

CAMBRIDGE ETHNIC COMMUNITY FORUM [CECF]

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

Wednesday, 15th November 2023.

Present:

Abdul Muhammad, Abhik Palit, Abigel Tamasi, Afsana Khan, Amjad Mogul, Ana Chikwaka, Andrea Verdasco, Angela McCabe, Angie Ridley, Aqeela Ihsan, Asaduzzaman Ahmed, Asma Martain, Avaley Lee, Blessing Ashimi, Bushra Ahmed, Carol Brown-Leonardi, Cecil Chipendo, Chris O'Neil, Dipa Chauhan, Dulce Lewcock, Edward Imhagwe, Eva Chan, Fahad Hussain, Farah Mogul, Farhan Hussain, Farida Khanam, Fathima Begum, Gita Jethva, Grace Peteni, Graham Lewis, Habiba Chowdhury, Hamida Farooq, Hana Osman, Hsin-Ling Liang, Ibrahim Rahman, Ila Chandavarkar, Imene Kacha, Khadija Arsalan, Kahlid Malik, Ksenia Afonina, Leanne Austin, Lucia Medici, Luthfa Kahtun, Lydia Idakula, Mansoor Abdullah, Margateth Noha, Mark Freeman, Matt Jaworski, Melody Baker, Mirsab Hussain, Mohammed Hassan, Muneeb Khan, Naiyer Ahmed, Nasreen Bawa, Paul Haynes, Penninah Serrano, Quratulain Tahir, Raihan Hussain, Rebwar Hussein, Reem Khan, Rob Guyton, S Ahmed, Saima Din, Sandra Simoes, Sarwat Khawaja, Shahada Begum, Shahida Rahman, Shahnaz Malik, Shopna Begum, Sidra Dar, Simone Ferrari Toniolo, Suzan Murrad, Tabassum Syeda, Taheem Muhammad, Tahrima Khatun, Tanzia Khanam, Tayba Baawais, Ummay Chowdhury, Vicky Baddeley, Yan Wang, Yuehwen Chiu, Z Ahmed

Staff:

Eddie Stadnik (CEO), Almudena Cano (Finance), Louise Tan (Development Services), Samuel Budu (CHESS), Panna Chowdhury (Race Equality Services), Nahar Chowdhury (Marketing and Communications), Alla Viktorova (Ukrainian Refugee Services).

Apologies: These were received from Mike Todd Jones, Saira Law, Qamar Nizam, Ana Maldonado, Diane Lane and Tracy Cripps.

1. Welcome, minutes and introduction from the Chair

The Chair, Asaduzzaman Ahmed welcomed all to the CECF AGM, said it was a great attendance and thanked them all for coming out on such a cold night. He said it had been a long time with only online attendance, and it was good to see everyone face to face. He read out the agenda and reported that CECF once again had a very busy and productive year, completing three different health projects as well as a health and wellbeing project for refugee and migrant women. It was sad that the Building Better Opportunities Employment project led by Panna Chowdhury ended in the year. This project in partnership with the Papworth Trust, had been a significant part of CECF over the past five years. He was pleased that the Cambridge City Council funded services in capacity building and race equality had continued to serve communities, showing how significantly BME (Black and Minoritised Ethnic) communities had been affected by the rise in the cost of living.

CECF finally had the opportunity which it had not during the pandemic, to run a Cultural Diversity Day. This was a great success attended by over 400 people and proved to be a dynamic celebration of the diversity of communities in Cambridge.

The Cambridgeshire Human Rights and Equalities Support Service (CHESS) and CECF Refugee Services continued to be very busy, with services in great demand throughout the year.

Asaduzzaman said he would like to take the opportunity to thank all CECF staff and volunteers for their dedication and hard work and also the Trustees for their commitment throughout the past year. Without this, CECF would also be unable to function. He also thanked all funders and supporters and then handed over to Eddie Stadnik, CECF CEO.

