

Race Equality in the South West: Time for action



"If we are to unlock the talents of all our people then we need to give everyone an equal chance to contribute."

Fairness and Freedom: The Final Report of the Equalities Review (Cabinet Office, 2007)

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1. Foreword

Equality South West and the South West Race Equality Forum wish to pay tribute to the work, both past and ongoing, of individuals and organisations across the public, voluntary and private sectors who have sought to make real progress on race equality.

Such work cannot be dismissed as ‘defining people according to boxes they have ticked’ as the government’s Equality Strategy suggests. On the contrary, by facing up to the reality of identity-based prejudice and discrimination, and working with Black and Minority Ethnic individuals and communities to challenge discrimination and change hearts and minds, these organisations have made a real difference.

The Equality Strategy seeks to create a false dichotomy echoed in a letter to ESW from the Minister with responsibility for Race Equality and Integration. It suggests that tackling identity-based discrimination, the recognition of which is a central plank of the Equality Act 2010, is a mistaken approach denying people’s individuality. The implication is that respect for people’s individuality directly conflicts with naming and addressing racism.

Prejudice means pre-judging people, not on the basis of who they are as individuals, but on the basis of characteristics they share with others. The government’s flawed logic is proving damaging to race equality and to integration. When BME people are singled out on the basis of their colour as suspected illegal immigrants, the toxic effect is not confined to that individual: it is felt in BME households across the country.

We believe beyond doubt the work undertaken by race equality organisations to eliminate discrimination and its impacts is fundamental in enabling people’s individuality to flourish and their potential to be fulfilled.

Sado Jirde

Jamshid Ahmadi

Co-Chairs - South West Race Equality Forum



2. Introduction

Racism has long been a problem in the South West of England. While clearly we do not have a monopoly on racism in England, it would be true to say that the South West¹ has a particular problem with rural racism.

Compared with the main concentrations of Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) communities in the UK², such as those in London and Birmingham, the South West's BME population is scattered, isolated and under-represented outside the conurbations of Bristol and Plymouth.

While an analysis of 2011 census data by the campaigning organisation Operation Black Vote, suggests the situation is changing, still in many parts of the region candidates seeking election feel little pressure to factor in 'the Black vote' when drawing up their election materials, or when casting their votes in the council chamber or in Parliament.

The evidence that the South West has yet to come to terms with diversity is not new. The Commission for Racial Equality's (CRE) report 'Keep them in Birmingham', published in 1990,

“(presented) a disturbing picture of racial prejudice and discrimination directed against ethnic minority residents. While a few organisations and individuals are taking positive steps to promote racial equality, there is mostly widespread complacency — or worse — in the majority white community as a whole.”³

This report was followed by further studies of attitudes to race in Devon, Somerset and Cornwall⁴, along with other regional and national research conducted during the intervening years.⁵

With support from the CRE and local authorities, and against this background, a network of ten race equality councils sprang up across this huge, scattered region. These were later joined by voluntary sector equality infrastructure organisations such as Equality South West

“It is incumbent on every institution to examine their policies and the outcome of their policies and practices to guard against disadvantaging any section of our communities.”

(Lord William MacPherson,
Stephen Lawrence Enquiry)

¹ The South West is defined as conterminous with the former SW Rural Development Area, encompassing the area in the south from Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly to Gloucestershire and Wiltshire in the north.

² The acronym 'BME' encompasses Irish and Roman gypsy and traveller communities

³ 'Keep Them In Birmingham', Eric Jay. Commission for Racial Equality, 1990

⁴ Challenging Racism in the Rural Idyll: Final Report of the Rural Race Equality Project Cornwall, Devon and Somerset 1996 to 1998, Mohammed Dhalech, NACAB 1999; It Doesn't Happen Here?: Racial Harassment in Taunton Deane, Nadira Kenny, Somerset Racial Equality Network, 1996;

⁵ For example 'Rural Racism' Neil Chakraborti and Jon Garland, Routledge, 2004, 2013

(ESW) - a pan-equality charity - and Black South West Network (BSWN) the purpose of which was to support frontline equality and community groups in challenging deep-seated prejudices. With the onset of the recent recession, one by one these organisations have largely fallen by the wayside due to the absence of funding. Those that remain have found it increasingly difficult to meet the need of BME communities for advocacy and support.

This paper is concerned with the task remaining for those working to promote race equality and community cohesion in the South West during these difficult times.

3. Background and Preface

This report results from work undertaken by ESW and members of the South West Race Equality Forum (SWREF) over an 18 month period between 2012-2013, but also makes reference to research carried out before this.

Problems associated with urban racism and inter-communal tensions that have periodically erupted into major disturbances in cities across the country have dominated public policy responses to race-based inequalities. Rural racism has had barely a look-in, in spite of attempts to highlight the issues. This report seeks to increase understanding about the ways

“An equal society protects and promotes equal, real freedom and substantive opportunity to live in the ways people value and would choose, so that everyone can flourish.

“An equal society recognises people’s different needs, situations and goals and removes the barriers that limit what people can do and can be.”

Fairness and Freedom: The Final Report of the Equalities Review: A Summary (Cabinet Office, 2007)

in which racism and race-related prejudice is manifested and experienced in more rural settings, and about the structural barriers masking its existence and impeding progress towards its elimination.

It is not the first report about racism in the South West, and it is unlikely to be the last, but all the evidence suggests that repetition is necessary. Cohorts of decision-makers, who may have begun to understand how to make a difference, give way to new ones who need the messages to be repeated.

Some powerful and direct messages came out of qualitative research by ESW in the autumn of 2010 among representatives from BME communities in one of the South West’s most rural counties. The reports of these discussions demonstrated the prevalence and persistence, yet near-invisibility, of racial discrimination in the various forms defined by the Equality Act 2010⁶.

Since then the cuts in public spending resulting from the coalition government’s deficit reduction programme intensified a trend which had characterised the latter days of the outgoing Labour administration following the global financial crisis.

From early in 2011, as the cuts and major structural changes began to take effect, ESW was alerted to an ongoing process in which race equality councils and similar-purpose civic

⁶ Black and Minority Ethnic Voices: Dimensions of Inequality in Somerset, ESW, 2010

society organisations in the region were closed for lack of funding. Such organisations had grown up over previous decades, as successive race equality laws, funding from the CRE, and a growing awareness of ‘institutional racism’ highlighted by the MacPherson Report, had begun to have an impact.

