



Equal Voice Network Meeting Minutes

Date: 18th September 2024

Time: 9:30 AM – 1:00 PM

Location: Sing Plus Centre

Chairperson: Gemma Collins – gemma.collins@seftoncvcs.org.uk

Attendees (with contact emails) :

Stuart Steele – Royal British Legion – SSteel@britishlegion.org.uk

Jennifer Friday and Joshua Sanderson – Kirk – Crown Prosecution Service – jennifer.friday@cps.gov.uk

Emma Stewart – Sefton MBC – Emma.Stewart@sefton.gov.uk

Fatima Aidarous – Venus Centre – fatima.aiardous@venuscentre.org

Kabba Banjika – Black Business Network North-West – kbajinka@outlook.com

Hannah Neary and Joan Couple – Sefton Safeguarding Adults Board – hannah.neary@sefton.gov.uk

Jennifer Campbell- Klumps – Southport African Caribbean Heritage Association – africancaribbeansouthport@gmail.com

Joe Goff – Sefton Libraries – joe.goff@sefton.gov.uk

Janine Hopewell – Hugh Baird College – janine.hopewell@hughbaird.ac.uk

Bobby Brennan – robert.brennan@seftoncvcs.org.uk

Catrin Hughes - catrin.hughes@seftoncvcs.org.uk

Registration and Refreshments

Time: 9:30 AM - Attendees were welcomed with refreshments, and registration took place.

Welcome and Introduction

Time: 10:00 AM – 10:15 AM

The meeting began with a warm welcome from Gemma. The agenda was introduced, and attendees were reminded of the importance of inclusivity and respect during the sensitive discussion ahead. It was noted that participants could leave the room if they felt uncomfortable or submit their thoughts via email to Gemma Colins (gemma.colins@seftoncvcs.org.uk).

Action Items:

- Attendees were encouraged to complete the Equality & Diversity Monitoring Forms.
- Send out the Equal Voice Newsletter to all participants.

Presentation by Stuart Steele (Royal British Legion)

Time: 10:15 AM – 10:45 AM

Stuart Steele gave a detailed presentation on the Royal British Legion's work and services in the Southport and Crosby areas. His key points included:

The Royal British Legion (RBL) is open to all service members of the UK Armed Forces, even if they have only served for one day, anywhere in the world.

Two centres in Southport and Crosby provide local services to veterans.

Bottleback Programme: A two-week initiative designed to help veterans reintegrate into civilian life after service.

Helpline (0800 8028080) provides needs-based support, including high-risk team assistance for veterans facing homelessness or addiction. The helpline also provides means-tested funding.

Stuart mentioned teams that support individuals in the custody system, the welfare team, and a community engagement team.

Veteran Population in the Northwest: Approximately 300,000 veterans, with £1.7 million in funds allocated to support them.

RBL no longer operates a branch system; the centres now run independently.

Diversity in the Armed Forces: Stuart highlighted some of the many diverse service personnel that 2.4 million Arabic community members have served in the forces. He also mentioned the contributions of Polish and Windrush generation members during World Wars.

The majority of military work today involves humanitarian relief, and the RBL continues to hold events and activities for these diverse communities.

Key Discussions:

Bobby asked if the RBL collaborates with the "Veterans in Sefton" organisation. Stuart noted that while that organisation has its own agenda, they often meet with other veteran-supporting groups.

Fatima shared her experience with an intergeneration group that brings together younger and older generations, promoting the sharing of valuable experiences and wisdom. She also mentioned a Yemeni veteran she knows.

Joan inquired whether ex-wives and widows of veterans receive support. Stuart confirmed that they do, through the helpline.

Stuart also spoke about how dementia affects veterans and highlighted the role of Royal Admiral Nurses in supporting affected individuals and their families.

Presentation by Jennifer Friday and Joshua Sanderson- Kirk (CPS)

Time: 10:45 AM – 11:00 AM

Jennifer Friday provided an overview of the legal proceedings following the Southport riot. Key points included:

- Up to 300 individuals could face arrest in relation to the Southport riots.
- On the Monday after the riot, 11 people were heard in court by Joshua Sanderson-Kirk.

- A training plan was delivered to ensure prosecutors could manage the high number of cases swiftly.
- Evidence was provided by members of the public, including videos, Ring doorbell footage, and victim statements. A compilation video was shown in court.
- Victim Statements included those from the wider community, and a personal statement from the Mosque was read during every hearing.
- Jennifer explained that for hate crimes to be applied, they must be reported correctly and proven, such as with the use of racist language or slogans. In some instances, violent disorder was the charge rather than hate crime.
- A "Steps of Court Statement" explains the sentencing process. There is a sentencing uplift for hate crimes, and if a person pleads guilty, they receive one-third off their sentence. The hate crime element is addressed as a separate uplift.

