

## One North West & CLES: Race equality at the local level... where next?

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On April 1<sup>st</sup> at the Zion Centre in Hulme, One North West and the Centre for Local Economic Strategies held a joint policy roundtable. This brought together expertise around race equality, economic development and place. The roundtable involved participation from leading academics, representatives of the Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) voluntary and community sector (VCS), local politicians and also local council officers to ask: ‘where next for race equality at the local level?’

The roundtable began with an introduction into the current political context and was followed by a wide ranging discussion. Three key areas of learning emerged that included linking with wider agendas, the issues with the growth agenda and making local accountability work. This is summarised below, which intended as a reflection of the event and the beginnings of a new debate.

The two essays that formed the introduction to debate: ‘The changing relationship between national and local policy-making’ and ‘race equality under the coalition Government: an overview’ can be found at the back of this document

### Key debates: Race equality at the local level... where next?

#### *Furthering race equality by linking with other agendas?*

Whilst it remains essential to maintain race equality on the agenda due to the persistent patterns of disadvantage and discrimination, it is increasingly important to link the promotion of race equality to other strategic objectives, from which the needs of black and minority ethnic (BME) communities will be furthered as key issues intersect with mainstream agendas. This will ensure stronger alliances and therefore ensure that race equality does not slip off the agenda.

For example, by developing measures to address poverty, minority ethnic communities will inevitably benefit due to the overrepresentation of BME communities in indicators of socio-economic deprivation. Furthermore, the links between ethnicity and place mean that focused work with deprived communities in the North of England could have the subsequent effect of promoting race equality. Additionally, by working to ensure that race equality is considered as part of the wider growth local employment agenda, much could be achieved (see below). The case for race equality needs to be made in every agenda.

Intersectionality and the understanding of complex identities that shape people lives are therefore crucial. This approach is taken by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation’s Ethnicity and Poverty programme and will lead to more positive solutions<sup>1</sup>. Through this understanding, One North West has prioritised work with BME women through partnership with Oxfam due to a concern that Government develop policy without the knowledge, conceptual tools or data required to fully understand the needs of BME women. At best, this lack of understanding would mean that Government strategies fail to support ethnic minority women out of poverty. At worse, however, these strategies exacerbate these levels of poverty amongst BME women. Therefore, by developing stronger links with gender equality, (for instance around the gender pay gap) and engendering a more intersectional approach that includes race equality, the outcomes for disadvantaged women from ethnic minorities will be improved. There must also be a recognition of the huge differences within and between BME communities.

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<sup>1</sup> For more information on the JRF Ethnicity and Poverty Programme please see:  
<http://www.jrf.org.uk/work/workarea/poverty-and-ethnicity>

### ***Where does race equality sit within the Coalition Government's pro-growth agenda?***

Since the election of the Coalition Government last year, a host of policies and initiatives have emerged that are underpinned by a 'pro-growth' ideology: from the Local Growth White Paper and the Budget, to Enterprise Zones and the Regional Growth Fund. There has been significant debate regarding the likely efficacy of these policies for increasing economic output, but as was raised in the course of the roundtable, where do race equality issues sit within the Coalition Government's pro-growth agenda?

The coalition government's pro-growth agenda is clearly underpinned by principles of 'traditional' economic growth: that by increasing GVA, wealth will inevitably 'trickle-down' to the most deprived people and places. However, experience shows that this does not often happen: all too often the opportunities that economic growth brings, including new jobs, are enjoyed by the few and not by the many. As one participant commented, evidence suggests that some ethnic minority groups continue to experience discrimination by potential employers, especially where their ethnicity intersects with other aspects of identity, such as gender, disability or class.

The transition from Regional Development Agencies (RDAs) to the emerging Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs) also featured prominently in the discussion. LEPs are locally owned partnerships between local authorities and business, driven by the priorities of the private sector; their focus is on stimulating economic growth and increasing levels of employment and enterprise, i.e. realising the coalition government's pro-growth vision. Participants at the roundtable questioned whether LEPs will have the same interest in pursuing the race equality agenda as RDAs did. Moreover, questions remain as to what extent LEPs' boards will be representative in terms of ethnicity and gender. If they fail to be representative, how do we ensure that the voices of potentially marginalised groups are heard?

### ***Accountability at a local level: a partnership approach?***

With the removal of Local Area Agreements, Comprehensive Area Assessments and weakening of race equality legislation, there has been a shift from a process-driven 'bureaucratic' accountability to a version of Big Society accountability that places emphasis on communities challenging unequal outcomes. The argument is that there was too much focus on tick-boxing under the previous system and that public bodies became skilled at completing these tasks, therefore bringing little real equality on the ground.