In the South West, particular issues affecting BME people in rural areas became more apparent - as revealed in various pieces of research referred to above. Also apparent are the pressures on BME people outside of the region’s conurbations to ignore, deny and under-report racially motivated crime and sub-criminal but harmful incidents, in spite of the definition of reportable incidents provided by the Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO)⁷.

Nevertheless, progress has clearly been made in terms of changing attitudes and behaviour since the first Race Relations Act was passed in the 1960s. In more recent decades public bodies which had not done so before, formed local strategic partnerships as new legislation was introduced, and this facilitated and encouraged collaboration with, and provision of support for, voluntary race equality councils and other organisations whose purpose was to support BME people affected by racism and race-related discrimination.

However, set against a range of policy drivers impelling key public bodies and agencies to address race equality, most of them in place before the change of government⁸, a different policy environment emerged from 2010 propelling these public bodies and agencies in the opposite direction.

The Coalition Government’s ‘new approach to equality’ – announced in an Equality Strategy in December 2010 declared an end to ‘identity politics’ and combined with a relentless ‘war on red tape’ to create a rationale for the premature review of the Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED). This was announced by the Minister for Equalities in May 2012

The significance of the impact of this new approach to equality became increasingly evident from early 2011 when, in April the Cabinet Office ‘Red Tape Challenge’ website offered up the Equality Act 2010 as a candidate for abolition as a whole or in part.

The new approach to equality which (in repudiating ‘identity politics’) effectively repudiates the concept of institutional racism, was strongly evident in the publication ‘Creating the Conditions for Integration’.⁹ This was the government’s response to calls for a race equality strategy. Published in 2012 by the Communities and Local Government department (CLG), responsible both for race equality and for driving the localism agenda, it fuelled concerns among race equality organisations and BME communities regarding the Coalition’s policies on racism. Aware of deep-seated prejudices that persist in many less progressive areas, the drive to devolve much wider powers to local authorities and ‘neighbourhood groups’ was, in

⁷ See the True Vision reporting website for definitions
http://report-it.org.uk/racist_or_religious_hate_crime1

⁸ E.g. The Equality Act 2010 and the Public Sector Equality Duty; relevant case law; the NHS Equality Delivery System; the MacPherson recommendations in relation to race hate crime and incident reporting;

⁹ Department for Communities and Local Government, February 2012

itself, causing anxiety among many equality groups. This was further exacerbated by official guidance issued to councils by the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government condemning equality monitoring and the provision of alternative language translations of council information.¹⁰

High-profile speeches by the Prime Minister¹¹ have also attacked key building blocks of the Equality Duty - such as the need to gather equality data and to undertake equality analysis - previously confirmed in case law. Such high and lower profile attacks on the foundations of the Equality Act have had a palpable effect on the degree of importance attached to compliance with its provisions, particularly by decision-makers who are less than enthusiastic to promote equality.

This is the background against which ESW decided, as the host organisation for the SWREF, to investigate and highlight the issues facing people and organisations that have a specific interest in progressing race equality in the South West. This would provide a basis on which to consider how best we could assist with local capacity-building among people committed to race equality, and also whether there was sufficient enthusiasm for us to re-launch the SWREF as a forum for mutual support and to provide a strategic voice for the cause of race equality across the region.

In June 2012 ESW co-hosted, with Black South West Network, a regional round table meeting for remaining representatives of the RECs and other interested parties. The aim was to share information and thoughts on the situation facing BME people and race equality organisations in the South West. ESW further undertook to host a regional event in 2013 to review how things stood, and to consider the future for race equality and specialist support organisations in the region.

A summary account of the round table was sent to all MPs in the region - including the current Minister for Integration and Race Equality - with an invitation to meet representatives later in the year. This evidence, along with the outcomes from other events, is incorporated into this report. We subsequently heard from two voluntary sector race equality organisations (one Bristol-based and the other a national VCS organisation) that the issues highlighted were consistent with those identified in their own researches.

It was disappointing that, in spite of the care taken with the scheduling of the proposed meeting (before Parliament resumed but not clashing with party conferences) no South West MPs were available, and very few responded at all.

Between early 2012 and the spring of 2013, additional losses occurred among race equality organisations, along with changes in focus necessitated by funding conditions. Among the casualties was the closure of the Somerset Racial Equality Council (SREC) which had been in operation for more than 20 years. In the context of ESW's concerns regarding local capacity across the South West, we met with representatives of the former SREC to see explore

¹⁰ 50 Ways to save: examples of sensible savings in local government. Practical tips and guidance for councils. DCLG December 2012

¹¹ E.g. The speech to the CBI annual conference, November 2012 condemning equality impact assessments

whether we might be able to help facilitate discussions towards establishing a new race equality organisation.

The meeting resulted in two actions for ESW. One was to conduct a regional 'needs and gaps' survey among ESW race equality contacts, the final results to be presented at the regional event planned for July. The other was to convene and facilitate a round table meeting to explore support for, and the potential nature and functions of, a new race equality organisation in Somerset.

Meanwhile plans for the regional event scheduled for 3rd July proceeded. Rob Berkeley, Director of the Runnymede Trust¹² agreed to speak, but Don Foster (Bath) MP, the Under Secretary of State for Integration and Race Equality was unable to attend. One of the hoped-for outcomes from this event was to explore the level of interest in participating in the SW Race Equality Forum, as well as to provide an agenda for action on race equality.

¹² The Runnymede Trust is a leading independent race equality think tank

4. Executive summary

1. The current economic, social and national policy environment calls for
 - a. All public bodies, voluntary organisations and private sector service providers to implement zero tolerance of racism in all its forms, ensuring all racially motivated incidents are properly recorded and dealt with.
 - b. Race equality and BME support groups to work together to ensure that progress made towards greater equality is not halted or reversed, and to actively encourage reporting of racially motivated incidents.
 - c. Council leaders and chief executives of public bodies to exercise leadership in combating racism by word and deed, including actively engaging with and supporting BME groups and organisations.
2. Too many BME people take no part in local and general elections, and their interests are overlooked by those elected. Councils should work with 'Operation Black Vote' to actively encourage voter registration among BME communities. BME people should ensure they register to vote and use their status as voters to hold elected representatives to account.
3. Rurality masks the impact of social exclusion and racism among small, scattered BME populations. Public bodies should use the discretion available to them within the Equality Act 2010 to take positive action to address the social exclusion of BME residents in rural and semi-rural areas and small towns, including barriers to accessing services and to social contact.
4. Access to justice has become more difficult for those experiencing racial discrimination, the effect of which can be devastating to people's health and well-being. Local authorities and other public bodies, including higher education law faculties, should urgently explore new ways of combining resources to ensure British justice is equally available to all.
5. Local policy makers should ensure their policies and practices are based on sound evidence concerning the needs of BME people, and the effectiveness of current and proposed policies and practices in meeting their needs fairly and equitably. This is the essence of the Public Sector Equality Duty, and Lord MacPherson's conclusions.
6. In order to send out the right messages to policy makers, the capacity and scope of the Equality and Human Rights Commission's powers should be restored to enable it to

properly fulfil its role as an independent body capable of taking the range of actions necessary to ensure effective implementation of the PSED.

