



Equal Herts Community Engagement

**A study of issues facing
organisations working
with diverse communities
in Hertfordshire.**

Acknowledgement

The Equal Herts project upon which this report is based would not have been possible without input from the Hertfordshire Equality Council (HEC) Board of Trustees, sponsorship from Awards for All – Big Lottery and a number of voluntary sector organisations and groups giving their time and expertise. HEC is extremely grateful to all involved to bring the project to successful conclusion. Particular thanks go to the individuals and organisations below:

Disability Watford (DW)
Gypsy And Traveller Empowerment (GATE Herts)
Hertfordshire Asian Women's Association (HAWA)
Herts People First
Polish Community
Viewpoint
Watford Afro-Caribbean Association (WACA)

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INTRODUCTION



Hertfordshire Equality Council (HEC) has an ambitious diversity programme which aims, amongst other things to increase diversity across the public sector in Hertfordshire.

The 'public sector' is interpreted to mean all institutions and organisation that are in receipt of public funding, and the various organisations that support and promote equality and inclusion.

'Equal Herts' is a HEC project funded by the Big Lottery with the aim of engaging with protected groups across the county, to identify equality issues being faced by communities, individuals and voluntary organisations in the county of Hertfordshire. The aim was to hear from voluntary and community groups to identify and share issues to provide a clear direction for HEC to work on improving opportunities in Hertfordshire for those who experience difficulties accessing services, poverty or social exclusion because of their protected characteristic.

Another purpose is to take action with Hertfordshire communities to address problems and engage effectively with public sector bodies at meetings across the county. HEC proposed to host 6

events. Following poor attendance at the first two events HEC took sounding from community groups. A lot of the organisations contacted said they were over committed and had a limited number of volunteers.

HEC responded to this feedback by creating a survey monkey questionnaire to enable community groups and organisations to take part in the project in a way that might suit them best and by hosting two further events with invited speakers from different communities, groups and organisations, with the aim to explore:

- **lessons learnt from 'Equal Herts' project to date.**
- **how 'a voice for Hertfordshire Communities' can be made more effective.**
- **what HEC needs to do to support disadvantaged communities / groups**


This is a study of what voluntary organisations said when HEC asked about their experiences of the public sector and answers what has been the impact on the voluntary sector and disadvantaged communities in Hertfordshire of the implemented austerity cuts. It provides answers to three core questions:

What are the issues currently facing the voluntary sector particularly in relation to equality and diversity?

How do people currently working in voluntary sector perceive the public sector?

How inclusive of voluntary groups are their needs is the culture of the public sector currently?

This is a unique study of the perceptions and experiences of the voluntary sector who are working with diverse communities in Hertfordshire. The study is based on findings from focus events, one to one discussions, scrutiny of Local Authority (LA) policies, meetings with LA officers, an online survey conducted with voluntary organisations in a five-month period between October 2017 and March 2018 and telephone interviews with several voluntary groups.

As part of the process HEC updated its contact list of organisations in Hertfordshire with an equality and diversity focus. 

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report presents the findings of a project to engage and build on the work with disadvantaged communities to promote equality of opportunity and foster good relations, to improve access to public services for protected groups under the Equality Act 2010 and extent to which public sector is being inclusive.

HEC will work with the insights contained in this report to provide inspiration and encouragement for the voluntary sector to come together to challenge public sector agencies by creating a single voice for the disadvantaged community in Hertfordshire. HEC will agree a plan to progress this aim by December 2018.

Based on responses from organisations who took part in this project, the following emerged;

- **Mental Health.** A thread running through the contributions of the different groups was the concern about mental health. (e.g. lack of care, services etc.).
- **Communication Gaps.** Threaded through the contributions made and reflected the piecemeal approach that seems to be adopted by the public sector in communicating with community groups. Communication gaps especially affect disabled people and non-English speakers leading to their exclusion from society and isolation. The House of Lords Select Committee on the Equality Act 2010 and Disability report published 2016 recommends;

Communication: access needs are being ignored
Communication is a perennial problem. There is too little awareness of the needs of disabled people, especially among the Government departments and public bodies on whom we all rely, and whose websites and documents often ignore those with particular access needs.¹

- **Transport Gaps.** The necessity for safe and easy access to affordable transport was emphasised. The lack of audio-visual equipment on buses was a major concern for disabled people and with communication problems.
- **Language Gaps.** Community groups were working with their communities to improve English language skills. This is because of lack of provision by the public sector in particular by the education bodies.

