



# Bradford District **Assembly**

**REPORT ON THE 'YOUR CITY, YOUR VOICE' EVENT**

**Diverse Voices, United Wisdom**

**Bringing about positive change for the communities of  
Bradford District**

**10th July 2018**

## **Background to the Event**

The Bradford District Assembly (BDA) was established in 2009. It is the communication link between the Voluntary and Community Sector and the public sector, primarily the Local Authority's key strategic partnerships. The work of the Assembly is conducted through a number of forums and that work is overseen by the Assembly Steering Group.

The Assembly understands that to the most effective communication link, thereby increasing the capacity to influence strategic policy and decision-making depends on being able to ensure that the forums reflect as far as possible the full range of the communities who live in Bradford District. The issue was raised at the Equalities Forum where it was agreed that there was further work needed to ensure this.

Holding a 'Your City, Your Voice' event was felt to be the most useful first step. The event was designed and organised to bring together both current assembly members and people from relevant grassroots community groups.

The stated purpose of the event was to identify actions to increase the number and range of voices from BAME communities on the Bradford District Assembly and its Forums so that the Assembly is able become an even greater influence for positive change.

Members of the organising team were keen that participants in the event understood that the outcome that was being sought was not just about increasing numbers and voices for its own sake. Rather, that the greater diversity would enable greater wisdom to be gathered, so that the Assembly has a greater chance to influence strategic decision-making for the greater benefit of the communities in the District.

## **Event Methodology**

The methodology used for the session was Appreciative Inquiry (AI). AI is a collaborative search to identify and understand:

- an organisation or a system's strengths,
- the greatest opportunities that exist
- and people's aspirations and hopes for the future.

There are four stages of an Appreciative Inquiry: Discover; Dream; Design and Deliver. For this event the first two stages of AI were used: to discover the best of what exists already and to dream by imagining the future and picturing results.

The session concluded with action planning focused on identifying specific actions to help increase BAME participation in the Assembly and its Forums.

## **Appreciative Inquiry Stage 1: Discovering the best of past and current practice**

When do individuals' stories stop being anecdotes and begin to provide qualitative evidence? When stories are collected in bulk so that clear themes, messages and success factors can be identified. For this process the participants provided over 30 stories about what motivated them individually to take action to make a positive difference, as well as the same number of stories of outstanding practice focused on how to involve others.

The success factors identified through the individual interviews at the event give some good information about the types of approaches that succeed in getting people involved e.g. action targeting a specific 'wrong'; gathering people together to identify needs; drawing on the knowledge and lived experience of local people.

### **The Best of What Is – Stories of personal motivation to participate in making a positive difference**

#### **Key success factors:**

- Taking action about things that are wrong e.g. racism, lack of understanding of a community's needs and struggles
- Desire to speak out and raise awareness about community needs
- Specific personal and communal experiences that motivate people to take action and speak up.
- Personal passions to make a difference/give back/make positive change happen.
- Seeing or knowing about the success of other initiatives.

### **The Best of What Is – outstanding examples of successful work to increase participation of BAME communities**

#### **Key success factors:**

- Listening to people
- Targeted projects/research
- Full participation — people brought together across communities, everyone valued and able to share, openness to new ideas.
- Partnership/networking
- When mutual benefits are realised
- Particular attributes necessary for successful work: persistence, determination, dedication, solidarity, resilience

## **Identifying Strengths that can be built upon**

Every person interviewed was asked to give their view of the three greatest strengths that the Voluntary and Community Sector brings to the work of increasing the participation of BAME communities in the Assembly and its Forums.

Five main areas of strength emerged:

- Community knowledge and understanding.
- The ability to bring people together to work collectively.
- The diversity of the sector, from small community groups to large voluntary organisations.
- The size of organisations and the number of people already making a difference.
- A structure with the voices to influence.