2. Chief Executive Officer report

Eddie said all the paperwork for the AGM had been on the CECF website. There were a few hard copies. He thanked all those at stalls: Healthwatch, CB Mentoring, Tzu Chi, the Karim Foundation and Cambridge Home Improvements Agency.

He then reviewed the minutes and asked if there were any comments. There were no matters arising and the minutes were agreed – proposed by Asaduzzaman Ahmed and seconded by Carol Brown-Leonardi.

Eddie said the year had been a difficult one, as people emerged from COVID. All the impact of the pandemic had then been made worse by the cost of living crisis. He thanked all the funders that helped CECF help their beneficiaries. He thanked the people who had participated in an amazing Diversity Day, sharing their culture. All participants do this as volunteers and it makes Cambridge a better place. He then asked staff to talk about their project work.

He introduced Louise Tan, the Development Officer. CECF ran 18 advice surgeries, for example, ongoing work with CB Mentoring and set up advice for the African Caribbean Research Group. In all CECF assisted with the following topics: draft constitutions, helping new groups decide the structure and register as a charity if needed, reviewing project documents, giving advice on banking, fundraising, funding applications, public liability insurance and issues around regulations for food at events.

4 training sessions were delivered: Managing group money effectively; Increasing income diversity; Managing group activities effectively and Developing networks for group success. Sessions were attended by up to 6 individuals from different BME groups and the feedback was very positive.

Eddie outlined the huge and varied partnership work such as with Cambridge City Council on their review of children's services and the Community Reference Group updating participants on a variety of relevant topics, including asylum seekers & refugees and impact of cost of living on the city's established BME residents. A detailed list of this work is included in the Impact Report, showing how CECF engages with agencies to communicate views and issues from BME communities.

Work continued with BME community groups. For example, meetings with CB Mentoring to collect information on key issues for the group and decide collaboratively how CECF could help. CECF helped Women's Voices for Africa with an event "Bridging Diversity with

Technology and Innovation and attending BME community events such as the Cambridge Chinese New Year celebration event.

Sam Budu, the CHES Manager was invited to talk about the work of CHES which he said was covered in detail in the Impact Report. The service helped 55 individuals and their families with advice, information and support. The main areas continued to be round employment and housing. 12 individuals were supported with employment issues and CHES was able to help all resolve issues with no need for any further action such as a tribunal case. In addition, 5 employers contacted CHES for advice and information. 12 cases in housing and benefits were resolved with CHES help. In addition, CHES saw 5 parents with regard to racism and also sex education matters in schools. One primary school approached CHES for advice on Equality, Diversity and Inclusion training. CHES had also helped 6 clients with disability related cases, at the request of Directions Plus and with the agreement of the management committee. 4 of these were successful, 1 was not and 1 was still awaiting a decision. The Impact report gives details of CHES partnership work and a case study of a CHES-aided successful challenge to a Home Office immigration case where it was felt a visa application was turned down through race discrimination.

Eddie talked about the refugee services, funded by Cambridge City Council and Lloyds Bank Foundation. Cambridge City Council handles resettlement services so this is for other refugee services. The service helped 146 beneficiaries with 823 pieces of work over 14 different issues and also dealt with 102 remote enquiries. Beneficiaries came from over 26 different countries of origin, with the most coming from Afghanistan, Iran, Syria and the Ukraine. Eddie said the sheer numbers and the complexity of cases meant services were very stretched. CECF staff have OISC registration at Level 2. This is a free service as very few get legal aid. Level 2 advisers can submit initial applications and appeals on initial grounds, as well as the work that can be done by a Level 1 adviser. Cases requiring specialist casework, such as challenging existing case law or third country asylum appeals, have to be referred to a higher level adviser.

Eddie thanked Panna for her role in Building Better Opportunities and asked her to speak about this and her new role in Race Equality Services. Panna said BBO had been a rewarding service. Many service users, mainly women, came in with no belief in themselves to change situations to improve lives and then went on to be role models for their daughters. Lots had gone onto jobs or volunteering. The project helped many develop and increase finance.