¹ The Equality Act 2010: the impact on disabled People. House of Lords - Select Committee on the Equality Act 2010 and Disability. Report of Session 2015–16

- **Local and central governmental gaps in service provision.** Have led to increased lack of support and engagement from local and central government. This problem has been intensified by the welfare cuts that have led to increased poverty across the community groups.
- **Equality Act compliance gaps.** In different ways, community groups pointed to the failings of the Equality Act 2010 and its effect on the well-being of different groups, whether it was access to services or access to employment. The House of Lords Select Committee on the Equality Act 2010 and Disability report published 2016 recommends;

Public sector equality duty: a fundamental flaw

When the Government and public authorities are formulating their policies, they have a duty to “have due regard” to the need to eliminate discrimination and advance equality of opportunity. This wording allows them to consider all the evidence, but still to pursue plainly discriminatory policies. We recommend that the wording should be strengthened, so that the discriminatory consequences of their decisions can no longer be ignored.²

- **Employment gaps.** Access to employment was an issue for most of the groups present. Access was made difficult by a number of issues, including discrimination, disability, language skills, lack of training etc. The House of Lords Select Committee on the Equality Act 2010 and Disability report published 2016 recommends;


Red Tape Challenge: a pretext for removing protection

Many of the laws and practices which help disabled people require action from public authorities, employers and others. All too often the Government has characterised this as red tape, and made changes under the Red Tape Challenge which increase the problems of disabled people. These must be reversed. The Government, instead of concentrating on the burden on businesses, should be looking at the burden on disabled people³

^{2,3} The Equality Act 2010: the impact on disabled People. House of Lords - Select Committee on the Equality Act 2010 and Disability. Report of Session 2015–16

- **Racism and harassment.** Again crossed communities. The Polish community reported how racism and harassment had increased post Brexit. The African Caribbean group reported that this was a continuing problem including stop and search. GATE Herts reminded the group that racism against Gypsy, Roma and Traveller (GRT) was viewed as the last bastion of acceptable racism. The view was held that prejudice against the GRT community was endemic and reflected an extreme form of institutional racism.

Build on good practice. Participants reported that it was important to communicate positive images of community work and build on examples of good practice some of which are below:

- a. Polish Community reaching in to improve the language skills and building confidence and reaching out to access funding, campaigning, teaching, 'building bridges, not barriers'
- b. Herts Asian Women's Association focused on informing, advising, supporting their communities. A range of projects which both reached in to support well-being and confidence of women plus reaching out including visit to House of Commons to inform and build confidence
- c. GATE Herts. Hate crime advocacy service – for Gypsy, Roma and Traveller. 

BACKGROUND

HEC successfully applied for *Awards for All* under the Big Lottery funding programme in the summer of 2015. The purpose of the 'Equal Herts' project is to bring about real and lasting benefits for disadvantaged community groups and develop a two way channel of communication between decision makers and the wider community.

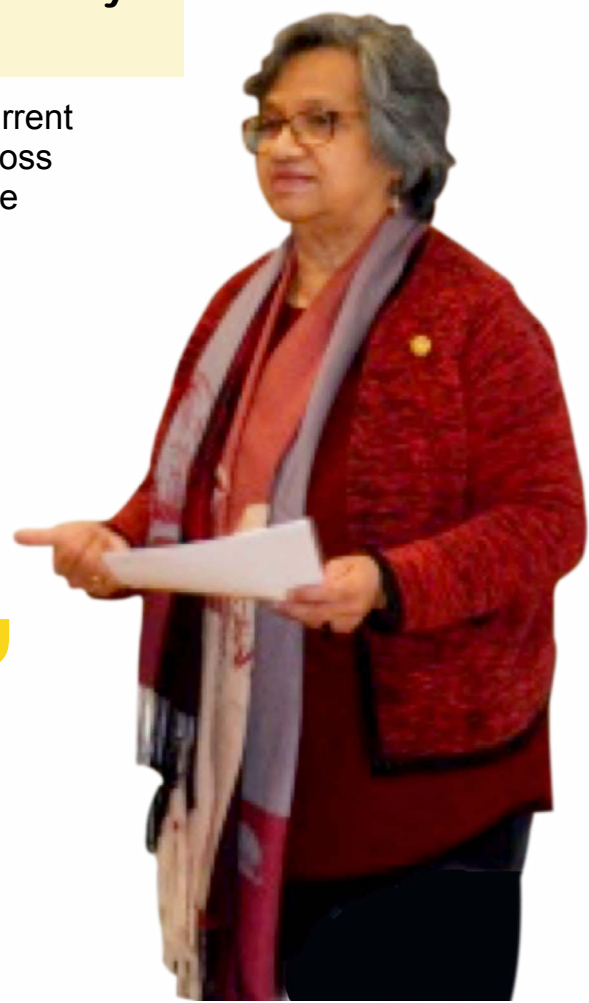
Legal and demographic changes are bringing about significant challenges in equality and diversity not only in the workforce but also in service delivery and interaction with the community. Knowledge and awareness are no longer enough as action and intervention are demanded. Public sector organisations need to demonstrate behaviour and achieve measurable outcomes not seen before to enhance reputation.

