



The 1st Report of the Merseyside Coalition for Equality.

Why this report

- 1.1 This report explains the early progress of the Coalition in developing its operational rationale and structure and lays out a draft of its forth-coming programme of activities. This draft programme has been arrived at through discussion within its steering group, a small scale conference of interested participants in October 2007 and further consultation on a one to one basis with interested parties, particularly those working in a frontline capacity with equality issues.
- 1.2 The report will be used to gain the resources needed to implement the proposed programme and underpin the structure that is required to support the partnerships and network necessary to bring about the initial and future programmes. Finally it is hoped the report will help generate a wider discussion on the issues it raises and which in turn will support the appropriate environment for further activities.

The initial briefing paper issued

- 2.1 **Overall purpose;** The Coalition is established by Merseyside Network for Change and Merseyside Council of Faiths to provide a Forum of Support for those communities across the Greater Liverpool sub-region who are affected by hate-crime and discrimination, to enable them better challenge these evils and to articulate their views and concerns to those in power. Merseyside Network for Change is a charitable company and part of the labour movement established in 2001 to run projects and campaigns which promote justice, especially racial and economic justice. Merseyside Council of Faiths is also a charitable company set up to safeguard the interests and expand upon the work of faith communities for the benefit of the whole community.
- 2.2 **Organising Principles;** The Coalition is, in essence, a network of networks with the following at its heart;
 - Liverpool Community Empowerment Project; 324 community groups, 186 of whom are representative of black and racial Minority communities and 9 groups of people with disabilities

- Merseyside Refugee Support Network; 110 organisations working with asylum seekers and refugees, incorporating the LASAR and Time Together partnerships.
- Migrant Workers Northwest; a project of the Northwest TUC campaigning for the rights of migrant workers.

2.3 **Steering group**; From these Networks has been drawn a Steering Group to run the Coalition with the following membership;

Co-Chairs: Donna Tagoe, manager Building Bridges Care Homes
Peter Morgan, Parish Priest, St Bernard's, Granby

Members: Donna Bernard (Transport and General Workers Union)
Rana Chrysokhou (Liverpool Greek Society/ Merseyside Yemeni Community Association)
Tom Dowling (All Together Now)
Siddi Majouba (Liverpool Community Sports)
Ewan Roberts (Asylum Link Merseyside)
Mariame Saleh (Al-Rhama Mosque)

2.4 **Finance**; Core funding to establish the Coalition in 2007/8 comes from the Commission for Racial Equality, with project funds for a Women in faith project secured from Awards for All and for an ethnic elders and BME economic activities projects awaiting funding decisions.

3. **Consultation feedback**

3.1 This section of the report is a summary of the discussions held in the steering group, the mini conference held at the end of October 2007 and with interested parties informally in the first months of the project.

3.2 There is a degree of frustration felt by many frontline groups and individual members of some communities at what they see as deficits in the match between the legal, policy commitments and intentions of civic agencies committed to equality and human rights and the day to day experience of many who are supposed to benefit from the legislation and initiatives arising from it.

3.3 In part this frustration stems from what is seen as a lack of willingness to commit resources to ensure compliance with regulation or policy and in part the manner of use of the resources that are committed. This situation is leading to a degree of cynicism and demoralisation among some groups, who express their relations with government agencies as seemingly endless battles over equality issues.

3.4 With regards to the level of support some groups receive is the belief that the police and fire and emergency services, often previously regarded as among the more conservative of agencies in regards to equality issues, are now in the forefront of delivering support. While these bodies should be applauded for their efforts, there is the perception such efforts are not being matched by those agencies who would like to regard themselves as being in the lead on equality matters.

3.5 The consequence of this partial failure to implement a more robust response to ensure equality is the continuing reluctance for people to come forward when confronted with any form of discrimination. This situation is skewering the data being collected. There is often an issue on the extensiveness of data and the methods by which it was collected. The consequence of this scenario is that it becomes an uphill struggle for some groups to articulate evidence- backed arguments for further actions which could lead to improvement in their situation.

3.6 An improvement in the quality of data could lead to better resource management as well a more focused approach to policy implementation. This lack of data is particularly acute where authorities work with outdated census data and show an unwillingness to recognise localised recent and rapid changes in demography.

