

To: The Scrutiny Committee

Date: 3rd December 2013

Report of: Enfranchisement and Empowerment Scrutiny Panel

Title of Report: Enfranchisement and Empowerment Final Report

Summary and Recommendations

Purpose of report: To present findings and recommendations from the Scrutiny Committee Enfranchisement and Empowerment Panel.

Scrutiny Panel Lead Members: Councillors Roy Darke, Graham Jones and Helen O'Hara

Executive Lead Member: Councillor Bob Price, Corporate Governance and Strategic Partnerships.

Recommendations:

- (1) Given the importance of social cohesion for Oxford's future, that the Enfranchisement and Empowerment Panel continue its work into 2014 to:
 - extend the Focus Group discussions to other recently arrived communities
 - explore options for raising awareness across the city of the extent and character of its diversity
 - inquire into social cohesion strategies developed in other local authority areas
 - review the effectiveness of ESOL support from the Social Inclusion Fund
 - evaluate officers' proposals to maximise IER
 - take evidence on the number of, and means to empower, those adult residents not entitled to take part in elections
- (2) That the Principal Electoral Services Officer presents:
 - an update to members on the progress towards the implantation of IER in 2014 and how funding, following a successful bid to the Cabinet Office to increase voter registration within IER was to be spent.

- an update on the current annual update (canvass) of the electoral register, which will be published on 17th February 2014.
- (3) To provide better communication and engagement, officers investigate how on-going dialogues can be established with as many of the larger communities as possible. Exploring what information would be most useful to them and in what form i.e. leaflets, website information in various languages etc.
 - (4) Officers should discuss partnership and joint/co-ordinated activities between Electoral Services and Communities and Neighbourhoods, with the introduction of IER to provide opportunities for outreach and engagement not only with in-migrants but also with other hard to reach groups such as young people. It provides an opportunity to communicate and inform about the democratic process and the need to sustain the vitality of civic engagement. All efforts should be made to maximise available funds from Government and other sources to produce the widest possible outcomes.
 - (5) City Executive Board is asked to renew the Council's Social Inclusion Fund in 2014/15 and to actively seek bids which meet the aspirations of extending the engagement and support work with new and emerging communities
 - (6) To support the consideration of bids within the Social Inclusion Fund Officers should be asked to draw up a "wish-list" of resources needed to take this work further. Working to make Oxford a welcoming, diverse and integrated community is an important aim.
 - (7) That Officers report to the Panel how the integration of recent in-migrants communities has been encouraged in other local authority areas.

Introduction

- (1) This report outlines the findings from the Enfranchisement and Empowerment Scrutiny Panel since it last reported to the former Communities and Partnership Scrutiny Committee in April 2013, and makes recommendations from these findings.
- (2) At the April 2013 meeting of the Communities and Partnership Scrutiny Committee, it was agreed to extend the life of the Panel into the 2013/14 Council Year. This was to enable the Panel to arrange focus groups to consult with Oxford residents from 3 minority communities: Polish; Somali and Pakistani around themes and questions detailed later in this report. The Panel was also asked to continue to analyse Census results as they became available.

Context

- (3) The core purpose of the Panel this year has been to provide insight into the views of the chosen communities in an effort to widen understanding and encourage and improve empowerment of recent immigrant communities. Approximately 29% of Oxford's population was born outside of the UK.
- (4) A significant number of over-18s in Oxford who contributed to the city's economy, paid tax and used services are not eligible to vote. These are nationals of countries outside the European Union and the Commonwealth. Those from EU member states can vote in local and European Parliament elections but not in UK General Elections.
- (5) Since reporting in April the national context of a broad sense of disenchantment with politicians and the political process prevails with some commentators reporting a deepening of these views. The celebrity Russell Brand wrote an article as guest editor of The New Statesman in October 2013 concluding that voting in elections was a waste of time. These views have been highlighted by traditional and social media as a major issue. Russell Brand appeared on BBC 'Newsnight' a few days after the article appeared and Jeremy Paxman agreed that he found it hardly worthwhile to turn out and vote. There has been an expanding debate in the media with bodies such as the Electoral Reform Society making the obvious point that participation is the cornerstone of a democratic society and that not voting is a counsel of despair and even nihilism.
- (6) General alienation from the democratic/political process adds to the problem facing the Panel when seeking to expand civic engagement and may take many years to diminish. It is not an auspicious moment to be advocating civic engagement. The move from household to individual registration for the electoral register therefore presents an even greater challenge and there is a danger that significant numbers of people will either choose not to register or will not make the effort.