HEC believes there is a lack of evidence that the Public Sector Equality Duty under the Equality Act 2010 is being taken seriously and implemented by the public sector. HEC believes this is demonstrated by the absence of any meaningful engagement with the community from the public sector in Hertfordshire.

HEC initiated the 'Equal Herts' project to understand the current state of inclusion in Public Sector policies and activities across the voluntary sector, and also to identify how best to engage with protected groups across the county. 🗨️

“ We strive to foster a collaborative and inclusive socially conscious culture by working in partnership to promote equality in Hertfordshire. ”

Chair of HEC, Kate Belinis DL



PURPOSE AND OUTCOMES


HEC is the only independent equality organisations in the county of Hertfordshire. It has a responsibility to respond to equality challenges, to question and hold the public sector to account and to work closely with the voluntary sector in promoting equality of opportunity.

The aim of involving organisations who work with communities is to use their experience to understand and find ways to remove the inequalities and discrimination that may have inadvertently become embedded in the public sector existing policies and practices.

The Public Sector Equality Duty does not give individuals more rights; it is focused on 'outcomes' and removing barriers within public sector policy and the design of the public sector services or initiatives which may have a negative impact on the lives of all the protected groups.

Involvement is a long-term on-going exchange of information and news that enables organisations that work with protected groups / communities to influence and change public sector policies and practices. Evidence gathered through this project suggests that public sector organisations in Hertfordshire have not consulted with voluntary organisation on equality issues for a long time.

Community groups are involved in a number of partnership focussed groups in Hertfordshire however in most of these their success from the perspective of the community is not being considered by the partners. The Hertfordshire County Council Adult Care Services Co-production Board was mentioned by the disability groups taking part who all attend the meetings.

The Co-production Board, meeting since July 2016, aims to work in Co-production with a wide range of individuals and organisations. Co-production standards have been agreed which aim to support the effective involvement of people who use services in the design and delivery of services. The work of the Co-production Board was mentioned as a positive step toward effective involvement. Though there has been no specific focus on the Equality Duty to date as the agenda is co-produced there is an opportunity for this. 

FOCUS GROUP PRESENTATIONS

Each event hosted several speakers and following is a brief abstract of the presentations;

1

Refugees the Hertfordshire refugee organisation, have set up a registered charity called 'Herts Welcomes Syrian Families' (HWSF) who gave an in-depth presentation about 83 refugees families recently supported.

St. Albans, Stevenage, Dacorum and Watford have taken the lead to provide housing in Hertfordshire. It is important to note that not all local councils in Hertfordshire volunteered to take refugees. The numbers of issues raised by HWSF are;

- a. Withdrawal of formal English classes e.g. ESOL
- b. Transport difficulties
- c. Need to create more support networks
- d. Understanding how the government system works
- e. Hate crime vulnerability
- f. Job opportunities and training/re-training

2

Viewpoint talked about the issues surrounding people with mental health problems, and accessing services. Viewpoint discussed cuts made to services and the impacts this has on service users. The difficulties around booking appointments within a service that has had its funding cut. Viewpoint suggested the following;

- a. There is an ongoing need to compare data and the impact of reduction of services, resources and funding for voluntary sector services
- b. Dual Diagnosis Protocol – impact of protocol on service users and carers
- c. Physical Health check – suggestions include to set up a “drop in centre” for people to engage in annual health checks, to measure quality of health checks and to promote annual health check information
- d. Tracking “lost” people – people who previously accessed services and were discharged after criteria for services changes or funding is reduced

3

Disability Watford DW discussed the cuts to funding this group has suffered, and the impacts on service users who have used the DW facilities. DW discussed how facilities differed in the county, particularly surrounding public transport. DW also discussed issues around personal carers and the cuts that service users are experiencing around having the PIP payments cut.

