

REVIEW OF RACE INFRASTRUCTURE IN TELFORD & WREKIN AND SHROPSHIRE

***Building Capacity to
Make a Difference***



SO Associates Ltd.

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Sushel Ohri

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**Sushel Ohri Associates Ltd.
Dallington Hall
Dallington Park Road
Northampton
NN5 7AA**

(01604) 589397

sohri@soassociates.co.uk

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REVIEW OF RACE & DIVERSITY INFRASTRUCTURE

Building Capacity To Make A Difference

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Shropshire County Council (SCC) and Borough of Telford & Wrekin (BTW) commissioned Sushel Ohri Associates Ltd to undertake a review of race and diversity infrastructure in March 2004. This followed the decision by both Councils to cease funding the Telford & Shropshire Race Equality Council (REC). The brief for the review was drawn up jointly by both local authorities and required an extensive consultation process to be undertaken, taking note of national, regional and local factors in arriving at a model for moving forward.

The key **drivers for change** identified from desktop research and consultation were:

- The requirements of the Race Relations Act 2000
- The proposal by the government to establish a new Commission for Equality and Human Rights (CEHR)
- The government agenda to promote community cohesion, social inclusion and partnership working
- The continued prevalence of racial discrimination
- The uncertainty over the future of the Race Equality Council
- The growing Black & Minority Ethnic (BME) population in the area
- The requirements to meet the needs of an urban/rural population
- The need to build BME groups' capacity to be able to develop and respond to the needs of their communities and public bodies' expectations
- The priority placed on race and diversity issues by both Local Strategic Partnerships and all the Councils
- The lack of trust that exists by BME groups with the Councils, and other public bodies, over their records in relation to race equality

The requirements of a new approach include:

- A degree of independence from the councils
- Adequate resourcing
- Provision of advice functions
- A scrutiny/challenge role
- The need to create a sign-poster to other groups and organisations with specialist expertise rather than a “gate keeper” to BME communities
- A broader equality dimension (in line with Commission for Equality and Human Rights), but nevertheless establishing race equality as a priority
- The need to engage at a strategic level with the Local Strategic Partnership (LSP)
- Developing ongoing dialogue and consultation - a collaborative culture with effective networking and partnership working
- Additional resources for race and other equality work

Lessons need to be learned from how the REC operated, building on strengths and developing best practice where required.

The **agenda for change** therefore focuses on building the capacity for change in the following areas:

- The partnership infrastructure to provide community leadership
- Local service delivery
- Local public servants
- The voluntary and community organisations

The proposed **organising principles** are:

- A Community Cohesion approach to the issues and the culture of the new organisation
- An early focus on race issues but a long term commitment to expanding this to a general equalities focus

- Separate but closely linked arrangements for BTW and Shropshire which reflects the historical focus of race equality issues in BTW but which nonetheless support a renewed Shropshire focus on rural racism and other relevant issues

Recommendations for BTW and SCC

That the proposed new arrangements for addressing Race, Equality & Diversity (RED) be endorsed. That the Race dimension be implemented with immediate effect.

Recommendations for BTW

1. That an Implementation Group (IG) be established immediately to lead on the next stage of the process and a named senior officer be appointed as an interim manager to advise the Group and ensure implementation of action plans. Specifically the IG will need to address:
 - The appointment of staff to the RED team
 - The nomination of members of the RED Executive
 - The broadening of the role and activities of the Connecting Communities Forum (CCF)
 - The preparation of a full financial plan
 - The Service Level Agreement for provision of case work services to Shropshire
2. That all public sector organisations make a resource allocation, some financial, some in kind, for the next 3 years and that posts be established and implemented as the organisation evolves towards the CEHR Model
3. That a programme of informing BME groups of the changes that take place is immediately set up and consultation with other equality groups commences so that an integrated model (like CEHR) could emerge over the next phase
4. That a joint seminar be organised for all stakeholders to enhance ownership and an understanding of the new arrangements

Recommendations for Shropshire

1. That the proposed new arrangements be endorsed, including a linkage to the proposed arrangements for BTW in relation to case work.
2. That 3 new posts be established, one equality post by the County Council and two by the LSP. The latter will encompass equality co-ordination and one specifically for race and disability issues.

The Next Steps

The review is the beginning of a process of working with local people, groups, and communities, as well as partner agencies. In developing structures and priorities for race and potentially wider equalities issues which both represent, and serve, the range of diverse needs in the areas of Shropshire and Telford and Wrekin. The next steps to be taken include:

1. Commitment to the policy directions and new structures proposed
2. That all public sector organisations make a resource allocation, some financial, some in kind, for the next three years and that posts be appointed to the Support Team as the organisation evolves towards the CEHR model
3. That an Implementation Group (IG) for BTW be established immediately to lead on the next stage of the process and a named senior officer be appointed as interim manager to advise the group and ensure implementation of action plans
4. Appointments to be made to the new bodies and posts (such as interim manager in BTW) to secure further funding, accommodation and implementation of the recommendations
5. The holding of a joint seminar to enhance the ownership and understanding of the agenda amongst all stakeholders
6. Shropshire will also need to take steps to recruit three new staff as soon as possible
7. That a programme of informing BME groups of the changes that are proposed and consultation with other equality groups commences so that an integrated model (like CEHR) could emerge over the next phase

SUSHEL OHRI
Director
SO Associates Ltd.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. The Review

This review was prompted by the decision by Telford & Wrekin and Shropshire County Councils to cease funding of the local Race Equality Council. Both councils had a number of concerns which they felt had not been adequately addressed by the REC. However, both councils were fully committed to promoting race equality in their area and believed that an external review of the race infrastructure – the mechanisms through which race equality issues are and should be addressed - would be the best way forward. The review was jointly commissioned by Shropshire County Council and the Borough of Telford & Wrekin.

The brief for this review was:

To review the infrastructure available to support minority communities and promote race and diversity

This required:

- A review of legislation and national guidance
- A desktop review of literature
- Seeking partners' views, regional bodies and community groups
- Seeking views of both BTW & SCC REC members
- Preparing financial costs for new infrastructure

Other considerations taken into account were:

- Offering options for a new body
- How wider diversity issues could be addressed
- Services for the new body to provide
- Links with voluntary and community sectors
- Links with the Local Strategic Partnership
- The process for consultation
- Recommendations for action

1.2. This report

The report sets the context for a review of policy at both the national and local levels. It analyses feedback from a variety of local consultations, identifies the main elements of the change agenda and proposes a way forward for updating the equalities infrastructure.

The overall message of the report is that Shropshire and Telford and Wrekin, like other parts of the country, are changing rapidly, as is the policy environment in which local government must operate. Issues to do with Equalities and Community Cohesion are at the heart of those changes and must therefore be at the heart of the strategic response of local government.

Responding to that challenge requires a step-change in the approach of the two authorities to issues of equality, but one that is based on consulting and engaging those concerned, as this review has started to do. Most importantly of all the response to that change must be:

- Inclusive of the communities and organisations most affected by equalities issues
- Achieve a cultural change in how public bodies and BME groups address these issues

The response must therefore build on the consultation carried out for this review and *build the capacity* of both the voluntary and community organisations and the public agencies to rise to this challenge.

1.3. Methodology

A literature review was undertaken, comprised of local data from Councils, other reports, Population Census data, and research findings relating to race issues both locally as well as nationally. The Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000 along with various guidelines and codes of practice from the Commission for Racial Equality (CRE) were key documents. Submissions from the three equality Commissions to Government, on their consultation proposals to create a Commission for Equality and Human Rights (CEHR), were also considered. Attendance at the very successful diversity training presentation organised by BTW on behalf of the LSP was very useful in highlighting diversity issues in the area.

However, the most important evidence was obtained from the conversations with many of the local BME groups, strategic partner representatives, senior managers and elected Members from both sponsoring local authorities.

Given that consultation was part of the overall project brief, it was an opportune time to analyse the qualitative questionnaire that BTW carried out with 14 of their BME groups. (Details of this are given in the Findings section below). Shropshire County Council is in the process of preparing a draft consultation strategy and this was also taken as evidence.

Meetings with BME groups usually entailed group discussions at the Connecting Community Forum in Telford and on-site visits to some of the groups, for example the Telford West Indian Centre, the Visual Minority Development Council and the Bangladeshi Women's Group in Oswestry.

Some community and LSP/partner representatives were seen individually. Interviews were held with a selection of officers from both of the councils, and presentations were made to elected members from both Shropshire and Telford and Wrekin.