Questions and Discussions:

- Emma asked whether any prosecutions for hate crimes or inciting violence online had occurred. Joshua responded that while such cases had not yet been dealt with, online cases take longer to gather evidence. There has been one prosecution, believed to be in Chester, but the threshold for inciting racial hatred is high.
- Further Question: Another question was raised about the duty of internet providers in such cases. Joshua noted that while Ofcom has a role, this is not pursued by the CPS.

Before concluding, **footage of the riot** was shown. Jennifer checked if anyone wanted to leave the room before showing the video, and **one person did**.

Reflections on the Southport Tragedy and Riots

Time: 11:00 AM – 11:30 AM

1. Thoughts and Reflections from the Group

Fatima's Experience:

Fatima shared her concerns about her son, who experienced anxiety for over a week when starting a new job, reflecting the emotional toll of the riots. She expressed sadness over the situation. Although she received no formal complaints or reports of hate crimes, one service user was verbally abused with a comment to "go back to your own country" from someone

driving by. She managed her sessions via the Venue Centre and WhatsApp, noticing that although there were no explicit conversations, many people were avoiding going out.

Bobby's Reflections:

Bobby raised concerns over the safety of asylum seekers during Friday prayers , but fortunately, there were no issues reported. However, there were hate crime incidents involving Kurdish children wearing hijabs who were verbally abused on their way to school. Bobby also noted that some clients, including one coming out of the hospital, faced discrimination, such as being denied service by a Stagecoach bus driver. Local youth, too, felt afraid to leave their homes due to the tension.

Emma 's Reflections :

Emma reflected on her personal experience living as a minority ethnic resident in a predominantly white area. She noted that racism has always been present but questioned why Merseyside Police did not anticipate the riots, given the social media buzz beforehand. Emma believes this is an opportunity to address the deep-seated racial issues that have been long ignored, stressing that schools are unprepared and lack confidence in addressing these challenges.

Police (CPS):

The CPS representative discussed how youth rehabilitation is the general approach, though incarceration was used in some cases. They also shared that hate crime work now focuses on deterrence and sentencing to send a clear message about the consequences for those engaging in hate crimes.

Public Transport and Hate Crime:

Concerns were raised about hate crimes on public transport, especially buses and taxis. Licensed taxi drivers receive training, but partners agreed that more work is needed, particularly with Merseytravel , to improve responses to hate crimes.

Stuart Steele's Reflections :

Stuart highlighted the increasing violence among youth, emphasising the need for consequences for young people who go from verbal abuse to physical violence. He suggested that media and social media be used to communicate that perpetrators will be treated like adults and held accountable.

2. Any Intelligence They May Have, from Who to Enhance the Impact of and Needs Arising from the Event in the Medium and Long Term

Fatima:

Fatima mentioned that she kept in contact with her service users through a WhatsApp group, offering support and updates, noting that the riots had affected people's willingness to go outside. Her observation was that while formal hate crime reports were minimal, the underlying fear and anxiety were very much present. This suggests a need for long-term community support and outreach to monitor well-being.

Emma:

Emma pointed out that racism in Southport was not new, and the riots only served to expose it. She referenced social media advertisements before the riots that went largely unaddressed by law enforcement. There is potential intelligence here regarding improved monitoring of online platforms and early detection of public threats.

Bobby:

Bobby highlighted several hate crime incidents involving local youth and public transport, which could provide insight into where community education and youth engagement programs might have the most impact. He also raised concerns about asylum seekers and the importance of ensuring safe spaces for minority groups within the community, such as during Friday prayers.

3. Any Emerging Gaps in Local Services

Fatima's Feedback:

Fatima's experience underscores a lack of accessible, immediate mental health support for those impacted by the riots. The fact that some community members did not feel safe enough to go outside for a period suggests a need for more outreach services and psychosocial support post-riots, especially for minority groups.

School Involvement (Emma):

Emma mentioned that schools have received guidance materials, but there is a clear lack of confidence among staff in delivering these resources. This points to a need for teacher training on handling racial issues and hate crime in schools, as well as student-focused interventions that address these topics more openly.

Public Transport Issues:

The incidents on buses, such as drivers shutting doors on minority passengers, highlight gaps in public transport staff training around hate crime and customer care. There is a need for stronger partnerships with public transport providers, such as Merseytravel, to ensure all staff are trained and prepared to handle hate crimes and discrimination effectively.

Youth Rehabilitation (CPS):

The CPS representative mentioned that they cannot publicize youth rehabilitation cases as easily as adult cases, but sentencing and repercussions for youth engaging in hate crimes need to be widely communicated. This suggests a gap in public awareness campaigns targeted at young people and the need for early intervention programs to address hate crime behaviours before they escalate.