Scope

- (7) The Panel's overarching scope:

As Census data was published we began to see the diverse and changing nature of Oxford and the number of people who failed to complete details without at least one reminder. Alongside this there were a number of properties with no one registered to vote.

- What effect did this have on the understanding of Oxford's communities, within the Council and more widely across the city?

- Did we understand why some households/communities chose not to engage?
- What was the extent of the democratic deficit?
- What did this mean for communities, services and funding?

Methodology

(8) The Panel used a mix of observations, discussions and visits to gather evidence. These methods allowed for a better understanding of the issues affecting residents. The Panel has:

- (a) Analysed statistical information available from the 2011 Census and the 2013 Register of Electors provided by Mark Fransham and Martin John.
 - 2011 Census, namely what was classed as the 'usually resident' population by age whose main address was Oxford on Census Day in 2011, though not people living in the city for less than 12 months (**Appendix A**)
 - 2013 Electoral Register broken down by ward detailing number of properties, population, eligible electors, under 19s, annual canvass return rates and voter turnout in the May 2012 City Council elections (**Appendix B**)
- (b) Met with officers from Communities and Neighbourhoods (Luke Nipen), Electoral Services (Martin John) and Policy, Culture and Communications (Mark Fransham).
- (c) Focus Groups - Met with representatives from the Asian Women's, Polish and Somali communities as follows:
 - 24th October 2013 met with the Asian Women's Lunch Club at the Rose Hill Community Centre
 - 28th October 2013 met with members of the Polish community at the Blackbird Leys Community Centre
 - 31st October 2013 met with members of the Somali community at the Blackbird Leys Community Centre

The Panel decided to formulate questions (**Appendix C**) that would not be prescriptive but which would act as an aide-memoire and be a starting point for discussions. The questions were divided into four main areas: (**results at Appendix D**)

- **Why Oxford?** – to explore what attracted people to Oxford in the first place and find out if it has fulfilled any expectations they may have had;

- **Your Community** – to explore what a community’s experience is, and what, if any difficulties it has experienced in work and places to live;
- **Your services** – to find out what services different communities chose to use, and if there are any barriers to their use. To try to discover where their “trusted places” are;
- **Voting and democracy** – to find out what people knew about voting, and to touch on their experiences of the democratic process.

Findings

Census 2011 and Electoral Registration

- (9) The Panel noted that the 2011 Census information and data sets were already out-of-date. During the period since the Census there had been two complete annual canvass updates of the electoral register (autumn 2011 and summer 2012) and a further one is underway which commenced on 15th October 2013, for the 2014 Electoral Register, to be published on 17th February 2014.
- (10) The most recent annual canvass update of the electoral register (summer 2012, published on 16th October 2012) achieved a property response rate of 96.2%. Despite best efforts this still left 3.8% of properties from which the Council was unable to obtain a reply. However for an all-urban authority like Oxford this was an encouraging result. For comparison, according to the Electoral Commission’s latest report on electoral registration rates (The Completeness and Accuracy of Electoral Registers in England 2010 – Electoral Commission), the average for English authorities was 92.7%. Towns like Cambridge, Canterbury, Nottingham and Warwick, all university towns and all fell below 90%. Oxford’s result compares well within these benchmarks.
- (11) During the annual canvass update in the summer of 2012, the churn rate for Oxford was 53.2% i.e. 53.2% of properties had some changes to the details held on the electoral register at the start of the canvass. Cambridge had a churn rate of 47.4%, Southampton was 34.3%, Exeter was 33.9%, Haringey was 19.7% and West Oxfordshire was 17.3%.

Focus Group Discussions

- (12) The Panel was supported in this work by the Community Specialist Officer (CSO). This is a new position in Oxford City Council’s Communities and Neighbourhoods Team. The CSO builds and maintains links to ‘communities of interest’ in Oxford while also

providing specialist advice on engagement with these communities to other service areas and partner agencies. Oxford is ethnically diverse with approximately 29% of the population born outside the UK. Part of this role is to work with established and emerging communities to achieve their aims and build effective links with council services.

