

Faiths Together In Croydon

Report on the Economic downturn in Croydon Evening event Tuesday 5th May 2009

The event was held at the new CVA Resource Centre in London Road and was attended by about 20 people. We were welcomed by Revd Barry Goodwin on behalf of Faiths Together in Croydon.

The first speaker was Brian Stapleton who talked about the Croydon Economic Recovery Plan, which has three main strategies. In his presentation he spoke about the support that there is for both large and small businesses in Croydon. The Croydon Guardian and Your Croydon magazine which are sent free to most houses in the borough both have information regarding support, advice and marketing. All the business support agencies have been encouraged to work together and people are being encouraged to buy locally and shop locally. The use of the local district centres is also being encouraged with festivals and events planned to bring people to local centres.

There is also a strategy in place to support people. A new website has been made www.croydoncrunch.org to give people information and help. People who are in danger of redundancy can get information on setting up their own businesses, retraining and adult apprenticeships. The train to gain scheme offers funding for retraining skills. We also heard about the Volunteering action Plan which aims to keep redundant people active by finding jobs in the voluntary sector to keep them active. There is also a move to increase the number of work placements for young people.

The third strategy is to promote Croydon and be ready for the financial upturn. The Croydon ambassadors programme ensures that Croydon gets a good press, the regeneration programme is being maintained and inward investment is actively sought.

Questions and suggestions were sought from those present after the presentation. Mr Mehta asked about graduates coming back to Croydon and suggested that a business fair offering placements would be a good idea. Also that perhaps the Boroughs could work together more. The question of the BME glass ceiling was raised and that jobs were needed for both graduates and older people who had been made redundant. Brian Stapleton reported that Croydon has the highest BME employment rates and that the 'job centre plus' helps those being made redundant. He also accepted that while the Croydon crunch website needs to be more widely advertised, not everyone has access to the Internet. A question on funding for advice centres was asked which Brian will look into. He also took note of places where an information leaflet, which would also give information on where people can access a computer, could be distributed.

Echez Ubaka from the Chief executives office in Croydon Council introduced himself. He will be taking over from David Dalglish as Faiths Together link with the Council.

The third speaker was Cllr Gavin Barwell who has the portfolio for Community Cohesion and Safety. He talked about the policing of Croydon and work being done to reduce the fear of crime. He also said that within the next 10 years the minority

groups in Croydon will be in the majority and it is therefore important that everyone feels valued. The Council are working to strengthen the voluntary sector and that there would be a new system of deciding grants from 2010. Promoting neighbourliness is very important and to that end there will be a series of street parties on July 19th this year called the Big Lunch where people can get to know others in their street.

After these presentations there was a workshop session where members were asked to consider 4 questions.

- How can Croydon faith communities support the economic recovery plan and vice versa?
- What impact is the economic downturn having on Croydon's communities?
- What are Faith groups doing to support people caught up in the Economic Downturn?
- What examples are there of good practice?

The results of the discussions were as follows;

Group 1. Answered all the questions as one.

Limit desires and greediness, get together and share. All religions to give support and guidance; Get back into sharing, contacting and supporting all in the community. Put people in touch with help lines and services. People who are depressed may not be able to access services; faith groups can help people with this need.

BME strength have close friends and family who will support them. Ethos to help one another and build on family support.

Domestic violence may be a spin off in these difficult times and faith groups could help and support families.

People in trouble aren't always willing to talk about their problems.

One of the pillars of Islam is a tax to support the needy of 2 1/2% of earnings.

Churches need to increase attendance. Faith communities could perhaps help support mothers returning to work. Volunteers from community for free advice.

Parish nurse or equivalent for help and advice; nurse within the faith community.

Encourage faith communities to foster children in care.

Group 2

Communicating with each other is a key to helping.

There is too much jargon used in communications which cause extra fear.. People who do not have English as a first language may need help understanding forms and letters and need ways of getting help. Letters from the council should be written in a less jargonised and formal way.

Voluntary organisations are facing increasing work loads and decreasing funding.

At least 4 churches and the Mosque are offering debt counselling or advice this could be increased and the centres listed somewhere. Advice centres should know where to send people to the right community.

Group 3

Q How can Croydon faith communities support the economic recovery plan and vice versa.

A sign posting, sharing information, support and empathy.

Q What impact is the economic downturn having on Croydon's communities?

A Unhappy families/people, housing repossession. Business closed down, rise in food costs

Status of refugees is made worse.

Q What are Faith groups doing to support people caught up in the Economic Downturn?

A Drop in advice centre, dialogue within groups.

Encourage discussions and give pastoral support.

Q What examples are there of good practice?

A West Croydon Baptist church gives help and assistance to the needy especially to refugees.

Debt counselling from some groups, faith groups are rising to serve impending needs. Advice centre activities, Increase in cohesion.

Need to search for new ideas.

The meeting finished with an explanation of the Act of Commitment that FTiC wishes people and faith groups would sign up to. There will be a book to sign at the Visioning Event on 1st July.