There is a detailed report on the Race Equality Services in the Impact Report. The service ran 3 days a week and had over 2000 enquiries leading to 533 pieces of work. 79% of appointments came from the CB4 area, an area of deprived wards and where CECF is located. 288 beneficiaries were assisted, 207 adults and 81 children. The two top ranked topics we dealt with were assistance and support towards household energy needs and organising culturally appropriate food. Both of which were quite often provided together - (37% of all of the work) - illustrating that many BME people are still struggling post-Covid, through the now Cost of Living Crisis. CECF provided dry food packs to go out to 36 households, for over 126 beneficiaries. This was in partnership with the Cambridge Mosque. With the Karim Foundation, CECF facilitated 52 culturally appropriate food packs. Deliveries were made where health issues prevented collection. CECF also issued 11 small grants of up to £100 towards culturally appropriate foods, ingredients, baby supplies and a cooker. In addition,

CECF gave out, or posted 42 £25 shop gift cards for beneficiaries to get essential items, including toiletries and issued Foodbank Food vouchers. CECF signposted many people to the Cambridge Food Hubs and made referrals directly to the Fairbite shop. To help towards energy costs CECF issued 46 £50 small fuel grants, plus 23 Foodbank Fuel vouchers for those with pre-paid meters.

Immigration, welfare and housing were also top priorities. There were a few cases of destitution and experience of domestic violence. The main countries of origin for casework were African, Arab, Caribbean and South Asian, more specifically Bangladeshi. 60% of beneficiaries were Bangladeshi. Although many in the community are progressing there are still major issues of deprivation and disadvantage with support needed because large low-income families, extended households and overcrowding, mixed households for benefit purposes for example spouses from abroad with no recourse to public funds, language issues, low educational attainment, low self-esteem, poor confidence and health levels. These issues are combined with historical institutional and systemic issues around barriers and discrimination for this community accessing health care and other statutory provision, showing the need for a race equality service.

Eddie asked Suzan Murad to speak about her projects that she ran at CECF. Suzan replied that it was a pleasure. CECF was her second home, the first in terms of starting her journey in Cambridge. The first project was Crafting the Self, funded by the Evelyn Trust. A partner to this project was Anglia Ruskin University which was carrying out research on education and identity among refugee women. A well-established body of research found that art and craft-making activities yield numerous benefits for participants, including improved health outcomes, an enhanced sense of self and self-efficacy, as well as an increased sense of belonging within the community where the activities are taking place, very relevant to address displacement and isolation experienced by refugee and migrant women. ARU measured how the activity contributed to women's wellbeing and self-esteem, specifically how it aided development of communication and relationships to aid integration. Activities included crochet, a book club, yoga, dance and health and wellbeing talks. Some activities like crochet were run by participants. There were 48 women who attended from over 27 countries of origin

The health project was in two parts, recruiting and using BME Health Champions and about improving diabetes care. The Health Champions visited a variety of community groups in Cambridge from diverse backgrounds including Women's Health and Wellbeing sessions at Ross Street Community Centre, Crafting the Self sessions and meetings of the Khidmat Sisters. Health Champions did presentations and encouraged sharing of knowledge between their friends, families, and local communities. They were also able to talk about local health resources. The project identified confidence and trust issues within some of the communities regarding statutory provision; that there was an increase in mental health issues among communities across all ages but a lack of appropriate provision. It also found that GP reception services needed to be more aware regarding community in terms of health needs, and language continued to be a significant barrier. It recommended improved use of Community Centres and libraries as places of community contact as well as improved contact with communities and leaders and longer term investment in community health initiatives.

To help improve diabetes care, Suzan attended health and wellbeing sessions run by Luthfa Khatun at Cambridge City Council, helping her make connections with 25 Bangladeshi and South Asian women. She ran a survey which got 61 responses, helping identify diabetes issues and needs in BME communities.