Key issues raised by DW

- a. There is an equality issue in the Council – e.g. disabled communities are not necessarily consulted before a decision is taken on a service
- b. Council is not listening to disabled people – e.g. DW has raised concerns about the removal of disabled parking bays in town centre
- c. Councils need to reach-out to the disabled community
- d. Council needs to go out and speak face to face with disabled community members and organisations.



4

The Polish Community gave a presentation which detailed the progress of their 'self-help' project. They spoke about a fun-day they had recently run and its success for the Polish community. They told of future plans for further community get together. However the presenters highlighted a number of issues and barriers faced by the community;

- a. The Brexit effect on attitudes of Polish people “go home”
- b. Citizenship and the cost to apply
- c. Hate crime vulnerability following the Brexit vote
- d. No clarity from the government – uncertainty of the status of residence after Brexit
- e. EU entitlements – would they be protected under the EU regulations
- f. Language barrier is the biggest barrier
- g. Community support for English language classes
- h. Jobs and training needs – linked to language barriers
- i. Lack of knowledge of the local government and NHS systems
- j. How to access community funding
- k. Polish community feel they can't take part in community activities and consultations due to lack of confidence in speaking English.
- l. Polish community would like to challenge perception, stigma etc. to overcome many barriers faced.



5

Gypsy, Roma and Traveller Community (GRT) talked about Hate Crime directed towards the GRT community, and the project run by GATE Herts, “Report Racism GRT”. Gate also discussed the issues GRT have around access to health care and education and how Hate and Hostility impacts on this.

Key issues raised by GATE Herts

- a. Refusal of services to GRT community by public sector, such as refuse entry to local shops
- b. Refusal of services by some shops and other retail facilities – for example; booked a venue for a wedding and as soon as the venue found that the booking is from a GRT community the venue cancelled the booking
- c. The role of GATE is to fight misunderstanding. 80% of Gypsy community are living in homes and settled
- d. Due to stereotyping and stigmatisation, some members are at times reluctant to engage with service providers
- e. GRT community are reluctant to engage with the wider society due to the stigmatisation
- f. GATE is trying hard to create a better relationship with the police



6

Hertfordshire Asian Women's Association (HAWA) discussed how Asian women can feel isolated. They detailed how project HAWA encourages women from the Asian community to get together, they hold coffee mornings and have recently started a women's only fitness club. HAWA says these get together have improved women's mental health and helped to remedy the loneliness and isolation within the Asian Muslim community.

Key issues raised by HAWA

- a. Getting Muslim women out into the community
- b. Taking part in physical exercises
- c. Public sector use HAWA for interpreting, but don't want to pay for the service
- d. Lot of local authorities no longer have a "drop-in" service, it is by appointments by phone on-line or go to the council offices and make an appointment only and this presents a major barrier to those women who don't speak English
- f. Lot of local authorities only fund 'one off projects' and there is no funding from them for continuation of successful project that directly target hard to reach community groups like Asian Muslim women
- g. There are lots of BAME 'unpaid' carers and the need for a carers service to support them to care for their loved ones. Also there are women who want to train to work in this sector, but bi-lingual training is not available



7

Watford Afro-Caribbean Association (WACA) discussed how the new generation differs in culture from the older generation in their community, and talked about the steps WACA has taken to bridge the gap between the generations. WACA discussed how the older generation are suffering from loneliness, and how WACA is working with other community members towards providing support to the elderly and the wider community.

Key issues raised by the community

- a. Reduced life chances educationally, in employment and accessing public services
- b. Dementia and other health issues such as cancer and heart disease
- c. Generation gap problems
- d. Cultural and social engagement
- e. Immigration and issues relating to access to justice, example; “Windrush”
- f. Sustainable funding support
- g. Lack of internal community capacity
- h. Access to training and employment. Black people are the victims and are blamed for all the ills of society
- i. Want to find ways to work more with young people, to give them a future and not be criminalised
- j. Lack of dedicated programme that is resourced to target the communities many challenges
- k. Not having their own community building
- l. Institutional discrimination is still a major concern for the African and Caribbean communities. The community still suffer high rate of ‘stop and search’, very high prison population
- m. Concept of community cohesion and it’s the narrow interpretation by government and local authorities (David Lammy MP report)

