

Bracknell Forest

Faith & Belief Communities in Action 2011

Executive Summary



**Mapping, Understanding and Engaging
with Faith and Belief Communities in
Bracknell Forest**

iCoCo
Futures Institute
10 Coventry Innovation Village
Coventry University Technology Park
Cheetah Road
Coventry
CV1 2TL
Tel 0247 679 5757
www.cohesioninstitute.org.uk

REVIEW TEAM

Nadeem Baksh
Ted Cattle
Daljit Kaur
Annette Hay
Harris Joshua
Daniel Range

SECTION 1: INTRODUCTION

1. Introduction

Faith & Belief in Action 2010

- 1.1. This research follows on from and builds on the Bracknell Forest Faith and Belief funded publication 'Faith and Belief In Action 2010'¹, which presented the findings of a survey carried out by Bracknell Forest Voluntary Action (BFVA) mapping '*the contribution and valuable work of the many faith and belief organisations in Bracknell Forest*' and their '*...real and economic contribution to the borough and civil society.*'
- 1.2. Based on returns from questionnaires distributed to all of Bracknell Forest faith groups, findings of the survey included and found that:
 - Services delivered by faith groups responding to the questionnaire are making a significant contribution to the local community.
 - All together, the responding faith organisations were involved in 106 projects/initiatives aimed at benefitting the local community, with a total of 5291 people accessing these activities.
 - In an average week 602 children and young people, 438 older people, 543 parent and toddlers, 498 teenagers, 145 families, 61 people with learning difficulties/physical disabilities access these activities.
 - Faith groups responding to the questionnaire donated 2067 volunteer hours each week to community life - valued at over £1 million.
- 1.3. However, in delivering services to the wider community in Bracknell Forest, the survey also found that faith groups were experiencing a range of challenges, most notably:
 - * Changing legislation placing more and more pressure on voluntary, community and faith organisations to 'professionalise' their services in-line with the statutory sector.
 - * Difficulty in accessing public sector and other funding streams.
 - * The need to develop stronger relationships between the public, voluntary and faith sectors.

A report on the survey was delivered to the inaugural conference of Bracknell Forest Faith & Belief in Action in February 2010 and led to the development of the Bracknell Forest Faith & Belief Forum Steering Group.

The Purpose of this Research Project – Faith and Belief Communities in Action 2011

- 1.4. The primary purpose of this project is to provide the Local Authority, Bracknell Forest Prevent Steering Group, Bracknell Forest Voluntary

¹ Available by contacting Bracknell Forest Voluntary Action, Ground Floor, Amber House, Market Street, Bracknell RG12 1JB, Phone: 01344 304404 Web: www.bfva.org/ Email info@bfva.org

Action, the Faith & Belief Forum Steering Group, other local partners and residents with a wider picture of changing faith, ethnicity, community and cohesion in the Borough.

- 1.5. Moving on from the contribution of 'Faith and Belief In Action 2010' publication, the objective of this project is to:
- Provide a detailed description, narrative and profile of Bracknell Forest's changing population by faith and ethnicity - using quantitative and qualitative data – so that the local faith, public and voluntary sectors may be better informed of the communities they serve.
 - Identify issues, concerns and aspirations across different communities.
 - Make further recommendations on how key Partners might modify their contribution to improving engagement, participation, and cohesion and preventing all forms of violent extremism for the future, and better respond to the Government's agenda on 'localism' and the 'Big Society' - i.e. helping communities to help themselves.

1.6. **Methodology**

The key elements of the brief involved:

- [1] **A Desk-Top Documentary Review**
- [2] **Analysis of Statistical Data**
- [3] **One-to-One Interviews with Key Stakeholders**
- [4] **Focus Groups**

A full list of Interviews and Focus Groups is provided in Appendix I.

About iCoCo

- 1.7. iCoCo is an applied research based unit within Coventry University, which combines the experience and expertise of practitioners from a range of diverse backgrounds and professions including four Universities, local councils and the Local Government (LG) Improvement and Development (formerly the IDeA).
- 1.8. The Institute was established in 2005 to provide a new approach to race and diversity and, in particular, to focus on the development of harmonious community relations.
- 1.9. iCoCo is committed to 'improvement from within' by working with local authorities to build on their current strengths. We therefore operate as a 'critical friend', constantly questioning and challenging, but also trying to find ways of supporting Councils in improving community cohesion by bringing good practice and expertise to the recommendations we make.
- 1.10. We have extensive experience of undertaking community cohesion reviews across a wide range of local authority areas leading to evidence-based strategies with clear priorities and Action Plans. Much of our recent work has involved community mapping, tension monitoring and addressing the Prevent agenda.

2. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

About Bracknell Forest

- 2.1. The Borough's population has grown steadily and rapidly since the establishment of a New Town in Bracknell in the 1950's. Between 2001 and 2009 the rate of population growth was amongst the highest rates in the South East region and nationally - and is projected to continue growing at an average rate of 1,000 per annum to 2031.
- 2.2. Though the Borough's population is younger than the national average, it is projected to grow older over the next two decades.
- 2.3. The local authority area also experiences a higher level of population turnover (churn) than is the case for either the region or the nation as a whole. In addition, around a half of the Bracknell Forest's working age population commute out of the Borough on a daily basis, and half of the area's workforce, commute in on a daily basis from surrounding areas.
- 2.4. In many areas, these factors would point to lower levels of community cohesion. But on the national headline, public perception measure of cohesion, Bracknell Forest scores highly with more residents likely to agree that their local area is a place where people of different backgrounds get on well together, compared with the region and nationally.
- 2.5. A key explanation of the high headline community cohesion score in Bracknell Forest is the level of prosperity in the Borough. Though there are pockets of deprivation, Bracknell Forest is one of the least deprived areas in England.

