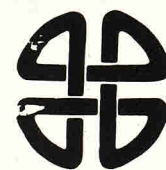


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*'fostering development
meeting the need'*

A half-day conference took place on the 23rd March 1995 to consider the findings and recommendations of, **Developing a Community Response: The Service Needs of the Irish community** - the most up to date report on the Irish community in Britain. The conference was organised by the Association of London Authorities (ALA) in association with the Action Group for Irish Youth (AGIY) and the Federation of Irish Societies, (FIS).

The target audience was senior local authority officers and Health authority staff, London-wide and National Social policy making and development bodies and Irish community organisations.

The conference was very well attended with over sixty delegates from a variety of statutory and voluntary agencies. Bernie Grant MP and Paul Murphy MP also attended.

The purpose of the conference was to consider the findings and recommendations of the report and to explore how local authorities and related agencies can take practical steps to address Irish concerns in the areas of service delivery, equitable access to resources, provision for the homeless,

community care planning and health strategies.

Speakers on the day were : ALA Chair Toby Harris, Herman Ousely, Chairman of the Commission for Racial Equality, (CRE), Lisa Murphy, Director Action Group for Irish Youth, Joan Kane, Community Care Officer, Federation of Irish Societies and Gurbux Singh, Chief Executive, London Borough of Haringey.

Workshops were held on a number of issues raised in the report: Equalities Monitoring, Housing, Health and Social Services and Domestic Violence.

In his summing up, John McDonnell, Secretary of the ALA, said he believed the conference to have been very successful in highlighting the report's findings and recommendations. He agreed to liaise with representatives of AGIY and FIS to develop this initiative and organise future seminars and conferences.

He clearly identified the need to specifically highlight the data around physical and mental health issue and to ensure the increased participation of Health authorities in future conferences.

In opening the seminar, **Toby Harris, Chair of the ALA**, outlined its origins.'

' In 1994 a two stage approach to drawing attention to the report had been agreed by the ALA and AGIY/ FIS with the potential for possible further stages. The first stage was to ensure that the report was distributed to the ALA boroughs and to be brought to the attention of our service Committees.

The second stage was to convene this seminar to discuss the findings of the report. The aim being to see what interest there would be in bringing together Irish community organisations and public sector representatives. The significance of the report is that it is the first systematic study of the needs of the Irish community for some time.'

He then went on to say, "From the early 1980s the GLC and London boroughs, like my own Haringey, and others such as Islington, Camden, Southwark and Greenwich, not only recognised the Irish as an ethnic minority but went through a process of examining the needs and aspirations of the Irish in London.

...There followed a series of studies and reports which were used as consultation documents to enable Irish people themselves to have a voice in the development of local authority policies and services. The significance of the report and today's seminar is that these initiatives not only inform us of what needs there are and what response we should give, but as importantly, they bring us together once again as a potential lobby for the Irish community in London."

ala conference

The Service Needs of the Irish in London

Gurbux Singh

(Chief Executive LB Haringey)

!! The starting point here for us as local authorities must be the **Race Relations Act** and its definition of a racial group and ethnicity. It is under this Act that we have clear obligations and duties in terms of Race Relations.

In 1979 the borough did a voluntary self identification headcount of all employees and Irish was one of the ethnic categories most frequently identified so Irish was included in Equal Opportunities headcounts for the future.

A significant role has been played by local Irish community organisations like the Haringey Irish Association, Irish councillors and one or two Irish officers within the Council in getting a positive response to the Irish communities initial agenda. Local Irish communities argued that their concerns should be addressed within the council's Race Equality structure

In 1987 the council established an Irish Liaison Unit, a centrally based unit with a strategic role but with clear functional links to key service areas as agreed by the Community and the council. It highlighted a wide range of needs within the Irish community, articulated by community groups and which they felt were in part at least the responsibility of the local authority to address.

Haringey Irish Consultative Forum was established at a Community Consultative Conference as a clear means of accountability between the Irish Liaison Unit and the local community. Its existence meant that the Council knew in dealing with the Forum that we were dealing with the diversity of interests and concerns within the community

The work covered by the Unit included

* 'Equal Opportunities Training - the Irish Dimension', * Research into the social situation of Irish elderly in Haringey, * A newsletter, * Organisation of Haringey Irish Arts Festival, * Organisation of a Job Fair for the Irish community in January 1990 with over 400 Irish people attending, * Advisory leaflets on services for Irish people in Haringey and on the services provided by the Irish Liaison Unit.

