

Appendix 8 Commissioners visit to Southall Community Alliance

Date: Tuesday 21 September 2021

Venue: Southall Town Hall,

Participants: Harsev Bains Chair, Janpal Basran Manager, Ravi Jains Treasurer

Commissioners: Simon Woolley, Mohan Luthra, Mark Poulson

Introduction

The Southall Community Alliance (SCA) was formed as a company in 2000 and over the next few years had two main functions, providing a community voice for people in Southall, and delivery of the national neighbourhood renewal programme, with a focus on supporting ethnic minority communities. The community voice was built on the back of anti-racist resistance against events that happened in 70s and 80s in Southall; the death of Blair Peach in 1979 by the police, and previous to that the death of Gurdip Singh Chaggar, an 18 year old Sikh boy by white youths in 1976 and the razing of Hambrough Tavern in 1981 after skinheads had attended a concert there and then started terrorising the local community. Such events have shaped the communities that make up Southall and are now commemorated by blue plaques on the wall of Southall Town Hall. Some of the community leaders of that time have been instrumental in the drafting of race relations legislation and the alliance is well versed in the complexities of racial inequalities being experienced by residents in an area which, although predominantly from South Asia, has Somali, Tamil, Afghan and other ethnic minority communities.

The SCA have spearheaded resistance campaigns to prevent public assets being acquired by faith organisations and against the council who have sold or closed publicly accessible community assets since 1975, including Southall Town Hall, High Street Shops, the Tudor Rose. They are currently backing a campaign to save the Young Adult Centre.

Many of the campaigns have been community-led reaction to a perceived chronic underinvestment in the local area to the detriment of the local communities disadvantaged

by other factors such as low wage economy, cash-in-hand economies, language barriers, undocumented people and a lack of representation or advocacy.

Links to the Ealing Race Equality Commission Themes

Education and Learning

No affordable secular, accessible space (at the times that the community can meet), to enable diverse communities to meet and work together; a failure to recognise the impact this has on communities

At one time the jobs centre was also in Southall Town Hall

What do you need to change?

Space for young people and ongoing listening

Support to get young people into training and jobs

Afterschool clubs

Health and Housing

The impacts from the covid pandemic have followed the same fault lines that existed pre-covid.

The Afghan crisis is also impacting the area, with the local MP saying he has received 250 applications for families

The local gurdwaras are also under pressure to feed many more people

What do you need to change?

Health advice

Income and Employment

High levels of young people and elderly, impacted adversely at the end of the furlough scheme, a town with vibrant restaurant businesses but often people being exploited by not having contracts so no sick pay or pension, being treated as casual labour without insurance or health and safety protection

What do you need to change?

Support to tackle not only youth unemployment but all age unemployment

Support for people who have never been unemployed or on benefits and for those who do not speak English. This is particularly acute for those who are facing redundancy as fall out from Heathrow airport

Opportunities to develop transferable skills (leadership, campaigning, fundraising, project management)

Reassurance that the council is on their side to get the support it needs to deal with the impending high level of redundancies – bearing in mind that Ealing (town) and Southall has very different needs

Development of a database of opportunities to help with unemployment

Crime and Justice

There is an historic lack of trust between the police and the communities, exacerbated by the cuts and period of austerity resulting in the lack of police resources in the area to tackle the current issues such as those relating to drugs

What do you need to change?

Recruitment and training of police must change to work in a diverse borough and to build trust with its community. More police in the borough, to allow for greater partnership working with the voluntary and community sector

Participation, decision-making, and leadership

There is a lack of trust because of the experiences of the community, they feel they are not being heard, neither are their views, and what they can offer, respected. This needs time and effort to reset and resolve.

There is a distinctive lack of elected representation for those from non-‘South Asian’ communities, and this in turn is perceived to be leading to an imbalance in setting and reacting to local communities’ priorities.

The approach to regeneration is about bricks and mortar, making friends with developers but neglecting the existing communities, and the power and influence being in the hands of the developers.

Southall is now suffering from a lack of shared vision for the area, with community facilities being sold, with the money frittered away and no lasting or tangible benefits for Southall being sought in mitigation (through s 106 for example), and no investment in social activities.

What do you need to change?

Make this report the starting point – an opportunity to lay bare the challenges and give everyone the chance to lean into it to make it the best we can – the commission and its recommendations is not owned by the councillors or a single group but sets the direction and takes everyone with them

Engagement with the community, put together a realistic budget and put in a monitoring platform and an implementation group.

Robust oversight and scrutiny over implementation of election and other democratic processes (including party political processes - for Southall there are currently 15 elected representatives, most are South Asian and one is white, and does not reflect the Somali, Tamil, or Afghan etc communities).

Mechanisms/structural involvement of SCA’s leadership to help frame the recommendations, not only for the council but for businesses and community leaders, so

they can use their expertise and connections to bring the right people together, to help get buy-in from big businesses and buy-in from the local communities for unity and solidarity for the local communities.

Active advocacy for the different, sometimes opposing, communities, including faith communities, that make up the existing area and help integrate those that are from newer communities who also chose to live in the area.

Structural mechanism with teeth to monitor and evaluate actions and implementation of work to reduce inequalities.

Action to stop the feelings of powerlessness/stigmatisation felt by the community and to redress any imbalance of power that may affect minority communities' resilience.

One such action might be to include a Southall focus in the Cultural Strategy?

- Celebration of Southall's unique history (already being shared in local primary schools)
- Make a unique selling point of the number of places of worship in Southall, and the types of cuisine

Create a NEW shared vision for Southall that actively involves the existing community and makes development work hard for local people – use of S106/CIL to underpin community wealth building.

Leverage with local successful businesses (Giftos) and big businesses (FSE 100) to the betterment of the local area and its economy

Geographical space

Political space

Business buy-in

SCA have suggested that the EREC report be an interim report so that they can consult on it with the community (through their community forum)