5. Our conclusions

A perfect storm?

There are strong indications that at the same time as the infrastructure supporting and promoting race equality crumbles, and protections enshrined in the Equality Act are increasingly compromised by conflicting government messages, racism and the fear of racism is on the increase in the South West.

In the midst of this turbulence people of good will and a shared commitment to race equality have brought together many different perspectives and sets of experiences, discussed the problems and pooled ideas which we have tried to capture in this report and in our conclusions. There is no question that there is a storm to be weathered, the brunt of which is being faced by people who have few opportunities to set out their views. What we and others can do is use the levers we have at our disposal to protect the progress that has been made towards greater race equality, and build foundations for the future.

A knowledge deficit and advice desert

Many BME people in the South West are seriously disadvantaged in seeking to claim their rights to equality under the law in their workplaces, in their communities and when accessing services. Lack of basic knowledge of their rights, and scarcity of legal advice have been compounded by restrictions on people's access to justice through legal aid changes, a reduced availability of judicial review and charges for taking claims to employment tribunals. This knowledge gap can be critical for BME women who are subjected to domestic abuse and violence with or without recourse to public funds.

By pooling resources local authorities in Bristol and the surrounding areas are making it possible for people to access the services of the Avon and Bristol Law Centre. Other local authorities should explore the options in their areas, including working with law faculties in higher education institutions.

Rural racism – seen but not heard

The rural nature of the South West creates conditions under which the tasks of eliminating racism, promoting race equality and fostering good inter-racial relations rests far too heavily upon the shoulders of overburdened voluntary groups and committed individuals. Typically, BME individuals and households lack local support networks: a situation that leaves them isolated and without a voice. Meanwhile the public bodies whose duty it is to take seriously their role in these matters too often regard race equality as an irrelevance instead of an opportunity to deliver truly inclusive, and effective services at a time of unprecedented public spending cuts.

Public authorities, from national government down to parish councils and area-based committees, should show the leadership and determination to eradicate racism that is necessary to build the integrated, safe and harmonious society they wish to see. This leadership should include a re-launch of the Public Sector Equality Duty, and provide departmental guidance and support for public bodies and communities to help ensure that the Duty is understood and implemented in spirit as well as in law. It should provide assurance that people working within public bodies are able to raise concerns and challenge persistent poor practice with impunity. It should also challenge negative and damaging stereotyping that divides society and communities and creates fear and tensions.

The government's stated aim is to empower communities, yet practical recognition that racial discrimination exists 'around here' is all too rare, as are efforts to develop accessible and constructive channels for engagement with BME communities by decision-making bodies that are overwhelmingly unrepresentative of the diverse populations they serve.

There is an urgent need to address the democratic deficit for BME communities, in which the great majority of those whose decisions impact on their quality of life have little or no understanding of these communities and their needs and aspirations.

Local elections are usually won and lost on a small turnout, and can even be decided by a single vote. BME individuals need to ensure they are registered to vote, and use their votes in every election, and local authorities should actively encourage registration among under-represented groups.

During the election period BME voters can raise issues, and question candidates on their record regarding race equality and the needs of BME communities. The electoral register is one way of ensuring candidates are alerted to issues of racism and their responsibilities towards minority groups should they be elected. Registering as a voter is also a pre-condition for BME people to stand as candidates themselves.

Counted and understood?

Too little effort is made by policy-makers to gather and analyse - with the appropriate skill and insight - statistical and qualitative data that can inform good policies and quality services. Although there are outstanding examples of positive and effective action in the region, these are too few and too far between.

The call for improved equality awareness training and education is echoed across all protected groups in relation to all public service providers, from decision-makers to frontline staff. But the greatest emphasis is on the role of schools to inculcate in today's teachers and parents and, importantly, tomorrow's citizens, decision-makers and leaders, positive attitudes concerning race equality and respect for diversity.

Making the Equality Duty work

It was recognised by participants in roundtable meetings and at our regional event in July 2013 that if all organisations were paying due regard to the requirements of the Public Sector Equality Duty by making race equality an integral consideration in the performance of all their functions, this would go a long way towards removing the pressures on voluntary sector groups to challenge and advocate on behalf of those who are discriminated against. In the meantime, constructive and instructive engagement with BME groups would assist in the much-needed awareness-raising necessary for this to happen.

Action on hate crime and abuse

Public authorities and regulatory and inspection bodies should use the opportunities and powers available to them to promote health and well-being by instituting 'zero tolerance' of racism. They should recognise, report and record race-based harassment, bullying and crimes; and ensure these are dealt with promptly and effectively. The police and partner agencies should ensure hate crime reporting is made as accessible as possible as a matter of priority, and the causes of under-reporting - which are being positively addressed by some police forces - should be an active concern for all. If third-party reporting centres (such as voluntary organisations associated with one of the protected characteristics) are to serve all the protected groups, the usage should be reviewed to ensure that this does not create barriers for some. School leaders and governors should build 'zero tolerance' into their rules, ethos and curriculum and work with parents and specialist organisations to understand, prevent and minimise the impact of racist incidents on BME children in their care.

Finding new ways of working

The obstacles that potential funders of race equality organisations face in the current economic and policy environment were recognised. For some this changed climate makes it necessary for everyone to look for new ways of working that meet increased needs with significantly fewer resources. It was widely accepted that organisations that share a common desire to promote race equality need to work together to survive and be effective, whether these are public sector partnerships, cross-sector consortia, or VCS equality groups which have traditionally competed for funding.

Key factors for future partnership working include mutual trust between race equality organisations, potential funders, and BME communities. Identifying and maintaining focus on shared aims and objectives, and involving BME communities in shaping these are essential in building trust, but effective recording and reporting of impact and outcomes are also critically important. Race equality organisations have willing allies in most cash-strapped public authorities, who nevertheless need to be confident that service level agreements will be met, and that funders will be alerted if serious difficulties threaten to prevent this.