2. DRIVERS FOR CHANGE

2.1. A Changing Environment

Shropshire and Telford and Wrekin, like other parts of the country, are changing rapidly as a result of social and economic forces that are now global in character. As community leaders the local councils need to respond to that change and to support others in both coping with its negative effects and securing the benefits of positive opportunities. Equalities and community cohesion are at the heart of the challenges that arise from this dynamic environment. So an understanding of this wider context is essential in setting the agenda for future actions.

A number of the key drivers for change are related to legislation, changes in society and the economy, and the general policy direction of the Government. In relation to race and equality issues, these wider impetuses for change will have a direct impact on how these issues are addressed locally across the Telford & Wrekin and Shropshire area.

2.2. Equality Legislation

Since the 1960's, a number of key pieces of legislation in relation to the various equality strands have been passed by Government. Some of these address specific issues like equal pay, tackling discrimination on grounds of race, sex, disability and improving access to services by discriminated groups. These have been complemented by the European Directives in relation to employment.

Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000

General Duty:

This places a general duty on public bodies to promote race equality. To ensure that they comply with their obligations, the General Duty requires listed public bodies to:

- Eliminate unlawful discrimination
- Promote equality of opportunity
- Promote good race relations between people of different racial groups

Specific Duties: Race Equality Scheme (RES), Policy and Service Delivery

This entails publishing a RES, a strategy and action plan that will deliver their obligations under the General Duty. Authorities are also required to assess the impact of their current and proposed policies, procedures and service delivery, taking action where adverse impacts are found. Provide training for staff and publish their findings.

Specific Duties: Employment

This in essence is about maintaining data on the workforce by ethnic origin including staff in post, applicants for employment, training and promotion, those who receive training, grievance or disciplinary procedures, performance assessments and those who cease employment. Such monitoring data also needs to be published every year.

2.3. Fairness for All: A New Commission for Equality and Human Rights (CEHR)

The Government's White Paper sets out detailed proposals for a single equality body which, if approved by Parliament, will replace the Commission for Racial Equality, the Disability Rights Commission and the Equal Opportunities Commission. The Government argues that "fresh thinking" is needed for future challenges in promoting, enforcing and delivering equality and human rights. The new CEHR will be given powers and duties to include:

- A new duty to consult stakeholders on its strategic plans
- Regional arrangements to promote CEHR's work
- Powers to promote human rights
- Powers to promote good practice and enforce the law in the new areas of discrimination legislation in relation to sexual orientation, religion or belief and age

Government argues that the CEHR will be:

- A strong and authoritative champion for equality and human rights
- Better able to take a cross-cutting approach
- Able to provide a simple point of contact for equality and human rights for individuals, agencies, employers and service providers
- Equipped to tackle discrimination on multiple grounds
- More effective at promoting improvements in the delivery of public services
- Better able to take a more coherent approach to enforcing anti-discrimination legislation
- More effective at promoting good relations between different communities
- Combine strengths of existing commissions with the expertise from key organisations representing the new equality standards

Although all the three equality commissions are working closely with the Department for Trade and Industry who are leading on this, recently the Commission for Racial Equality announced that they were now opposing the setting up of CEHR.

2.4. Social and Economic Change

Globalisation

Changes in the structure of the world economy, linked to technological change now have an impact on every local community. There is an unpredictable pattern of employment requiring flexibility and learning of new skills by individuals and whole communities. Alongside this, increased migration (from both within the UK and across the world) has led to a radically more diverse culture and an increasing pace of cultural change in which inter-cultural barriers are being challenged and broken down. The cultural labels and identities of the community are no longer capable of being defined in terms of simple distinct categories or life styles and the homogenous communities of previous generations are being replaced by neighbourhoods that are far more diverse in terms of social class, occupation and household structure, as well as race and ethnicity. In this global economy, successful communities are those that are able to respond positively to this diversity and turn it to their advantage.

New Communities (migrants and asylum seekers)

Britain has long been a multi-racial society, with a history of inward and outward migration. Migration of new communities into Britain, for whatever reason, offers many positive benefits particularly pertaining to the economy but also in terms of cultural breadth and understanding. The local agricultural economy has long been dependant upon seasonal and temporary labour from Europe and today's flexible labour markets are intensifying that dependence on migrant labour. Our national health service depends on skilled professionals from other countries. The emergence of new communities, in some cases, may also bring challenges in developing a more cohesive society.

Demographic Changes

The minority ethnic community's population has now (2001 Census) increased to nearly 9% (4.5 million of the total population). In the West Midlands 11.3% of the population are from ethnic minorities (593,099). The age profile of the population is changing to one where people are living longer and relatively fewer children are being born. The number of older people is set to increase compared to the under 25 year old group. However, amongst an aging population, the fastest growing ethnic category is dual heritage group. Half of the people in this group are under 16 and only 8% over the age of 45 years.

70% of people from ethnic minority backgrounds live in the 88 most deprived areas of the country. This pattern is reflected in Shropshire and particularly in Telford where, for example, 40% of the community in College Ward are black or Asian.

Information, Communication and Technology

Rapid advances in technology are of course enabling and driving most of these changes, but they are also influencing the way private and public sectors are embracing the need to change, being more user and customer focused and using the technology to connect with some of the discriminated and isolated communities in our society. Government has set robust targets for public sector organisations to embrace e-government by 2005.

2.5. The Direction of Government Policy

Tackling social exclusion

There has long been a recognition by Government and public bodies of the current inequality in our society, manifested in sharply different experiences of poverty, crime, unemployment and ill-health and large differentials in income, housing quality and educational attainment. The Government's Social Inclusion Unit has produced many reports highlighting the exclusion of sections of our society. There are inequalities in pay between women and men doing similar jobs and also in the outcomes for disabled people and minority ethnic communities in the employment market. Racist abuse is still prevalent and racial discrimination has still not been eradicated. The Government's view is that these inequalities represent a denial of life opportunities, which in turn reduces the prosperity and cohesion of the country as a whole. Through crime, anti-social behaviour and economic under-performance we are all affected by social exclusion.

In particular, the Government has recognised that social exclusion is concentrated in certain neighbourhoods and certain social groups. This is the basis of their emphasis on **Neighbourhood Renewal** and **Community Cohesion** and on **Floor Targets** for narrowing the gap between the most deprived communities and the average, particularly in terms of employment, education, crime and health.

Civil Renewal

There is a growing recognition that neighbourhood renewal (tackling crime, anti-social behaviour and "liveability" issues) requires more than just investment in the physical and economic infrastructure. Due to a number of factors associated with the social and economic changes outlined above, it also requires a renewal of the social infrastructure, stronger families and community organisations, more active citizenship and a greater role for flexible and dynamic voluntary and community organisations. This agenda entails local councils evolving new models of service delivery, neighbourhood planning, a growing third sector, and policies to promote active citizenship and stronger communities. The new Safer and Stronger Communities Fund, beginning in 2005 brings together many funding streams from ODPM and the Home Office which seek to address these issues.

A Regional Approach

Alongside the emphasis on local neighbourhoods, economic performance, housing and “**sustainable communities**” are increasingly subject to a regional focus. Further drives towards regional assemblies in England along with more unitary councils are being envisaged.

Community Cohesion

The disturbances in Bradford, Oldham and Burnley highlighted the importance of building communities that are engaged with one another and more “cohesive”. Closely linked to the Civic Renewal agenda, a cohesive community is defined (by the LGA) as one in which:

- There is a common vision and a sense of belonging for all communities
- The diversity of people’s backgrounds and circumstances are appreciated and positively valued
- Those from different backgrounds have similar life opportunities and
- Strong and positive relationships are being developed between people from different backgrounds in the workplace, in schools and within neighbourhoods

2.6. Transition to Inclusion & Community Cohesion

Local government has witnessed a transition from the models preferred in the 1960s addressing race issues to the new agenda of cohesion from the beginning of this decade as summarised below:

Period	Focus	Objectives
60s/70s	Tackling Racial Discrimination (Reactive)	Campaigns: Employment bias, limited in scope
80s/90s	Equalities Model	Cross strand co-ordination Service Issues/Community Consultation (Grants)
Late 90s	Emergence of Diversity Approach and Inclusion	Valuing difference Mainstreaming
2000 – 10	Cohesive Communities, Civic Renewal RR(A) Act 2000 (Proactive)	Reconnecting with communities; localism; Promoting Race Equality Commission for Equality and Human Rights

Sushel Ohri and Linda Lineham

Modernising Public Services

This is in essence about improving service delivery to the public in ways that meet the increasingly diverse needs of individuals and groups. It is about public bodies being more accountable, closer to their customers and more efficient and effective. “**Personalisation**” of services is a key element in this vision – adapting services to individual needs based on consultation with the user, particularly in education and social care. Equality and fairness are an integral part of this drive to improve public services, as is the evaluation of public bodies’ performance on this important issue. (CPA, SSI, OFSTED, etc.)

