

Progress on the 25 recommendations found in the Final (Missing Communities) Report

What follows relates to the recommendations from the Missing Communities report (June 2009) and what progress in the view of the author has been made since. It is admitted that some of this relates to the views of the author yet is respectfully submitted as a basis for discussion.]

1. With respect to the issues identified relating to our missing communities, these need to be considered by the relevant agencies and incorporated into their strategies and plans.

[While some of these issues have been partly addressed in documents such as the SBC Cohesion Strategy and South East Essex PCT Strategic Plan and the Action Plans for the various areas of Southend Together, I am not aware of concerted efforts to ensure issues raised in the Final Report are addressed in key documents emanating from Southend Together and it seems certain important issues e.g. relating to Southend's Zimbabwean community have not been satisfactorily dealt with at all.]

2. While there is a lot of relevant data in the public domain relating to our missing communities, this needs to be further brought together and gaps in data need to be filled.

[I believe the work of the SBC Data Observatory project to be ongoing and has made progress since writing the report. This group has been instrumental in bringing together various data sets and making these more generally available. How much has been achieved to date, what needs to be done still, in particular filling gaps regarding profiling our diverse community, is not entirely clear although there is undoubtedly a lot more that can be / should be done in reaching a comprehensive understanding.]

3. Quantify the needs relating to the issues of asylum seekers and those living in poor housing.

[This work is ongoing, in particular through the work of the Southend Zimbabwean Network and Southend Homeless Action Network, but more needs to be and could be done.]

4. Regarding health inequalities among our missing communities that have yet to be addressed, in particular in accessing services, creative ways need to do so found to do this.

[Since producing this report discussions have taken place with South Essex NHS PCT re addressing health inequalities and the opportunities for running projects that might help toward achieving this. This, however, remains to be picked up upon as there are areas of concern, for example how to reduce the large discrepancy between life expectancy between the most and least deprived wards. I feel there is significant scope for health improvement issues to be addressed as part of a multi-agency approach]

5. The taboo subject of mental health is as relevant, and maybe more so, among our missing communities as the existing BME communities, and yet for all there are needs to be met.

[Excellent work continues to be done by Southend Mind's Reason project and this is making a positive impact on the mental health of a small yet significant number of those affected. The author is not aware of other mental health services aimed specifically toward the BME communities although there are several services that are available that are not specifically for BME clients, and these are relevant. Gaps in service provision for those with mental health needs, especially if not deemed severe, remain big.]

6. The issue of domestic violence is a significant one, and needs further exploration.

[There still remains a need to further understand issues surrounding domestic violence, especially regarding the victims who are of ethnic origin. The issue of barriers where there is "no recourse to public funds" remain a concerning one despite some progress. Some of the recent positive work being done by agencies such as Marac, SAVS, Women's Aid and CDRP are all important developments.]

7. The issue of racial discrimination remains a significant one, and needs further exploration.

[The author is not aware of developments in the area since the Report was compiled and would raise the concern that with the recent demise of the Essex Racial Equality Council, an important champion for combating racial discrimination, as they now been removed from the public stage.]

8. There are many who are making significant contributions to improving the lives of those in our missing communities, often beyond the call of duty, and they need to be recognised.

[It has ever been thus and we should be grateful for those who contribute in this way. Anything that can be done to acknowledge/reward the contributions of those who do this sacrificial work ought to be.]

9. Southend Borough Council is making important inroads into partnering with those in the voluntary sector and other agencies and that relationship needs to be further developed, including joint provision of new services that would benefit our missing communities.

[While I can personally testify of many positive interactions with Southend Borough Council, there are, I suspect, areas we can usefully develop for joint partnership working. Consideration should be given to the question who controls the budgets allocated for projects as this has an important implications. I am concerned there have been moves to remove capacity from the voluntary sector and bring more under the Council - I feel this may not be the right way forward. Two examples: the need to tackle the drug culture on the Queensway estate cries out for a joint agency approach, ideally with empowered voluntary and community partners and involving the police. The move toward getting community wide initiatives should do more to acknowledge what is already in place.]

10. While Southend Borough Council fulfil most of their statutory obligations, there are things that could and should be done beyond that, in partnership with others, in areas such as housing and asylum seeking, thus making “Southend a better place” (SBC strap line).

[Despite steady progress being made following producing the Final Report, I believe there remains significant scope for improvement, for example in my work with homeless issues I am aware of people living in unacceptable private sector accommodation and people not being helped who do not fulfil a strict criteria for being housed. There are significant concerns around the position of asylum seekers and cases of individual distress (some known to the author) not being dealt with.]

11. While the Voluntary Sector does a considerable amount toward helping our missing communities, the lack of capacity and failure to make the most of opportunities, in particular by partnering with other voluntary and statutory agencies, needs to be addressed.

[The VCS remains a potential fruitful source for helping our missing communities, but the need to develop capacity in order to provide help remains an important factor. Recent developments, especially in the light of the current economic climate, that may lead to reduction in capacity for organisations such as SAVS (and Turning Tides) (already being seen) remains a concern.]

12. Statutory Sector partners sometimes need to be educated in order to have a more realistic understanding of the limitations of the voluntary sector and to respect its primary function is to champion the cause of those it serves rather than fall in line with other agendas.

[Quite likely, there is a need still to “educate” statutory partners on what is available in the VCS and for them to call upon VCS services remain. However, I am heartened that many in the VCS do get involved with what is going on in the statutory arena and our contributions are appreciated. I do have a concern that by being dependent on statutory funding and good will that the VCS may feel less inclined to challenge the status quo where statutory services are not being delivered in the most effective form.]