A Forum for action

The encouraging turnout and determined spirit among those who attended the Regional Race Equality Event and the meetings that preceded it, make it possible to draw some positive conclusions. So too do the results of our 'needs and gaps' survey which revealed untapped seams of potential activism and support for race equality, and a will to work for organisations at local and regional level. This potential could be encouraged and utilised, particularly if training is made available to develop skills and confidence.

Key training needs include understanding the Equality Act 2010, rights and responsibilities under its provisions, and the ability to recognise, influence and challenge institutions that are failing to meet their equality and human rights responsibilities. The fact that these are development needs among dedicated people suggests there is real work to be done building an effective activist base.

The South West shares with other rural parts of the UK many of the issues affecting BME minorities. The inadequate recognition of these issues underscores the need for an umbrella organisation to pull together all the themes particularly affecting BME people in the South West. These differ in many respects from the issues highlighted by campaigning organisations whose focus is on areas of dense BME settlement in London and Birmingham.

A reason for the lack of sustainability among front-line organisations fighting against discrimination has been their necessary focus on tackling local issues. Many have been unable to benefit from infrastructural support provided on a regional basis, or on capacity building activity, because they do not have the staff time and resources to participate in regional meetings and campaigning.

Against the backdrop of struggling and defunct voluntary sector organisations, and cuts in dedicated local authority equality and diversity personnel, it is essential that organisations remain to campaign for race equality and to act as a rallying point for the many who want to fight for race equality. Campaigning requires resources, and a structure such as SWREF would enable funding bids to be developed for projects highlighting the issue of race equality.

This report has referred to the need for leadership. This is a crucial role, and through the continuance of a united South West Race Equality Forum, dedicated to fighting for race equality, leadership can emerge - drawing people together for information-sharing, strategic thinking, mutual support, and action.

6. What we learned - and how

BME focus groups: 2010

In 2010 ESW was commissioned to conduct focus group discussions among BME individuals and representatives in one of the more rural South West counties. Seven women and nine men from a variety of BME backgrounds took part. The ensuing ESW report concluded that:

“Some of the experiences and examples indicate worrying levels, and graphic examples of racist attitudes and abuse. These are found in (the) streets, in workplaces and in people’s homes - at the hands of the public, and of public servants in some cases. They are also occurring within public and publicly funded institutions, which ought to be in the vanguard of safe and supportive environments for BME residents.

“BME people feel disempowered and disenfranchised in (this county), both in terms of democratic structures and processes, and in dealings with professionals who exercise power over important areas of their lives.”

Regional race equality roundtable: 2012

The government’s strategy document ‘Creating the Conditions for Integration’, published in February 2012, and was greeted with despondency from organisations and individuals who had been looking for signs that government was not ‘rowing back’ from commitment to race equality.

Equality South West and Black South West Network agreed to jointly convene a roundtable meeting to seek answers to the following question:

“As people and organisations who share a commitment to race equality and human rights in the South West, how can we use current public policy (including, where possible, the ‘Creating the Conditions for Integration’ strategy), to ensure that race equality and human rights are fully integrated into public service planning and delivery?”

The subsequent report - ‘Race in the South West: More or Less Equal?’ was circulated to participants for approval before circulation to South West MPs. Below are extracts summarising the key messages from that report. This, along with the focus group report quoted above, is available on the ESW website: www.equalitysouthwest.org.uk.

Participants felt the government’s policy document ‘Creating the Conditions for Integration’ failed to offer measures necessary to address the issues and concerns experienced on the ground in the South West. They considered that The Equality Act 2010 provided the basic framework for race equality in spite of the obstacles that are being created to accessing the

benefits of its provisions. It was observed, that the review of the Public Sector Equality Duty “must be regarded as a threat to its existence” and that there was a pressing need

“... the review of the Public Sector Equality Duty must be regarded as a threat...”

for combined action to oppose this. Since the Duty remains in place for the time being it was possible to mount collective challenges to breaches, using 'no-win, no-fee' lawyers. However, the Ministry of Justice had recently announced its intention to make judicial review more difficult to access, posing new obstacles to mounting collective proceedings under the Equality Act 2010.

Other opportunities included writing to offending authorities and highlighting key parts of the legislation with which they were not in compliance. This could be a support role on the part of ESW as a regional organisation not at risk of losing local contracts, or coming into conflict with potential local funders in the way race equality councils and other local groups might be.

Key questions could be asked about processes by which policy decisions were being/had been made. Such questions under the Freedom of Information provisions might ask what evidence was used to assess the impact on BME communities, what consultations had taken place, and how.

Opportunities could be taken to influence policies through local consultations, citing ‘Gunning Principles’ contained in legislation covering consultation. These require that consultations should offer a ‘reasonable opportunity to change outcomes’.

Reference was made to Local Enterprise Partnerships and the potential to influence these bodies to engage with the race equality agenda .

Finally it was recognised that if recourse to UK law failed, EU directives could offer opportunities to challenge policy makers. The inevitable question is – ‘how to challenge?’ - particularly in light of the changes in eligibility for Legal Aid and those that are taking place in the EHRC.

The inevitable question is – ‘how to challenge?’

Other Opportunities

Other opportunities were also suggested as worthy of consideration. These included:

- Building the case through monitoring/data/evidence/outcomes
- (Re-) connecting with supportive politicians locally, regionally and nationally
- Offering training to organisations in breach of legislation or challenged to raise their game
- Seeking to develop partnerships, for example: with the EHRC in accordance with their new priorities; Voice 4 Change; local and regional equality and VCS organisations
- Adopting campaigning approaches such as those of ‘38 degrees’

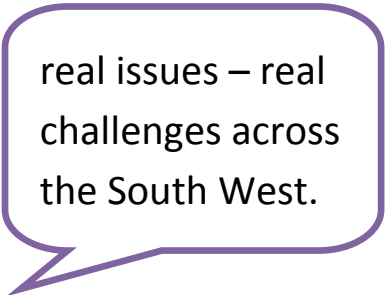
What are the barriers that need to be overcome?

Many of the barriers had already been alluded to. These included the kinds of conditions imposed on BME organisations, inhibiting action with and for BME people. The conflicts of interest in challenging funding bodies with the PSED are a serious inhibitor at local level.