## **Appreciative Inquiry Stage 2: Dream - Imagining the Future, Picturing Results**

From people's stories of the best of what is, the strengths identified and their ideas for the future, a scenario was developed which gave people a focus for their collective imagining of the future. The scenario used can be found in Appendix 2.

In an appreciative inquiry the 'dream' phase of the work is not simply a 'blue sky' thinking exercise, a 'free for all'. It is a chance to develop a picture of an imagined future that is based in reality, the reality of what is already successful. This is coupled with the ideas people already have for making things even more successful.

This 'step into the future' with the Appreciative Inquiry process takes place for two reasons:

- How the future is imagined, affects what people do in the present.
- Without a clear idea of where they want to get to, people do not know what action to take now to move towards the desired future.

The participants worked in five small groups. The Vision pictures produced three areas of focus:

- The desired 'high level' outcomes for the District and its people: thriving economy with education attainment, skills and employment linked to it; better health and less health inequality; making the diversity of Bradford, especially BAME, visible right across the public sector workforce and leadership.

- Communities supported and ‘empowered’ to be active participants in the District’s policy and decision-making. There was a common emphasis on the importance of young people’s voices from diverse communities.
- That diversity itself needs to be made visible and celebrated in a conscious and proactive way. If people from BAME communities are going to be encouraged to participate at every level, then it needs to be made very clear that Bradford as a city and District, sees its diversity as a key strength.

## Action Planning

### Identifying Actions

In terms of increasing BAME voices in the Assembly and its Forums, each group was asked to identify two small actions that would have a big impact and could be taken in the next 3-6 months with current resources, then to identify one bold idea that would be transformative and could be delivered over the medium term.

#### Short-term actions identified

Proposed Action	Proposed timescale
Specific theme-based Forum events every 2 months (aimed at community groups)	Three events by April 2019
Outreach to communities with events about the role of the Assembly	
Promotional drive about the Assembly and Forums with the wider public	ASAP using social media, word of mouth, news bulletin, ‘piggy-backing’ existing events
Joint meeting of Forums at an annual event to share outcomes.	In six months.

Proposed Action	Proposed timescale
Grassroots engagement with people not community leaders. Have 'community' voices involved rather than paid reps.	
Focus on integration not assimilation to allow diversity and difference to be ok/normalised.	
Promote the Forums/Assembly	
Non-professional diverse individuals on each forum	

#### **Bold Actions identified**

Proposed Action	Proposed Timescale
<b>1. Future Leaders Outreach and Development – schools, colleges and university to educate about how to make a difference and become activists.</b>	<b>Next school year</b>
<b>2. Young People Voice and Influence. Opportunities, aspirations, diverse, innovative, interactive cohesive</b>	
<b>3. Strategic Action for BAME (SABAME) - Widening BAME voice to be relevant and current for individuals as well as organisations.</b>	
<b>4. Bradford Diversity Day – all communities coming together to celebrate their culture.</b>	<b>Summer 2019</b>
<b>5. Celebrate 'City of Diversity' – an annual festival involving all.</b>	

## **Responding to the Bold Ideas – Pitching and Voting**

The session ended with participants making a ‘pitch’ about their bold idea to the whole gathering. Having heard the five ideas, participants were asked to vote.

As there was clear overlap between the two young people focused bold actions and between the two ideas focused on a city celebration of diversity, the votes cast for each of these were amalgamated. Effectively this gave the participants a choice of three bold ideas for which to vote.

In the first round of voting people were asked to vote for the bold idea that was the most exciting. The bold idea (ideas 4&5) for creating an annual celebration of diversity was the clear winner in this round.

The second round asked people to vote for the bold idea that they felt was most important for increasing the numbers of BAME voices in the Assembly and its forums.

Bold idea 3 (SABAME) won this round.

The third round asked people to consider in which bold idea they would be willing to invest their time. This time the votes were evenly spread with a good number of people signing up to each.

The session ended with people signing up and committing to take action on their preferred bold idea.