Diversity and Faith

- 2.6. The level of diversity in Bracknell Forest is also changing. Between 2001 and 2007 the Borough's Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) population increased from 5% to 9%.
- 2.7. Indicative of ongoing trends, in 2011 there were more than three times as many ethnic minority pupils in Bracknell Forest schools compared to 1998 and more than four times as many pupils with English as an additional language. Since Bracknell Forest Council began collecting standardised data on ethnicity and mother tongue in schools, there has been a very clear trend of growing diversity. A total of 77 languages were spoken in Bracknell Forest's schools in 2010.
- 2.8. The Borough's population mix is also changing as a consequence of International migration. In recent years Eastern European migrants from European Union Accession Countries – particularly from Poland – have featured prominently. Further, recent changes to the UK's HM Forces Immigration rule have led to the arrival of new migrants from Nepal. But indicative of the major role of high technology firms in the Borough's

economy, Bracknell Forest attracts migrants from many parts of the world.

- 2.9. In terms of the makeup of the Borough's BME groups, just under a half was Asian in 2007, most of whom were of Indian heritage. The rest were either Black – in particular Black African, Mixed Heritage, or Chinese and Other. It is also worth noting that the Borough's BME population is younger in its age profile than the population as a whole, with the Black African, Bangladeshi, Pakistani and Mixed heritage groups having the highest proportion of young people.
- 2.10. However, Bracknell Forest would seem to be less diverse in terms of major declared faiths based on 2001 census data. As is the case nationally, the overwhelming majority in Bracknell Forest were Christian, but other major declared faiths (Hindu, Muslim, Jewish, Sikh and Other) made up less than 3% of the population compared with nearly 6% for the nation as a whole. The most significant difference – going by 2001 census data – would appear to be the relatively small size of the Borough's Muslim population.
- 2.11. But size is not the most distinctive feature of Bracknell Forest's minority faiths population. Looking at declared faiths by ethnicity using 2001 Census data, the Borough's minority faiths appear to be much more diverse than is the case nationally. Amongst minority faiths, Bracknell Forest's resident Muslim population is the most ethnically diverse. For example, nearly a quarter of the Borough's Muslims were White and contrasting with the national picture only just over a third of Muslims were of Pakistani and Bangladeshi heritage. The Borough's Jewish and Buddhist faith groups would also appear to be more diverse in ethnic terms than is the case nationally.
- 2.12. This report is a faith mapping exercise and so is reliant in places on data from the 2001 Census. Faith is not generally recorded in more up to date statistics in the same way that ethnicity is and so short of undertaking a Bracknell Forest-wide survey of faith, which is both outside the remit and budget of this piece, there are no newer faith related statistics.
- 2.13. The diversity of some of Bracknell Forest's faith populations compounds the difficulties in tracking the changing demographics of faith groups as it is not, in many cases, wholly suitable to use one or two ethnic groups as a proxy for a faith group. For instance there are no majority ethnic populations that make up the Buddhist or Muslim populations of Bracknell Forest. Moreover the often small numbers of residents from minority ethnic backgrounds in Bracknell Forest means that small sample survey data is likely to be either statistically unreliable or not disclosed due to confidentiality issues.
- 2.14. Bracknell Forest also has a small but significant Gypsy, Roma and Traveller (GRT) population, many of whom are long settled. More precise details of numbers and make up of this population are likely to

become available through the 2011 Census which includes the category 'Gypsy and Traveller' for the first time

Integration, Equality and Cohesion

- 2.15. Turning to issues of integration, equality and cohesion in Bracknell Forest, spatial or geographical residential distribution by ethnicity is often used as a measure of the degree to which different ethnic groups are segregated or isolated from each other – leading 'parallel lives'.
- 2.16. Unlike many other areas in 2001, BME groups were to be found in, and were fairly evenly distributed across all of Bracknell Forest's 18 wards. However, the 2001 data did point to some emerging residential clusters – particularly in respect of the Asian and Black population.
- 2.17. Possible explanations of these developing clusters include growth of the BME population, migration, affordable house prices and choice. But housing tenure also appears to be a factor. In 2001, Black residents were significantly less likely to own their homes. Moreover, BME groups – in particular Asians – were less likely to be found in Social Rented properties, and more likely to be found in the Private rented sector. The location of properties for rent - Social and Private – would seem to be one determinate of where BME groups are most likely to be found.
- 2.18. However, it is worth noting that residential clusters were far less pronounced in terms of faith. Contrary to national patterns and reflecting the level of ethnic diversity, the Borough's Muslim population are amongst the most dispersed and are to be found in all wards. The same may be said of Bracknell Forest's small Sikh, Buddhist and Jewish faith groups. In fact, and again contrary to national patterns, the Borough's Hindu faith population is the most concentrated with just over a half (50.6%) residing in 4 wards.
- 2.19. Labour market measures can also provide some indication of the degree to which different minority ethnic groups are becoming more integrated. Here again, the picture in Bracknell Forest is largely positive. In national terms, the Asian working age population is most likely to be found in the Wholesale/Retail, Hotels, Restaurant, and Transport sectors. This is not the case in Bracknell Forest where the Asian workforce is most likely to be found in Real Estate, Rental and Business Activities and Defence. The main exception is the Pakistani heritage workforce 40% of whom were to be found in the Wholesale/Retail and Transport sectors.
- 2.20. The Borough's Black workforce also appear to be over-represented in the Health and Social Work Sector, which is not wholly dissimilar to national patterns. Concentration within the Health Sector would seem to be most pronounced within the Borough's Black African workforce.
- 2.21. Continuing with labour market measures but with a focus on the level of equality across different ethnicities, the picture in Bracknell Forest is also largely positive. Nationally, different ethnic groups have significantly

different levels of participation in the labour market with direct implications for annual household incomes and the incidence of household and child poverty. Annual Population Survey data for June 2010 show the working age employment rate for BME groups in Bracknell Forest as only slightly lower than for Whites. The Black working age population is the most notable exception with a working age employment rates less than half that of the rest. In terms of occupations, again in contrast with national patterns, BME groups were well represented in the top three categories – Managers and Senior Officials, Professional and Technical.