8

Herts People First introduced themselves as a rights based charity representing adults with learning disabilities in Hertfordshire

They spoke about what is important to Hertfordshire people with learning disabilities:

- **Equality Laws and Rights.**
A Government select committee found 'The Equality Act is failing Disabled People'. Herts People First has asked to be part of checking if this is true for Disabled People in Hertfordshire? There has been no response so far
- **Safe and easy to use transport and easy access to transport information.**
Herts People First have talked about this many times, over years, and at lots of different meetings working on transport action plans. Changes are slow to happen and often not co-produced
- **Hate Crime**
People want to be safe in the community and to walk down the street without being judged or targeted because they have a learning disability. Action plans take a long time to start and their delivery not co-produced
- **Health**
People with learning disabilities are dying from early preventable deaths, and this must stop
- **Meaningful and fulfilled lives**
People want to work, volunteer, keep learning throughout life, have relationships and children, hobbies and holidays and good support to do all of these things
- **Accessible information**
People with learning disabilities want to receive information that is useful to them and in ways they can understand. This includes all information and easy ways to access the community, get advice, make a complaint and report crime

Herts People First agreed with other presenters on how cuts to services, locally and nationally had impacted on disabled people.

People with learning disabilities speak up but are often left thinking nothing has happened. When action does happen or when services want advice, involvement, and consultation or to work in Co-production with people with learning disabilities it can all go too fast that they are left behind.

People with learning disabilities want to be heard, to access their Equality Rights and to work in Co-production.

They asked if Herts Equality Council can be an Equality Advocate?


Contact Herts People First if you would like more information on any of the above, admin@hertspeoplefirst.org



9

HEC Trustee Errol John presented the findings from the recent survey that HEC had conducted – Please see page 16 for more detailed information

10

Open discussion; access to health services were discussed and also access to mental health services. The general consensus was that all services were experiencing cuts to funding, making the delivery of services problematic. 

SURVEY RESULTS

HEC sent a survey to 50 known organisations in the county and received 26% response. HEC sought support from all the Hertfordshire Council for Voluntary Services (CVS) and also Hertfordshire Diversity Network (HDN - officers from some 22 public sector organisations make up this network) with a view to encourage support/assistance from their respective community networks and members to take part in the survey. We were disappointed with the lack of participation from the CVS and HDN networks which is one of the responses that served to confirm that equality is definitely not on the public sector agenda.



What was once a thriving network of organisations and groups supporting people often described as (hard to reach) in Hertfordshire appears to have been desecrated perhaps by the relentless cuts to the community voluntary sector by the public sector agencies.

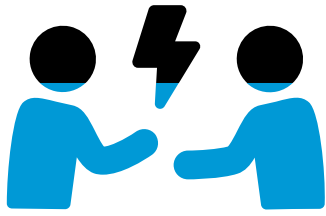
The government austerity cuts, the weakening of the Equality Act 2010 and an apparent disregard for the Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED) appears to have enabled public sector agencies to jettison the equality agenda in the absence of a strong voluntary sector voice in Hertfordshire.

**The results of the on-line survey were presented by Errol John
HEC Trustee**

- a. It was notable that there were “No organisations from Broxbourne, Dacorum or Hertsmere” that had responded / took part in the survey.
- b. St. Albans, Watford and Welwyn and Hatfield had the highest response and 25% of the organisations who had responded covered whole of the county
- c. The survey asked the question “Equality issue concerns to your organisation”?
concern to your organisation”?



- i. **70%**
of the respondents
acknowledged that community
cohesion is a major concern.
- ii. **70%**
of the respondents identified that
lack of community engagement
is a major concern.
- iii. **61%**
There were a high percentage over 61%
recognised Mental Health is an issue for
the disadvantaged communities



61.5%

- iv. Over 61.5% of respondents listed Hate crime as their major concern



61%

- v. Access to public services came fifth on the list of concerns for organisations, over 61%



54%

- vi. 54% of the participants who responded stated that cuts in funding has resulted in lack of engagement with the public sector



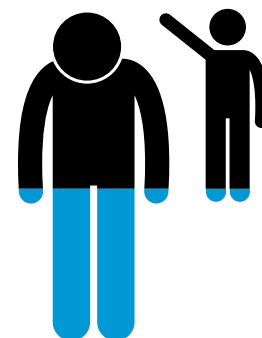
38%

- vii. of the organisation stated that voluntary sector has a growing concern about people with learning disabilities in Hertfordshire, services are cut and decision are made without proper engagement with the disabled people of the community



46%

- viii. Lack of culturally sensitive facilities was one of the main concerns from BAME community groups and associations. Over 46% stated that cuts in funding have driven the community to fend for themselves.