- (13) The CSO spends a significant amount of time building relationships and trust with communities who previously may have had little or no contact or perceived poor relationships with the Council. This is a long term project but will ultimately improve communication and the City Council's capacity to engage effectively. There is often a feeling of suspicion within some recent communities when the City Council tries to engage with them. By building effective engagement through the CSO, this is reduced. The provision of expert advice on who to speak to and best practise when engaging communities, enables other service areas to be more effective with their consultation.

Common comments from all three groups

- (14) Discussion Point - Why they chose Oxford?

- To be with relatives.
- Employment was easy to find.
- Its reputation and the education system.
- The small size of the city.
- Considered a safe place.

Additional comment: The Polish community also felt that Oxford as an old city reminded them of towns and cities back in Poland.

- (15) All three groups were happy in Oxford, had gained employment and had accessed education and medical services. They understood the issues around housing such as the lack of supply of affordable accommodation etc.
- (16) All would welcome additional funding to support their respective groups and translator services when accessing the Council.

Discussion Point - Your communities

- (17) All three groups said that they sought advice primarily within their communities as the most trusted source. They all raised language as a barrier. They welcomed ESOL, which provided language courses etc. though some concerns were raised on its delivery. Some felt that previous language courses provided under "English as a Foreign Language" were more intense and included tests and a qualification.
- (18) There was some apprehension that they would experience racism and prejudice, but this had not happened in Oxford. The Asian Women and the Polish communities did feel that some newspapers, some

politicians, some members of the public and some ill-informed neighbours, fostered perceptions such as all Muslims are terrorists and the Polish only come to take British people's jobs.

- (19) All three groups felt that their children were their most important concern with a concern particularly of a growing "culture" gap between the generations. The older generation was concerned that the younger generation did not necessarily consider that their community's language, history and culture, was important/relevant to them.

Discussion Point - Services and accessing information

- (20) All three groups were happy to access public services. All again raised the issue of language and felt that translators were required. Education was very important to all three communities as was housing. They were all aware of the housing crisis in Oxford.
- (21) Some members of the Somali community said they felt disadvantaged. Specifically they perceived their housing needs were passed over in favour of other in-migrants, as they did not know how to access the system for services. Almost none knew the identity of their Ward Councillors.
- (22) All three groups welcomed the support received from Luke Nipen, the Community Specialist Officer. The Panel also welcomed this appointment as a welcome step towards better communications and mechanisms for participation.

Discussion Point - Voting and democracy

- (23) All three groups understood the electoral process, however there was some distrust raised by each of the groups. For example, one group felt that politicians promised a lot at election time but did not always deliver once elected. Two of the groups specifically said they felt that they only saw politicians at election time.
- (24) All those that were eligible had participated in voting and were aware of the 2014 electoral registration canvass forms currently being delivered to every residential property in the city. All groups felt that it was important to vote.

Conclusions

Voter Registration

- (25) The Panel felt that it was encouraging that Oxford was achieving a high rate of return on its annual update of the electoral register. It considered whether or not there is value in pursuing further the missing responses, but on balance understood the limit of what could be achieved with the available funding and resources. The introduction of

Individual Electoral Registration (IER) whilst fitting well with the drive for personal responsibility does pose some serious risks and has the potential to reduce voter registration in Cities and places with particular characteristics. The Panel would like to see all efforts to maximise available funds and knowledge to deliver IER to maximise voter registration.

Focus Groups - Empowerment

- (26) For recent arrivals to Oxford there is some engagement with civic society but there is also unfamiliarity with: access to services; democracy (local councillors)/ governance; places to seek help and advice; and electoral registration and democratic processes. The Panel discussed a number of factors that could explain this. For those who are not EU or commonwealth citizens the value of electoral registration and wider engagement in civic affairs is low unless they need specific services which require a record of registration, for example credit. Community groupings and associations have the value of providing a secure place to find out about the locality and local services and these safe havens, are the first port of call for inquiries and needs. For whatever reason this reluctance to engage has a marginalising effect and to encourage new communities through dialogue need to continue with real outcomes.
- (27) The Panel did not want to engage with the broader debate about assimilation vs. multiculturalism as being beyond its brief and a somewhat sterile dichotomy in any case. It is however an obvious conclusion from the meetings with recent in-migrants that productive and valued engagement with a host society takes time, familiarity and experience. The Panel saw evidence of what can be called 'second generation effect'. The parent of a teenager from Poland said that her son was still seen (and felt) as an 'incomer' when among his school friends, yet felt a growing distance from the cultural heritage of his parents when among groups of older generation compatriots. Members of the Panel saw this differently depending on their own experiences, and agreed this signified the challenge for second generation in-migrants, and for all the community, to enable young people to reconcile positively the range of cultural experiences to which they are exposed, in a way that enriches and contributes to local democracy, rather than divides.
- (28) The Panel recognised and would like to highlight that recent migrants are individuals and families who are taking a major step when coming to Oxford. That step may either have been forced on them by circumstances at home or chosen as a fresh start and direction. The predominant age of the groups spoken to by the Panel was 20 to 40 years and they had families and needed work and a home, the common challenges for all regardless of background. There is reason to believe that amongst the indigenous population the 'peak' of civic engagement tends to be in later years when issues of career- and