Under the proposed system, the VCS will be able, through more transparency, to challenge unequal decisions. However, proposals to remove the duty to complete equality impact assessments takes away the evidence by which we can see how decisions have been made and is reliant on a vibrant VCS that is able to advocate at a time when its capacity to do so is being weakened. The issue of accountability at a local level raises some key questions that need to be tackled:

- Without the formal process, how can there be effective scrutiny of performance?
- Who will make the judgements and how will these be made?
- Does Big Society really provide the answer?

The local VCS could lobby local authority areas to continue with *and improve* equality impact assessments but offer their expertise in partnership. There may be no additional funding available, but this approach would ensure better outcomes for BME communities.

## Next Steps

**One North West:** We will continue to work with partners to influence national policy and debate through research, policy responses and making connections between the BME VCS and Government. In addition to this, One North West will provide evidence and ideas to local VCS organisations and encourage and support them to make changes that will lead to increased race equality at the local level, bringing in learning from above. The key debates from the roundtable will be explored further at the NW BME Policy Forum, which brings together a unique mix of front line organisations (both rural and urban and across equalities), social enterprise, infrastructure organisations and national partners, in order to develop some concrete action.

**CLES:** The Centre for Local Policy Studies and Centre for Local Economic Strategies (CLES) are working in partnership with the North West Infrastructure Partnership and Voluntary Sector North West to undertake a piece of research on Equality, Localism and Big Society in the North West. The aim of the project is to make the socio-economic case for equality within the Big Society and Localism policy agenda: What will be the social and economic cost if Big Society and Localism fail to embed equality? This work will identify solutions, make recommendations to policy-makers and strengthen the case for equality within the current debate around 'fairness', in the process, promoting the value of the equalities VCS in the North West.

New Start magazine, which is now published by CLES, has a long-standing interest in equalities issues and welcomes contributions from practitioners working in the field. For more information see:

<http://www.cles.org.uk/newstart/>

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## Appendix: Introductory Essays

**Jessica Smith, Policy Researcher (Lead for Equalities and Inclusion), CLES:**

*The changing relationship between national and local policy-making*

### Introduction

In January 2011, the Centre for Local Economic Strategies (CLES) published findings from an international research project examining two local authorities' responses to increased ethnic diversity: Manchester and Copenhagen. Written in a climate of public sector cuts, the publication poses the question: *Where next for ethnic diversity policy-making at the local level?*

The report is available to download at:

<http://www.cles.org.uk/publications/where-next-for-ethnic-diversity-policy-making-at-the-local-level/>

## About the research

The aim of the research was to find out how national policy and rhetoric around ethnicity and cultural diversity was translated at the local authority level. Within academia, much has been written about central government approaches to this agenda but less so about how this translates to policy-making at the local level.

In the Danish context, the research sought to find out how contentious national debates related to immigration, ethnicity and religion were being negotiated by policy makers in a left-leaning council; whilst in Manchester the research attempted to understand what 'community cohesion' - a term that has guided policy-making in this field in the last ten years - meant to local policy makers.

The three key aims of the research were, therefore:

- to understand how central government policy concepts and rhetoric are negotiated at the local level
- to gain an insight into what concepts such as 'integration' in the Danish context and 'community cohesion' in the UK context mean to policy-makers
- to find out what policies, projects and approaches have subsequently emerged

## Findings from Manchester and Copenhagen

In both local authorities, interviewees revealed a strong rhetoric of independence from central government. In Copenhagen, many were eager to distance themselves from the right-wing views that underpin policy and media coverage at national level; whilst in Manchester interviewees were keen to stress that the City Council had its own way of doing things, even under the previous Labour government.

However, despite this perceived independence, the research found that national policy and rhetoric nevertheless had had a significant impact at on policy-making at the local level in both cities.

In Copenhagen, for example, national level concerns about the 'ghettoisation' of migrant communities had led the Council to introduce a policy whereby a proportion of social housing is allocated to employed tenants with the aim of promoting socially - and ethnically - mixed neighbourhoods. In 2007, the Council also introduced a voluntary scheme whereby school children from migrant communities were moved to schools where the majority of pupils were ethnic Danes. There is also a significant emphasis on employment in a Danish speaking setting as a key milestone in migrants becoming integrated citizens; a reflection of the need and desire to sustain a functioning Welfare State. The publication describes Copenhagen's policies as evidence of a 'structural' approach to ethnic diversity policy-making.