A Cultural approach to Change

Related to the modernisation agenda, the Government is increasingly adopting an approach to change that involves incentives and rewards and recognises the need to change the culture of service delivery, rather than just structures and monitoring arrangements. In particular, this approach emphasises the need to **develop capacity** through training and development as well as additional resources for service delivery.

Partnerships and a new strategic role for local government

The Local Government Act 2000 (with its requirement for Local Strategic Partnerships and a Community Strategy) and the Government’s Local Vision documents, represent a significant shift of the role of local authorities away from being a service provider to a more strategic, co-ordinating and enabling role. This stems in large part from the work of the New Local Government Network on “**New Localism**” (e.g. “Towards a New Localism”, 2000).

The development of Local Area Agreements, based on the current Local Public Service Agreements, take the emphasis of the relationship between central and local government very much in a partnership direction. Local authorities will work with local partners on broad targets and plans for the economic, environmental and social well being of their area, backed by funding streams which are also broader based and more integrated. At the same time the proposed development of Children’s Trusts to oversee education and children’s social services and the shift to direct funding of schools by Whitehall are further examples of a shift to the strategic local authority. The message is very clearly that there are rewards for partnership working on broad themes such as community cohesion and social inclusion in terms of additional resources and freedoms.

The Excellent council of the next period will not just deliver excellent services but will also be strong at providing strategic leadership and developing effective partnerships to achieve community outcomes. Prominent amongst these will be Equalities, Community Cohesion and Social Inclusion.

2.7. The Changing Local Area

Shropshire is a diverse county with a population of 286,700 that is spread across an extensive area (319,736 hectares or 1,235 square miles) with 65% living in market towns. This area is serviced by Shropshire County Council and 5 district councils (North Shropshire, Bridgnorth, South Shropshire, Shrewsbury and Atcham and Oswestry). The extensive rural (85% of the land is agricultural) dimension of the area with dispersed communities, creates its own exclusion due to poor transport, uneven access to public services and pockets of social deprivation in defined areas which feature poor housing, poor health and low incomes. A third of the area is designated as an area of outstanding natural beauty. Two Oswestry wards are in the 20% most deprived nationally. The local economy is based on tourism and agriculture and the County Council is the largest employer.

The population of Telford and Wrekin was 158,325 at the 2001 Census, a growth of 11.9%, or 16,825, since 1991 (which included net in-migration of 1,901 people of which 668 were from overseas). The economy in this largely urban area is strongly dependent on manufacturing (25% of employment, compared to 15% nationally).

Black & Minority Ethnic Groups

Telford & Wrekin, due to its larger BME population, has historically played a more predominant role in seeking to address race issues in this locality. The County Council acknowledges that in the past it has played a less prominent role. However, there is now a genuine commitment by the elected members and chief officers in both local authorities to make a step change and deliver a new infrastructure which is fit for purpose. Indeed, commitment to this work is embedded in the Councils' corporate plans, visions and values. Clearly, given the rural context and the disparate nature of the BME communities in much of the countywide area, the scale and the approach to these issues has been different by the County Council from that adopted by the Borough of Telford & Wrekin.

Some of the BME groups, particularly in Telford, have been established for a number of years, for example Telford West Indian Association, the Sikh Temples and Muslim Mosques. A number of the community groups have their own buildings where various community activities take place on a daily basis. There are also some relatively new organisations like the Equal Project (working largely with Pakistan descent communities in relation to training local people to secure skills required in the job market). The African and Bangladeshi Welfare Associations and the Visual Minorities Development Council which was formed with the purpose of co-ordinating BME groups to articulate their needs and secure further funding.

Like many other rural areas, Shropshire has a low BME population and only has a few established BME groups, some of which cover the Telford area, e.g. Bangladeshi Welfare Association. BME Communities are more spread out, making it difficult to organise and formally establish groups. Many BME

members look to Telford or other urban areas in the West Midlands for their religious and cultural support.

Residents of Shropshire and Telford & Wrekin Councils commute daily to each other's areas for work and leisure. For example, some of the BME residents from the Shropshire area travel to the Mosques, Sikh Temples and African-Caribbean Churches in Telford. The West Midlands provides a wider array of services and community support and there exist strong relationships between Telford and the conurbation. Therefore, the issue of administrative boundaries can appear to be artificial when it comes to meeting the cultural needs of individuals and groups of people.

Local Race Issues

Shrewsbury and surrounding areas have long experienced racist attitudes, with some very active anti-migrant political activity. Research evidence from other rural areas would suggest that BME residents are more than twice as likely to encounter racist abuse than in urban areas. 'No Problems?' Race issues in Shropshire, a study carried out by Parreen Nizhar (1995) revealed a worrying scenario of official and institutional complacency against a background of a real experience of discrimination, prejudice and even harassment and violence. This issue was highlighted again recently with the comments of Trevor Phillips (Chair of the CRE) that racism was common in rural communities, that the areas were 'unwelcoming' and therefore increasing the difficulties for households from BME communities in settling there.

In the Telford & Wrekin area, a small number of events have highlighted the BME communities' frustrations that the local institutions are not addressing race issues adequately. The death of two members of the McGowan family brought the national media spotlight to Telford in 2000 as a result of the police investigation in the events surrounding the deaths. During the period of this review, publicity was focused on a disturbance in the College Ward involving predominantly members of the local Pakistani community clashing with the police. An investigation into this event is currently in progress.

Demography

The table overleaf shows the latest available population breakdowns for the Shropshire and Telford and Wrekin areas. This indicates that purely in terms of numbers, the BME communities now play a significant role in the local area and are therefore an important part of public policy debates. It also illustrates that, whilst the BME population still represents a much higher proportion of the population in Telford and Wrekin than in Shropshire, the proportion has been growing rapidly in both areas.

The largest BME groups in the BTW population are Indian (2.1%), Pakistani (1.4%) and Black Caribbean (1.1%). By 2006 the BME population in BTW is projected to increase to 10,200 (out of a total of 168,000 - 6.1%). By 2011 the projection is 12,200 (out of 167,400 - 7.3%).

Population in White and BME Ethnic Groups – 1991 and 2001 Census

Area	Total Population		White		BME	
2001 Census	No	% of Total Pop.	No	% of Total Pop.	No	% of Total Pop.
Shropshire	283,173	100.0%	279,742	98.8%	3,431	1.2%
Telford & Wrekin	158,325	100.0%	150,014	94.8%	8,311	5.2%
Former County of Shropshire	441,498	100.0%	429,756	97.3%	11,742	2.7%

1991 Census	No	% of Total Pop.	No	% of Total Pop.	No	% of Total Pop.
Shropshire	266,871	100.0%	265,040	99.3%	1,831	0.7%
Telford & Wrekin	139,516	100.0%	134,674	96.5%	4,842	3.5%
Former County of Shropshire	406,387	100.0%	399,714	98.4%	6,673	1.6%

Economy

The local economy is robust, attracting inward investment but with a low skill and low pay culture. Due to the age profile of the BME population, in Shropshire 2.5% of the economically active population is from BME groups (higher than their proportion in the population as a whole). However, unemployment amongst Muslim communities and young African-Caribbean males is much higher than in the population as a whole.

2.8. Responding to Change

The above drivers are influencing the way public sector organisations are embracing change in the way they provide their services and work with strategic partners to meet the diverse needs of all their communities. Performance is now more stringently measured at various levels by the Audit Commission and other bodies like Social Services Inspectorate (SSI) and OFSTED and results are widely published with a rating for the council/department.

Partly in response to the agenda set out above, there are significant changes taking place locally. Increasingly, Race, Equality and Diversity issues are integral to everything the public sector organisations do. There is greater emphasis upon improving the internal aspects like better ethnic monitoring systems, Race Equality Schemes, performance against the Equality Standard are leading to a new integrated approach to these issues. County Council BME workforce has increased over last year from 0.65% to 0.86%.

BME communities at times also feel frustrated that progress is slow and that they require further support to increase their capacity to respond more proactively in articulating the needs of their communities and to requests from public sector organisations for consultation and engagement.