family-building are more settled and therefore less of an influence on lifestyle and behaviour. Given this it should come as no surprise that recent migrants do not prioritise civic and general community engagement, they are more likely to do as all do and focus on jobs, family building and housing.

- (29) Another significant issue for many in-migrants is language. The Panel heard many grumbles about ESOL and the dwindling opportunities to get classes in English language. Taking the specific concerns about reforming current practice is beyond the brief for the Panel but is a possible area of future work for the Scrutiny Committee/Communities & Neighbourhoods. Scrutiny might wish, for example, to track the use and outcomes of the £10k (doubled from external source) won from the Council's Social Inclusion Fund for continued coordination of ESOL by Oxfordshire Community and Voluntary Action (OCVA).
- (30) All three discussions were clearly helpful and could have lasted longer. All three groups asked for dialogue to be on-going. How this could be done needs to be explored.
- (31) The Panel were aware that it had only met three of Oxford's 60 or so in-migrant communities. It is concerned that the exercise should be widened out to at least the largest of the other 57. Again, how this could be done needs to be explored.
- (32) The Panel would like to thank officers, especially Mark Fransham, Martin John, Luke Nipen, Mathew Metcalfe and Lois Stock for their invaluable assistance during this review.

Recommendations:

- (33) Given the importance of social cohesion for Oxford's future, that the Enfranchisement and Empowerment Panel continue its work into 2014 to:
 - extend the Focus Group discussions to other recently arrived communities
 - explore options for raising awareness across the city of the extent and character of its diversity
 - inquire into social cohesion strategies developed in other local authority areas
 - review the effectiveness of ESOL support from the Social Inclusion Fund
 - evaluate officers' proposals to maximise IER
 - take evidence on the number of, and means to empower, those adult residents not entitled to take part in elections

- (34) That the Principal Electoral Services Office presents:
- an update to members on the progress towards the implementation of IER in 2014 and how funding, following a successful bid to the Cabinet Office to increase voter registration within IER was to be spent;
 - an update on the current annual update (cavass) of the electoral register, which will be published on 17th February 2014.
- (35) To provide for better communication and engagement, officers investigate how on-going dialogues can be established with as many of the larger communities as possible. Exploring what information would be most useful to them and in what form i.e. leaflets, website information in various languages etc.
- (36) Officers should discuss partnership and joint /co-ordinated activities between Electoral Services and Communities and Neighbourhoods with the introduction of IER to provide opportunities for outreach and engagement not only with in-migrants but also with other hard to reach groups such as young people. It provides an opportunity to communicate and inform about democratic process and the need to sustain the vitality of civic engagement. All efforts should be made to maximise available funds from Government and other sources to produce the widest possible outcomes.
- (37) City Executive Board is asked to renew the Council's Social Inclusion Fund in 2014/15 and to actively seek bids which meet the aspirations of extending the engagement and support work with new and emerging communities
- (38) To support the consideration of bids within the Social Inclusion Fund officers should be asked to draw up a "wish-list" of resources needed to take this work further. Working to make Oxford a welcoming, diverse and integrated community is an important aim.
- (39) That officers report to the Panel, how the integration of recent in-migrants communities has been encouraged in other local authority areas.