Back to Manchester, despite the rhetoric of independence, 'community cohesion' - a concept that defined New Labour's approach to this policy field - was a guiding principle of much of the City Council's activity. Unlike the structural approach in Copenhagen, which emphasises the role of employment and housing in the integration of migrant communities and their descendents, in Manchester the emphasis was on culture, identity and a feeling of belonging: or a 'social-cultural' approach. Under the banner of 'community cohesion' a host of policies and initiatives have been developed that emphasise the importance of shared Mancunian values and a strong sense of place.

## Conclusions from the research

The research, therefore, uncovered two very different approaches to ethnic diversity policy-making in the two local authorities. It is not the intention of the research to propose an ideal approach; such an attempt would

inevitably prove unsuccessful as the opportunities and challenges that ethnic diversity bring to a locality vary greatly depending on a range of factors, not least the nature of the local economy and the history of immigration.

To be most effective, ethnic diversity policy-making at the local level must be tailored to these local circumstances and not constrained by predetermined national rhetoric – whether that is ‘integration’ in the Danish context or ‘community cohesion’ here in the UK.

### **The current context: opportunities and threats**

It was highlighted in the course of the research that ‘labelling’ funding streams with nationally defined policy rhetoric can be unhelpful. In applying for and accepting specialist ethnic diversity related funding streams, local authorities are, implicitly, ‘buying into’ nationally defined rhetoric with the implicit assumption that their locality was otherwise ‘un-cohesive’ or poorly ‘integrated’. Whilst the current context raises many challenges, the removal of ring-fences from local government funding may open up possibilities for a more targeted use of monies which is more relevant to local circumstances. Moreover, it could encourage greater cross-department collaboration; economic development officers coming together with race equality officers to meet shared objectives, for example.

Moreover, whilst David Cameron has proclaimed the ‘death of state multiculturalism’, this hasn’t translated to a policy statement on the coalition’s approach: however all signs suggest that the ‘community cohesion’ agenda is being quietly dropped.

Without an overarching policy steer from central government, local authorities will have to think creatively and independently about how they are going to approach this field of policy-making in the future and there won’t necessarily be a theoretical concept for them to draw on. This potentially presents an opportunity for local authorities to develop the type of creative and locally-specific approaches that this research advocates.

Perhaps the current climate presents an opportunity for the emergence of a truly ‘bottom-up’ approach to ethnic diversity policy-making: an approach which is responsive to localities’ particular circumstances and affords local state actors the opportunity to think beyond pre-determined policy frameworks.

### **Daniel Silver, One North West:**

#### *Race Equality under the coalition Government: An overview*

### **Introduction**

The coalition Government is pursuing a radical agenda of reform. This has implications for the race equality movement, the BME VCS and the communities that we work for. This is particularly true for BME communities in the North of England, in which the intersection of ethnicity, place and poverty bring particular disadvantages being exacerbated by current policy.

Below is a brief overview of some of the key challenges to race equality that have emerged within the first year of the coalition Government:

### **The Age of Austerity**

The cuts are dominating the political landscape and BME communities (especially women) in the North West will be disproportionately affected as a result of the cuts, in large part due to higher levels of poverty and

unemployment that exist. It must be remembered in any analysis that the scale and the speed of the deficit reduction is a matter of political choice that has now become inextricably linked with the Big Society and Localism agenda.

The impact of the cuts will be felt more acutely in the North of England. There is geography of disadvantage in which BME communities are further impacted upon disproportionately due the over representation of BME communities in deprived areas. For example, thirty percent of the North West's BME population live in the region's top five most deprived districts. Furthermore, research from the Joseph Rowntree Foundation suggests that the effect of living in a deprived area appears to impact more on BME groups than White British.

With the impact on communities evident, the decision to place local authorities under an obligation to front-load cuts has resulted in many VCS groups facing imminent closure and reduction of service delivery, which in turn further impacts upon marginalised communities.

The BME VCS is working in a challenging climate as a result. This is within the context of the shift of focus away from race equality and towards a single equality approach, increased competition and the shift towards commissioning. This difficult climate will have an impact on the communities that are reached by the sector.

### **Equality to Fairness**

Equalities Minister Theresa May has stated that the Government favour 'a greater focus on "fairness" rather than "equality", arguing that many people felt alienated by the equality agenda'. The fact that this comes from the very minister whose responsibility it is to promote equality is deeply concerning. Fairness is a highly contestable area and unlike equality, it does not have a legislative framework behind it. This means that it remains subjective and therefore, provides a vehicle for making moral and politicised judgements. Indeed, David Cameron has said that:

*'Fairness means giving people what they deserve – and what people deserve depends on how they behave'.*

This could lead to an 'undeserving poor' that do not receive any support from the state as the notion of redistribution is eroded. The continued existence of structural inequalities based on race, gender and poverty undermines work towards achieving an equal and just society.