2.22. As indicated earlier in this summary, Bracknell Forest scores highly on the headline and most other indicators of community cohesion as measured by the national 2008 Place Survey. Compared with regional and national averages, Bracknell Forest residents are more likely to be satisfied with their local areas as a place to live, and they are just as likely to agree that they can influence decisions affecting their local areas.

2.23. However, the Borough appears to be relatively weak in respect of the percentage of residents who felt they 'belong to their immediate neighbourhood'. Similar to many areas in London and elsewhere, this may well reflect the relatively high level of annual population turnover and daily commuting. Bracknell Forest residents are also slightly less likely to have volunteered in the last twelve months compared to residents in the South-East and nationally though there is some evidence to indicate that the local level of volunteering may be underestimated in the Place Survey.

2.24. Also indicative of the level of community cohesion in Bracknell Forest, the overall number of all forms of Hate Crime is comparatively low and has not increased significantly over the past four years, despite significant changes in the mix of ethnicities and nationalities in the Borough. In 2009/10, the overwhelming majority of Hate Crimes were race-related with the Asian population as the most common victims. But the nature of Hate Crimes is changing – nationally and locally - and nearly a third of victims in Bracknell Forest in 2009/10 were White. However, under-reporting of Hate Crimes has been recognised as a possible issue and work is underway by the Police, Council and partners to increase reporting.

2.25. Finally – notwithstanding the prosperity of the Borough and other indications of positive relations between different ethnic, faith and social groups – Bracknell Forest has not been wholly exempt from the attentions of Far Right political groups. However, all indications are that support for Far Right groups is fairly low in the Borough.

Issues and Concerns – Interviews and Focus Groups

2.26. As may be seen from the findings and statistical analysis presented above, though the mix of nationalities, ethnicities and faiths in Bracknell

Forest is changing, the underlying picture of cohesion and integration is essentially positive.

2.27. Notwithstanding, issues related to a low sense of belonging (reference paragraph 2.23) and recognition of under-reporting of Hate Crimes (reference paragraph 2.24) – in short, many of the factors that divide different communities and faiths in other parts of the country are not prominent in Bracknell Forest. By and large, different ethnic groups are not geographically segregated in residential terms compared with most other areas with a significant minority population. Nor is deprivation and disadvantage as disproportionately concentrated amongst some minority groups as is the case in many other areas.

2.28. This is not to assert that the Borough is wholly unaffected. Available evidence points to the need for a continued focus on integrating the Borough's new incoming migrant communities – in particular it's Nepalese, Eastern European and Black African population. The same may be said of the Borough's Traveller communities. There appears to be very little support for Far Right political groups locally, and little evidence of other forms of violent extremism including the activities of groups claiming to be inspired by the Muslim faith. Nevertheless, as recent experience has shown, no local authority and/or Police Service can afford to ignore these issues in their area.

2.29. This having been said, a number of specific issues and concerns were identified in interviews and focus groups during the course of our research. These included:

- Misinformation, a lack of knowledge and to some extent trust within and between different faiths.
- Sustain and extend meaningful engagement with minority faith groups – including sub-groups within the majority faith community
- Voluntary and Community sector concerns regarding the impact of anticipated cuts in Government funding to local authorities and how small and medium sized organisations will cope with an increasing emphasis on competing for Public Sector service commissions in order to survive.
- Inter-generational tensions within the Nepalese community - "...us and them between the younger people and the older generation" - associated with fewer young people learning the Nepalese language and cultural traditions on the one hand and a traditional approach to parenting by the older generation on the other.
- Sustain support for the non-military community particularly women within the Borough's expanding Nepalese population.
- Further work to integrate Nepalese pupils in local schools.

- Hostility towards the Borough's Gypsy Roma and Traveller (GRT) communities in general – but particularly in schools.

