

2007 Bicentenary of the abolition of the transatlantic slave trade

Notes of a meeting with members of the African Caribbean community

23 March 2006

Present: Paul Stephenson; Princess Campbell; Clement McLarty; Elaine King; Bruno Daniel; Hilary Banks; Rob Mitchell; Simba Tongogara; Rupert Daniel; Rev Dawnecia Palmer; Guy Reid -Bailey; Adriene Layne; Derrick Anderson; Asif Khan; Paul Barnett; Terry Wagstaff (Chair)

Apologies: Madu Ellis

Background

A report considered by the Bristol Partnership on 16 March had been circulated. At the meeting African Caribbean members of the partnership had questioned the objectives set out in the report and indicated that their community did not want to be part of any plans the city has for commemorating the abolition of transatlantic slavery. As part of 2007 they wished to focus on securing sustainable improvements in the quality of life of BME communities. They also wanted the African Caribbean community to be at the heart of planning and making the arrangements.

The Partnership decided that a meeting should be convened as a matter of urgency by the Council's Assistant Chief Executive to discuss and consider these views further so that the Partnership could reconsider the arrangements for 2007.

Introduction

Terry Wagstaff explained the purpose of the meeting. The purpose of the report considered by the Bristol Partnership had been to propose arrangements that brought together and supported all those who wished to contribute to 2007. It would be important to engage the whole city so that the year had a positive impact on the promotion of equal opportunity for all and upon the quality of life of BME communities. The meeting would enable the original proposals to be reconsidered.

Summary of views expressed

- the Consortium of Black Groups had decided it should coordinate the BME response to the 2007 Bicentenary
- some were cynical about the motives of the council in putting forward proposals which were tasteless and lacked clarity
- earlier discussions at the Malcolm X Centre had identified a number of proposals that would offer a lasting legacy including:
 - embedding Black history in the school curriculum;
 - establishing Kuumba at the Westmoreland House site.
- African Caribbean's should have a central role in planning for 2007
- what slavery was like, its harshness, what it did and its effect today should be publicised widely

- past and current heroes of the Black community should be celebrated
- must go forward and look to the future
- essential to look at the legacy of the slave trade not just jump on the bandwagon
- Bristol may, but African Caribbean's won't celebrate the Bicentenary
- what is planned must be meaningful with measurable outcomes
- make use of the opportunities, challenges and obligations from 200 years ago
- the council has an opportunity to be involved ; we'll flunk it if we challenge that involvement; we need to tell the council what we want
- Mr Prescott said what you want must be meaningful, measurable and sustainable
- we need Westmoreland House Young People, Arts and Cultural Centre and a place for the Elders too
- teachers must learn about Black culture; it should not be optional in the curriculum
- this is the last generation to have this opportunity of dealing with these issues
- important to consider before slavery, during slavery and after slavery
- an Easton Emancipation Day is being planned. Celebration is about paying respect to our ancestors, to refocus generation to generation and to avoid the same trials and tribulations in the future
- education, history, sport motivate people
- important to recognise that African Caribbean people were not slaves at first; they were not meant to be slaves
- faddish ideas should play no part in 2007; deeper actions should be planne
- QCA are reviewing the history curriculum now
- "Merchants Quarter" is contrary to 2007
- we need to believe and feel the agenda for 2007
- the council service providers are not here
- we don't want a PR exercise, it's always left us worse-off
- in looking at education we need to consider how the legacy of slavery has impacted on African Caribbean young people
- black history must be in every school by next year; the EU are as guilty as the Government ; the resources required must be made available

- Leadership is required ; Bristol is too reticent and needs to be more positive and champion Black history
- the benefits of slavery to the Merchants is obvious ; the converse is true for BME people
- commemorate the end of the slave trade; communications centre; arts and cultural centre; serious work on the impact of history on culture and introducing black history into the curriculum
- resources for a study foundation documenting our history
- provision for our Elders who don't own land and are vulnerable in old age
- start talking to us not down to us
- I feel suppressed based on an experience soon after moving to the city recently; there is a fear of engaging with the race element of diversity; there should be more leadership including from the council
- we need a dialogue with the council directors
- leadership goes right to the core; council should employ more black people especially at the senior levels ; there should be more Black councillors
- passionate about not having the name Merchants Quarter; merchant means men who sold slaves....buccaneers
- if a community feels subjugated it can't move forward
- involve the Race Forum as well as the Consortium of Black Groups
- leadership of the African Caribbean community in tackling improvements in the educational attainment of young boys to give them more confidence
- education of young boys is so poor they are not prepared for life; they lack self-confidence and self-esteem; they are not taught about the achievements of black people as part of raising their aspirations
- there should not be such scrutiny of BME organisations ; more should have been achieved under S.11
- leadership should be provided by the Consortium; the council should adopt the BME code
- the lead by the Consortium is not agreed to by all
- we should adopt planning for realwhere outcomes are identified and ways of achieving them adopted
- the risk is that we won't be listened to

- some of what we want requires mainstream services to respond; we need to meet Directors of council services
- the theme could be: commemorating the abolition of transatlantic slavery and redressing its legacy towards a more just future
- BME resources are being cut and in some cases council services are competing for BME resources

Proposed ways forward

After the discussions about proposed priorities for 2007 were exhausted the meeting began to consider proposed arrangements for planning and prioritising 2007. In summary the following proposals emerged.

2007 should give an historical perspective drawing attention to the period before slavery, the harshness of the period of slavery and its impact upon the African Caribbean community

2007 should pay respect and draw attention to the achievements of African Caribbean people

2007 should focus on actions that would be of lasting value to the BME community; some require changes and achievements in mainstream services and other sectors

2007 would include commemoration by Bristol of the bicentenary of the abolition of transatlantic slavery although the African Caribbean community would not participate

2007 should engage the whole city as part of ensuring a better recognition of what the African Caribbean community suffered and the importance today of taking further action to ensure equality of opportunity for their community

The African Caribbean community through representatives of the Consortium of Black Groups, plus other representatives to be identified, would identify their priorities for 2007.

There would be 4 theme groups (Communities, Culture, Education & Young People and Businesses & Sponsorship) as identified in the report to the Bristol Partnership, each with some African Caribbean members. Their role would be broadly as described in the report to the Partnership with encouragement and support for a wide cross-section of views and ideas from the whole city.

The steering group would comprise members from each theme group, including African Caribbean members from each group, plus other nominations including a few from the council. The Group would need to be of manageable size to be effective, say 12, and its role would be broadly as described in the report to the Partnership

The need for urgent action to get on with the planning and preparation required

Next steps

Notes of the meeting and draft proposals to be circulated

Further meeting 6.00pm 3 April in the Council House to finalise a proposal

2 African Caribbean representatives to join the planning meeting with the potential regional lottery funders on 4 April

Urgent arrangements would need to be made to obtain Partnership support to the revised proposals

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