Services Response:

- **Royal British Legion (RBL):**

The RBL centres, normally open from Tuesday to Saturday and staffed by volunteers, extended their hours to seven days a week in response to the Southport events.

 - Around 150 people have visited the centre, many of whom do not have an armed forces connection. The centre has provided a safe space for community members to share their experiences related to the riots and tensions.
 - The RBL has played an important role in offering support and listening to the community, and it plans to remain open as a warm space throughout the winter months to continue providing comfort and assistance.
- **NCT Walks (Friday):**

The NCT (National Childbirth Trust) walks, held every Friday, continued throughout the summer. Participants still felt confident enough to go out and engage in the walks, which helped maintain community spirit and connection during difficult times.
- **Southport Football Club:**

The club continues to hold 2–3 sessions per week, offering opportunities for community members to join in walking groups or attend meet-and-greet sessions. These activities are open to everyone, providing both social interaction and physical activity, which has helped the community stay connected and supported

Presentation by Emma Stewart – Lessons from Windrush

Time: 11:40 AM – 12:00 PM

Emma Stewart discussed her upcoming event on October 22nd, 2024, which will take place at The Atkinson. This event is part of a larger initiative aimed at educating younger generations about the Windrush experience and fostering community-wide understanding.

Target Audience and Purpose:

The event is primarily aimed at sixth-form & college students aged 16–18. The goal is to allow young people to engage with the Windrush Exhibition and participate in facilitated discussions with adults. These conversations will provide an opportunity for students to reflect on the cultural, historical, and social impacts of the Windrush generation. Additionally, it serves as a chance for the wider community to gain insights into the experiences of Windrush people and their descendants, helping to highlight the challenges and contributions of these communities.

Event Structure:

The event will include question-and-answer sessions where participants can interact with the facilitators and share their thoughts or concerns regarding the Windrush legacy. This interactive format is designed to ensure that the young audience can engage deeply with the subject matter.

Stuart Steele from the Royal British Legion has offered to support the event, further enhancing the discussion with his perspective on ****diversity within the armed forces****, including contributions made by people from the Windrush generation.

Filming and Future Content:

The event will be filmed, allowing for a broader audience to access the discussions and learning beyond those attending in person.

Additionally, Stuart Steele highlighted a film project he is working on, which recounts the story of a Windrush passenger who was not allowed to disembark from the ship until he had secured both a job and accommodation. This 25-minute film, which Stuart hopes to present at an event next year, will be followed by a discussion group to further explore the themes of immigration, resilience, and belonging.

Key Objectives:

The overall purpose of the event is to:

Raise awareness of the Windrush generation's contributions and struggles.

Encourage youth engagement with historical and cultural issues.

Promote intergenerational dialogue to ensure these stories are passed down and understood by younger generations.

Create a space for the community to reflect on the lessons from Windrush and connect it to present-day issues of immigration and identity.

Open Discussions and Networking Opportunities

Time: 12:00 PM – 12:30 PM

During the open discussion, participants shared updates on current community projects and future networking opportunities:

Jennifer from SACHA discussed the ongoing Windrush: Our Story, Our Community Exhibition at The Atkinson, which will remain open until 18th January 2024. Jennifer reflected on how deeply moved she was by the stories featured in the exhibition, especially since joining the SACHA team recently. She called for increased respect, unity, and understanding within the community, emphasizing the importance of such exhibitions in bridging divides.

Kabba introduced the new Black-Owned Business Network recently set up in the North West, aimed at supporting Black entrepreneurs. This initiative seeks to foster connections and opportunities for Black-owned businesses across the region. Emma mentioned that she has several useful business networking links which she will share to help support the network's growth.

Veterans Pride Event (January 2024):

The upcoming Veterans Pride Event at HMS Eagle will take place in January 2025 to highlight and support LGBTQ+ individuals affected by the historic ban on serving in the UK Armed Forces. Stuart Steele shared that the event will focus on those impacted by this ban, especially those at the intersection of race and sexuality. Stuart encouraged anyone affected to contact him directly regarding Efferson reports and the associated compensation scheme.

New Artwork by British Muslim Artist:

Stuart also introduced a new bronze artwork, standing 5 feet tall, created by a British Muslim artist. The piece represents all those who have served in the Commonwealth and UK Armed Forces. This travelling artwork will soon be displayed, with plans to hold it in venues in central Liverpool and Manchester for a week each. Education packages will be available to accompany the exhibition.

For schools , a 3D-printed model of the artwork will be used for Years 8 and 9 to incorporate maths and science into a presentation that students can deliver to the rest of their school.

Catrin's Request:

Catrin asked that the social media details for the Windrush Exhibition be shared with the group so that they can promote it across their networks.

Lunch and Networking

Time: 12:30 PM – 1:00 PM

The meeting concluded with lunch and an opportunity for informal networking.

Next Meeting