Telford & Shropshire Race Equality Council (REC)

This was established in 1997 covering both Shropshire and Telford & Wrekin. The Commission for Racial Equality sponsored the study, "No Problems" in Shropshire, to highlight some of the issues that warranted attention from the REC and the public bodies. The REC has played a positive role in championing race issues in the area and Elected Members, senior officers from both of the local authorities and other strategic partners like the Police, have all played a pivotal role. Although there is currently some uncertainty about the future of the REC, nevertheless, given the challenges facing the public bodies and the BME communities, lessons need to be learnt and a new approach is required if further meaningful progress is to be made in effectively promoting race equality and diversity issues in the area.

Local Strategic Partnerships (LSP)

These are statutory but not executive, multi-agency bodies. They comprise of key organisations from the public, private and voluntary sectors charged with the responsibility of producing a Community Strategy outlining a vision and key priorities and targets for their area, and monitoring progress against these commitments. Their task is to address multi-faceted problems requiring a range of response from different bodies. Local partners working through the LSP will continue to take the major decisions about priorities and funding for their area of responsibility. As such, they are expected to lead the agenda for equalities in service delivery and strategic planning. Both LSPs in Shropshire and Telford & Wrekin have a strong commitment to race, equality and diversity issues.

In Telford & Wrekin, the establishment of the Race Equality Leadership Group (RELG) under the auspices of the LSP and the Connecting Communities Group have both provided fora for bringing together public bodies and local BME groups to work together on race related issues. The recent Diversity **Action** training programme used 'theatre' as a means of raising awareness, communicating and engaging staff to this complex issue. It has also demonstrated an on-going commitment to change the way public services work with their diverse communities locally.

The Shropshire LSP in September 2003 had a conference to identify the priorities for change. Equalities and Diversity was identified as one of the top five challenges for all of the 25 partners at the County and District level. It is establishing an Equality and Diversity Forum comprising of diversity champions from all their members to lead on this agenda. Bridgnorth DC successfully co-ordinated a capacity building bid from the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister to support this work. A statement is due to be signed by all Members of the LSP confirming their commitment to equality. Working more collaboratively to pursue further mapping of current equality work and to secure funding for an equality post to assist in implementing their action plan.

The response of local councils to the above drivers for change has varied. This diversity is also reflected in the way they have responded to issues of equality. The local BME population has influenced their approach, and it is notable that areas with the higher BME population, such as Telford & Wrekin, have been the most concerned. Related to this is also the fact that local BME groups in Telford & Wrekin have also been the most active and vocal in articulating their communities' needs and lobbying for resources to ensure that needs of their communities were addressed.

For historical reasons noted earlier, the level of resources specifically allocated to addressing issues of equality has also varied between the areas. However, there does appear to be greater determination to mainstream the equality agenda in everything that the councils are doing, taking account of the need to allocate resources proportionately to the scale of issues.

The complex challenges that both external and internal drivers for change are offering would suggest that traditional approaches to RED (Race, Equality and Diversity) are not adequate. A new approach is therefore now required. This will entail cultural changes for both public sector organisations and BME (and other equality) groups in how they relate and interact with each other, to ensure a step change is made in the way services are able to meet the needs of all the diverse individuals and groups in the area.

It is this step change that is the subject of the proposals set out later in this report.

3. FINDINGS FROM CONSULTATION

The consultation process has comprised of three phases:-

- Analysis of the audit of BME groups undertaken by BTW in Spring 2004
- Issues raised during the initial interviews and discussions held by the consultant with partners and groups
- The feedback from the interim report that has circulated in Summer 2004

Overall, there is a clear recognition by many involved that progress is being made by public sector organisations, however more needs to be done to:

- promote race equality in the area
- improve the representation of BME people in the Councils
- deliver services in a more responsive and accessible way

Some discussion with interviewees has related to the Race Equality Council. Many diverse views were expressed about its role, achievements, strengths and weaknesses. The key lessons from this evidence are to ensure that the new organisation learns from this and adopts new ways of working, principally in terms of fuller engagement and leadership from BME communities themselves.

3.1. Audit of BME Groups in Telford and Wrekin

Although the Council has a good record of consulting BME groups in the area over a long period, the Council felt it appropriate in 2004 to audit local BME groups in order to secure a better understanding of the services they provided, their aspirations for the future and to examine how the consultations could be further developed.

The purpose of the audit was to seek information from the existing BME community groups in Telford regarding:

- Services they supply
- How they promote learning in their communities
- The condition of their buildings, if any
- How they involve children, older people, women, people with disabilities and the community in their activities
- What policies and procedures they have in place

- What services and general needs they have identified in the community
- How they work in partnership with other organisations and the support they receive or would like to receive from the council

The survey was conducted by Borough of Telford and Wrekin staff via a questionnaire sent to identified BME community groups during April 2004. A list of those surveyed is attached at Appendix 2, but the core services they provide to the communities can be summed up as follows:

- Cultural – events celebrating their respective cultures
- Social – leisure activities and communal meeting places
- Educational – for example supplementary schooling and promoting adult learning
- Campaigning – highlighting inequalities and issues faced by their communities

3.2. Key issues emerging from the survey

Diversity and engagement

Understandably the engagement of children, older people and people with disabilities in the groups surveyed reflects the purpose of each group. One has people with disabilities on their management committee. Some groups not directly serving people with disabilities find it difficult to provide access due to resource constraints and inadequate facilities.

Most of the groups have male only or male dominated management committees, though one has a separate women's committee. Others involve women volunteers operating in specific roles (e.g. teaching).

None of the groups undertook any explicit engagement initiatives to involve the wider community. Most said that involvement was through regular meetings and directly through the activities carried out (e.g. direct feedback to those running the group, telephone calls, visits to individuals and "word of mouth").

Partnership working and support from the Council

Most of the groups said they co-operated with other organisations, though they tended to mention other community groups (including some others in the survey – suggesting the beginnings of a network of such groups) rather than the local authority or LSP partners.

One group specifically mentioned a wish to work with Jobcentre Plus. Other partnerships that would be useful are implied by the issues listed below.

Most of the groups said that the Council met their needs, but four explicitly said it did not. However those who thought the Council helpful all mentioned specific further help that would be useful. The clearest requests were for:

- Help with improving, moving or expanding their premises
- Help with identifying and pursuing funding opportunities.

There was a general message that more information is needed about what support is available from public agencies and who to contact about this.

Other support services needed by the groups include:

- Help with business planning
- Funding for specific needs as well as core costs
- Management skills training
- Advice on benefits, health and housing
- Language training support
- Communications with the community

Issues for the communities

The issues that groups felt needed to be addressed in their communities focused on the need to expand services and facilities, through voluntary groups or public agencies, particularly for those who are most isolated or excluded. They included:

- Social interaction and social skills – including helping newcomers to understand the culture and the services available
- Advocacy – basic advocacy support for people whose first language is not English
- Social care and support for those with mental health problems
- Meeting places for older people
- Transport – particularly for older people, people with disabilities or women without access to a car
- Advice and information – the lack of easily accessible information on issues such as immigration and asylum, employment law and benefits advice

- Tackling racism and monitoring of racial incidents – the need for improved systems to record and follow up racial incidents and the importance of involving BME communities in the support process
- Improving responsiveness in the police service
- Employment and training – recognising the relatively low levels of qualifications in some of the communities and the importance that most groups place on gaining meaningful employment, particularly with public sector bodies
- Children and young people – the importance of working with young people and the priority that all of the groups place on ensuring that their children get the best possible start in life - education and after-school support

Conclusions

The groups surveyed cover a wide range of services and roles and should not be treated as being alike. However the survey points to a range of support needs. Many of these can be met more effectively through enhanced support to voluntary and community groups (facilities fundraising etc) and some of which pose critical challenges to the services of statutory agencies themselves. These are the overall responsibility of a diversity of partners including the Council, the NHS, the Learning and Skills Council, the Police, Jobcentre Plus and other agencies. This in itself suggests a partnership approach to meeting these needs.

In the short term the survey also highlights the need to help **enhance the capacity** of some of these organisations in terms of facilities and governance and to ensure that support services are well known and contacts are clearer. This is a role that the Council for Voluntary Service in Telford would see itself playing a more active role in.