Cuts in training budgets within public authorities have also had the effect of reducing equality and diversity knowledge and expertise. Equality and diversity posts have been deleted or the role subsumed within more generic customer care or performance focused role. In addition, a tendency is emerging for more effective training methods to be replaced by cursory references in induction training and e-learning packages that provide little more than the basic legal requirements. The level and quantity of awareness training had already proved demonstrably inadequate to properly equip decision makers and many front line service deliverers before this occurred, as research by a wide range of equality bodies (including the EHRC, Government Equalities Office, and ESW) has shown.

At least one authority has resorted to buying-in consultants to produce equality impact assessments with the expectation that these would pass scrutiny and 'legality' tests.

Finally, a pervading 'sense of hopelessness'. In spite of there being plenty of evidence concerning the need for action on racism, and entrenched discriminatory practices, participants and their organisations felt defeated by the seeming impossibility of using this to make effective challenges. The restructuring and downsizing of the EHRC was a material factor in fostering this sense of hopelessness, while there are 'real issues – real challenges' across the South West.



real issues – real challenges across the South West.

At the end of a lengthy discussion, participants summarised the issues they believed were important to their organisations and BME people in the South West. These are set out below.

Direct discrimination

- Discrimination at work
- Racism in schools
- Increases in racist incidents
- The continuing/growing need for advocacy in cases of discrimination and harassment

Lack of voice, influence, support and access to justice

- The indifference of public bodies to BME issues
- Predominantly White decision-making bodies

- A lack of voice for BME communities, including those where ‘leaders’ do not speak for minorities within them.
- The loss/lack of race equality organisations’ capacity in the face of increased demands
- Trusted organisation’ unpaid work expected/required to meet needs
- Difficulty in accessing legal support for immigration cases
- Capacity to challenge and risks associated with challenging using legislation

Poverty and unemployment

- Poverty among BME people within a prosperous region
- Unemployment among young BME people
- The impacts of recession and unemployment on mental health and crime

Domestic abuse

- Emerging evidence of domestic violence within BME communities
- Abuse of foreign brides: domestic violence, divorce and destitution

Roundtable conclusions

The report concluded that core funding is a major issue for race equality organisations in the South West. Important regional infrastructure, and locally-based support and advocacy organisations have been hard hit during the recession, and by post-recession austerity measures. The capacity of local organisations to mount effective challenges to poor equality practice by public bodies is severely curtailed.

Unemployment levels among young BME people are at 50%, and there are concerns about the impact on mental health and a drift into criminality.

Many race equality organisations have either been forced to close (Black Development Agency, Swindon REC, Somerset REC), others continue on the goodwill of volunteers alone and still others have no option but to tailor their service provision to meet the priorities and agendas of local funding bodies, which may not coincide with those of BME people themselves. The ongoing and increasing demand for advocacy in discrimination cases confirms this is as a crucial service for BME communities, yet these services rely on the core funding that is now withdrawn or threatened. In addition, drastic changes to the legal aid system present a further serious challenge to progress in achieving greater racial equality.

National policies and legislative changes, such as those affecting employment rights, welfare benefits, housing costs, and legal aid services are having a disproportionate impact on BME communities, many of whom are already marginalised in the labour market. This, coupled with a widely-perceived indifference in government circles in regard to enforcement of the

Equality Act in general and race equality in particular, are seen by many as a growing threat to integration and social cohesion on which the 'Big Society' and localism were predicated.

Politicians need to be aware of the cumulative effects of the situation described at this meeting by people working at the sharp end of race relations in their communities. These are compounded into what was described as a 'sense of hopelessness' by the diminution of independence and the drastic cuts in staff and funding that are being visited on the country's primary enforcement body, the EHRC.

Somerset Race Equality Roundtable: June 2013

The race equality roundtable, convened following the closure of Somerset REC, took place shortly before the regional event. The early regional survey results, which were shared at the meeting, showed the three most important areas of work for a race equality organisation were considered to be:

1. Protect and support BME people against race-based hate crime and incidents
2. Campaign for and promote race equality
3. Challenge public bodies who are failing to fulfil their legal obligations under equality legislation

Participants were all mindful of the national, organisational and local/regional policy drivers affecting key agencies. These included, at the macro level, the substantive provisions of the Equality Act 2010, the Public Sector Equality Duty and relevant case law. In addition the NHS Equality Delivery System which, although not mandatory on NHS organisations and agencies, places on them an expectation to work towards this 'in house' standard as a means of meeting the Equality Duty.

The 2010 Somerset Community Safety Strategic Assessment recognised the scale and importance of properly reporting and addressing race related hate crime. The MacPherson recommendations relating to race hate crime and incident reporting, and recommendations from a Plymouth University regional study funded by the Department for Communities and Local Government¹³ were also relevant.

The meeting's attention was drawn to race hate crime figures for 2011 – 2012, reported in 'The Guardian' newspaper's data blog, showing that in Somerset 1,200 race hate crimes/incidents were reported as compared to 8,000 in the whole of London. This is in spite of widely acknowledged under-reporting, and the massive differences in these respective populations.

Ensuring that race hate crime reporting is made as accessible as possible was recognised as a priority, and the causes of under-reporting were also being addressed by the police.



Figures for 2011-2012 showing ...in Somerset 1,200 race hate crimes/incidents were reported as compared to 8,000 in the whole of London

¹³ 'Exploring Prejudice: Mapping Hate Crime in the South West' (2012)

The obstacles that potential funders of race equality organisations face in the current economic and policy environment were recognised. These make it necessary to identify new ways of working that meet the same, and potentially increased needs, compared with those that existed before. Participants spoke about the importance of all organisations making equality an integral part of all of their functions in practice as well as in theory.

Key factors for future partnership working would include mutual trust between race equality organisations, potential funders, and those whom such organisations seek to benefit. Clarity regarding shared objectives, along with effective recording and reporting of impact and outcomes are also crucial when every penny has to be made to count.

A subsequent meeting occurred in late July. In the meantime those present would consider options for replacing SREC with an organisation that would meet identified needs and organisational objectives across the county.

Regional survey: July 2013

There were 55 responses to the ESW survey when it closed. The survey sought to identify needs and gaps in race quality services in the South West. Respondents were individuals living from 13 out of 15 major local authority areas who had a particular interest in race equality. Thirty two people said they were involved with one or more organisations locally. These varied in nature, and many appeared to be groups run by and for people from particular, shared BME backgrounds as distinct from organisations aiming to promote racial equality, and support victims of racism more broadly. Respondents were asked to prioritise, from a list agreed by an advisory group, the most important functions for local race equality organisations to perform. Respondents' top three priorities were averaged to give the results below. We also asked them to add any personal priorities that were missing.

