



## **The LGBT Health and Inclusion Project**

### **Consultation on an LGBT BME People's Forum - Meeting Note**



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Brighton and Hove NHS Clinical Commissioning Group (BH CCG) and Brighton and Hove City Council (BHCC) have commissioned the LGBT Health and Inclusion Project at Brighton and Hove LGBT Switchboard to conduct a series of consultation and engagement activities with local lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans people (LGBT) people. The aim is to use the information gathered to feed into local service commissioning, planning and delivery.

***Please note, the following report presents information about the consultation and engagement work conducted by LGBT HIP and should not be taken as a position statement of Brighton and Hove LGBT Switchboard or of any participating organisation.***

### **Introduction**

LGBT HIP is a mechanism for engagement with the LGBT communities of Brighton and Hove. Discussion with commissioners indicated that there were perceived to be constituencies within those communities who were seldom heard and who were understood to find consultation and engagement activities less accessible than other groups. LGBT HIP sought to undertake activities to address this exclusion and to engage with those groups. One such group was LGBT people from Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) backgrounds. LGBT HIP therefore sought to initiate a discussion about how best to create a forum for engagement with LGBT BME people in the city.

It is beyond the scope of this brief report to document in detail the rich history of BME LGBT people in Brighton and Hove. Readers are referred to the recently published book of oral history 'Queer In Brighton' for personal testimony.<sup>1</sup> The Count Me In Too research has also documented the inequalities and exclusions experienced by LGBT BME people in its sample, relative to other LGBT people, and readers are encouraged to consult the range of reports produced by that project for a full account.<sup>2</sup> However, one striking finding is that in identifying the top three most commonly cited sources of bullying, abuse, discrimination and exclusion experienced, BME LGBT people cited LGBT venues and events (34%) and from other LGBT people (24%) most commonly. Employment (14%) was cited third.<sup>3</sup> Clearly, this finding challenges any assumption that the LGBT community automatically represents safe and inclusive space for BME LGBT people.

There have been previous initiatives in Brighton and Hove to act as a forum for BME LGBT people to put such issues on the agenda and promote action but these appeared to have ceased functioning. LGBT HIP therefore sought to initiate an open dialogue with BME LGBT people and BME organisations in the city about the scope for developing an engagement initiative.

### **Method**

LGBT HIP coordinated an exploratory initial two-hour meeting in January 2014. The intention was to invite local LGBT BME activists, BME organisations in the city and interested individuals who would like to participate. Local organisations of and for BME people were invited to attend.<sup>4</sup> The meetings were publicised in the LGBT HIP newsletter and suggested contacts were

<sup>1</sup> Jastrzebska, M & Luvera A (Eds) (2014) Queer In Brighton. Brighton: New Writing South.

<sup>2</sup> See <http://www.countmeintoo.co.uk/library.php> for the range of Count Me In Too publications.

<sup>3</sup> See Browne (2007) Count Me In Too. LGBT Lives in Brighton & Hove. Initial Findings: Academic Report <http://bit.ly/1gaHSbD> [accessed 5th March 2014].

<sup>4</sup> Invitations were sent to: The Black and Minority Ethnic Young People's Project, Black and Minority Ethnic Community Partnership, the Brighton and Hove Black History Project,

invited by email. However, it is likely that this does not represent the full range of BME organisations and LGBT BME activists or interested individuals in the city, and the issue of how to reach all those who may wish to participate was a focus for discussion.

The meeting was relaxed and informal, beginning with a brief presentation from the LGBT HIP Coordinator about the background to the project, its engagement work and reasons for carrying out the consultation. This was followed by group discussion about the topics of interest. The LGBT HIP Coordinator took notes from the session.