3.3. Other issues raised by the review

In terms of the specific issues that were raised by respondents to the consultation the salient points to emerge were that:

- There is a lack of trust by BME groups with the Councils and some of the public bodies over their record in recruiting and retaining local BME staff, and lack of transparency, in their view, as to how the decision to cease funding of REC was made
- There is a need to build BME groups' capacity to develop and respond better to their community needs and public bodies expectations over future consultations on the RES

Views about future arrangements for Race and Equalities Issues

- There was a split between those who would opt for a race specific organisation; others would very much welcome a broader equalities model
- Must be independent from Councils
- Must be transparent in the way it operates, recruits, consults etc.
- Must be adequately resourced to provide a high level of service to the public as well as public bodies. There needs to be an element of certainty for a medium to long term resource commitment by the funding organisations
- Support should be provided to develop BME group's capacity to engage with the new organisation and public bodies
- A great deal of importance is attached to the need to provide advice on various issues like immigration, discrimination, welfare, tribunal cases. It is felt critical that the new organisation provide adequate level of case and legal advice
- Should be given a scrutiny role that provides the means for public bodies to open themselves up to the local community and to receive advice on how their services could become more responsive
- Public must have good access to services provided by the organisation, particularly taking account of the large rural nature of the county area with isolated communities
- The new organisation should not act as a gatekeeper to the Council/LSP/other groups

Public Bodies' Expectations and Views

There was a genuine willingness to develop a dialogue and an effective partnership with the BME community groups. There was widespread acknowledgement that public bodies valued and benefited from such arrangements. In view of their legal and public remit responsibilities for the range of equality issues, all of the bodies interviewed had comments on new arrangements.

Their specific aspirations were that the new organisation should:

- Have a broader equality dimension (in line with CEHR) being built into the new arrangements
- Be credible, professional and act with integrity
- See race equality as a priority issue

- Demonstrate a willingness to make a step change in promoting equality
- Take a lead on new specific projects that would lead to service improvements. Research and co-ordinate activities, in relation to harassment, monitoring of racist incidents. Piloting new initiatives to enhance learning for all organisations would be particularly welcomed
- Be engaged at a strategic level with the LSP. Make an input into the strategic direction and the well-being of the area
- Provide clear leadership with a vision. Set key priorities and work effectively with partners to make a step change in race/equality issues
- Work towards developing unity amongst BME and other groups, as required by the RR(A)A 2000
- Lead on developing an ongoing dialogue and consultation framework with BME communities in the area
- Many partners felt they would welcome advice on diverse cultures and training programmes to enhance learning

Voluntary groups' views

Representatives from the voluntary sector were very supportive of this review. Overall they felt that taking a broader equality/diversity approach would be most beneficial. However, they acknowledged the need to address race issues, perhaps first, taking account of the situation with the REC.

They aspired to work in partnership with any emerging new organisation. Those from the Shropshire County area felt that there should be a separate organisation for their area and that this should network with other rural areas like Worcestershire.

3.4. Feedback on the Interim Report

A short questionnaire accompanied the interim report (attached at Appendix 3). 19 responses were received.

- The majority of respondents wanted a separate provision for Telford & Wrekin and Shropshire with a minority preferring a joint approach
- In relation to funding it was felt that both councils, along with their strategic partners, should fund the initiative. Some respondents suggested that other external sources of funding should also be pursued

- In total there were 18 indications that the new arrangements should report to the LSP (with 10 indicating that it should also remain independent). Some written responses also indicated a strong preference for a degree of independence from council control.
- 12 of the respondents wanted to be directly involved in the steering group.
- The average number of Black and Minority Ethnic representatives that respondents thought should be on a steering group of 10 was 5. Some also mentioned that the chair should be such a representative.
- A large majority (16) of the respondents wanted to see a broad approach to equalities (rather than an exclusive focus on race). However respondents were also asked to rank the importance of the various issues that the new bodies could address and this showed that race was seen as the most important issue.

The results were as follows:

Issue	Average rank
Race	1.6
Disability	3.5
Gender	5.4
Community cohesion	5.4
Harassment	5.7
Religion	6.3
Sexuality	6.4
Training and employment	7.5
Age	7.9
Travellers and gypsies	7.9
Consultation	8.7
Translation	9.2
Legal advice	9.3
New communities	9.5
Case work	10.3
Rural issues	10.3

3.5. Connecting Communities Forum

Following the publication of the interim report and the circulation of the questionnaire, a meeting of the above forum took place on 1st September, 2004. The findings of the questionnaire were shared with the Group. The Group gave a clear indication that they would welcome the creation of two separate organisations for Shropshire and Telford areas. They were also positively responsive to forging links with both LSPs and acknowledged the need to have a co-ordinated approach to the wider equality agenda but within a framework where race issues were not to be diluted. Indeed, they felt wider equality agenda at this stage was an aspiration and that race issues urgently needed to be addressed, particularly as the Race Equality Council has not been able to respond to community needs for advice and support.

4. EMERGING ISSUES: SETTING THE AGENDA

The overall focus of the agenda for change that Shropshire and Telford and Wrekin should now develop can be summed up as:

“BUILDING CAPACITY TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE”

Capacity building needs to take place in four distinct but linked areas:

1. The capacity of the partnership infrastructure to provide strategic leadership
2. The capacity of the key public services to improve service delivery from an equalities perspective
3. The capacity of public servants to commit to the equalities agenda
4. The capacity of voluntary and community organisations to deliver responsive, community led services which add to the services delivered by the main public agencies and to engage with the service planning and delivery process

The proposals in the next section concentrate on the first step in this capacity building process. But it is important to be clear about the further steps that will need to be built upon that foundation.

4.1. Provision of strategic leadership

- Both LSP's and in particular the Chief Executives or their equivalent in all of the main public bodies need to promote a step change in the drive for fair and equal access to services and opportunities within the Councils' areas
- More resources are needed for race and other equality work in progressing improvements in the way that agencies address this agenda
- A significant promotional effort is required to get across the messages that (a) Shropshire, Telford and Wrekin and all their partners are committed to a positive equalities agenda and (b) racism and discrimination will not be tolerated within local communities

Learning from the past/working in partnership:

- The former arrangements (REC), had strengths but also some clear weaknesses, which should be taken into account in developing any new structures
- For the new organisation, new structural arrangements are important but also the organisational culture needs to be more of a collaborative nature,

with effective networks and partnership working. It also needs to offer clear leadership and direction in this specialist area of service provision

Covering all equality strands:

- When it comes to meeting needs of individuals and groups of BME communities although geographical isolation is an important issue in rural areas, boundaries between the two Councils are artificial when it comes to work, leisure, or meeting religious needs. Additionally, there was a view that meeting the needs of BME and all residents required a recognition of multiple identities e.g. being an older, black, disabled, and a woman

Minority voices need to be heard:

- BME women, disabled, and young people, are invisible in terms of having a voice and engaging, and this needs to change
- BME groups wish to maintain their individual links and access to public bodies and their leaders. Therefore, under no circumstances should the new organisation become the sole gatekeeper to decision-makers

The need for a scrutiny/challenge role:

- The new arrangements must have a scrutiny role so that they can challenge public bodies' performance on promoting race equality, employment and service delivery issues. Public bodies in response to the RR(A)A 2000 and to external monitoring of their performance require a robust consultation arrangement with BME and other voluntary groups. The various strategies and their action plans would benefit from local scrutiny. Such a unique role would help to inspire confidence and trust with the BME community groups that public bodies are serious about transparency and accountability

County-wide or separate provision:

- On the subject of the new organisations being countywide or specific for Telford & Wrekin and Shropshire, there were mixed views. Some felt economies of scale would dictate one organisation for the area which must have safeguards or ring-fenced resources for the rural areas as the best way forward. Others felt race issues in the urban areas warranted a different approach and that the county area may not fully engage in the process as this was not a dominant issue for them

4.2. Public Services for all

Some of the key areas of service improvement are:

- Advice and information on issues such as immigration and asylum, employment law and benefits advice
- Improved systems to record and follow up racial incidents and the importance of involving BME communities in the support process
- Improving recruitment from BME groups into public service
- Older people – meeting places and responsive care services which need to adapt to the changing population
- Employment and training opportunities for BME groups
- Children and young people –Sure Start, schools and after-school support

4.3. Building commitment amongst public services

- Recruitment, monitoring and selection procedures need to be reviewed in line with legislation and efforts should be made to communicate what good work is already being done to ensure fair recruitment and a representative work force
- Training and awareness development needs to involve leaders but also a wide range of public servants. Training events should involve the BME communities and a wide cross-section of staff, to maximise joint learning and experience
- More efficient ways of consulting BME groups by public bodies would assist in avoiding duplication
- Consultation and engagement strategies should seek to move towards greater participation in service and policy planning rather than arms length approaches to consultation

4.4. A stronger community and voluntary sector

Community and voluntary organisations drawn from the BME communities are making a vital contribution in providing additional targeted services to these communities. This is particularly important in the areas of advice, advocacy, languages and the integration of new comers, social care for older people and supplementary education for children. That role needs to be enhanced through building the capacity of the sector in the following key ways:

- Adopting and developing the local Compact between the voluntary sector and statutory agencies

- Help with improving, moving or expanding their premises
- Help with identifying and pursuing funding opportunities
- Help with business planning
- Funding for specific needs as well as core costs
- Management skills training
- Advice on benefits, health, housing etc.
- Language training support
- Improving communications with the community (networking, sharing best practice and participation)

5. ORGANISING PROPOSALS

5.1. Background

Interim Report

Following presentations of early findings of this review to BME groups and various strategic partners' fora, including discussions of options for new arrangements, a smaller number of models for the way forward were drawn up. This was with the intention of enabling stakeholders to comment further and to indicate their preferred option.