Bracknell Forest Faith and Belief Communities Profiles

Bracknell Forest's Christians

- 2.30. Christianity is by far the largest faith group in Bracknell Forest making up 72% of the Borough's population in 2001 and an estimated 70% in 2007². There are over 25 Christian churches/congregations in Bracknell Forest representing a wide range of religious, cultural and many other diversities ranging from architectural building designs to styles of worship. Individual web links to the Borough's churches providing detailed information on their services and activities can be found at www.bracknellchristians.org. In terms of ethnic diversity, Bracknell Forest's main Christian denominational congregations generally reflect the changing population compositions of the Borough.
- 2.31. The largest Christian congregation in Bracknell Forest is Roman Catholic. There are two Catholic Churches in the Bracknell Parish³. There are also two Catholic primary schools in the Borough, though a major concern for the community is for the establishment of a local Catholic Senior school. Bracknell Forest's Catholic congregations are described as being very diverse and having become "*increasingly so, especially over the last nine years*".
- 2.32. Next, in size is the Church of England which has a number of parishes in the Borough. There are 14 Churches in the Bracknell Deanery⁴. The Parish is the most local level; however, parishes are "*not co-terminus with local authority boundaries*". There are 8 parishes in the Borough, 5 in Bracknell Deanery and 3 in Sonning Deanery. Bracknell Forest's Church of England Church congregations largely reflect the Borough's population compositions, mainly White British but also include a small number of families of Black Ethnic Minorities.
- 2.33. The Borough's third largest Christian congregation is Seventh Day Adventist⁵ which is a "*World Church*" though in the UK, Adventist church congregations are mainly made-up of African Caribbean and African heritages. However, Bracknell Forest's Seventh Day Adventist Newbold Church⁶ and College⁷ is exceptionally unique. The church attracts congregations from neighbouring areas and the college is the only institution of its kind in the UK, internationally renowned with a very diverse teaching and student population contributing to a "*campus environment... alive with passionate and vibrant debates and discussions*". Although, viewed by some as a community within a

² Estimates – based on 2001 Census Data and 2007 ONS MYEs

³ www.bracknellcatholicchurch.org.uk

⁴ www.achurchnearyou.com/activemap.php?d2=27202

⁵ www.adventist.org

⁶ <http://newbold-adventistchurch-org-uk>

⁷ www.newbold.ac.uk

community, with most of the student population spending majority of their time on-campus, facilities at Newbold College and Church are frequently offered to other denominations and several interfaith events have also been hosted at the centre. The college also has plans to open up to non-Adventist students by offering English language classes which has the prospect of adding to interaction and diversity on-campus. In addition to expertise in a range of religious and academic spheres, representatives from both the church and academic faculties demonstrated experience and understanding of processes leading to the adoption of extremist theology – and consequently have developed sophisticated insights/techniques to tackling such issues through reasoning debate and discussion

- 2.34. Kerith Community Church⁸ – originally a Baptist Church founded in the 1800s – is a large independent evangelical, multi ethnic community located close to Bracknell town centre. Kerith is linked with the UK based New Frontiers International⁹ and US Willow Creek¹⁰ and “*everything about the Church is contemporary and modern, from the buildings, the activities, colloquial language, modes and ways of Bible teaching*”.
- 2.35. St Pauls Church¹¹ is Bracknell Forest’s only United Reformed Church (URC)¹², which notably rents space to Anglican and Ghanaian Pentecostal congregations and also has developed good relations with Bracknell Islamic Cultural Society (BICS).
- 2.36. Easthampstead Baptist Church¹³, runs a wide range of events and activities, for older people, and the community and was especially noted for their work involving children and young people. In addition, there are a number of Free Churches including two of the Methodist denomination and a third which is jointly Methodist and Church of England. Methodist Churches are organised into Districts and Circuits – Bracknell Forest comes under the South East District¹⁴. Although only a small minority of the Bracknell Methodist Church¹⁵ congregation live in the area, it is located on a deprived estate and is very much focused on helping local disadvantaged and vulnerable people. The congregation was described as “*interestingly multicultural*” in that there are significant proportions of professional Black African and African Caribbean members of the Church.
- 2.37. There is also a Pentecostal Church called ‘The New Covenant Church’¹⁶, an assembly of Brethren¹⁷ (commonly called Plymouth

⁸ www.kerith.co.uk

⁹ www.newfrontierstogether.org

¹⁰ www.willowcreek.org

¹¹ <http://stpaulsbracknell.org.uk>

¹² www.urc.org.uk

¹³ www.ebc-bracknell.org/

¹⁴ www.methodistsoutheast.org.uk

¹⁵ www.bracknellmethodist.org.uk

¹⁶ <http://newcovenantbracknell.com/>

Brethren) and two independent Free Churches. In addition, some Bracknell Forest residents are members of the Society of Friends¹⁸ and the Salvation Army¹⁹ which both meet in Wokingham. And, relatively recently established in the Borough is a Ghanaian Pentecostal congregation.

2.38. In general, Bracknell Forest's churches and congregations enjoy amicable cross-community relationships. However, certain challenges were noted. 'Churches Together'²⁰ is a national body that provides local Churches of different denominations a range of support services to "*facilitate collaborative working*"²¹. Churches in Crowthorne²² and Sandhurst²³ belong to the Churches Together national network but, "*there has been no Churches Together in Bracknell Town for several years*". It was suggested that the diverse nature of churches in Bracknell Town, mean "*some churches are not entitled to join Churches Together and some find the network too prescriptive and limiting*".

2.39. In 2008, Bracknell Forest Christian Network (BFCN)²⁴ was established "*to link all the Borough's churches to supply information on appropriate community resources and funding opportunities they may wish to access*". Church membership to BFCN is free of charge and there is no obligation to join. In addition to several other appointments, representatives from BFCN are an integral part of Bracknell Forest Faith and Belief Forum Steering Group and have been at the forefront of supporting and initiating activities and events encouraging good relations across the Borough's faith and belief communities.

2.40. Nonetheless, barriers to collaborative working across all the Borough's Churches persist. Particular difficulties were said to exist in engaging Bracknell's Christian Brethren Assemblies and a relatively recently established mainly Ghanaian Pentecostal congregation. In addition for some churches priorities were more determined by resources and capacity.

Bracknell Forest's Hindus

2.41. Hinduism is the largest non-Christian faith group in Bracknell Forest and numbered 1,090 at the time of the 2001 Census. This accounted for a total of 1.0% of the total population of Bracknell Forest and is on par with the national average figure. The population is also proportionately the 8th largest in the South East region.

