



Community Cohesion Sub-Group report for High Wycombe Community Board meeting 10th February 2021

Cllr Rafiq Raja (Chair) and Cllr Andrea Baughan (Vice-Chair)

The Community Boards are not entirely a new concept introduced by Buckinghamshire Council, but in a short time (since September 2020) we have found ways of engaging with the public and come up with small and manageable projects which we hope will make a difference for some residents.

My name is Rafiq Raja and I am chairman of the Community Cohesion Working Group. Despite the fact that due to the Covid-19 Pandemic we have not had a proper face to face meeting since the new Unitary authority was set up on 1 April 2020, we have nevertheless adapted ourselves to the new situation and managed to have really fruitful meetings and sifted through a number of ideas and have come up with a few feasible projects; which hopefully have the potential to make a difference:

As you may have gathered from the name of the Community Cohesion Sub Group we are interested in improving the cohesion among our residents and have come up with the following projects:

Black lives Matter

- By the way it may be better understood if we referred to this topic as “Black Lives ALSO Matter”, because the BLM title may be misunderstood by some people who assume that we are stating that other lives don’t matter.
- Most of you would be aware of the BLM campaign which resulted from the continued unequal treatment of Black American citizens in the United States. This coupled with the disproportionate impact on the Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic communities of Covid-19 made it a relevant topic for our group to see how we could improve understanding of the issues relating to discrimination, institutional racism and racism at large in our society; I would only refer to the recent racist outpourings on social media against the Manchester United footballer, Marcus Rashford, who has been lauded for spearheading the campaign for free school meals being provided out of school term. In fact, the young footballer has been trying to lessen the impact of poverty on the lives of many young children.
- The best way, with the current pandemic in our midst, is to have a few talks (by people who understand the issue and have been speaking about racism) in our focused meetings

which would be open to our fellow members of the council and local residents via Zoom or Teams.

- We are hopeful that we can set up a series of talks which will help to increase our understanding of the historic wrongs visited on the Black people (slavery, colonialism and institutional racism) and making people aware of how discrimination still impacts the lives of our Black and Brown citizens in our country.
- The Covid 19 Pandemic is going to be with us for some time to come, despite commendable efforts being made to improve our combined (herd) immunity by the vaccinating the population.
- Analysis so far has shown that the pandemic is having a disproportionate impact on the Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic communities, which is indicative of social and economic deprivation as well as the fact that the government's message may not have been fully understood by people with English as a Second Language (ESL). Members of the group have been helping efforts to spread the message by producing literature and video clips in different community languages.
- A leaflet was issued before Christmas which was sent to the Community Midwifery Managers for Bucks Healthcare Trust, who were very pleased, with its message.

English as a Second Language (ESOL)

- Another area where we can make a practical difference to lives of some of our residents is to help them to learn to communicate in English.
- You may think that this is not a problem, but we have felt that there are a number of youngish people in High Wycombe, principally female, from Pakistan and Eastern Europe, who could benefit.
- We have found some enthusiastic partners in the form of Bucks Adult learners, who will be able to offer course work and tutors and a facility (The Hive) in the Bowerdean area, has already been identified as a venue. The Hive would welcome the opportunity to host these sessions; with social distancing rules.
- The second lockdown put a stop to our plan for small, ESL groups of women to learn English speaking skills with an emphasis on women's health issues. The aim of this is twofold. As well as having the confidence and language skills to ensure women's physical and mental health is addressed and the women have the confidence to discuss their concerns with Health Care Professionals, it is hoped this will help women make friends and contacts within their local community. The Healthy Living Centre is currently running an online women's language course which has been circulated to teams in Buckinghamshire Health Care Trust. It is hoped we can progress the live lessons as soon as practically feasible.
- Coupled to this would be making the students aware of other issues regarding general health, mental health, childcare, obesity and diet as topics for discussion. The feedback we have had suggests that if the first course is successful then we will need to have it rolled out to other parts of High Wycombe and indeed Buckinghamshire.

Youth provision

- We are also interested in looking at the problems faced by the young people, especially those who fall into the NEET (Not in Education, Employment or Training) category.
- Action4Youth delivered a presentation and have submitted a funding application for their new initiative Safety Net. This is a project which will provide a package of holistic support

for disadvantaged young people initially in Wycombe, and then wider Bucks in future years. The overall aim of the project is to improve the wellbeing of the local youth population and their communities, reducing anti-social behaviour by providing positive activities, ongoing support and pathways to additional provision if required. Action4Youth propose to collaborate with a wide range of groups and organisations supporting young people in High Wycombe to deliver this project.

Crime & Anti-Social Behaviour

- Another issue we wish to consider in due course is to understand the nature of crime and what forces people to drift into crime. We hope to have a few talks to improve our understanding of this wide topic and the related Anti-Social Behaviour.
- Our aim is not only to involve our adult residents but our young people, especially school children who can not only take messages home but can also teach us about the economic, social and peer pressures which govern their daily lives.
- 7Roadlight have submitted a draft proposal for a project to work in schools with young people - their mentoring and therapeutic model has been well received <https://www.roadlight.co.uk/about-us/testimonials/>

Other Ideas

- It is our desire to make the work of the Community Board relevant to the people and here we hope to launch awareness of keeping your neighbourhoods clean and tidy and taking pride in the areas we live in. So we are hoping, in the Summer months, Pandemic permitting, to promote a light hearted competition to give people an incentive to tidy up their gardens and take pride in their area across the Wards.
- Our group has made contact with the Wycombe Museum about an art trail across Wycombe or exhibits in the Arts Centre (and more unusual venues) - possible themes to be the massive and invaluable contribution by the people who settled in Wycombe from the Windrush Generation, but will be a celebration of BAME artistic talent and will be a fun, uplifting low/no cost idea for later in the year. Local artists - particularly those from the BAME community will be invited to display their work in cafes and other locations across town - where would you least expect to see an Art Exhibition? Cllr Andrea Baughan (vice chair of the group) is meeting with colleagues from the Culture & Leisure Development Service and the museum. This will depend on when Lockdown Regulations lift.

We trust this gives you a flavour of what we have been engaged in the last few months.

Cllr Rafiq Raja
Chairman
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