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APPENDIX A

Population by ward, 2011 Census

Source

National Statistics

This data refers to the 'usually resident' population in Oxford on
Census day 2001 and 2011

The usually resident population is, broadly speaking, people whose main address is in Oxford and
who have stayed or intend to stay for 12 months or more

University students are counted at their term-time address; people living in the
city for less than 12 months are not counted

Ward Name	All Ages	0-4	5-9	10- 14	15- 19	20- 24	25- 29	30- 34	35- 39	40- 44	45- 49	50- 54	55- 59	60- 64	65- 69	70- 74	75- 79	80- 84	85- 89	90+
Barton and Sandhills	7,202	672	543	440	418	511	739	619	532	480	458	373	337	315	239	176	134	88	78	50
Blackbird Leys	6,077	547	444	474	400	420	471	415	395	431	436	349	245	236	220	220	181	122	49	22
Carfax	6,361	63	50	66	1,284	2,617	876	433	193	146	142	118	86	92	63	47	31	32	12	10
Churchill	7,303	447	314	295	801	1,460	759	617	464	345	300	248	248	232	177	162	127	165	96	46
Cowley	6,562	509	368	373	375	454	735	639	494	471	427	325	275	262	187	186	148	148	112	74
Cowley Marsh	6,977	455	346	257	524	1,014	1,168	843	493	402	356	240	229	174	123	122	89	88	38	16
Headington	5,764	311	266	209	245	729	631	532	402	327	348	292	233	279	215	178	187	154	138	88
Headington Hill and Northway	6,224	335	274	316	1,041	961	563	419	343	311	292	262	209	212	183	125	127	129	88	34
Hinksey Park	5,944	364	280	221	252	592	879	671	474	389	375	262	258	264	184	147	119	107	63	43
Holywell	5,425	22	19	22	1,525	2,905	479	149	55	51	42	40	42	27	22	12	3	5	4	1
Iffley Fields	5,713	376	267	235	322	817	723	575	373	390	366	303	274	235	143	93	107	61	38	15
Jericho and Osney	6,820	322	239	176	387	1,087	1,200	769	503	360	355	292	263	247	208	147	101	75	54	35
Littlemore	6,441	497	400	313	290	417	695	598	454	483	475	390	310	294	236	185	151	126	91	36
Lye Valley	7,372	573	406	361	497	745	974	700	505	450	419	395	325	258	198	218	137	115	69	27
Marston	6,259	385	362	344	321	421	564	476	450	432	408	331	277	354	283	253	231	198	117	52
North	5,809	191	213	378	533	1,174	692	445	306	276	300	238	249	260	194	119	84	71	54	32
Northfield Brook Quarry and Risinghurst	6,308	487	343	268	302	469	572	510	484	458	409	356	347	372	271	202	155	147	106	50
Rose Hill and Iffley	6,500	532	420	381	368	388	661	561	426	416	451	398	293	294	251	235	195	114	75	41
St Clement's	5,952	171	130	126	359	2,008	816	465	288	239	228	243	223	205	139	112	73	42	52	33
St Margaret's	5,497	265	301	266	672	508	511	420	316	355	336	287	276	257	210	157	111	114	70	65
St Mary's	5,330	195	130	90	401	1,859	796	471	288	213	180	165	149	134	71	54	48	33	31	22
Summertown	7,209	405	399	659	696	361	681	566	430	438	439	386	360	337	288	202	176	154	147	85
Wolvercote	5,866	338	317	310	367	214	333	373	358	429	447	419	414	413	285	274	240	164	114	57

EMPOWERMENT AND ENFRANCHISEMENT - POPULATION AND ELECTOR ANALYSIS

WARD	PROPERTIES ⁽¹⁾)	POPULATION (2)	ELECTORS (3)	UNDER 19'S (4)	CANVAS NON- RETURN (5)	VOTER TURNOUT CITY ELECTIONS
Barton & Sandhills	2899	7202	5187	2073	79 = 2.73%	22.54%
Blackbird Leys	2351	6077	4225	1865	48 = 2.04%	20.81%
Carfax	1509	6361	4380	1463	26 = 2.03%	20.27%
Churchill	3858	7303	5068	1857	212 = 7.66%	21.62%
Cowley	2514	6562	4608	1625	81 = 3.23%	26.84%
Cowley Marsh	3054	6977	4998	1582	64 = 2.37%	27.77%
Headington	2909	5764	4446	1031	212 = 7.30%	41.35%
Headington Hill & Northway	3383	6224	4693	1966	83 = 4.29%	25.24%
Hinsey Park	2727	5944	4620	1117	73 = 4.09%	32.34%
Holywell	305	5425	3627	1588	11 = 5.95%	21.82%
Iffley Fields	2279	5713	4110	1200	149 = 6.58%	42.49%
Jericho & Osney	3192	6820	4993	1124	237 = 8.01%	30.53%
Littlemore	2846	6441	4827	1500	79 = 2.78%	24.44%
Lye Valley	2922	7372	5101	1837	136 = 5.08%	22.86%
Marston	2562	6259	4717	1412	32 = 1.25%	40.41%
North	2049	5809	4598	1315	71 = 3.78%	34.82%
Northfield Brook	2705	6991	4477	2430	27 = 1.21%	17.51%
Quarry & Risinghurst	2706	6308	4858	1400	83 = 3.08%	36.56%
Rose Hill & Iffley	2649	6500	4518	1701	79 = 3.04%	31.58%
St. Clement's	2340	5952	5019	786	102 = 4.51%	26.29%
St. Margaret's	2122	5497	4167	1504	83 = 4.09%	31.89%
St. Mary's	1935	5330	4025	816	115 = 6.14%	27.88%
Summertown	3086	7209	4985	2159	151 = 5.17%	36.34%
Wolvercote	2710	5866	4663	1332	50 = 1.85%	41.91%