46%

- ix. One surprising findings of this survey was, over 46% pinpointed discrimination at work and school as a major problem



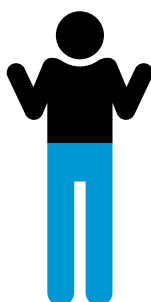
23%

x. 23% stated religious discrimination was as a concern



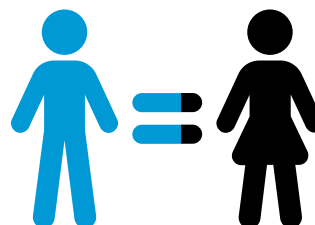
15%

xi. Over 15% sighted "Stop and Search" as a concern for the community



55%

xii. The survey asked "in the past 12 months have you taken part in any consultation?" 15% of the organisations had been consulted by the public sector. However over 55% respondents said that they have not been consulted



45%

xiii. The survey asked "has your organisation raised equality issues or concerns?" 45% of the organisation responded said they have raised equality issues with the Local Authorities



60%

xiv. The survey asked "what equality concerns or issues did you raise with them?" Over 60% stated Hate Crime and Access to Information, followed by funding support and impact of public sector cuts



xv. 100% of the participants responded that Voluntary sector needs a strong voice to raise issues of community concerns and that (HEC) should be actively working with and challenging the public sector

OVERALL FINDINGS

The project achieved its objective to seek the views of the community and learn about the nature of issues and barriers being experienced by community groups in Hertfordshire, including their activities and their concerns.

The actions and barriers identified by the different groups are really important and HEC has captured these in this report. It was evident from the survey and presentations that there are overlaps and intersections between the groups; while there are particular concerns relevant to the specific needs of different groups, at the same time it is very evident that there are common concerns across the groups. Set out below are common concerns and HEC is seeing them as 'gaps'. These particularly relate to gaps with respect to mental health, communication, transport, language, local and central government, Equality Act compliance, racism and harassment and then finally the importance of communicating the good practice has been identified.


- **Mental Health.** A thread running through the contributions of the different groups was the concern about mental health. It is unsurprising that this was raised by the African Caribbean group as this has been a long standing concern in this community. Participants still report lack of access and inappropriate treatment with respect to mental health. Their responses were very much in line with the David Lammy MP report, https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/643001/lammy-review-final-report.pdf Issue of mental health are also of concern to GRT community. Participants argued that mental health services should be on a par with physical health services.
- **Communication Gaps.** Threaded through the contributions made and reflected the piecemeal approach that seems to be adopted in communicating with community groups. Communication gaps affect disabled people and non-English speakers leading to their exclusion from society and isolation, for example, where people are reluctant to use buses that do not have audio-visual equipment, or where no interpreting services available. Advisory services had been cut and there was a real need for informed advisers (see Herts Asian Women's Association) and a restoration of drop-in services. Drop-in services enabled a form of communication that worked well for those groups for whom telephone and internet are barriers to communication. One of the communication gaps emphasised

was the lack of a central voice which contributors felt was necessary. Disability groups reported that working together is getting harder and harder and cited the need for a central voice.

- **Transport Gaps.** The necessity for safe and easy access to affordable transport was emphasised. The lack of audio-visual equipment (see communications above) on buses and trains was a major concern for disabled people and those with communication specific communications needs. Some transport gaps were being filled by community groups, for example, Herts Asian Women's Association arranged transport for their trips. There was concern that the HCC Bus Committee action plan is not moving forward.
- **Language gaps.** Community groups were working with their communities to improve English language skills. It was notable that the Polish group's language classes were open to and involved learners from different ethnic groups. GATE Herts pointed to literacy problems in the GRT community.
- **Local and central governmental cuts.** Have led to increased lack of support and engagement from local and central government which has been intensified by the welfare cuts leading to increased poverty across the community groups. This has been made worse by the lack of affordable housing in Hertfordshire one of the most expensive counties in the country. Because of cuts, some community groups have found it difficult to function effectively. The lack of community representatives in local government has led to decisions made without reference to the effect on different communities.
- **Equality Act compliance failures.** In different ways, community groups pointed to the failings of the Equality Act and its effect on the well-being of different groups, whether it was access to services or access to employment. One specific issue raised as enforcement. Large parts of the equality act are not enforced in law which means the individual has to take those who breach it to civil courts. This is made more difficult by lack of lawyers who know/understand the act, no legal aid unless it is employment related and only a few law firms in the country that do No Win No Fee for equality act breaches.