¹⁷ Emmanuel Chapel, Netherton, Wildridings, RG12 7DX. Web: www.bracknellgospelhall.org

Tel: 01344 451693

¹⁸ www.quaker.org.uk/wokingham

¹⁹ www.salvationarmy.org.uk

²⁰ www.ctbi.org.uk

²¹ www.ctbi.org.uk

²² www.crowthorneparishchurch.org.uk/index.php?option=com_content&view=category&layout=blog&id=54&Itemid=121

²³ http://www.sandhurstmethodist.org.uk/standard/sandhurst_churches_together1.htm

²⁴ www.bracknellchristians.org

- 2.42. Religious diversity within the Hindu faith is exceptionally complex with many denominations and varied beliefs. Some Hindus prefer not to claim to belong to any denomination, nonetheless, Caste identity is for many integral to the faith, belief and social structures – based on ancestry linked to several aspects including economic and spiritual. There are four general sections of Hindu faith communities in Bracknell Forest, representing diverse ethno national, regional and religious differences; the established Indian Gujarati, relatively recently settled Indian heritages (from various regions including Southern Indian States) and the Nepalese military and non-military communities.
- 2.43. There are no Hindu Temples (Mandir) in Bracknell Forest. The Borough's established Indian Gujarati heritage and recently settled Indian Hindus are seemingly content using Mandir in neighbouring Boroughs (Reading and Slough). However, some of the Borough's Nepalese Hindu have access to an on-site Hindu Mandir at the Royal Military Academy Sandhurst that caters for the religious worship needs of the Borough's Nepalese Hindu Ghurkhas and their families.
- 2.44. In Bracknell, the longest established Hindu population is of Indian Gujarati heritage and those we spoke to did not seem to consider their religious identity as being particularly important. In terms of getting together, those consulted expressed a preference to do so under the auspices of the Indian Community Association Bracknell (ICAB)²⁵ which also has some informal links with Hindu Associations in Slough and Reading. *"Our aspirations – good education for children so can get good profession then once settled we want to give back through volunteering and community work"*. Instead, this community prioritised being productive members of society through academic success and career progression. All those consulted conveyed being very happy and content living in Bracknell Forest having achieved significant successes in terms of careers and affluence. This community has no formal or informal relationships with Bracknell Forest's, more recently settled (and some transient) Indian Hindu families or with Nepalese military or non-military Hindu communities.
- 2.45. Most of Bracknell Forest's Nepalese residents are Hindu. Nepalese Hindu practices reflect a culturally diffused variation influenced by aspects of Buddhism. In Nepal it is quite common for Hindus to worship in Buddhist Temples and vice versa. The on-site Hindu Mandir at the Sandhurst Military Academy caters for the specific Hindu religious worship needs of the Nepalese Hindu Ghurkhas and their families. For many of the Ghurkas consulted, faith was viewed as a personal choice though wives and mothers were considered to be more religious. Some however, noted intergenerational differences, in terms of loss of religious and cultural identities amongst younger generations.

²⁵ www.ica-b.org. Birch Hill Community Centre Leppington, Birch Hill, Bracknell, RG12 7WW

2.46. In Bracknell Forest there were also differences between the military and non-military Nepalese communities with the former having established strong support and social networks. However, extensive work is being carried out to support the non military community's needs e.g. the Council employ a Nepali Community Worker and are working with the Primary Care Trust (PCT) on a European Integration Fund (EIF) project²⁶.

Bracknell Forest's Muslims

2.47. At the time of the 2001 Census and accounted for just 0.7% of the total population of Bracknell Forest compared to the national figure of 3.1% of the population. However population trends linked to birth rates suggest that the Muslim population in Bracknell Forest is likely to have at least doubled in size over the last decade.

2.48. Bracknell's Muslims are represented across multiple layers of diversity – "*possibly the most diverse faith group resident in the Borough*". The majority of Bracknell's Muslim residents are Sunni, represented across a range of theological and ethno national/cultural variations and traditions. There is also said to be a few Shia Muslims living and/or working in the Borough. In addition, Bracknell is home to a long established – albeit significantly smaller and relatively less diverse – 'religiously distinct' community of Ahmadiyya Muslims.

2.49. It is significant to note that all Muslims consulted (from Bracknell Forest and surrounding areas) as part of our research were wholly commending of Bracknell as a place to live and work.

Sunni Muslims

2.50. Sunni Muslim organised religious affiliations – are generally identifiable with Madhahib (Schools of Thought – circa 7th & 8th C) often corresponding to global geographical regional origin, and/or Sufi Order or Salafi (8th & 18th C) variation. Bracknell Forest is home to Sunni Muslims from over 30 countries including converts of African Caribbean, White English and dual/multiple heritages. The Bracknell Islamic Cultural Society (BICS)²⁷ is the Borough's only mainly Sunni Muslim led organisation. Other than individual relationships there are no formal links between BICS and mosques in neighbouring Boroughs or with any national Muslim organisations. BICS have recently been granted a lease on Harmans Water Community Centre, and have long-term plans to secure land for an eventual purpose-built mosque and cultural centre. No single grouping exerts a dominate influence over the operation of BICS. Such developments are quite exceptional – with similar trends appearing in only a few places elsewhere, specifically where congregations are particularly diverse and are increasingly identified as "contemporary Sunni" unique in many ways to time and place. Bracknell's Sunni Muslim Religious and ethnic diversity combined with a

²⁶ Raising awareness of the needs of the Nepali community within Bracknell Forest 2010

²⁷ <http://bracknell-ics.org.uk>

relatively, affluent, professional, small and residentially dispersed, population – were considered to have contributed to “*harmonious Muslim and cross-community relations*” in the Borough.