13. There is further scope to develop and fund at grass root level VCS led initiatives, possibly as social enterprises, that might meet the needs of our missing communities.

[This is still the case, although developments such as the Community based business advice service has made some inroads. The need to encourage key people to undertake such ventures remain. One example an area of need is to further develop One Stops shop run by trusted members of the community as first ports of call, dealing with issues of need not picked up by other agencies, linked possibly to the CAB. Encouraging and removing barriers for people to be engaged in work should remain a priority.]

14. More effort is needed to bring all the interested parties into partnerships that seek to meet the needs of missing communities, specifically to remove barriers and overcome obstacles.

[Since the Final Report was produced, inroads have been made in bringing disparate parties together to meet the needs of the missing communities, but there is still work to be done, including making all interested parties aware of what is available and possible without duplicating services. There is a strong suspicion there remains significant duplication of effort in the providing of services. There could be scope for an independent mapping exercise of where these areas may exist.]

15. The faith communities need to be encouraged in the important part they potentially and actually play in meeting the needs of our missing communities.

[Faith communities still do outstanding work helping missing communities and individuals with needs that for various reasons are not addressed by the statutory services. There is potential for doing more. The Community-in-Harmony Missing Community project in April 2010 will provide some help in addressing this. Consideration should be given to removing barriers to faith community involvement and that the spirit of the Compact regarding involving faith communities is adhered to. It might be helpful to identify what work is being carried out and what is being considered.]

16. Given that an inadequate grasp of the English language is widespread, there is a need to develop the provision and uptake of English learning among our missing communities.

[This is partly being addressed in the new approach to ESOL work being headed up by Southend Adult Community College. It would be helpful to identify what is needed in order to further roll out ESOL, especially since there remains a significant number whose English communication skills are poor.]

17. Empowering key people in our missing communities represent the best hope of being able to address the issues and they need to be given every encouragement to do so.

[Still important, although it is not clear what we can be done. However, it would be a helpful exercise to enquire of those who can be identified as "key people" (community leaders / champions) and see what help can be afforded e.g. by removing unnecessary barriers and helping to increase capacity. The work of SAVS in helping set up community groups is important. Gaining an understanding of where we are at on this could be a useful exercise.]

18. The issue of how best to provide support to the communities themselves, e.g. setting up associations, financial, use of buildings and other resources, needs further consideration.

[Ongoing - services are presently supplied by organisations such as CAB, SAVS and SCHP - the concern is these services might be cut back due to funding cuts even when there may be a need to explore how these can be extended.]

19. There remains a need to form strong BME associations, and although the doing of which is a challenge, those who have the expertise should be encouraged to provide support.

[Likely the best way to help is for those who have the knowledge and trust of those communities to provide assistance and pass on wise advice and for the existing capacity to do so be maintained (it is important that while focus maybe on specific ethnic groups it should be seen as partnering with the wider community to address areas of common concern) - this work is ongoing. As I survey the BME scene in Southend, I feel many BME groups are not represented and often do not exist even when there is a need and those that champion BME causes are making little more than token inroads.]

20. Regarding three of the main project outcomes: Big Event, Polish Day and SOS, these have all been shown as meeting needs and ought to be developed further in future.

[The Big Event is scheduled to take place 20 June 2010. Hopefully there will be a further event along similar lines of what happened with the Polish Day, likely aimed at African communities. The SOS project continues and has made significant inroads, although there is a need to develop capacity in this. An African event(s) in the latter part of 2010 is currently being discussed.]

21. In terms of community engagement and regeneration, models such as that which has been described, relating to what is happening in the St. Lukes Ward, need to be considered.

[I think the issue is identifying best practice, avoiding duplication and pooling of resources. There is scope for improving in all those areas. The need to bring together the full range of interested parties in meeting the needs of the local community remains and any new initiative that seeks to deliver services to any community should seriously consider the question what has been done in the past and being done.]

22. In terms of furthering the causes of the new ethnic minority communities, there is a need to deal with the gaps and overlaps in the existing structures and organisations.

[The issue of duplication of services remains and there is evidence this is a significant issue and can lead to a waste of scant resources. There is also evidence of gaps (some of which were identified in the Final Report) of still not being met.]

23. There is scope for further work in disseminating information to professionals regarding our missing communities (it is hoped this report will contribute to making this happen).

[This report has been well received, but there remains gaps in peoples knowledge that if filled will likely lead to more effective service delivery. The need for joined up working between the various interested organisations remain.]

24. There is scope for further developing community based business initiatives that involve our missing communities, possibly using the newly appointed community business advisors.

[This work is ongoing and is being undertaken currently by services offered through Turning Tides and St. Lukes Healthy Living Centre. Concern remains on continuing the work began by Turning Tides when this project finishes March 2010.]

25. Southend Together does need more grass root participation (with “clout”) so that it can more effectively provide a strategic lead in what services are delivered in Southend and how.

[While Southend Together has extended its membership to include more grass root participation, how effective this is, in particular pertaining to real and effective decision making, remains to be seen. Concern have been raised that the “real” power does not lie with the membership. I have been concerned there has been insufficient scrutiny of the action plans arising from the various parts of Southend Together and this undermines the whole purpose of such plans. The fact that VCS members are often not paid to do this work remains a concern.]

The work of Missing Communities is ongoing. Between July 2009 and March 2010, SCHP have undertaken further work, in particular to ensure some of the momentum from the earlier project is not lost. Between April 2010 and March 2011, work will continue and will focus on specific areas of need not being covered elsewhere. This is currently being discussed by SCHP trustees. The work is possible thanks to a £12000 grant from “Faiths in Action” and will have a faith perspective.

John Barber - 08 March 2010