Answer Options	% in top three
Protect and support BME people against race-based hate crime and incidents	81%
Challenge public bodies who are failing to fulfil their legal obligations under equality legislation	81%
Help public bodies to consult with BME people about services	79%
Provide advocacy for victims in racial discrimination claims	79%
Campaign for and promote race equality	79%
Carry out work related to issues affecting BME communities on behalf of funding organisations such as councils and NHS	74%

Other priorities included:

1. Contribute to community cohesion.
2. Be involved in training and ensure equality is engendered in all aspects of the organisation

3. I think that support around race based incidents and discrimination are crucial but sit with the police, CAB and other bodies. The race equality groups should work to ensure they are doing this

Twenty nine people said they would like to be involved or more involved with a race equality organisation in their area, and 25 said they would like to be involved in a regional group.

Eighteen people said they would like some training to help with this. Several mentioned more than one area of training. The replies are set out under four headings below.

Current equality legislation - rights and protections:

- Discrimination as it relates to Labour Law.
- The Race Equality Act - challenging the statutory organisations,
- Any training regarding race equality
- Racial issues and what BME people are entitled to
- Overview of current and past equality legislation
- About application of legislation
- Legislation issues
- Legislation

Racial and cultural awareness and understanding:

- Relations and fractions between different minority communities; different communities, different cultures and beliefs
- Commonly-experienced problems faced by migrant workers and best way to resolve them.
- We would love to be involved in training teachers in schools, they need to be educated on how to help their students, and what is the best practice.

Influencing decision making:

- How to influence the local strategic agenda
- Schools /educational providers related
- Learning new skills and approaches to campaigning and advocacy.
- Effective lobbying
- Involving young people in race equality agenda; proactive education and campaigning
- How to get involved with local authorities
- How to get your voice heard.
- Good practice on campaigning and promoting race equality nationwide and worldwide

Other:

- Partnerships to see who is working in these areas
- Effective public speaking and presentation/ Effective Communication
- Effective leadership

- I.T.
- Funding

Further comments

Finally, respondents were invited to add any further comments. Two spoke about the recent demise of Somerset's Race Equality Council and the loss that this represented. Another respondent highlighted an incident in 2011 in which a press statement had implicated Eastern European perpetrators in a violent crime against an English person. The case was subsequently closed, with no arrests, but the press statement had put migrant communities at risk: "Migrant communities were attacked on a weekly base in Yeovil and surrounding area. 98% cases reported to police of hate crime were closed after one interview with victim."

"...one of the major reasons that some disadvantages are intractable lies in the fact that the very desire to take responsibility for bettering one's own life chances can be crushed by the reality of prejudice and bias." (Fairness and Freedom)

Regional race equality event: July 2013

Forty one delegates with a broad range of perspectives took part in this event held in Taunton. It was entitled 'Race Equality in the South West: What's Changed since MacPherson?'

Rob Berkeley, Director of the Runnymede Trust, was the keynote speaker. Although Don Foster MP, the Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Integration and Race Equality was unable to attend he set out the government's approach to equality in a letter to ESW. With agreement from his office, this was read in full.

The event offered delegates a chance to attend two out of four workshops covering: Race equality in schools; Using the Equality Act to influence and challenge; Safety and security; and Access to justice. Facilitators recorded important issues that emerged from the discussions to feed into this report. The detailed points arising from these workshops are listed later, grouped under the following headings and are listed at the end of this report:

- Rurality
- Reporting and recording racially motivated crimes and incidents
- Inter-agency collaboration
- Community capacity to influence, inform and challenge
- Leadership issues
- Diversity awareness to combat victim-blaming and stigmatisation

The letter from the minister spelled out the government's approach to race equality. The fundamentals were already familiar to some delegates, and the letter reinforced concerns

that had been expressed in earlier meetings referred to. Some of these concerns were expressed in Rob Berkeley's speech, as well as by delegates during the course of the day.

Extracts from the Minister's letter

"There remain significant challenges with regard to inequality and poor social mobility in Britain today, but isolating one aspect – race, is not the best way forward...

"The Government's Equality Strategy 'Building a Fairer Britain' set out a new way of tackling inequality, including race inequality, moving away from the identity politics of the past to an approach that recognises people's individuality.

"We still need specific action to deal with specific problems, but we need to move beyond defining people simply because they have ticked a box on a form."

The letter included reference to specific high profile achievements of people from BME backgrounds. However, while these should be celebrated they cannot be held up as evidence that racism does not constitute a substantial barrier to large numbers of BME people achieving their full potential.

While BME households are disproportionately represented in poverty statistics any notion that poverty-driven initiatives will address race is misconceived. Two thirds of schools receiving the pupil premium (available to children from all households known to be eligible for free school meals on grounds of income), have no equality schemes that would help schools to identify, prioritise and address race and other identity-related barriers to children's attainment. Two thirds make no mention of addressing barriers to race equality. The Runnymede Trust was soon to publish a report which looks at the impact of the public spending cuts on race equality.

Ending his address, Rob Berkeley encouraged delegates to focus on the kind of world we want to live in, and on working together, combining our efforts to make it happen. This focus is driving a new campaign on which Runnymede has embarked to 'end racism within a generation'.¹⁴

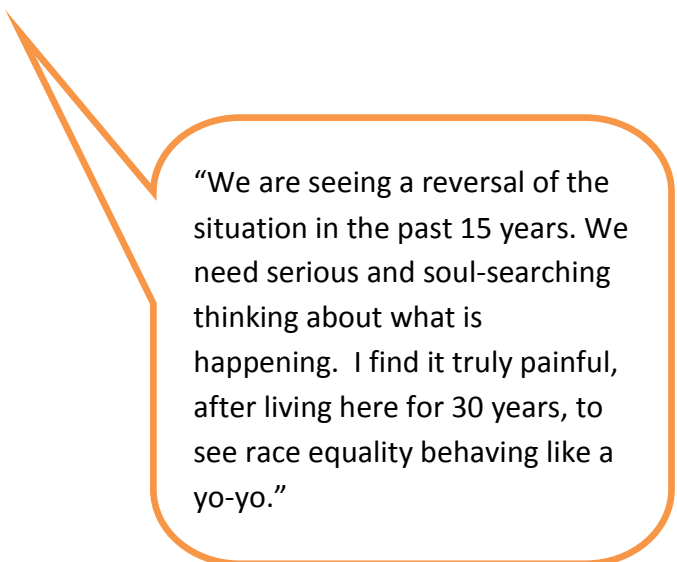
In a plenary discussion, the question was raised as to whether there had been any improvement in the South West in attitudes to race. Delegates agreed that there had been some progress in public and private behaviour and a general recognition that racial discrimination was wrong. Racism now tended to be less overt - although racist incidents continued to be all too frequent. (..... ' we still get stopped and searched....[and] ' it's hard to hold on to progress.....') – but remained an institutional feature of many public and corporate organisations.