(1) Figures taken from the summer 2012 Electoral Register update

(2) Figures taken from the 2011 Census

(3) Figures taken from the 2013 Electoral Register published on 16th October 2012

(4) Figures taken from the 2011 Census

(5) Figures taken from the 2013 Electoral Register update process, completed on 15th October 2012 (These figures do not include college and care home properties (5798))

City Elections, May 2012 – Overall turnout – 29.37%

Electoral Register Annual Update (Canvass) City wide non-return rate of 2283 properties = 3.71%

Questions

Section 1: Why did you choose Oxford?

Purpose: To find out what attracted people to Oxford in the first place.

What encouraged you / your family to come to Oxford?

Now that you are here, can you tell us if Oxford is as you expected it to be?

What are your hopes (and fears) for living in Oxford?

Now that you have been here for a while, can you see yourself staying here for the long term and putting down roots in Oxford? If not, can you tell us why not?

Section 2: Your Community

Purpose: To explore community experience

Do you think that Oxford is an attractive place for your community generally?
Do you think your community in Oxford will grow?

Can you tell us how your community helps newcomers to settle in and feel at home? What are the first things that people want to do?

Are you aware of any particular difficulties experienced by members of your community when they first come here?

Oxford is an expensive place to live. Does the cost of living here have an effect on people in your community and what they want to do?

Are you able to tell us where people in your community work? What are their main jobs, do you think?

Section 3: Your services and accessing information

Purpose: To find out what services people use, and if there are any barriers to their use.

What services do you know about, and do you find them easy to use?

Do you know where to go to get help and information when you need it?

Where are your trusted places for help and information and for your community in general?

What do you think “the Council” in Oxford does for you? Would you consider the Council to be a trusted place for help and information?

Section 4: Voting and democracy

Purpose: To find out how much is known about democracy

Do you know about voting and is this something you do, or want to do?

Do you know what the electoral register is, and what it is for? Do you think it's something useful?

Do you feel that anything is stopping you from voting or going on the electoral register?

Did you know about the Census in 2011, and did you complete it? [if here at that time].

Final wrap up questions

If you've been here a while, and want to stay here, do you feel part of the Oxford community overall? What makes you feel that way?

If not, or if you are still thinking about making a future in Oxford, are you able to tell us 2 things that would make you feel more a part of the Oxford community in which you live and work?

Asian Women's Club – Thursday 24th October 2013

The Asian Women's Club met every Thursday at the Rose Hill Children's Centre. The reasons for attending varied but included being able to participate in activities such as knitting, cooking, taking language courses, meeting others and generally having the opportunity to learn. Being housewives, they said they appreciated the opportunity to get out of the house.

Some women felt that they had lost their confidence and skills previously gained before coming to Oxford. The Club allowed them to regain confidence and to mix with others and learn new skills.

The attendees all lived locally to the Centre. Some had been in the UK for little more than 3 months, while the longest had been here for 25 years. Countries of origin included India, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Afghanistan.

Section 1: Why did you choose Oxford?

During the discussion reasons/attractions for coming to Oxford included:

- To be with their husbands.
- Followed other relatives.
- Heard the name Oxford and its reputation and wanted to come.
- The University, medical facilities and the education system in general.
- If others had done well in Oxford, they felt Oxford was a good place.