We were involved in **setting an agenda with the CRE** on Irish issues. We lead a series of representations that successfully resulted in the inclusion of the Irish in the CRE's code of guidance on rented housing and successfully lead on representations that resulted in the

inclusion of the Irish in the Housing Corporation and NFHA's systems for monitoring of ethnic origin developed as part of the CORE system.

In a sense the Irish Liaison Unit was addressing a gap in service response that went far beyond Haringey but which we were acutely aware of their impact at a local level. Each exclusion of the Irish from national initiatives made our local efforts more difficult.

1992 Haringey created a single central unit known as the **Strategic Planning Development and Equalities Unit**. Now Irish issues were reflected not only in the equalities part of this new strategic unit, but throughout all its project work on communications, personnel issues, corporate and service planning.

Seven years on what has Haringey to show for its work on Irish issues an what are the lessons for other local authorities and for the Irish community?

- * Of four Irish housing groups in Britain, two are based in Haringey.
- * We have a flourishing Irish Community Care Centre substantially funded by the council providing social work, advice and day care services for the local community.
- * We have a vibrant Irish Cultural Centre funded largely by the Council
- * Various other thriving voluntary sector groups in such areas of needs a Travellers, Irish women and children, Gaelic sports and campaigns groups
- * An Irish workforce which in overall percentage terms compares quite well with our local population make up.
- * A welcoming ethos which has brought in and retained an increasing number of Irish officers at senior grades
- * Contribution to the achievements made by the Irish community in its discussions with the CRE culminating in the CRE's decision to recommend Irish ethnic monitoring.
- * A workforce who increasingly address the Irish dimension to their work as part of mainstream sound practice

Irish issues now permeate much of our day to day service planning, service consultation and service delivery. It is not a constant battle over exclusion or marginalisation.

There probably remains a healthy tension over many issues. But we don't have to go back to basics every time we meet.

The legitimacy of the need is accepted and we start from the shared recognition in all our present dealings



Lisa Murphy, AGIY, Toby Harris, ALA, with the Irish community

Issues for the Irish Community

- * Encourage members of your community to stand for local election.
- * Spend time getting to know your local authority its structures and key officers. Focus primarily on service delivery and employment to the extent that the Irish are under-represented in senior grades in key service areas.
- * Present a united representative coalition to your local authority.
- * Use ethnic monitoring data where possible. Use the CRE's support and stance on Irish issues
- * Keep the focus on local government whilst also equally focusing on other key sectors impacting on equal life chances and Irish peoples quality of life in Britain.
- * There are other agencies operating at a local level that you should equally focus on. These include your local **health authority, the criminal justice system and Training and Education Agencies**

Lessons for other local authorities

- * Start with ethnic monitoring.
- * Support the development of a representative consultative forum with your local Irish community and incorporate into any ethnic minority/race equality consultative committee.
- * Positively support the development of a local Irish voluntary and community sector.
- * Appoint Irish Policy and Liaison Officers with a clear remit of mainstreaming Irish issues into all good service delivery and employment practice.

Learn from and build upon the Haringey experience.

Herman Ousely, CRE, Joan Kane FIS

Herman Ousely

(Commission for Racial Equality)

!! ...The issue that we're talking about today hasn't come easy for the Commission for Racial Equality. Last year we had the example of a case involving a gentleman called Trevor McCauley who was abused at work and humiliated by the racist jokes, which were alleged to be, 'humour... the banter in the workplace'. And who complained to management who did nothing about it. He got the usual reaction, 'you've got a chip on your shoulder, you should be able to laugh at these things its just workplace humour, its only a joke'. And ultimately, because he had complained he was dismissed. And he came to us and he won his case.

But what happened was a tremendous outpour of what I call **anti-Irish racism** throughout the whole spectrum of the British media including the broadsheets, the so called enlightened liberal wing of the British press. In their front page they engaged in an outpouring of vitriol. Four national newspapers called for the abolition of the CRE for helping an Irish man. Some newspapers ran pull out pages of Irish jokes and the message coming back to me as the chair was, what does the CRE think its playing at getting involved in cases of that kind?