Ahmadiyya Muslims

2.51. It is important to understand Ahmadiyya Muslims are considered an “Unorthodox” group by the majority of Sunni and Shia Muslims. In some countries, Ahmadiyya Muslims are persecuted and have even been killed – particularly in South Asian countries where relationships with other faith communities can also be strained. Originally emerging in 19th century India, the Ahmadiyyah faith now includes followers from many different nations said to be growing particularly in parts of Africa. In the UK the majority are of Pakistani heritage. In Bracknell Forest the Ahmadiyya Muslim community was said to number approximately 20 families mainly of Indian heritage originally settling as secondary migrants from East Africa and described as being an educated, professional, affluent community. Bracknell’s Ahmadiyya Muslim Association is connected to an international network headed by their Khalifa, a direct descendent of the founder of the faith and is currently based at the Baitul Futuh, Morden, Surrey²⁸. The Ahmadiyyah Association is part of a centrally governed and defined structure. Each area/locality is headed by a President and guided by Elders. The Presidency of Bracknell Forest’s Ahmadiyya Association extends to responsibilities for organising activities across Camberley and Wokingham.

Other Faith and Belief communities in Bracknell Forest

Sikhs

2.52. The Sikh population of Bracknell Forest is small by both regional and national standards. At the time of the 2001 Census it comprised of 213 people and made up 0.2% of the population. Nationally the Sikh population is 0.7% of the total. The Borough’s Sikh community are almost entirely of Indian heritage with a significant proportion having origins from South and East Africa. There is no Sikh Temple (Gurdwara) in Bracknell Forest and evidently the Borough’s Sikhs are content using Gurdwara in neighbouring Boroughs of Reading and Slough though the majority were said to prefer the one located in Camberley.

Jewish Community

2.53. Bracknell Forest’s Jewish population is both small numerically and small relative to the national average figure. The 2001 Census recorded a Jewish population of 185 people and this accounted for just 0.2% of the total population. The national average figure is 0.5%. The Jewish community is by definition an ethno-religious group so diversity is difficult to ascertain. Nonetheless, 75% of the total population are categorised as White British with the bulk of the remaining 25% as White Other ethnic group.

²⁸ www.ahmadiyya.org.uk

Buddhists

2.54. The Buddhist population in Bracknell Forest at the time of the 2001 Census numbered 306 people and accounted for a total of 0.3% of the total population of Bracknell Forest. This figure of 0.3% is exactly the same as the national average. Bracknell Forest's Buddhist population is one of the most diverse with no single ethnic group having close to a majority share, though nearly 20% of the Borough's Buddhists list their ethnic group as being Chinese. There are no Buddhist centres established in Bracknell, though Buddhism is practiced through a wide range of temples and small groups (also note a minority of Nepalese are Buddhist and as indicated will often worship in Hindu Mandir, reference paragraph 2.43) and practices may even take place in the home and involve no congregational meeting.

Baha'i

2.55. There are only a few people of the Baha'i faith in Bracknell Forest and although represent a relatively elder age profile are from a diverse range of backgrounds including Persian and White British. Despite being such a minority, however, the 'Baha'i community of Bracknell'²⁹ is active, and has representation on the Bracknell Forest Faith & Belief Forum Steering Group and have been integral in encouraging participation particularly from minority faith groups and young people.

Humanists

2.56. Often described as the "*silent majority*", it is difficult to quantify numbers of Humanists living in the Borough. Despite, what is assumed to be a minority – due to some extent the composition of their members – Humanists are very active. The most local Humanist group is the Berkshire Humanists³⁰ which is affiliated to the British Humanist Association³¹ headed by the President, thirteen Vice Presidents a Board of Trustees and includes many distinguished supporters.

Impact of the Prevent Agenda in Bracknell Forest

2.57. In line with the high-level of cohesion in the Borough, Bracknell Forest Prevent Steering Group is working with a wider definition to include all forms of extremism in its activity; concerned to ensure that Muslim communities are not stigmatised. It ought to be noted that a large proportion of people consulted during this research were not aware of the Prevent Agenda and thereby general questions were asked to draw out any concerns or opinions related to radicalisation and the processes that they felt may lead to violent extremist actions. Inevitably some Faith and Belief community representatives considered their individual faith teachings as providing the ultimate preventative solution to issues related to Prevent. These propositions were often qualified by statement of fact that no faith community respondent raised serious concerns regarding violent extremism in Bracknell Forest past or present. Overall,

²⁹ www.bracknellbahaicomunity.uklinux.net/index.html

³⁰ www.berkshirehumanists.org.uk

³¹ www.humanism.org.uk

there was a general consensus in support of Bracknell Forest's Prevent steering Group's approach. Beyond this, we also heard expert level suggestions of "holistic" approaches – which we understand the Council and Partners are already harnessing.

