

Lead Officer: Director of Housing

Wards: All

Agenda Item: 7

Subject: ETHNIC MINORITY ACTION GROUP

1. SUMMARY

This report recommends the development of the Ethnic Minority Action Group to represent the views of all ethnic minority residents living on Croydon Council estates and promote and encourage community cohesion.

2. RECOMMENDATION

The Panel is asked to support the development of the Ethnic Minority Action Group.

3. BACKGROUND

- 3.1 In 2006/07, following consultation with ethnic minority residents, the Housing Department worked with residents to develop the Housing Minority Ethnic Panel (HMEP). The aim of this panel was to encourage greater involvement from ethnic minority residents in the management of their homes and estates. In addition, members were encouraged to participate in mainstream resident involvement activities.
- 3.2 Initially the HMEP had some degree of success and meetings of the panel were reasonably well attended. Members of the panel worked with officers to arrange a number of events and activities, in particular an Open Day, to promote awareness of relevant issues among ethnic minority residents.
- 3.3 Various officers and representatives from other partner organisations regularly attended the meetings to provide attendees with information and an opportunity to discuss issues and ask questions.
- 3.4 However, despite attempts made by the council over time, the panel experienced difficulties in recruiting regular members and attendance at the panel meetings remained poor. Early meetings were attended by 10 – 12 people with the expectation that this would increase but by the last meetings attendance had fallen to around 8 – 10 residents.

- 3.5 More importantly, it was generally acknowledged that the outcomes from the panel were not meeting original expectations. There were few actions from the meetings and many of these were trivial matters that could or should have been dealt with elsewhere.
- 3.6 A final meeting of the HMEP took place on 21st April 2010, which had been called primarily to discuss the future of the panel. Resident members agreed that the panel should cease to operate as it was not meeting its key objectives. However, residents were keen to ensure that the council should continue to work with residents from ethnic minorities, who form a significant number of council residents, to enable them to be involved.
- 3.7 It was further suggested at that meeting that a new body be formed that would not simply receive presentations but be more strategic and act as a working or focus group. The aim would be to form a small but committed group, which would meet to focus on housing related issues that impact on residents from ethnic minorities. In particular, it would work to ensure the needs of residents from all ethnic minorities are considered in relevant decisions and help to improve the effectiveness of communication between the council and residents from ethnic minority communities.
- 3.8 A meeting of a small working group of resident members from the HMEP took place on 2 June 2010 and further detail was added to the proposal. The key point was the suggestion that a broader range of ethnic minority residents be surveyed to identify their priorities.

4. DETAIL

- 4.1 During 2010, a number of surveys were conducted:
- At a multicultural event (23 respondents)
 - A door knocking exercise
 - A further (and more extensive) survey of all ethnic minority residents registered on the Housing Sounding Board (380) which resulted in 43 responses.
- These surveys were conducted to establish the priorities of local ethnic minority residents. The results of these are attached (see **Appendices 1 - 4**)
- 4.2 Officers promoted the plan to establish a new group (under the working title of the Ethnic Minority Action Group) through a recruitment advert placed in Open House and a number of leaflets, which were distributed via local community / faith groups. Only 13 people responded to this campaign but of those, the majority were quite enthusiastic and 8 residents attended the first meeting which was called on 12 May 2011.
- 4.3 The results of the surveys were presented to the group and they used the information to agree their future priorities (see **Appendix 6**). The group also discussed the way it would operate and agreed to develop a communication network to ensure a much wider audience were aware of the group and its

activities, or have an opportunity to be more deeply involved. It was also agreed the group would remain known as the Ethnic Minority Action Group.

4.4 The group agreed it will not operate in the same way as many of the councils' panels, as members favoured a more dynamic and active approach. All those who had expressed an interest in the group were sent a copy of the Terms of Reference and asked for any comments. The final copy of the Terms of Reference was ratified at the meeting of the group which took place on 19 March 2012. The agreed Terms of Reference are attached (see **Appendix 5**) but the key points are below.

- Any ethnic minority resident who resides in a Council owned property or on a Council owned estate is entitled to join the group and up to 2 places are also available to non council residents.
- The group will nominate two representatives to the Tenants' & Leaseholders' Panel.
- Two councillors (one majority, one minority) can be nominated to the Ethnic Minority Action Group as non voting members.
- The meetings of the group will be facilitated and serviced by officers from the Resident Involvement and Scrutiny team, who will also provide support and a co-ordinating role to the work of the group.
- As a working / focus group, meetings will not be open to all members of the public.

5. DIVERSITY CONSIDERATIONS

5.1 The Terms of Reference require that the group shall positively promote diversity and work for the elimination of all forms of discrimination.

5.2 All members are required to attend induction training sessions which will include diversity awareness. Members are also entitled to claim assistance with any travel and care costs. Where possible, meetings will be held at mutually convenient times and in a venue which is accessible to members.

5.3 The Government tenant participation compact framework requires all authorities to develop a separate race equality strategy, with residents, which sets out how the council will aim to involve tenants from under represented groups.

6. FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS

6.1 There will be additional costs associated with the servicing of the Panel but these will be minimal and can be contained within existing budgets.