

Working with North West Kent REC

Gravesham Borough Council's commitment to racial equality in the borough is underpinned by the very strong links the council has established with North West Kent Racial Equality Council (NWKREC).

This transparent partnership founded on mutual respect played a significant role in Gravesham Borough Council achieving Beacon Status for promoting racial equality. The council and the REC have worked together on numerous projects promoting community cohesion and race equality in the borough. Notable achievements include the Big Day Out, the Annual Vaisakhi Celebrations, Connecting Communities, Football Festival, Future Citizens Youth Events and the Racial Harassment Group.

Gravesham Borough Council views the REC as a critical friend which is prepared to support and advise the council in an open and honest way on community issues. The council often uses the REC as a facilitator to disseminate information to, and as retrievers of, real feedback and opinion from the local community.

The council recognises that the REC has a key monitoring role to play with the council, and the open door policy which the council has developed with the REC ensures that feedback is taken in a positive light and is usually adhered to.

The close working relationship with the REC has also opened the doors to improved dialogue with local minority ethnic community groups, and has fostered the development of genuine partnership working between the council and the minority ethnic voluntary and community sector in the borough.

The Council has also invited representation from the REC to sit on the Community Cohesion Group, which is made up of Senior Officers and co-ordinates the council's work around promoting race equality both within the organisation and in the borough.



Working with Local Minority Ethnic Community Groups

Top Tip	Purpose
Don't classify all minority groups together	The most common mistake for local authorities is to put all minority ethnic groups under one big banner, not taking into account the different cultural and language issues the groups may have. Different groups will also have different interests, such as religion, sport or arts, so it is not sufficient to just contact one community group and think that they represent the interests and views of all groups. If there is a local umbrella group such as a Racial Equality Council use them to gain knowledge of what is going on, and who is doing what in the local community.
Build up relationships	Use either a local Racial Equality Council or similar umbrella organisation to determine what is going on in your area. Attend meetings of local groups, develop an accurate and appropriate database, invite groups to your offices and visit their base so that you can get a better feel of the local community you are working with and serving. This will allow you to develop a relationship with local minority ethnic groups.
Recruit minority ethnic groups onto panels	Recruit minority ethnic community groups onto resident panels, focus and steering groups for specific projects, to develop a partnership approach and encourage different perspectives. When you have difficulty, speak to other contacts such as the Racial Equality Council, Council for Voluntary Services, Citizens Advice Bureau, the local Police and Fire Brigade, who may have contacts that will help you.
Hold meetings at a convenient time	More often than not minority ethnic groups will have no paid workers, and will be run by volunteers. It is therefore important that any meetings which are organised are done so in consultation with the groups, as it is often difficult for them to attend meetings in the day if they are working.
Don't overload groups or individuals	Once you have established contact with a group, there is often a danger of overloading them with information which the local authority wish to consult on. Work at a level and pace that is determined by the group and not the Council's agenda, so forward plan. Bear in mind that groups are likely to already be in paid employment, and are being contacted by other statutory authorities for the same purpose. Any information sent out needs to be manageable, and easy to respond to. Outline clearly what you want. Don't put unrealistic demands or pressures on the groups or they will cease to respond.
Language issues	Often, for minority ethnic representatives, English may be a second language, so you may need to consider the use of translators at meetings or the use of translated leaflets. Find this out by speaking to the groups, don't just make assumptions. Get advice from organisations such as Race Equality Councils or other statutory organisations like the Police who may be working with the same organisations in a different setting.
Racial equality councils	Where you are working with a Racial Equality Council, treat them as equal partners. Encourage them to work closely in a positive manner with the local authority, providing constructive feedback. Encourage officers to make use of this facility, and where possible get them involved in specific projects which relate to issues around promoting race equality in the local area. Don't be afraid of negative criticism and try to view the REC as a critical friend.