- 2.58. In addition, Seventh Day Adventist representatives from both Newbold College and Church provided insights into understanding the processes leading to the adoption of extremist religious interpretations concluding that extremism can stem from any faith and concurring with conclusions presented by the aforementioned expert – that "*many of the processes leading to radicalisation are circumstantial*". We also heard from respondents (of various Faith & Belief backgrounds) who provided detailed analyses critiquing past government policy mistakes in the area of Prevent, including the influence of Foreign Policy and historical events.
- 2.59. The Borough's mainly and only Sunni Muslim representative organisation, the Bracknell Islamic Cultural Society (BICS) have from the outset maintained a position of co-operation though strongly criticised the very basis of the Prevent Agenda. In contrast the Borough's Ahmadiyyah Muslim Association were said to have been supportive and keen to be involved from the outset, although with good intentions this was viewed by some with suspicion. In addition, there was a noted sense of apprehension from some officers wary of inadvertently damaging relations with Muslim communities. The Police, and council have taken steps to improve understanding of local Muslim communities with a view to building trust and confidence. However, there were suggestions for a need to avoid the situation in neighbouring areas (Slough) influencing the Prevent strategy in Bracknell.
- 2.60. It is also unhelpful to reference certain organisations established with sole purpose of countering Muslim forms of extremism – whilst providing some sophisticated insights these are generally not applicable at local levels – certainly not in Bracknell Forest.
- 2.61. The coalition Government is currently reviewing the Prevent Agenda, the information available remains too vague to predict what the new approach will be in practice. The review is due for publication by the end of May 2011.

3. RECOMMENDATIONS

First of all, it is important to stress that the following recommendations broadly reinforce and extend those made by the Faith and Belief in Action Report – 2010.

Community Cohesion and Equality

- 3.1. Rather than assume that the Borough will automatically enjoy high levels of community cohesion as a result of its relative affluence, Bracknell Forest Council, together with Partners in the wider Public, Voluntary and Faith Sectors have worked to improve relations between residents from different social, ethnic and faith backgrounds.
- 3.2. 'All of Us' is the Council's corporate community cohesion and equality strategy. Adopted in 2004, the current strategy will come to end in 2012. During this period, on the headline measure of community cohesion – the percentage of residents who agree that people of different social backgrounds get on well together – rose from 66% in 2003 to 82.1% in 2008.
- 3.3. However, the mix of nationalities, ethnicities and faiths in the Borough has changed significantly in recent years and Bracknell Forest will need to revisit its community cohesion priorities for the coming period. A key aspect of this will no doubt be the Borough's rapidly expanding Nepalese community. A wide range of interventions spanning ESOL, health, youth, education and Adult Social Care have already been put in place. In addition, a report on 'Raising Awareness of the Needs of the Nepali Community' was recently produced by the Children, Young People and Learning Department of Bracknell Forest Council. The recommendations below are intended to lend broad support for the findings of the report.

Recommendation (1)

That priority continues to be given to integrating the Borough's expanding Nepalese population.

Recommendation (2)

In addressing issues related to the integration of the Borough's Nepalese population, particular attention should continue to be given to:

- **Promoting support mechanisms for the non-military community.**
- **English language provision for women.**
- **Promoting opportunities for women in the labour market.**
- **Responding to the housing, health and other needs of the incoming Nepalese population.**
- **Ensuring Primary and Secondary Schools have the capacity and skills to incorporate new Nepalese pupils.**

Recommendation (3)

Additional steps should also be taken to identify and respond to resident concerns in areas of expanding Nepalese settlement.

Recommendation (4)

Further, steps should also be taken to explore how Voluntary, Community and Faith groups in Bracknell Forest – particularly in areas of expanding Nepalese settlement – can further contribute to building bridges and better connecting the Nepalese community.

- 3.4. But the changing mix of nationalities, ethnicities and faiths in Bracknell Forest is not only a result of recent expansion in its Nepalese population. The Borough continues to receive migrants from all parts of the world – and particularly from Poland and other Eastern European A8 Countries in recent years.
- 3.5. In comparative terms this population is relatively mobile, but a significant proportion has chosen to settle in the Borough, and where permissible to bring in their families.

Recommendation (5)

Bracknell Forest will need to respond to the continuing demand for English as a second language in schools, colleges and in the wider community.

Recommendation (6)

Ways of increasing the availability of ESOL classes could also be explored with the Business Sector, PCT, Police and Fire Service who all have an interest in welcoming and integrating new migrants.

Recommendation (7)

Attention should also be given to how new and emerging communities can be better engaged and involved in the Public, Voluntary and Faith Sectors.

- 3.6. Notwithstanding the level of prosperity in Bracknell Forest, there are significant pockets of deprivation which largely impacts on the majority population but also on some minority groups – most notably the new Nepalese, Traveller and small Black African population. Moreover, competition for available resources is likely to increase in the coming period with cuts in public sector services and more difficult economic circumstances.

Recommendation (8)

Emphasising that the Council's approach to tackling deprivation and disadvantage will continue to be fair, transparent and even-handed across all groups could help to reassure residents that no one group will be favoured.

The Voluntary and Community Sector

- 3.7. A key objective of this research has been to provide a detailed narrative, description and profile of Bracknell Forest's changing population in order

that key organisations in the local public, voluntary and faith sectors may be better informed of the communities they serve.

Recommendation (9)

That the faith and community profiles in this report be used to help improve engagement with the Borough's new and minority communities.

Recommendation (10)

Further, that emphasis is given to taking consultation and engagement with minority groups beyond umbrella groups and traditional community leaders by encouraging grassroots residents – in particular women and young people – to participate in mainstream mechanisms of consultation.

- 3.8. More widely, the Voluntary and Community sector has been going through a period of change in recent times with the emphasis on funding switching from annual grants to service commissioning. Small and medium sized organisations are already at risk and are concerned for the future, given the potential impact of reductions in local and central government services and funding. At the same time much more is expected of the Voluntary and Community Sector under the Government's 'Localism' and 'Big Society' agendas.
- 3.9. Led by Bracknell Forest Voluntary Action and the Bracknell Forest Consortium, there are already strong organisations in the Borough providing infrastructure support to the Voluntary Sector. However, additional steps could be taken by the Council and Local Strategic Partnership to enable, empower and assist small and medium sized organisations in meeting challenges for the future.