3.7 The EHRC will engage with a wide range of groups and communities who have to confront an equally diverse range of issues. At the local level where the Coalition's engagement will be more hands on with these groups and communities it is recognised that particular and novel opportunities will arise in bringing the different equality strands together in a meaningful way in order to achieve the necessary reduction or banishment of barriers. At the same time the often generalised nature of equality policy and initiatives needs addressing in this new context.

3.8 Coupled to this situation are previously little considered issues such as, for example, the growing problem of age discrimination and domestic violence in single sex partnerships. The essence the Coalition should be one of putting people in touch with each other and with agencies to help create a very proactive framework, what we describe above as a network of networks. Secondly the Coalition

should not merely support but lead on and create initiatives which assist in building peoples capacity to engage with society as a player on an even playing field.

3.9 Discussion is on-going as to the centrality of human rights to the Coalition's work. While all agree that freedom from harassment and discrimination is a basic human right there are arguments for circumspection in how the issue is addressed. This is not because the human rights case is weak: it is in fact incontrovertible. Caution is dictated by the wholesale corruption of public discourse of human rights issues in Britain; there is a case for tackling that corruption before addressing the issues. To this end a programme of public education, particularly modelled on the successful Merseyside Refugee Support Network programme on public perceptions of asylum seekers, might assume a high priority for the Coalition.

3.10. There was general agreement that the priorities were threefold

- a. identify allies and enemies
- b. to invigilate the monitoring process of agencies and especially in how data is gathered, as a means of improving processes and their uses in reducing hate crime and discrimination and marginalisation.
- c. assist in overcoming the economic disadvantage that underlines many equality issues.

It was further agreed that these topics need to be explored in new ways and for any initiatives arising out of this process to be disseminated through workshops etc with the objective of spreading good practice and lateral thinking

4.1 The suggested programme arising out of the consultation process covering general areas of activity, specific events/activity with support sought, given

4.2 Despite there being a lot of consideration on the matter there remains a need to recognise the practical benefits which can be drawn out of the diversity of outlooks and practices of groups. In particular there is a desire to look at this as a means of supporting equally diverse forms of economic activity.

4.3 On the issue of developing networks, whether expanding existing ones or creating new ones is not to fall into the trap of formalistic approaches to network building too often found but to concentrate

on meaningful impacts that bring about progress and change. Two particular issues arise from this

- i. Ensure that the Coalition builds a Mersey wide engagement as people are increasingly moving between authorities and may work in one and live in another.
- ii. Improve the agreed lack of data and its access on certain issues and in particular areas.

4.4 To further improve the effectiveness of the networks the Coalition should help make it easier for people with good ideas to be able to go to a one stop shop type set up where those ideas can be developed shared etc. It is considered that there is too much reinvention of the wheel in the sector and that the Coalition should not be seen as replicating this situation.

4.5 Develop a series of targeted participants for workshops based on the belief that there are people out there whose brains are being under utilised by spending their time ticking boxes. These workshops won't be designed for beginners but aimed at leading reps with the communities the Coalition is working with. The Coalition will facilitate them but bring the best they can find to deliver them and design the events to ensure there's real participation and people work out their ideas in them rather than simply receive wisdom.

1st workshop Different perspectives re economic activity need to be better understood in the light of cultural, faith etc diversity. A one solution approach does work in bringing out economic potential or good practice.

2nd Giving communities the tools to answer back rather than just expecting them to comply with the authorities handouts and say so. A workshop in understanding information/data gathering, its use as a tool for change in reference to hate crime and minority community issues.

3rd Diversity; who's good and bad - living with difference a more thorough look at the whole of what we are and conflict reduction.

4th The demeaning of the Human rights agenda how we can get it back on the table as a main item and not an optional side dish.

5th Your not alone but networking is more than a list of contacts you either send your newsletter to or add as partners to your funding applications.

4.8 Arising from these there may be a second set which tackle more specialist topics e.g. how to get a judicial review or making the most of political connections and specific legal and economic issues in detail.

5.1 Funding strategy - Apart from any funding opportunities that are supported by the EHRC, which it is hoped will provide core funding, specific pieces of work will be funded through targeting appropriate funding bodies which in turn will determine the timetabling of these activities At present the Coalition is looking at developing bids to the following:

Connecting Communities a government fund managed by Community Development Fund

Deprived Areas Fund again a government fund distributed through a local fund

Further ideas on funding possibilities would be welcome.