The project also ran the first ever health fair for the Bangladeshi community, in partnership with the Bangladeshi Welfare and Cultural Association and the Karim Foundation. There were over 14 different services on-site, helping 50 participants with free essential health checks and services, for example, blood pressure and sugar measurement tests through Healthy You and diabetes eye screening by the ARU. In addition, participants were able to meet specialist diabetes nurses from Arbury Surgery and CPFT, and dietitians as well. Free advice and multiple types of resources were available through organizations such as Health Watch.

Eddie said Suzan had done an excellent job and it was good to see the combination of health champions and improving diabetes care as an integrated piece of work. The project helped health agencies as well as communities understand health needs and barriers to services and could make informed recommendations for resolution of barriers. He thanked all the Health Champions for their work.

3. Treasurer Report

Eddie went through the accounts pointing out an increase of income from year to year. 2022/23 income was £213,208 as compared to the previous year's income of £194,377. Expenditure had also gone up showing CECF ability to increase its work. The balance at the end of the year was £32,585 with an unrestricted fund balance of £22,891 and a restricted fund balance of £9,694. He pointed out page 9 which gave details of income by funder and page 12 which analysed the use of restricted funds. Page 13 gave detail of all expenditure. There were no questions and the accounts were accepted: proposed by Asaduzzaman Ahmed and seconded by Carol Brown-Leonardi.

Eddie asked if Geoff Mann could be appointed as the Independent Examiner for the next year, as he did a great job at a very reasonable price. This was agreed - proposed by Asaduzzaman Ahmed and seconded by Carol Brown-Leonard

4. Special Resolution

Eddie outlined the information for the special resolution to make changes to CECF Articles and Memorandum of Association. There were three changes. (1) to allow CECF to hold online meetings; (2) to change the appointment of a company secretary to make it optional; (3) changes to the management committee to allow up to 2 individuals to join as trustees. This is to allow BME people who do not have a community group to have a say in how CECF is run. The number has been limited to ensure that the majority of votes are from BME community groups. Individuals appointed to the Board would have full membership rights.

CECF member groups were given green voting slips. They held these up to show that the vote was unanimous in favour of all the changes, by the 9 member groups attending. There was no dissenting vote. The resolution was carried.

Penninah asked if there had been talk about generally extending full membership to individuals. Eddie said that was not the case and BME individuals would be entitled to associate membership. The intention was to have some flexibility to allow communities that don't have community groups to be involved, but the intention was still to keep CECF mainly a membership organisation of community groups.

5. Elections

The following management committee members resigned from the committee: Abdul Hye from the Bangladeshi Welfare and Cultural Association, Dr. Wei Sun from the Chinese Community Centre and Dr. Salah Bander from the Cambridge Sudanese Association. They were thanked for their work and contribution.

The following 8 trustees were continuing as members of the management committee: Asaduzzaman Ahmed (Bangladeshi Welfare and Cultural Association); Shahnaz Malik and Qamar Nizam (Khidmat Sisters); Yan Wang (Chinese Families Together); Carol Brown-Leonardi (Cambridge African Network); Shopna Begum (Karim Foundation); Hsin-Ling Liang (Tzu Chi UK); and Cecil Chipendo (CB Mentoring).

The following was nominated to the management committee: Penninah Serrano from the Jewish Residents Association, proposed by Marilyn Fersht and seconded by Valerie Berkson.

The numbers standing for election were less than the number of available places so there was no election. Eddie asked if anyone questioned nominations and there were none so they were all accepted on to the Management Committee. Asaduzzaman Ahmed was re-elected as Chair and Yan Wang as Treasurer.

6. Thanks

Nothing was raised under Any Other Business. Eddie thanked all for attending. There was then an amazing dance demonstration by the Sanskruti School of Dance followed by a wonderful meal, which helped great networking.