## **Findings**

We did not ask participants to complete demographic or evaluation forms, in keeping with the intention for a relaxed and informal event. Six people attended with an apparent even gender division in the group. We did not ask participants to identify their ethnicity and there was no requirement to self-identify as being of BME origin and the group included individuals drawn from a range of ethnic backgrounds. Some individuals attended in a personal capacity, others represented the following organisations: Brighton and Hove City Council, Mosaic, the Church of England Diocese of Chichester's Social Inclusion Project, Brighton and Hove's Black Women's Group.

## ***Key Issues Emerging***

Here we present a brief summary of the key issues that emerged from the discussions.

### *Why wasn't there already a BME LGBT Forum?*

- It was noted that there had been previous initiatives to establish forums for BME LGBT people in the city, with lots of initial enthusiasm and activity at the outset but that sustainability was a problem. It was also reported that there had been particular difficulties in engaging men in initiatives for BME LGBT people previously.
- There were experiences reported from other parts of the country where BME LGBT groups were operating and flourishing, that might act a potential model for a Brighton and Hove initiative.<sup>5</sup> There was puzzlement about why such a forum was absent in Brighton and Hove with such a large LGBT population. However, one participant cautioned against making assumptions about the networks available to BME LGBT people, in the sense that these may be informal networks of friendship and support that were not on the 'radar' of white workers in LGBT organisations. BME LGBT people were also reported to be more active within national movements such as the trade unions, where there was said to be a strong BME presence.

### *Significant problems and barriers*

- Participants detailed previous experiences of feeling the need to withdraw from certain representational roles in engagement forums in the city because of racism. It was explained that there was a lack of confidence among some participants that they would not be exposed to this again, with decisions therefore made to decline future invitations.
- The issue of multisectionality emerged, highlighting the impact of "...multiple forms of discrimination occurring simultaneously."<sup>6</sup> This had particular relevance to these discussions where participants reported discrimination and exclusion because of their ethnicity *and* their LGBT identity as well as other characteristics, but which were perceived to be given insufficient attention.

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Brighton and Hove's Black Women's Group, Mediterranean Resources Network, Brighton & Hove City Council BME Workers Forum, Mosaic.

<sup>5</sup> One such group cited was Rainbow Noir, based in Manchester. See <http://rainbownoirmanchester.wordpress.com>.

<sup>6</sup> See Avert Family Violence (2010) Factsheet: Intersectionality. <http://bit.ly/1eX9KiE> [accessed 3rd March 2014] for a more detailed explanation of the concept of intersectionality.

- There was also thought to be an unfeasible burden of representation placed on BME people, whereby one BME person may often be expected to represent the views of Brighton and Hove's diverse BME communities.<sup>7</sup>
- There was also frustration expressed with tokenistic consultation and engagement activities that sought to involve BME LGBT people as a 'tick-box' exercise, with little apparent use made of the information or follow-up.
- There was also some frustration expressed with LGBT organisations in being seen to fail to offer something of relevance to the specific needs and interest of BME LGBT people. As one participant put it: "What's in it for us?" This was interpreted to question to what extent the priorities of LGBT organisations and projects were those of BME LGBT people and communities.
- Some participants also expressed the view that it was important not to assume that LGBT organisations were free of racism and discrimination. Similarly participants spoke of racism within wider LGBT communities and that significant work was needed to challenge this.
- There was also felt to be a lack of good data about the experiences and needs of BME LGBT people in the city. For example, it was noted that the recent BME Needs Assessment report was unable to report any robust data on the ethnic profile of LGBT residents in the city, including BME LGBT people.<sup>8</sup>

### *Opportunities for development*

- However, it was noted that there were important initiatives to be aware of and linked into. These included the BHCC Community Safety Strategy,<sup>9</sup> which included attention to LGBT and racist hate crime, the recently completed BHCC BME Needs Assessment,<sup>10</sup> as well as bodies such as the local Racial Harassment Forum<sup>11</sup> and Refugee and Migrants Forum.<sup>12</sup>

### ***An LGBT BME People's Group?***

Having discussed in broad terms some of the complexities of setting up an LGBT BME group and briefly touched upon some of the issues confronting BME LGBT people, the meeting focussed on next steps. The consensus was that there was value in further exploring the establishment of an initiative to enhance the voice of BME LGBT people in the city, with certain requirements identified.