Although a questionnaire was forwarded to all key stakeholders seeking their views about the 4 options, most of the evidence was through consultation at various fora including visiting a number of BME organisations and interviewing officers from the strategic partners.

In proposing options, we took account of the various challenges facing all public bodies, particularly the two local authorities, their vision and aspirations for the future. The new arrangements, to be effective, need to be forward thinking and take account of the changing demographic and socio-economic environment.

Independence and the role of the LSPs

All four suggested models for a new organisation were linked to the Local Strategic Partnerships. This is believed to be critical to ensuring the new arrangements can respond directly to the concerns expressed by BME groups. It also responds to the call from those consulted for the new organisation to be independent of the Councils. Given the role of LSP's in leading upon the Community Strategy and their ability to engage and influence all strategic partners in the area, both from the public and private sector, they are in an ideal position to proactively engage with local work pertaining to the race and diversity agenda.

The link being advocated to the two local strategic partnerships goes a significant way to meeting these needs. It will also contribute to securing independence from the 'control' of the local authorities and placing the new organisation to not only challenge, but also influence, all public bodies on their statutory obligations to promote race and other equality agenda.

Recent guidance from the CRE has set out clearly the role of public authorities and partnerships in promoting race equality and this can form another useful contribution to the planning of the work ahead.

Finally, the link with the LSPs also enables the new body to influence the future direction of the area in relation to developing equal opportunity for all. In the longer term serious consideration needs to be given to making the 'new organisation' completely independent from LSPs and the Council(s).

Differences between Shropshire and Telford and Wrekin

Taking account of all the evidence both qualitative and quantitative, it is very clear that there are different sets of challenges facing the public sector and the BME groups in Shropshire and BTW. The history and profile of race issues is manifestly diverse and therefore it is argued different approaches are required in terms of how further progress can be delivered and sustained. If one examines a historical perspective in how local authorities have responded to this important agenda (see below) it is evident that both of the councils are, for reasons of history and local context, at a different stage in the transition process.

At the same time there is strong view that the two areas need to work together and mutually reinforce their commitment to this agenda. The following proposals therefore suggest a linked but nonetheless distinct approach in the two local authority areas.

A new focus on community cohesion and equalities

In designing organisational models it is important to keep in mind the purpose and ethos of the activities proposed. In general the context set out above, the agenda for change summarised in the previous section and the changing approaches to race and equalities (see chart overleaf), would indicate that the proposed bodies need a culture which focuses on community cohesion, wider equalities, diversity and civil renewal as their guiding principles, rather than a narrow focus on race.

The potential to develop the new model to explore the wider equality and human rights agenda may well be assisted by the results of the national consultation which is currently being undertaken by the Department for Trade & Industry. At this stage the review has not considered in any detail the views of those groups and organisations concerned about issues pertaining to gender, disability, sexuality or age.

Over a period of two to three years (perhaps in line with the Government's possible creation of Commission for Equality and Human Rights by 2006-7) gradually incorporate all aspects of the equality strands. Such a timescale will enable all councils and strategic partners to fully engage and consult with local voluntary organisations leading on broad equality issues such as disability, gender, sexuality and age.

However, given the remit for this review was primarily to focus upon the race infrastructure, it is proposed that the issue of 'race' be addressed immediately. Tweaking of the new organisational arrangements could take place as the wider equality agenda is more fully embraced.

The new approach must therefore be inclusive and engage all sections of society to anticipate this Community Cohesion Agenda. Promoting and celebrating diversity will be a critical new role, alongside challenging racism, discrimination and harassment at every level.

5.2. The basic essentials

If progress is to be made in addressing the agenda set out in this report and building a stronger, genuine and shared commitment to community cohesion and diversity, any new arrangements proposed for the Shropshire and Telford areas need to, at the very least:

- Build on the success of the past - learn from the experience, both positive and negative
- Build on some of the current infrastructures but at the same time offer clear fresh start in terms of both the level of commitment and the inclusivity of arrangements
- Fully embrace and understand the external and internal drivers for change set out in this report
- Develop the consultation and engagement process with the BME groups by actively empowering them to participate further in the decision making process. Be inclusive. At times, the forgotten new communities (refugees and asylum seekers) need to be given a more positive profile. Traveller and gypsy communities also need to be fully engaged in the new arrangements. Chinese communities appear also to have a low profile. Women, gay and lesbians, young people and people with a disability are currently some of the unheard voices
- Embrace a new approach in tackling the various levels of current inequality, be it in service delivery, employment, access to training and learning
- Embrace cultural changes in the way it operates. This change of approach affects both Members, officers and BME community representatives

5.3. Borough of Telford and Wrekin

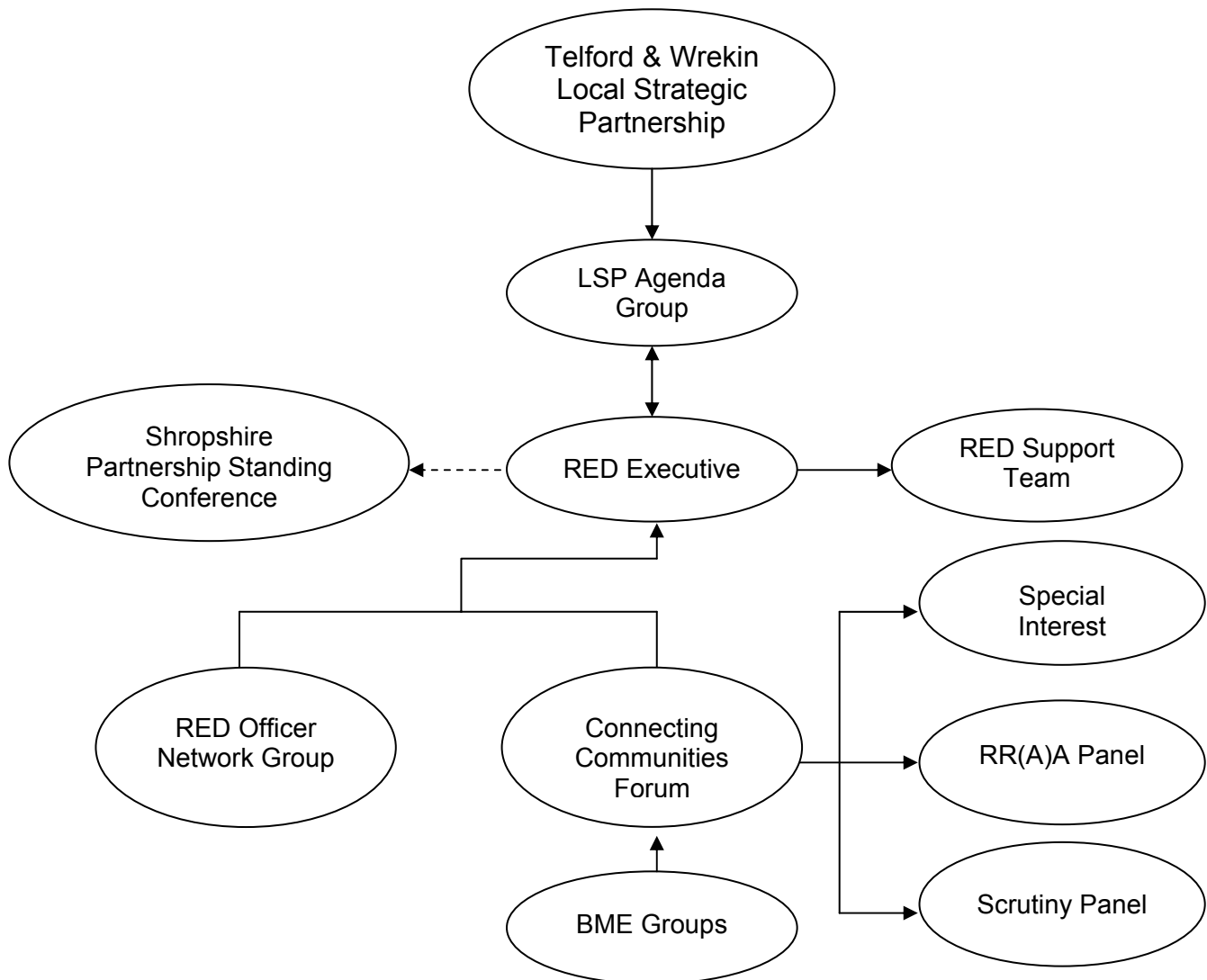
The diagram summarises the organisational arrangements proposed. The following pages explain the role and operation of each body.

