

Maidstone Borough Council

External Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Tuesday 16 September 2008

Diverse Communities Review – Interview with Gurvinder Sandher

Report of: Senior Overview and Scrutiny Officer

1. Introduction

- 1.1 Gurvinder Sandher is the Assistant Director of the North West Kent Racial Equality Council (REC) and Chairman of the Maidstone Mela Advisory Group.
- 1.2 The mission statement of the North West Kent REC states that it is a “voluntary organisation working in partnership to create a just society which gives everyone an equal chance to learn, work and live free from discrimination and prejudice, and the fear of racial harassment and violence”. It aims to work towards the elimination of racial discrimination and to promote equality of opportunity and good relations between persons of different racial groups.
- 1.3 Further information on the work and aims of the North West Kent REC can be found at www.nwkrec.com.
- 1.4 The Mela Advisory Group is made up of Council officers and representatives of local community organisations and is responsible for the staging, promotion and development of the Maidstone Mela, which took place this year on Sunday 14 September.
- 1.5 The Maidstone Mela website (www.maidstone-mela.org) states that “the Mela is a celebration of the diversity of the borough through music, food and dance. The Mela has a truly international theme with stalls preparing, cooking and selling their national and regional cuisine as well as displaying crafts and national dress. On the stage there is full programme of culturally diverse entertainment. The Mela brings together partner agencies, community groups, local schools and charities to celebrate the diversity of the borough and promote community cohesion.”

2. Recommendation

- 2.1 Members are recommended to interview Mr Sandher with regard to the Committee’s review of community cohesion and the integration of ethnic minorities in the Borough, in particular considering the terms of reference for the review (attached at [Appendix A](#)).

Diverse Communities and Community Cohesion

Final Scoping Document

What is the focus of this review?

- The focus of this review is community cohesion and the integration of diverse communities, in particular ethnic minorities, in the Borough of Maidstone.
- The four categories of ethnic minorities that the review will focus on are:
 - The settled community
 - Economic migrants
 - Refugees and asylum seekers
 - Gypsies and travellers

What are the questions that need answering?

- What are the 'diverse communities' in Maidstone?
- What is the Council already doing to promote community cohesion?
- How do people living in Maidstone already feel about their communities?
- What are the main issues facing Maidstone with regard to community cohesion?
- How will the growth of Maidstone affect cohesion, particularly in rural areas which traditionally have less transient communities?
- How has the make-up of Maidstone's communities changed since the 2001 census? How is this information collected?
- What should the Council be doing to encourage integration and community cohesion?
- How is social housing allocated and how do providers of social housing in the Borough view their responsibilities towards encouraging integration of and between diverse communities?
- How do major employers cater for their staff from other countries when they first arrive in Maidstone?

What are the objectives of this review (the terms of reference) and the desired outcomes?

- Assess the make-up of Maidstone's communities.
- Identify areas of tension or potential areas of tension.
- Influence Council plans and services and the plans of external service providers to ensure they promote community cohesion and cater for all sectors of the community.
- Encourage integration in the Borough.