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Tackling Race Inequalities: A Discussion Document

A national consultation from the Department of Communities and Local Government

This is an important consultation for those people and organisations concerned with race inequality and also the government's current equalities agenda.

This is a document seeking views on the Government's future approach to tackling race inequalities. It is intended to be the start of a wide ranging discussion and asks 3 key questions about race inequality;

- What should a government race equality strategy look like?
- How does tackling race inequality fit with a broader equality and fairness agenda?
- How do we strengthen our society to tackle race inequalities?

This consultation period ends on **18th May 2009**.

What it says

- The document gives a historical context for race relations and identifies some key landmarks, including the creation of the Commission for Racial Equality in 1976, and the Macpherson Inquiry following the murder of Stephen Lawrence. This concluded that public services needed to take a more pro active approach to achieving equality by putting at the core of policy making and delivery. It was enshrined in the Race Relations Act 2000 which helped to change public sector culture towards Black, Asian, and minority ethnic communities.
- It recognises the key role of VCS organisations in helping to achieve community empowerment.
- The document give details of progress made since it launched the strategy "Improving Opportunity, Strengthening Society" in 2005. It talks about the landscape for equalities work including establishing the Equality and Human Rights Commission in 2007, establishing statutory duties on public bodies to promote equality for disabled people in 2006, the creation of the Government Equalities Office in 2007, and the publication of plans for a new Equalities Bill in 2009. This will streamline the law on equalities, create a new single equality duty, and strengthen enforcement of equality law. It has also introduced a raft of targets and objectives around equality in PSA's, and cross department equalities targets.

Challenges for the Future

- By 2010 the law on equality is expected to have been streamlined into a single act and public bodies placed under a single equality duty. The document recognises that moving away from separate equality strands to one that looks at helping people achieve their potential regardless of race, disability, gender, age, religion, age or sexual belief, is a cause of concern for some people and groups. They ask the question; **how can we make sure that race equality maintains a distinct profile within a wider programme of work to address multiple disadvantage?** They also ask; **Which are the priority areas for Government action on race equality?**
- The document looks at some of the reasons why not all communities are in the same position and identifies some specific issues; for example Black/ Caribbean pupils education attainment, the high proportion of Pakistani/ Bangladeshi children living in low income households, and the over representation of black people in the criminal justice system. They ask the question; **how should a race equality strategy focus on addressing disadvantage linked with race and ethnicity, as opposed to mainstream programmes?**
- Challenges facing disadvantaged white communities are given higher profile because some white people experience worse outcomes than Black, Asian, and minority ethnic groups. The challenge is to eradicate poverty and improve social mobility for all in Britain.

The document looks at the following areas and gives details of current policies/ strategies which address equality needs;

- Education
- The Labour market.
- Health
- Housing
- The Criminal Justice system.

It lists the 10 'central and valuable freedoms' published in the 2007 Equalities Review which are used to measure equality in these areas. They include a long life, physical security, a comfortable standard of living, and participation and voice.

They ask the question; **should we expand our policy areas? If we do, do we risk diluting the focus on the five public service areas mentioned above?**

The local level

There are actions that need to be taken at local level to address race inequality. They ask; **How can we encourage the public sector, such as local councils, criminal justice agencies and NHS Trusts to prioritise their work on race equality?** and **WHAT ROLE DOES THE VCS HAVE TO PLAY IN PRIORITISING RACE EQUALITY AT THE LOCAL LEVEL?**

Promoting race equality via a range of mechanisms

They want to 'mainstream' race equality through things like Race Equality Impact Assessments and 'Connecting Communities Plus' a funding programme to help the third sector address race equality. They ask; **how can we focus more effectively on ensuring that mainstream policies meet the needs of Black, Asian, and minority ethnic groups?**

The document talks about improving the level of civic participation and volunteering in ethnic minority groups, and **asks for ideas about how this can be achieved.**

Long term vision and shorter term action plan

They favour a balance between a longer term vision of strategy until 2025, and a shorter term action plan, and **ask if we agree with it.** They also ask; **what does 'success' look like? And how do we measure it?**

Conclusions

- This consultation is asking how the government can tackle race inequalities in the context of the new and broader **equalities agenda**. It is about meeting the different needs of individual groups whilst promoting fairness for everyone. Difficult to do?!
- How should the VCS respond to the questions asked? In particular, how can we ensure that our response is based on the future needs of **communities** in our region, and not just on the interests of **separate groups within it?**

What happens next?

The Regional Forum will be responding to this consultation on behalf of the VCS in the region.

- This full document can be viewed at; www.communities.gov.uk. This contains a full list of the consultation questions and we welcome your views and ideas. Please contact; stephen.fox@regionalforum.org.uk.
- A briefing on the Governments Single Equalities Bill can be viewed on the Policy section of the Forum website.

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