The two overriding aims of the proposed approach are to:

- 1. Provide for clearer, more accountable leadership on race, equality and diversity issues, linked to the role of the LSP**
- 2. Enable a more inclusive approach with greater engagement in decision making by the wider community of BME organisations**

Both of these are essential components of the new arrangements.

Proposed Model for Telford & Wrekin Area



5.3.1 RED Executive

The proposal for a RED Executive seeks to address the first of these aims. It will take overall responsibility for mainstreaming the Race, Equality and Diversity (RED) Agenda.

Purpose

- To develop and implement RED strategies, policies, vision, value and objectives
- To prioritise, monitor performance against the work programme and produce an annual report to the LSP Board

- To administer the budget for RED. Responsible for financial management of the agreed budget and the financial audit arrangements of BTW as the 'accountable body'
- To lead and raise the profile of RED issues at international, national and local level, including engaging with all forms of media for positive publicity
- To work closely with the designated staff support
- To receive and consider progress reports/minutes from connecting communities' forum and panels
- To support partnership and local partners in developing work plans in line with priorities identified by LSP
- To publicise the work programme, co-ordinate activities like training and community consultation that bring added value to all partners
- To maximise external funding to deliver the work programme and support capacity building of the local voluntary sector

Operational Arrangements

- The Chair of the RED Executive will represent it on the LSP Board and will be appointed by the Executive for a maximum 2 year term
- Membership will include 5 members from BME groups to be nominated by the Connecting Communities Forum. This could be reviewed at the end of 2005 or when the remit of the Executive evolves and incorporates other equality strands
- Strategic partners (on the LSP) will nominate the remaining 5 representatives to the Executive, one of whom should be from a Government Regional Agency
- Meetings will be held bi-monthly and serviced by the RED Support Team
- Six members attending will represent a quorum for this group
- An annual meeting with the Connecting Communities' Forum will receive the annual report including financial statements. Annual elections of community representatives will also take place

5.3.2 Connecting Communities Forum: Organisational and Cultural Change

The Connecting Communities Forum (**CCF**) needs to be supported in fulfilling the second of the two key aims set out above – including a wide range of expertise and interests from the local community with a clear and leading role in the decision making process.

It will be responsible for developing strategies and policies in relation to all RED issues. The forum will also prioritise areas for scrutiny of the local public sector and will develop an annual programme.

This forum has offered an effective means for BME groups to meet with key senior officers, including chief officers from Telford & Wrekin Council to discuss race issues. Community groups have been able to raise their grievances, ask important questions particularly in relation to employment opportunities for their communities and service delivery issues. The council has been able to consult and engage community representatives over policy issues. Attendance has been generally good and, increasingly, the forum has operated as a question/answer session.

Given the challenges facing the councils, LSP and the Community Groups, a new approach is being advocated. This forum needs to become the 'hub' effectively linking public sector organisations with the BME groups to influence the decision making process. The forum now needs to take on the mantle for driving the Community Cohesion Agenda for the area on behalf of the LSP. This will give the group a leadership role over a critical policy issue that is relevant to sections of the community. The challenges this offers the forum are to:

- Become more inclusive. Engage the elderly, the young, the disabled and women who currently receive a low profile. This is why establishing panels to focus on some key issues, e.g. young women's issues or needs of the elderly can be more sharply focused
- Seek representation from Travellers/Gypsies, new community groups and dual heritage minorities who are not currently represented
- In promoting cohesion, inclusion and good race equality across all sections of society, take the lead in organising events that promote a better understanding and tolerance of the diversity mix of the local communities. This responsibility will entail taking the cohesive message to schools, places of work and neighbourhoods and using the media effectively to publicise this more fully
- Hold public sector organisations to account. CCF needs to prioritise the key issues that they want to scrutinise, e.g. employment issues and service delivery at a strategic level. Individual cases should be pursued directly through, for example, the relevant agencies complaints procedure

The Connecting Communities Forum will also co-ordinate core activities pertaining to community consultation and community engagement. Strategic partners will be able to place items on the agenda for formal consultation with BME groups (other equality groups to follow in due course). The forum will also co-ordinate such activities to avoid duplication. For example, a six monthly meeting with the forum could be arranged by all public sector partners who need to consult on their response to the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000, in particular the Race Equality Schemes, impact assessment, monitoring data, etc.

5.3.3 CCF Panels

Panels will be established to carry out the preliminary work, be responsible for analysing reports/data from the public sector partners. Membership of each panel will be influenced by the subject matter being scrutinised so that local community expertise is adequately reflected in the membership and additional expertise can be drawn in flexibly as appropriate. Panels will meet bi-monthly.

Panels will be established to carry out detailed analysis or examination of an important issue. One on-going panel will be established to carry out the proposed scrutiny role and another to concentrate on the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000. Other panels will be agreed by CCF to carry out detailed work on a prioritised area of work. Progress reports will be made to CCF. These panels will be time limited and chaired by a member from CCF.

5.3.4 RED Support Team

Purpose

To deliver the work programme of the RED Executive, CCF and the Panels through carrying out the necessary administrative, research and reporting functions.

The RST will consist of officers employed by agencies involved in the LSP who have a brief to work directly with BME communities. They will be supported by the wider network of officers engaged in equalities work within the various council services.

Responsibilities

- To work in partnership with LSP support staff, strategic partners and BME groups
- To identify and articulate needs of BME communities and to raise the profile of these issues
- To administer and support the work of the new arrangements
- To draft reports for RED Executive, CCF and Panels
- To seek external funding to further enhance LSP work and support BME groups
- To advise and support LSP members in relation to promoting BME equality work
- To promote, publicise, communicate achievements of LSP and its partners on its equality programme

5.3.5 Race Equality Leadership Group

The Race Equality Leadership Group should be replaced with a Race Equality & Diversity network group consisting of the Race Equality/Diversity Officers from each of the main public sector bodies. The main purpose of the group will be to coordinate initiatives and share good practice.

5.3.6 Black & Minority Ethnic Groups

There are currently 14 BME groups who are invited to the Connecting Communities Forum (Listed in Appendix 2). These groups undertake a variety of different roles and do fluctuate in terms of the numbers of people involved and how representative they are of the communities they support.

They do however provide a meaningful starting point to ensure BME groups are involved in the process of developing the new structure.

It will be important that the contributions made by these groups are valued and work is undertaken to strengthen their capacity to engage in the emerging organisation.

5.3.7 Management Arrangements

Under the proposed arrangements the legal identity of employer and budget holder for the range of bodies would be BTW Council as this is the most practical and dependable way to make progress in the short term. However serious consideration needs to be given to the establishment of an arms length or fully independent legal status for the RST and the CCF over the longer term.

5.3.8 Communication and Sharing Information

The positive messages about the new arrangements need to be effectively communicated amongst all partners, with staff working in the public sector, local community groups and the public. Effective use of all forms of media and technology will assist in effective sharing of best practice.

5.3.9 Effective Partnership Working

Listening, supporting and working jointly for the 'common good' will lead to good team work, multi-agency working in delivering a shared vision, objectives and priorities for RED.