This effectively means that decision making is taken through the prism of 'fairness' and is defined by those in power in a society in which BME communities are increasingly being cast as the 'Other'.

### **David Cameron on Multiculturalism: An end to a race equality strategy based on opportunity for all?**

David Cameron's February 2011 speech on multiculturalism in Munich signalled a major statement from the coalition Government about its thinking on race equality. The Prime Minister said that: 'under the doctrine of state multiculturalism, we have encouraged different cultures to live separate lives, apart from each other and apart from the mainstream'. There are some real concerns around this, such as the linking of race equality with counter-terrorism strategy, the contradictions in the speech when ESOL is being cut dramatically and the potential rise in Islamophobia that could occur.

Fundamentally, the view espoused by David Cameron that blames problems around race on the lack of integration from minorities, fails to acknowledge the persistence of race inequality within our society, inequalities that are due to historical structural factors and institutional racism.

By ignoring these there is a potential shift from a policy of race relations that promotes equality of opportunity, cultural diversity and tolerance and towards one of monoculturalism and assimilation, where race equality becomes part of counter-terrorism strategy and inequalities in our communities become further entrenched.

## Big Society and Localism

The Big Society and Localism agenda represents a fundamental redefinition of the welfare state and has emerged as a central theme of the coalition Government. Their vision for Big Society includes empowering communities through more involvement in local decision making and more choice for citizens; Opening up public services to the VCS and (importantly), the private sector; and promoting social action, which sees increases in volunteering as communities 'take up the slack'.

This is inextricably linked with the localism agenda, which aims to devolve power to a local level and supposedly away from Whitehall. In summer 2010, One North West worked with one hundred and twenty BME VCS organisations to highlight key challenges around this agenda, challenges that have still not been addressed.

These include:

- The lack of a social justice framework; there are no measures to include the most disadvantaged and underrepresented communities within local priorities;
- As power is decentralised to local areas, equality of access and outcome to public services could suffer. The removal of targets could bring benefits, but there currently are no safeguards in place. This could lead to what is euphemistically known as 'differential provision'.
- The narrow definition of community around the idea of neighbourhood excludes many communities of identity and interest from the Big Society. Many BME communities, especially gypsy, traveller and travelling show people, will remain invisible and their needs will go unmet; and
- The BME VCS will face challenges with the new model of public service delivery and inequitable commissioning process, coupled with a withdrawal of grant funding. The proposed community right to challenge, enshrined in the Localism Bill, could open up public services to sweeping privatisation and a system in which profit becomes more important than people.

## Conclusion

These are certainly challenging times for race equality and for communities from minority communities that experience discrimination and disadvantage. These inequalities are currently becoming wider under the coalition Government. The current Big Society model will not promote economic, social or political inclusion, and creative solutions will need to be found at both local and national levels. The BME voluntary and community sector has a rich history of developing solutions to inequality, but this will require partnerships across society.

## Further Reading

- One North West and JUST West Yorkshire submission to Inquiry of Big Society: [www.onenorthwest.org.uk/doc.asp?ID=81&Doc=/documents/One\\_North\\_West\\_and\\_JUST\\_West\\_Yorks\\_hire\\_Submission.pdf](http://www.onenorthwest.org.uk/doc.asp?ID=81&Doc=/documents/One_North_West_and_JUST_West_Yorks_hire_Submission.pdf)
- One North West and Women's Solidarity Forum on multiculturalism: [http://www.onenorthwest.org.uk/doc.asp?ID=74&Doc=/documents/One\\_North\\_West\\_and\\_Women's\\_Solidarity\\_Forum\\_on\\_Multiculturalism\\_Final.doc](http://www.onenorthwest.org.uk/doc.asp?ID=74&Doc=/documents/One_North_West_and_Women's_Solidarity_Forum_on_Multiculturalism_Final.doc)
- One North West Briefing: Big Society Accountability. Equality to Fairness: [http://www.onenorthwest.org.uk/doc.asp?ID=82&Doc=/documents/Briefing\\_on\\_fairness.doc](http://www.onenorthwest.org.uk/doc.asp?ID=82&Doc=/documents/Briefing_on_fairness.doc)

- CLPS and CLES Publication, The implications of government policy for equalities issues  
<http://www.cles.org.uk/publications/research-on-the-impact-of-emerging-policy-on-equalities-issues/>
- CLES Blog for New Start magazine, If multiculturalism has failed, where next for diversity policy?  
<http://www.cles.org.uk/features/if-multiculturalism-has-failed-where-next-for-diversity-policy/>