Section 2: Your community

The discussion revolved around what they felt was attractive about Oxford, the growth of their community, difficulties experienced, work opportunities and the cost of living, with responses as follows:

- Liked the mixed communities in Oxford and the smaller size of the city compared to places such as London, Birmingham and Manchester.
- Language was a barrier, but the Centre offered courses in this through ESOL.
- They found that "British" people had been very helpful, especially with language issues, being tolerant etc. which was not the case in other countries.
- Concerned that following recent incidents nationally and internationally, the perception by some people that being a Muslim made you a terrorist, not a problem in Oxford, but in the larger cities they felt it was.
- Concerned on the economy and especially the proposed cuts in the number of Children Centres.
- Some had experienced local prejudice and could not understand why.
- Family members worked or were in education.

Section 3: Your services and accessing information

The purpose of this discussion was to discover what services were used, if they knew who provided these services, and what barriers there were to accessing them, with responses as follows:

- Most did not realise that the Children's Centre building was funded by the County Council, but they were aware that the Centre's services were funded by the Council.
- They came to the Centre because they trusted the staff and knew the other women that attended and felt at ease in finding the help information they needed.
- All accessed medical services, but realised there were issues with increasing demand and resources not necessarily matching that demand and increased expectations.
- They felt that with language being a barrier, having language courses available in the local area was a great benefit especially as they were free of charge.
- Appreciated that information from the Council was available in other languages, but felt that there should be more translators available.

Section 4: Voting and democracy

The discussion was to establish what was known about the democratic process and how to be part of this. Responses included:

- Most had voted in elections in their "birth" countries and in the UK if they were eligible.
- Most were aware of the current Register of Electors 2014 forms that were being delivered to all residential properties in the City to update the register.
- Felt that if you had the vote, you should use it and were comfortable in encouraging this.
- Most discussed politics and elections at home with their families.
- Comments were made that some felt that they only saw politicians at election time when they wanted their votes.

General comments

The Group were very concerned that due to funding cuts the Centre could be closed and that if this was to happen to the Rose Hill Children's Centre, then the Asian Women's Club would fail. The Club needed this support to continue to encourage women to come out of the home and meet other women and learn new skills.

Many families taught their children their mother tongue first and English second. It was felt that they would learn English when they went to school. They felt that this tended to put their children at a disadvantage.

Oxford Polish Community – Monday 28th October 2013

The Oxford Polish Association (OPA) has 35 members who meet twice a month at the Blackbird Leys Community Centre. The Association provides advice to its members and holds events such as a Children's Day and Christmas events to raise money for the Association and local charities.

Some of the attendees had been in the UK for around 2 years, while the longest had been here for over 10 years. Some had lived in other parts of the UK before coming to Oxford, for example Devon and London.

Section 1: Why did you choose Oxford?

During the discussion reasons/attractions for coming to Oxford included:

- To be with family already in Oxford.
- Employment was easy to find compared to other cities in the UK.
- The city had an old culture and traditions which reminded them of the cities back in Poland and a good education system.
- Oxford was considered a safe place to live and raise children.

Section 2: Your community

The discussion revolved around what they felt was attractive about Oxford, the growth of their community, difficulties experienced, work opportunities and the cost of living, with responses as follows:

- Liked the smaller size of the city compared to places such as London, Birmingham and Manchester. Felt that Oxford was also a multicultural city.
- Language was a barrier, especially if trying to gain employment in the profession you had back in Poland.
- Felt that ESOL classes were very good, but concerned that the number available had been reduced. Welcomed that the Polish School in Oxford provided language courses at a low cost.
- Some had felt apprehensive that they would experience problems when they first arrived in Oxford, but problems had tended not to arise.
- Some had experienced prejudice in other parts of the country, before coming to Oxford.
- Employment was easy to find, however in order to have a job in the profession they were qualified in, they had to gain the British equivalent, without this "registration" you had for example qualified teachers taking cleaning jobs.
- Some concerns raised that there was a perception, especially in the media, that Poles were coming to the UK and taking jobs from English

people, which they felt was not the case as the jobs were there for anyone to take.

- Single people tended to go to where they could gain employment, and so for example would move from Oxford to Swindon for jobs in the car industry.
- Those with families were more likely to settle and stay in Oxford so that their children's education would not be disrupted by moving on.