There's a reality in all this leaving aside the basics of the law saying we're here to defend anyone against racial discrimination whatever their colour, whatever their ethnicity, whatever their nationality or racial grouping. That's what the law says. ... The point I'm making is that we do help white people to win cases when they come to us and they can show that they have been treated unfairly because of their colour or their race whether they're Irish Welsh

or Scots or even English. But if that's the sort of kickback we get, what the hell does the CRE think its playing at?, ie a veiled threat to our the existence.

Now this week you may have seen the Guardian ran a series in its newspapers talking about black Britain and there was a very interesting comment in some of the slots that they have by prominent people, about influences or issues around racism or prejudice, and Rianno Scipio, who does the weather after the main news, was asked about her worst aspect of racism ever experienced and she said, 'I was talking to an Englishwoman whom I thought at the time was Irish and when I asked her if she was Irish she said, 'Me, Irish I'd rather be black than Irish.'

There is a deep strain of anti-Irish racism that is different from the generality of the way in which black people are treated in this society.

If we go back to the first pieces of anti-discrimination legislation to outlaw racial discrimination in Britain in the 1960s, what were we dealing with? We were dealing with overt discrimination that said, if you were looking for housing accommodation, 'no blacks, no coloureds, no Irish, no dogs'. That's what was up everywhere and so I say to those people who say, Racism in Britain is a matter of black and white, its more than that.

People will come to us and say, as they have done, what are you going to do about discrimination against the Irish?, Clearly I've indicated to you how we tackle it on an individual basis where cases are brought to us. Its more difficult to get across the totality of the impact that racism has against Irish people or indeed other groups of people unless you're continuously unearthing information that brings it to the fore.

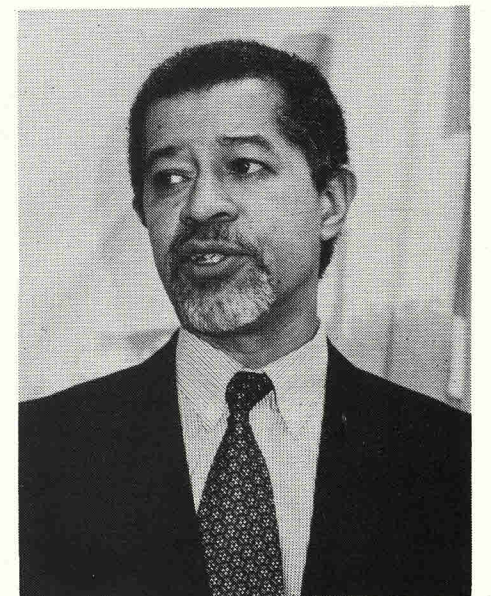
Monitoring is so important. It is the only way in which we can systematically look at patterns of discrimination that affect Irish people, or indeed any other group which we wish to gather information about, that will enable us, as policy makers, as people who implement services as people who make decisions about jobs and the allocation of resources to know whether in fact there are patterns of discrimination which are taking place that effect certain groups and to enable us to consider how we will deal with that.

.. Its not ideal that the Irish were not a core category in the last **Census**. I think the commission came late in the day to the issue. We, since I've been at the Commission, have had representation from groups here in London, although not exclusively in the London area, about

the need for the Commission to be taking a much more pro-active view, giving much more pro-active attention to these issues.

We're currently funding a research project about the Irish which is pulling together all the information that exists about Irish discrimination and disadvantage as well as initiating some new work and we expect that to be completed later on in the year.

We have also ourselves determined that Irish as an ethnic classification should be included in the advice that we give to institutions, be they public or private, in gathering data to identify patterns of discrimination. And in advocating ethnic monitoring we feel that Irish should be one of the categories that is included in automatic race data and ethnic monitoring.



Herman Ousely

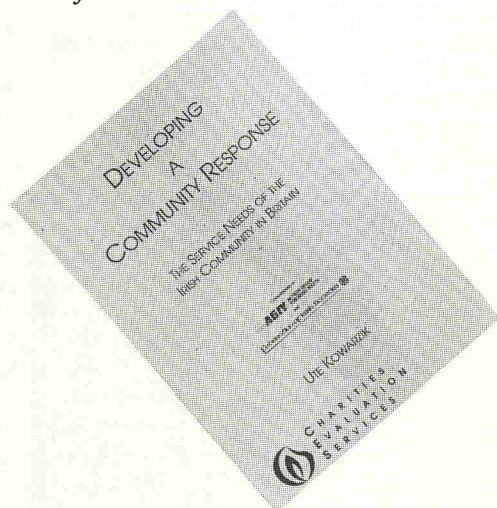
...Our involvement in providing protection within the context of the legislation for everyone ensures that we pick up cases of discrimination against Irish individuals.....

