Centre
Luton Educational & Cultural Centre

Mr M Khan Anwar
Mr M Khan
Mitalee Youth Association
Pakistan Kashmir Welfare Association
Sangam Women's Group
Saheyli Group

9 WORK PROGRAMME (REF: 12)

The Chief Executive (Head of Local Democracy) updated the Forum on details of the latest version of its Work Programme. The last meeting of the 2007/8 municipal year was the AGM on the 31st March 2008. The calendar of meeting dates for the 2008/9 municipal year was not yet finalised and so it was not possible to advise of the date of the next ordinary business meeting of the Forum.

The Equalities Officer advised the Forum that Ronnie Wilson of the Equalities and Human Rights Commission would be the keynote speaker at the AGM.

Resolved: That the report (Ref: 12) be noted.

10 ANY OTHER BUSINESS (REF: 14)

Mrs Farthing reported that Luton Victim Support was aware of increasing numbers of attacks on taxi and private-hire drivers. She asked for assistance from the Council to reduce the number of such incidents. The Equalities Advisor proposed that an initial meeting with representatives of the taxi and private-hire trade would be a useful first step.

Resolved: That the Equalities Officer, in conjunction with Luton Victim Support, be requested to arrange a meeting with representatives of the taxi and private-hire trade in Luton.

(Note: In the absence of the Chair, the Vice-Chair took the chair for agenda items 1 and 2. After his arrival, the Chair took the chair for the remainder of the meeting.)

(Note: The meeting ended at 9.10 p.m.)