In a brief address one of the Co-chairs of the South West Race Equality Forum spoke of how things look and feel from his own perspective as a BME person who has long been settled in the UK and latterly in the South West.

¹⁴ See details <http://www.runnymedetrust.org/projects-and-publications/projects/end-racism-this-generation.html>

“We are seeing a reversal of the situation in the past 15 years. We need serious and soul-searching thinking about what is happening. I find it truly painful, after living here for 30 years, to see race equality behaving like a yo-yo.”

This concern echoes those raised elsewhere in the recent past by a significant number of contributors to our enquiries. It summarises why ESW undertook this programme of work around race equality in the region.



“We are seeing a reversal of the situation in the past 15 years. We need serious and soul-searching thinking about what is happening. I find it truly painful, after living here for 30 years, to see race equality behaving like a yo-yo.”

End note

It is self-evident that legislation is not an end in itself but a means to an end. Equality legislation passed in recent decades has created a framework for regulating acceptable behaviour towards protected groups. Those whom it has sought to benefit recognise and acknowledge, in the main, that cultural as well as material changes have occurred as a result.

But if the Equality Act 2010 is to have its intended effect of progressive improvement, government and others in positions of power need to give strong leadership. Instead, the Equality Strategy's explicit repudiation of 'identity politics' fundamentally negates a central plank of the Equality Act and flies in the face of the evidence that identity-based discrimination remains a significant barrier to equality of opportunities and outcomes.

Calls for a strategy that tackles racism and promote race equality have been met with a generic Equality Strategy setting out 'niche' government schemes that bypass the fundamental issue of institutional discrimination. Other high profile strategies, such as the 'Mobility Strategy' and the 'Integration Strategy', air-brush racism out of the range of issues requiring attention.

This resistance among senior Parliamentarians to acknowledging the influence of racism in British society is a central concern underpinning the government's integrationist approach. It glosses over the fundamental effect of discrimination which, in its many forms, confronts people on a daily basis.

Inferences can be drawn from this colour-blind approach. It could spring from a belief that entrenched, institutional racism and its effects on people's lives was, after all, illusory, or alternatively that it has been eliminated. It is difficult to believe that either explanation provides a credible rationale for the government's position, particularly in light of all the evidence to the contrary

What is lacking, and urgently needed, is a supportive policy environment, and strong leadership from central and local government that names and condemns racism and exemplifies good practice.

We look forward in the hope that this need will be recognised and fulfilled in the very near future.

Brenda Weston

Equality Development Officer, Policy and
August 2013



Research

List of points from event workshops

A number of areas of concern overlapped across the workshops, and some key issues grouped under 'Community capacity to influence, inform and challenge' and 'Leadership' mirrored each other. The rural nature of much of the South West, and the diversity of its social, economic, demographic and cultural environments, form an important context for the majority of the points and observations.

Below are the headings, and the individual points recorded. The brackets show in which workshop the points were raised.

Rurality

1. The workshop identified the significant **impact of rurality and isolation on BME people's experiences**. (Access to justice)
2. Many parts of the SW have **isolated, dispersed and disempowered BME households** without critical mass to push for change/rights. (Making Equality Act work for us)
3. Many in the South West live in an **'advice desert'**. People from outside the catchment areas of the advice centre's funding bodies apply for help and have to be refused. (Access to Justice)
4. **Basic information about rights, or how to challenge** racial abuse of any kind is hard to come by, and even then access to legal aid supported advice is not available to them. (Access to Justice)
5. **Key decision-makers in the South West are mainly white, male and middle class** (in councils and other public bodies) and too few have the interest, commitment, understanding or political motivation to drive race equality initiatives. (Making Equality Act work for us: also included under 'Leadership Issues')
6. **Data in relation to BME populations is both inadequate and extremely unreliable**. In many parts of the region small area census statistics would not identify any BME households. (Making Equality Act work for us)
7. The importance of **statistical data should not be over-emphasised**. Correlating numbers of BME people with race-related 'issues' **ignores the frequency and impact of people's day to day experiences of discrimination** which largely arise out of a lack of familiarity with, and basic ignorance of racial and ethnic diversity. (Making Equality Act work for us)
8. There is concern that **an absence of pressure** from BME communities **allows a 'tick box approach' to equality analysis** where motivation on the part of decision-makers or is lacking. (Making Equality Act work for us)

Reporting and recording racially motivated crimes and incidents

9. **A legal duty to monitor record and report** discrimination and harassment issues should be introduced/enforced in schools. (Race Equality in Schools and Colleges)
10. Keep equalities on the agenda! There is a **real need to report on key issues such as race hate crime** and ensure race equality is given appropriate consideration. (Community Safety)
11. Police had experienced an **increase in hate crimes and hate incidents which coincided with media reporting of race-related issues and funding cuts**. (Community Safety)
12. **A police/PCSO migrant workers project in Cornwall** was showing good results, with a PCSO able to translate and speak Polish helping in this respect.

Inter-agency collaboration

13. The Avon and Bristol Law Centre is able to continue because it is located in the centre of several local authority areas in which there are higher concentrations of, and greater diversity among, their populations. These **local authorities have understood the importance of supporting such a centre, and combine resources** to ensure its continuation. (Access to Justice)
14. One suggested solution to the 'advice desert' was that South West Higher Education institutions which have **law faculties could undertake advice work through trained students** under the supervision of experienced faculty staff. (Access to Justice)
15. Stronger links between **race equality and support services with Ofsted**, Ofsted could then recommend school's engage with these services after poor inspections (Race Equality in Schools and Colleges)
16. Academies and schools have strong links with universities and FE colleges (around practice placements and wider curriculum). Agencies should **build links with HE/FE providers as a means of 'opening the door' to non-engaging schools**. (Race Equality in Schools and Colleges)
17. The Fire Service in Devon and Cornwall have been working with the Race Equality Council to ensure that fire safety information is accessible to people whose English reading and comprehension requires translation and simplification.