## **Summary**

### **Key messages that emerged from the event:**

- New people are willing to engage with Assembly when it holds events that they feel are relevant to them. This ‘Your City, Your Voice’ event did bring some new people from grassroots groups to participate.
- Participants are keen that the Assembly and Forums hear directly from local people working in communities, not just to have their voices mediated through community leaders.
- Young people from across all communities were identified as vital to the work of the Assembly and Forums. They are not just future leaders but citizens right now. Engaging them early and enabling them to become active participants in the communities is work for the present.
- There was clear support for the Forums to extend an idea that they have trialled, to hold Forum events out in the community. Such events would enable local activists and small groups to contribute to the Forums on a one-off basis thereby extending the Forums’ reach.

- There is a strategic task to do in ensuring that BAME people and voices are seen and heard in a whole host of arenas in the District's public life. It needs a strategic group to do this. It is important to acknowledge that there was a sense of frustration, and even depression that this work still needs to be done at all.
- There was strong support for the Assembly and its Forums to be even more proactive in making more widely known its role and achievements.
- Diversity, as an issue in its own right, needs some positive work. Whilst the rhetoric of diversity as a positive is to be heard in Bradford District, too often local people perceive it as a negative. There is work to do to tell the stories of success and make visible the richness and goodness of that diversity. Only when people understand diversity as an opportunity not a threat will the District be able to access the exceptional strengths that that diversity brings to creativity, innovation and the economy. This may not strictly be in the remit of the Assembly, but it may be something to be worked on with partners.

## **Conclusion**

At the end of the session participants were asked to express in one word how they felt about the work they had done together at the event. These can be found in Appendix 3.

The words were overwhelmingly positive, giving a sense of the energy and engagement that characterised the quality of the participation. For one or two people the subject matter itself demonstrated that despite the evidence of good work over a long period, there is still a lot to be done. They found this hard.

When working on issues that are long-term, from generation to generation, it is even more important to take stock and notice the successes. Bradford District is not the same place as it was thirty years ago, progress has been made. Even more progress is needed. The event focused on identifying what has been successful so far so that it can be expanded; strengths identified that can be built upon; and creative, positive ideas that should make future progress even faster.

The Assembly can take heart from the ideas, energy, passion and commitment that community partners, old and new, are willing to bring to the ongoing work of influencing policy and decision-making to improve the lives of the people of Bradford District.

**Elaine Appelbee**  
**July 2018**



## **Appendix 2 - The Scenario used for Stage 2 'Imagining the Future, Picturing Results**

It is 2023. Since 2018, the Bradford District Assembly and its Forums have gone from strength to strength. The Assembly is playing a key role in shaping decisions and policies. Those decisions and policies are improving life for people in the District on a scale never seen before.

The full range of the District's many communities, especially the BAME communities, are participating and contributing their wisdom. As a result, the Assembly is valued by public and private sector partners.

People are coming from other parts of the country to see what the Bradford District Assembly has done to create such a powerful, diverse and influential network of local voices. What do you tell them and show them?

- What are you most proud of?
- What difference is the Assembly's influence making to people's lives?
- What new actions did you take since 2018 that increased participation by BAME groups in particular?
- What successful 2018 work did you build on and increase?
- What is happening in the way the Assembly and its Forums work to keep that high quality participation going?
- Who are the partners you are working with to have such an impact on influencing?

**Drawing on the responses, strengths and ideas from the questionnaires create a picture of what is happening in 2023.**

**Be as concrete and specific as possible — what is actually happening on the ground?**

**Be bold, this is exactly the wide participation and impact you have always wanted.**

### Appendix 3

Words used by participants to describe how they felt at the end of their work together

Creative  
Network  
Engaging  
Different  
Interesting  
Needed  
Strategic  
Empowered  
Reality Check  
Excitement  
Refreshing  
Thought provoking  
Increased knowledge  
Depressing  
Awareness  
Informative  
Positive and Educative  
Confusing but worked out  
Future  
Way Forward