5.3.10 Policy Development

The new approach must involve working as a team (network group) to co-ordinate all activity in relation to RED issues, sharing and developing policy

initiatives. To work closely with strategic partners to support and develop their capacity to meet their legal obligations, e.g. over consultation exercises. A Service Level Agreement may well be the way forward for all partners to make a resource contribution and receive some real benefit from the new organisation

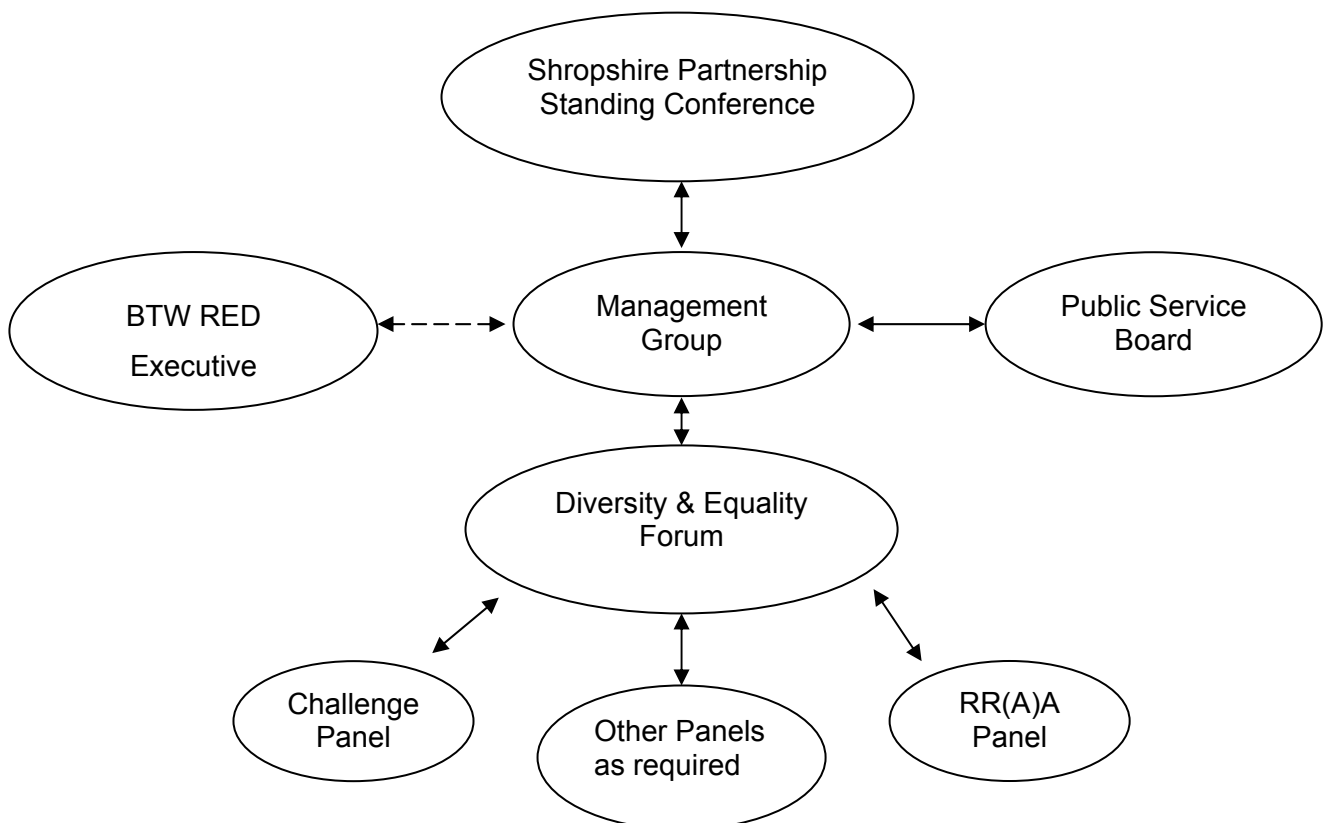
5.4. SHROPSHIRE

The key difference in the proposed structure for Shropshire area is that there is no Connecting Community Forum and given the very low number of identifiable BME groups in the area, it is not being proposed that they established such a group.

The proposals here are:

- In view of the benefits from a co-ordinated approach the BTW RED Executive links directly into the arrangements for Shropshire's LSP via the Management Group
- The Equality and Diversity Forum establishes the panels shown below

Proposed model for Shropshire County Council Area



5.5. Resources

For any new organisation, securing sufficient funds with some medium to long-term security will inspire confidence. It will assist in attracting the best personnel from all groups, and will provide meaningful opportunities to deliver sustainable change. The level of resources required will be influenced by the model that is finally agreed. For BTW the detailed work required for identifying the grades of new posts, operating costs etc. will need to be finalised through the proposed Implementation Group (see recommendations). For Shropshire, the RED Forum will lead on all matters pertaining to the establishment and appointment of the 3 new posts.

This review offers an opportunity for a fresh start for all stakeholders and an opportunity for a truly effective partnership between all public bodies. It opens the way for partners, particularly those with statutory/service delivery obligations to promote and develop race/equality issues, to demonstrate their commitment to this new venture by making a financial contribution(or in kind) in addition to their moral support.

The new organisation should also aim in the short to medium term to agree a target for generating income from its own initiatives. Strategic partnerships with CAB/CVS may help to pool resources and casework expertise; with a similar arrangement with a legal firm for legal advice. The Commission for Racial Equality may be willing to grant funds for specific race work, or other potential sources such as the Lottery Fund.

The new organisation will need to take advantage of the best technology on offer. A partnership link with both Local Authorities, who have ambitious plans over the next few years to use technology to reach their communities including some of the hard to reach, would be an advantage. This will enable the organisation to reach its members and local communities most effectively.

5.6. Joint Working

The 'golden thread' or the 'bridge' that binds together the two local areas is that some of their communities 'overlap' when it comes to take up of public sector services and BME groups in Telford have more of a physical presence which is shared by BME members in Shropshire, e.g. use of religious and cultural facilities. Another factor is the common theme of combating racism and discrimination in the community. A firm link is essential for both new organisations to work together for the 'common good'. For example, Shropshire will continue to develop its approach to rural racism and this specialism should be shared with Telford which, although generally more urban, nevertheless has a significant rural dimension in its area.

The issue of casework (immigration issues, legal advice about employment rights, welfare benefits) was often raised by elected Members and other community leaders as probably the most important issue for the community. This is a specialist service provision that would not necessarily be the most efficient and effective if both new organisations were to provide this individually. It is therefore proposed that the new organisation in BTW takes the lead on this service provision and that Shropshire makes a financial contribution (Service Level Agreement).

6. RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1. Recommendations for BTW and SCC

That the proposed new arrangements for addressing RED be endorsed. That the Race dimension be implemented with immediate effect.

6.2. Recommendations for BTW

1. That an Implementation Group (IG) be established immediately to lead on the next stage of the process and a named senior officer be appointed as an interim manager to advise the Group and ensure implementation of action plans. Specifically the IG will need to address:
 - The appointment of staff to the RED team
 - The nomination of members of the RED Executive
 - The broadening of the role and activities of the CCF
 - The preparation of a full financial plan
 - The Service Level Agreement for provision of case work services to Shropshire
2. That all public sector organisations make a resource allocation, some financial, some in kind, for the next 3 years and that posts be established and implemented as the organisation evolves towards the CEHR Model
3. That a programme of informing BME groups of the changes that take place immediately is set up and consultation with other equality groups commences so that an integrated model (like CEHR) could emerge over the next phase
4. That a joint seminar be organised to enhance ownership and an understanding of the new arrangements

6.3. Recommendations for Shropshire

1. That the proposed new arrangements be endorsed, including a linkage to the proposed arrangements for BTW in relation to case work.
2. That 3 new posts be established, one equality post by the County Council and two by the LSP. The latter will encompass equality co-ordination and one specifically for race and disability issues.

7. THE NEXT STEPS

The review is the beginning of a process of working with local people, groups, and communities, as well as partner agencies. In developing structures and priorities for race and potentially wider equalities issues which both represent, and serve, the range of diverse needs in the areas of Shropshire and Telford and Wrekin. The next steps to be taken include:

1. Commitment to the policy directions and new structures proposed
2. That all public sector organisations make a resource allocation, some financial, some in kind, for the next three years and that posts be appointed to the RED Support Team as the organisation evolves towards the CEHR model
3. That an Implementation Group (IG) for BTW be established immediately to lead on the next stage of the process and a named senior officer be appointed as interim manager to advise the group and ensure implementation of action plans
4. Appointments to be made to the new bodies and posts (such as interim manager in BTW) to secure further funding, accommodation and implementation of the recommendations
5. The holding of a joint seminar to enhance the ownership and understanding of the agenda amongst all stakeholders
6. Shropshire will also need to take steps to recruit three new staff as soon as possible
7. That a programme of informing BME groups of the changes that are proposed and consultation with other equality groups commences so that an integrated model (like CEHR) could emerge over the next phase