- The group or forum needed to be 'owned' by BME LGBT people, with support from external agencies. Agencies needed to 'do their bit' to ensure the sustainability of the initiative.
- That it was legitimate for LGBT HIP to use the forum or group as a vehicle for its consultation and engagement activities but this would only be one of its functions, which may extend beyond the remit of LGBT HIP.
- It should be focussed and have a tangible goal that would demonstrably benefit BME LGBT people. After discussion, it was felt that activities to address racism within LGBT community and voluntary organisations and projects would be a useful initial focus. Some examples of work proposed included training resources, the development of a guidance document (as had similarly been produced by GALOP in its Shining the Light Guide on the inclusion of transgender people<sup>13</sup>) or a charter-mark initiative on BME awareness for LGBT organisations.

<sup>7</sup> 2011 census data indicates that around 20% of Brighton and Hove's residents are from BME backgrounds and 2012/3 data from Sussex Interpreting Services shows that they provided interpreting support for users in 47 different languages, which gives some indication of the size and diversity of the local BME population. See Footnote 8 for source of data.

<sup>8</sup> BHCC & Brighton and Hove BME Needs Assessment Steering Group (2013) Black & minority ethnic communities in Brighton & Hove: A snapshot report. <http://bit.ly/lmVyWje> [accessed 5th March 2014].

<sup>9</sup> Brighton and Hove City Council.(revised 2013) Brighton & Hove Community Safety, Crime Reduction and Drugs Strategy 2011 - 2014 <http://bit.ly/lc9tCUQ> [accessed 5th March 2014].

<sup>10</sup> BHCC & Brighton and Hove BME Needs Assessment Steering Group (2013), Op Cit.

<sup>11</sup> See <http://bit.ly/lc9ERfU> for further details.

<sup>12</sup> See <http://bit.ly/lndjs77> for further details.

<sup>13</sup> Gooch, B. (2010) Shining the Light: 10 keys to becoming a trans positive organization. <http://bit.ly/lcCihHS> [accessed 5th March 2014].

The meeting concluded that more discussion with a wider group of stakeholders was needed to make further progress. It was proposed that meetings going forward be for people who self-identified as BME LGBT people to create the necessary sense of 'ownership' and safe space.

## **Conclusions**

This brief consultation exercise was useful in exploring scope for the development of an initiative to enhance the voice of BME LGBT people in the city. There was an appetite for further discussion to progress the idea but participants wanted lessons from the past to be learned. Sustaining similar initiatives had proved challenging in the past and the key learning was that any such initiatives needed to have relevance and currency for BME LGBT people, as well as ownership and control over its activities and agenda. However, support was also needed and there was a balance to be struck between the right level of autonomy for the group and the appropriate level of support needed to make it sustainable.

Racism, discrimination and exclusion persisted in some of the accounts given of attempts to participate and engage in the civic life of the city. This was also said to be encountered in LGBT organisations and communities. Participants in this exercise chose tackling this as a key activity to engage in during the initial stages of any forum or group.

The drive to empower and enable BME LGBT people to have their voices heard about these issues and engage in constructive work for change is a laudable goal that LGBT HIP clearly should support. As a consultation and engagement project, LGBT HIP is not currently configured to carry out the community development function that effectively developing this work would entail. However, LGBT HIP is seeking to develop its remit in this direction following the outcome of a funding application. As a result, only interim recommendations can be made until it is clear whether LGBT HIP will be in a position to take forward the developmental work needed to bring it to fruition. The following recommendations are offered until such time as a more established position becomes clear.

## **Recommendations**

- LGBT HIP to arrange two further consultation meetings to explore the establishment of a BME LGBT people's engagement group in the city.
- Following these meetings, LGBT HIP to produce an outline specification for the establishment of the group.

## **Acknowledgements**

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