But what we have to be conscious of is in giving publicity to the cases and their details do we feed a racist media to perpetuate stereotypes and give them the ammunition they need to respond in the way they have done not only in the cases I've described but in others. And we've got to find ways of turning that around And thats part of the bigger challenge we have.

We advocate monitoring in the way that I've described and reproduce it ourselves in our own organisation and we are working through this study which hopefully will help us to advance the issues further with representative groups and hopefully to get better outcomes for Irish people in Britain.

Toby Harris, ALA Chair

'The last Census recorded over a quarter of a million Irish-born people in London and that was a significant undercount, due to the absence of an Irish category in the Census questionnaire. This seminar draws upon a unique report which goes far beyond census data in profiling Irish welfare needs in London, in the areas of housing, health and community care. It has provided a valuable opportunity to address Irish concerns over policy planning, service delivery and fair access to resources'.



Joan Kane, Community Care Officer, FIS

'The conference highlighted the high level of need within the Irish community particularly around housing vulnerable persons, lack of employment opportunities and lack of access to services to meet health needs in particular around mental health. It showed that Irish agencies are meeting multiple needs not being met by mainstream agencies and raised the issue of more resources being made available.'

Lisa Murphy, AGIY Director,

'Our report highlights the urgent need for statutory and voluntary sector bodies to recognise the Irish as a separate group in ethnic monitoring programmes. Without monitoring, the Irish community is rendered invisible and needs continue to be ignored. We view today as the beginning of a vital process, a dialogue between Irish community representatives and service providers to ensure that an Irish dimension is included at all levels of service provision.'

Recommendations :

This conference calls upon all local authorities and other service providers in the areas of Health, Housing and Social Care to:

- * Undertake ethnic monitoring of the Irish community in recognition both of their obligations under the Race Relations Act and the CRE guidance on this issue**
- * Consult and liaise with Irish voluntary sector and Irish community organisations to include an Irish dimension in their equalities strategy**
- * Support the inclusion of an Irish category in the Census in 2001 in order that comprehensive data on the social situation of the Irish in Britain can be made available**

Workshops feedback

Equalities

Monitoring required in

- * Community Care assessments / Training and Enterprise Councils
- * Service Delivery, both local authority and health agencies
- * Racial Harassment cases involving Irish people
- * Youth Service provision
- * Self-definition of ethnicity is preferred
- Plus** There should be strategic policy development to address Irish needs
- * There should be Irish staff at appropriate levels to provide a welcome to service users
- * There needs to be joint cross-sectoral work on inclusion of Irish category in Census 2001
- * There needs to be an Irish inclusion in OPCS studies

Housing

- * Irish applicants need to be recorded as a distinct ethnic group, both as applicants for general housing and presenting as homeless and be encouraged to register on waiting lists for housing by local authorities
- * Equal Opportunities Policies and strategies for housing must include and Irish dimension
- * The D of E should ensure information on Irish homelessness and housing needs is collated by Local authorities
- * The Housing Corporation should analyse its CORE data and ensure housing needs of Irish people are included in strategies on improving access to housing for minority groups
- * Irish community should lobby local authorities to support Irish housing providers

Health

- * The Dept of Health should recommend Irish inclusion in ethnic monitoring by regional and local health agencies
- * Need for Irish users and service providers to come together to increase access to services. eg a consultative conference looking at purchaser and provider sectors
- * Irish to be included in health promotion/development strategies
- * Representations on nature and extent of Irish needs to be made to FHSA's and Health authorities

Social Services There is a need

- * To target Irish families for adoption and fostering
- * Develop models of good practice which include an Irish dimension
- * Conduct further research on Irish need and examine the implications of obligations on LA's under Children Act and Community Care legislation to address local need
- * Carry out audits of local communities
- * Consult with Irish communities on needs and feed into Community Care Plans
- * Develop strategies on services to Irish women and address the needs of isolated Irish elders

Domestic Violence

There is a need for:-

- * H As to work in partnership with Solas Anois, (the Irish Womens Refuge) to develop provision through general and special needs funding
- * Training around good practice for front-line workers, (HPU, Police, health agencies, Irish agencies, et cetera)
- * Removal of unnecessary hurdles for Irish women escaping domestic violence, eg, in relation to identification and medical evidence