Community capacity to influence, inform and challenge

18. The extent to which **fear is a deterrent to challenging injustices** should not be underestimated. It commonly results in people 'keeping their heads down' rather than asserting their rights to equal treatment. (Making Equality Act work for us)

19. People need to be made **aware of** what the Equality Act covers and **the rights that they have under the legislation**. They should have examples of how the Equality Duty has been used and what kinds of grounds they can use. (Making Equality Act work for us)
20. It is important to **equip and use people and institutions to scrutinise and challenge** the proposals and decisions of public bodies where they fail to take proper account of the equality duty. (Access to Justice)
21. In spite of the serious competition for funds, and the withdrawal of support for race equality action by government, a Police Equality and Diversity Unit, which takes a proactive and positive approach to addressing hate crime **was saved through effective lobbying by equality groups in the community**. (Community Safety)
22. While some methods used by members of BME groups to highlight complaints and discontent with public bodies may be labelled 'inappropriate' by organisations targeted, **powerful institutions need to question why such methods are resorted to**. (Making Equality Act work for us)
23. It was noted that the **Department for Health is funding a national partnership that includes representation from all protected groups** ('Making the Equality Act work for us'), and that this is proving a very positive initiative in terms at least of building equality and diversity into national thinking.
24. Inability to set long-term goals when on short-term contracts: there is a conflict between short-term funding provision and the need to provide **support services and to critically challenge services where necessary**. (Race Equality in Schools and Colleges)
25. **Mechanisms to challenge schools or hold them to account is currently limited**, especially by schools' discretionary power over whether to engage. Where do families and support services go if they are refused engagement after trying governors or considering a challenge under the equality act? (Race Equality in Schools and Colleges)
26. **Greater support, information and engagement to enable BME parents** to challenge schools over racist incidents, rather than accept them. (Race Equality in Schools and Colleges)
27. There has not been any plainly visible holding of the public sector to account so that they can be seen to deliver on equality objectives and targets. There is a real **need for empowered credible third sector regional bodies that are able to monitor public organisations and challenge effectively for improvement**. (Community Safety)
28. Organisations like the London based 'The Monitoring Group' are important **in giving a voice to BME communities and holding public bodies to account**. (Making Equality Act work for us)

Leadership issues

29. **Governments** need to clearly **develop initiatives that make it socially acceptable to challenge discriminatory attitudes and behaviours that lead to hate crime**. A safer environment needs to be developed where everybody is aware that we all have a duty to promote equality. (Community Safety)
30. There should be stronger government **support for initiatives that enable communities to come together and promote integration**. Such initiatives can deliver positive outcomes and should **not be a “one off” event** but could form part of a series that can help create stronger communities. (Community Safety)
31. Anticipation that **the Public Sector Equality Duty would be abolished has affected the commitment to drive forward the E&D agenda**. The Duty had enabled one equality professional to chase to comply, but this has been resisted since the review was announced. (Making Equality Act work for us)
32. **Key decision-makers are mainly white, male and middle class** (in SW councils and other public bodies) and too few have the interest, commitment, understanding or political motivation to drive race equality initiatives. (Making Equality Act work for us)
33. Participants noted difficulties **within the NHS of challenging** where good equality practice was absent “(you can) challenge, but not too hard...” (Making Equality Act work for us)
34. It was agreed that **public bodies have an obligation to provide accessible and constructive channels** for engagement for those whose sense of powerlessness can otherwise lead to despair, or to frustration that results in less constructive approaches. (Making Equality Act work for us)
35. There seems to be very little countering of the press’s strongly negative reporting of equality issues. **Community leaders should be coming forward to counter negative stereotyping** and win the argument that shows promoting equality is better for society. (Community Safety)
36. There is a need **for politicians at national and local level** to be good role models and not be afraid to voice opinions that **counter popular misconceptions regarding immigration, asylum seekers and unemployment**. (Community Safety)
37. It is important that schools understand the value to them and their communities of **engaging and promoting race equality work. This needs buy in by senior management and governors**. Persuading schools that **tackling racism is central** to their main objectives and **improving attainment** - especially for minority groups. (Race Equality in Schools and Colleges)
38. **Concern** of outside/equalities agencies **over ‘quiet’, non-reporting or non-engaging schools** – lack of requirement to even talk to voluntary services or outside organisations. (Race Equality in Schools and Colleges)

39. Need for **greater recruitment of governors, teaching staff and wider school staff from BME backgrounds**, especially where this ethnicity reflects the school community (Race Equality in Schools and Colleges)
40. Schools should not shy away from difficult targets by opting to **set the 'easy' equality objectives over tackling racism and intolerance**. (Race Equality in Schools and Colleges)

Diversity awareness to combat victim-blaming and stigmatisation

41. Improved **training and guidance for school governors**. (Race Equality in Schools and Colleges)
42. **All school staff to be trained up to be the 'expert'** rather than having to find the person with an interest or commitment to equality. Responsibility of schools to make this happen. (Race Equality in Schools and Colleges)
43. **Less blame culture** including deflection of responsibilities by school by **labelling the victim as the problem** – agree to work together to ensure situations do not re-occur. (Race Equality in Schools and Colleges)
44. **Fewer assumptions**: Not everyone meets the cultural stereotype of their ethnic group (Travellers, Muslims, Jews etc) acknowledgement that **as individuals our needs vary**, even from those with similar interests, backgrounds or issues. (Race Equality in Schools and Colleges)
45. **Value the individual** – move away from idea that it is not cost effective to deliver support to small numbers of BME pupils (i.e. – it's only one child/family, is it worth it?) Promote the value of diversity education to wider community. Giving isolated minorities a voice, valuing their experience and supporting them in tackling negative attitudes and behaviour. (Race Equality in Schools and Colleges)
46. **Role of schools as wider educators, learning for families as well as pupils** – challenging negative stereotypes and views of parents. Done via wider PTA involvement, events activities and equalities based parent forums (which offers instant consultation around equalities issues in accordance with schools duties and responsibilities). Also requires strong policies and stronger implementation (zero tolerance) (Race Equality in Schools and Colleges)
47. Opportunities for **young people to experience and understand diverse cultures**. Include an international perspective that is more than linking to 'poor' schools in Africa, which can perpetuate the myth that all of Africa is poor and dependent on aid to improve. **Promote the 'rights respecting schools' programme (UNICEF)** as a base mark for open, inclusive schools. (Race Equality in Schools and Colleges)
48. Service commissioners often do not understand the issues and are therefore **failing to include equality and diversity in their tender specifications**. (Making Equality Act work for us)