- **Employment.** Access to employment was an issue for most of the groups present. Access is being made difficult by a number of issues, including discrimination, disability, language skills, and lack of training. Muslim women for example, who want to do care work, but meet language barriers because job descriptions prioritise English speaking. Importance of enabling people into work with meaningful training.
- **Racism and harassment.** Again crossed communities. The Polish community reported how racism and harassment had increased post Brexit. The Watford Afro Caribbean Association reported that this was a continuing problem including stop and search. GATE Herts reminded the group that racism against Gypsy, Roma and Traveller was the last bastion of acceptable racism. That prejudice is endemic and reflects an extreme form of institutional racism leading to reluctance to engage with services and the police although there were efforts to improve relations with police. Relationships between the Afro and Caribbean communities have long been recognised of need to change. 🗨️

RECOMMENDATIONS AND NEXT STEPS

- a. Develop a plan to address the shared and individual concerns expressed by community groups.
- b. Develop communication with diverse organisations to inform the work of HEC
- c. Support and strengthen a voice for the individual organisations and groups when requested
- d. Secure independent funding to support the work of HEC going forward
- e. Through Hertfordshire County Council and Local Enterprise Partnership raise the demand for more ESOL funding to enable the diverse community to participate in the work of and for the community
- f. Review Hertfordshire based public sector organisation's equality action reports as per public sector equality duty under the Equality Act 2010
- g. Work with the public sector to assist the sector to understand the requirements of Public Sector Equality Duty, this may include challenging individual sector on their annual equality report.
- h. HEC to engage with and review the public sector community networks
- i. Publish the Equal Herts report on the HEC website
- j. Produce an Easy Read version. 

CONCLUSION

This project has highlighted the demise of many voluntary organisations in Hertfordshire that worked to support the disadvantaged communities across the county.

It has also highlighted a failure of the public sector to communicate effectively with the voluntary sector and is evidence that equality has been relegated to the bottom of their agenda.

There is lack of knowledge within the public sector about the importance of effective community consultation in implementing the equality duty and a failure to demonstrate an ability to monitor equality performance indicators as part of the hundreds of millions of pounds of contracts commissioned within Hertfordshire.

HEC concludes many public sector ‘organisations’ do not understand the equality duty and how to implement it within their individual organisations and as a result disadvantaged communities suffer.

This project has tried to identify what has changed since the introduction of the austerity measures and found the community who are most in need are worse off than before.

It has been 25 years since the death of Stephen Lawrence and we ask what has changed in the past 25 years? In 2017 Hertfordshire recorded over 2,134 Hate Crimes. There are very few people from BAME communities or disabled people in senior management in the sector. Public sector contracts in Hertfordshire to our knowledge are generally awarded to the known contractors or providers. Councillors and senior public sector managers take decisions without any or limited consultation with the community, each County Councillors has £10,000 community budgets but there is no audit that HEC or any of the community organisation involved in this project are aware of how the money has been spent and what impact the funds have made over the years.

HEC will aim to review progress on the effective implementation of the Equality Duty to redress the inequalities noted above and through the Equal Herts project.

HEC has developed a positive relationship with Hertfordshire Police and are represented on the Police Equality and Inclusion Board as well as on the Police Commissioners Hate Crime

Partnership Board. HEC is working with Hertfordshire County Council (HCC) to develop a more formal structure to review progress on the Equality Duty. HEC recently met with Hertfordshire Partnership Foundation Trust (HPFT) to discuss development of the HPFT equality strategy.

Going forward HEC will strengthen partnerships and develop a network of organisations who want to work together to stay vigilant and to ensure that when public sector developments impact on Hertfordshire's disadvantaged communities, that HEC is there to speak, challenge and support for positive outcomes. 🗨️

Hertfordshire Equality Council

3rd August 2018

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