

Leith Chooses meeting 10 April 2024

Present: Parveen (ELREC), Tremaine, Sally, Abby, Bruce (minutes) Don, Douglas

Apologies: Susan, Jade, Sally

The meeting was basically a long chat with Parveen of ELREC about how ELREC works, the problems it tackles, how LC could do better. There was then some discussion of making the LC online voting system more voter-freindly

For me, the big lessons were

- To engage with BME people, LC needs to reach out to **people** who are well-known and respected in the various BME communities, and go to the relevant venues/organisations.
- We can't do this online – many BME people can't or won't do online.
- There is a major lack of digital literacy in large parts of BMR communities.
- We need to show people/organisations what's in it for them before they will engage with LC.

Here are my notes from during the meeting, unedited apart from fixing typos.

General explanation of who we are, what LC is.

We asked Parveen her impression of LC (ELREC has won LC funding 4 times)

Parveen likes the LC style, Leith based so aware of local needs, background, prices 'easy, simple', grassroots oriented. Other applications very extensive, detailed, take very long or are untransparent, judges don't know what is happening. ELREC will always apply to LC.

ELREC created in 1970s by established BME community members being contacted about discrimination and need for help to navigate council etc. Hence providing services to communities they are part of. Needs are still present, working against discrimination and inequality. Also, establishing community needs (community tells ELREC often). During lockdown, many calls on personal cellphones cos folk couldn't cope, what does guidance really mean (realisation that things take for granted)

Also couldn't access food banks - these didn't cater for 'cultural' diets, hence that application to LC that provides food that meets requirements. Then application to enable connections online, e.g. video-calls. This shows how ELREC's evolved. Post lockdown, much disconnectedness, and mainstream services don't cater for all. ELREC is small to medium charity. Volunteers do what they can, but funding is needed.

ELREC applies for other community grants too, e.g. for cultural events. Several projects, e.g. energy/fuel-poverty information (language support) in partnership with CHANGEworks to offer BME-specific advice; loneliness of BME women; climate projects (awareness-raising); housing rights and responsibilities project - how to be a better tenant (with SHELTER etc); other wee wellbeing projects, nature walks etc, signposting

15 staff, 11 board members - all very diverse, (including MSP, Geoff Palmer)

Capacity has severely limited work in the Lothians

Multiple language skills in the staff. They don't limit how they try to help - client focussed, not subject focussed. Pushback from other organisations leads to aftermath and emotional drain. Many complaints from lack of in-person service. Much digital proxying work - and they can't really afford it.

ELREC works with other organisations. BME is maybe 2/5 of Edinburgh's population. Folk from all over Edinburgh coming to ELREC cos it has good reputation, has established rapport/trust.

Forms are a major barrier, leading to lack of proceeding and hence missing out on benefits. Other orgs target-driven.

Have learnt how to manage people, self-protect. But walk-ins are welcomed. Service users refer each other, or come from social workers, schools. Issues come from people being unable to access council service, e.g. CEC staff working from home (yet still paying for unused local offices). So ELREC doing CEC's job

Dundee council is better cos there is walk-in office that handles people well, very open access, including translators, i.e. it's accessible!

Calls via English-speaking children of those without English

Not many young people or BME people voting - is our messaging going wrong? Many BME folk just won't do things online, or will get family members to do so. So some ELREC staff will phone around and enable people via phone. Need to get BME orgs together. Perhaps lack of understanding or feeling or involvement

Sikh community has trusted members cos been here for long time

How about QR codes? Need to show them how! Go via community leaders showing folk what to do. But much of it is via phoning them.

ELREC teaching folk how to do digital was vaguely successful - folk want to learn from children. Folk not comfortable with digital - they just want to be phoned.

Too many steps in our online voting

We need to engage face-to-face/in-person. Need to make it clear why things are important, need to go out tether locations/organisations and say what/why things are important.

LC application form is probably OK. But our voting system is unfortunately too complex.

Discussion of when SG should meet (evening would be better for professionals, daytime probably OK for women)

Prefer term 'ethnic minority'. Discussion of proportions of ELREC clients from different areas - not so many now from European. Now South Asia, Chinese, Polish, new refugees (e.g. Somalia). African and black groups will not go to ELREC unless it has black staff - former staff member well-known, liked, spoke relevant languages