Section 3: Your services and accessing information

The purpose of this discussion was to discover what services were used, if they knew who provided these services, and what barriers there were to accessing them, with responses as follows:

- Housing was an issue and some had come to the Council for advice. They understood that Oxford had a housing problem, but that this was not exclusive to Oxford.
- All accessed medical services, but realised there were issues with increasing demand and resources not necessarily matching that demand and increased expectations. Easy to make comparisons between UK and Polish healthcare services.
- They felt that people tried to solve problems themselves in the first instance, though knew that they could approach the Citizens Advice Bureau and the Council for advice.
- Experiences of using the Council was generally good and welcomed the support the Council gave the OCVA.
- Would welcome translators being available when they approached the Council for advice etc.
- Aware of the Council's website, but did not always find it easy to navigate - for example to find how they could contact their local Councillor.

Section 4: Voting and democracy

The discussion was to establish what was known about the democratic process and how to be part of this. Responses included:

- All were aware that they were eligible to go on the electoral register in the UK.
- Most had voted in local elections and were aware of the European Parliamentary elections in May 2014.
- All were aware of the current Register of Electors 2014 forms that were being delivered to all residential properties in the city to update the register.
- They found the voting process easy in the UK and had been happy to approach councillors on various issues.

General comments

The Group were concerned that the retention of a Polish identity could be a problem, especially for the younger generation. They felt that the children would become more “English” and their spoken Polish would deteriorate as they would prefer to speak in English. They felt that in order to integrate some put a huge effort into learning and speaking English and because of this had not appreciated how fast Polish as a language spoken on a day-to-day basis would reduce.

Oxford Somali Community – Thursday 31st October 2013

The Somali community in Oxford is a new emerging community and not located in one geographical area of the city. Some of its members had been in the UK for around 2 years, while the longest had been here for 29 years. Some had lived in other parts of the UK before coming to Oxford, for example London. The community was extremely proud of its heritage.

Section 1: Why did you choose Oxford?

During the discussion reasons/attractions for coming to Oxford included:

- To be with family already in Oxford.
- Employment was easy to find compared to other cities in the UK.
- The reputation of Oxford internationally and its education system.
- Oxford was considered a safe place to live and raise children.
- A goal to come and study in Oxford.

Section 2: Your community

The discussion revolved around what they felt was attractive about Oxford, the growth of their community, difficulties experienced, work opportunities and the cost of living, with responses as follows:

- Liked the smaller size of the city compared to places such as London. Felt that Oxford was also a multicultural city.
- Language was a barrier especially when applying for a British passport. They were aware of ESOL, but concerned that the service offered while welcomed was not as in-depth as it used to be under “English spoken as a foreign language” when studying, for example, for the certificate necessary for UK citizenship, and the current system did not take into account the different learning needs between young and old.
- As an emerging community, felt that it needed a physical hub, where people could come for advice and regularly meet, but funding was an issue.
- They tended to go to trusted people within the community in the first instance for advice though wanted to build relationships with the Council.

- Felt that Oxford was a safe place. No one had experienced racism or crime.
- All left Somalia because it was unsafe, but the older generation would like to return to Somalia if the situation there was stable with a stable economy and Government etc., while the younger generation wanted to stay in the UK.

Section 3: Your services and accessing information

The purpose of this discussion was to discover what services were used, if they knew who provided these services, and what barriers there were to accessing them, with responses as follows:

- Housing was an issue and some had come to the Council for advice, but felt that this advice had not always been as helpful as it could. They understood that Oxford had a housing problem.
- Rents in the private sector were high and the accommodation was not always good. Concerned that some landlords gave little or no notice when they wanted their properties back.
- Felt that they were being treated differently to other more established communities. They felt that they did not receive the same amount of support as others. They needed to know how as an emerging community they could access the “system” for help.
- Would welcome translators being available when they approached the Council for advice and this could be provided by members of the Somali community.
- Aware of the Council’s website.

Section 4: Voting and democracy

The discussion was to establish what was known about the democratic process and how to be part of this. Responses included:

- All were aware that once they become a British citizen they were eligible to go on the electoral register in the UK.
- Most knew of their MP (Andrew Smith) but not who their local councillors were.
- Felt that politicians promised a lot but tended not to always deliver.
- Did not have complete faith in the democratic process as they felt that they only got 50% of what they saw other people and communities getting.

General comments

The Group felt that the process to become a British citizen was more complicated and expensive, but that to have an English test was good. However older people tended to find the tests more difficult.

The Group felt that their children and their futures were extremely important and that was why they came to the UK and Oxford.