Recommendation (11)

Further consideration should be given to supporting the development of Service based Voluntary Sector consortia bringing small and medium sized groups together with larger organisations to bid for and undertake Public Sector Service contracts.

Recommendation (12)

Continue to promote volunteering within the Public and Private Sector with the aim of providing skills, expertise, advice and support to small and medium sized Voluntary and Community Organisations.

- 3.10. 'Faith and Belief' in Bracknell Forest demonstrated that the faith sector is already doing a great deal in providing services to local communities and promoting community cohesion.
- 3.11. One of the main issues identified by participants in this research is the relative lack of knowledge that different faiths have of each other. However, steps are already being taken to address this challenge as a result of the Faith & Belief in Action 2010 report produced by BFVA. Indeed, during the course of this research project several well attended events were organised by BFVA, funded by Faith in Action and Capacity Builders. However, some noted the absence of younger people at the events.

Recommendation (13)

Through the Faith and Belief Forum Steering Group, continued emphasis should be given to activities and events that bring different faith groups together to tackle common issues of concern, build bridges, trust and confidence between each other. Special focus should be given to involving younger people, utilising existing Faith & Communities activities.

Recommendation (14)

A number of faiths have major resources, educational and other facilities in the Borough and efforts should be made to further engage and involve them in local forums and activities.

Recommendation (15)

At the same time, more also need to be done to engage and involve the Borough's minority faiths as well as majority faith sub-groups

Preventing Violent Extremism

- 3.12. Bracknell Forest Prevent Steering Group is working with a wider definition to include all forms of extremism in its activity; concerned to ensure that Muslim communities are not stigmatised. The Police and council have taken steps to improve understanding of local Muslim communities with a view to building trust and confidence.

Recommendation (16)

Continue with the broader view on extremism approach with assurances that any work carried out under the guise of Prevent will not stigmatise Muslim communities.

Recommendation (17)

Continue to develop harnessing of expert knowledge and extend to involve specialist religious and academic consultation.

	Name	Role	Organisation
1.	Abby Thomas	Head of Community Engagement & Equalities	Bracknell Forest Council
2.	Alison Sanders	Director of Corporate Services	Bracknell Forest Council
3.	Auzma Khan	Prevent Engagement Officer	Thames Valley Police
4.	Bob Welch	Chief Advisor- Education	Bracknell Forest Council
5.	Brian Uzzell	Director of Student Services	Bracknell & Wokingham College
6.	Captain Gurung		Gurkha Company Sittang
7.	Fr. Christopher Rutledge	Parish Priest	Bracknell Catholic Church
8.	Chris Smith	Executive Officer	Sandhurst Town Council
9.	Dilip Ladwa	Chair	Bracknell Forest Minorities Alliance
10.	Elaine Chalmers-Brown	Director	Pilgrim's Heart Trust
11.	Farooq Awan	Secretary and Treasurer	Bracknell Islamic Cultural Society
12.	Hassen Boodoo	Chair	Bracknell Islamic Cultural Society
13.	Henrik Jorgensen	Head of Student Services	Newbold College
14.	Ian Boswell	Community Safety Manager	Bracknell Forest Council
15.	Jon Goosey	Deputy LPA Commander	Thames Valley Police
16.	Kaleem Bhatti	President	Ahmadiyya Muslim Assoc
17.	Kashif Nawaz	EAL & Diversity Team Leader	Bracknell Forest Council
18.	Kath Cox	Head of Traveller Education Support	Bracknell Forest Council
19.	Ken Blanton	Minister	St Paul's URC Church
20.	Liam Parker	Youth & Schools Pastor	Kerith Community Church
21.	Madeline Diver	Community Action Link for Churches	Bracknell Forest Christian Network (BFCN)
22.	Major Limbu		Gurkha Company Sittang
23.	Martin Gilman	Chief Executive	Bracknell Forest Voluntary

		Action
24.	Michael Bentley	Retired Baptist Minister
		Standing Advisory Council on Religious Education (SACRE)
25.	Michael Pearson	Vice Principal
		Newbold College
26.	Paul Crawte	Acting Head of Youth Services
		Bracknell Forest Council
27.	Raman Patel	Seen as resident
		Indian heritage community
28.	Robin Selmes	Reverend
		Bracknell Methodist Church
29.	Rosanna Boarder	Senior Advisor- Inclusion & Diversity
		Bracknell Forest Council
30.	Simon Bowden	LPA Commander
		Thames Valley Police
31.	Vicky Chilvers	
		Newbold Church Parent & Toddler Group
32.	Patrick Johnson	Pastor
		Seventh Day Adventist Newbold Church

Focus Groups	
1.	Bracknell Islamic Cultural Society
2.	Gurkha Company Sittang
3.	Indian Community Association Bracknell – Female Group
4.	Indian Community Association Bracknell – Male Group
5.	Kerith Community Church – Young People Group
6.	Newbold College Students
7.	Newbold Diversity Event
8.	Newbold Parents & Toddlers Group
9.	Gypsy Roma Traveller Group

Events Attended & External Consultations	
1.	Bracknell Forest Interfaith Event
2.	Bracknell Forest Voluntary Action Equalities Conference – Joint Borough Event
3.	Newbold Diversity Event
4.	Slough Muslim Elders Group
5.	Reading Muslim Male Group