

T H E M U S L I M C O U N C I L O F B R I T A I N
M C B

*Response to the Consultation Paper from the ODPM
– ‘The Greater London Authority: The Government’s
proposals for additional powers and responsibilities
for the Mayor and Assembly’*

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Boardman House, 64 Broadway, Stratford E15 1NT
Tel: 0208 432 0585 Email: admin@mcb.org.uk
www.mcb.org.uk

Introduction

The MCB is pleased to respond to the ODPM's Consultation Paper and contribute its views on matters of strategic importance to the future of London and the well being of Londoners.

The MCB represents over 400 mosques, cultural centres and other Islamic associations in the voluntary sector, of whom about 120 have offices and activities in London. The city's large mosques such as the East London Mosque, the Muslim Cultural Heritage Centre and Al-Muntada al-Islami are affiliates, as are a number of Islamic schools, registered charities and professional associations. The MCB's London affiliates also include major Bangladeshi, Indian Muslim, Nigerian, Somali and Kosovar community bodies. Additionally the MCB has mandated a specialist committee, its 'London Affairs Committee' to work closely with City Hall on a range of projects including exhibitions, the 2012 Olympic bid, collating statistics on Muslims in London and working on strategies for caring for the elderly. Other MCB committees have worked with City Hall in organising women's and youth conferences.

The ODPM's Paper very helpfully identifies the options and their implications, and while the MCB cannot comment on the whole range of policy choices put forward, three in particular are close to its heart - education, health and housing.

According to the 2001 Census, London's Muslim population was 610,000, concentrated in some of the city's most deprived boroughs (using the ODPM Index of Multiple Deprivation – see Appendix A). In his report 'Community Pride not Prejudice' written after the events of Bradford in July 2001, Sir Herman Ousley observed, "if the Muslim community fails, Bradford fails". He said this to highlight the importance of broadening the base of stakeholders and offering a sense of hope in place of a feeling of marginalisation and lack of opportunity. The MCB firmly believes in the positive engagement of Muslim Londoners – but this means effective steps to address needs in education, health and housing. While about 1 out of every 11 Londoners is of the Muslim faith at present, in the next twenty years this could well change to 1 of every 7 or 8. In this sense, what Sir Herman said of Bradford is true for London as well.

The MCB would like to use this opportunity to place on record its appreciation of the work of the Mayor of London Ken Livingstone and staff at City Hall in engaging with the Muslim community. There is tremendous goodwill on both sides and the challenge of the future is to ensure institutional arrangements are put in place for the sustained engagement of Muslim representatives in the new oversight and delivery bodies created as an outcome of this consultation process.

Learning and Skills

Q4: Do you consider that there is a case for change to current arrangements for learning and skills in London?

Q5. Do you agree that the Mayor should have a greater say over learning and skills in London? If you do, which option do you favour?

The MCB favours a new approach in the delivery of Learning and Skills in London because of four considerations.

Firstly, there is a problem of educational underachievement. In the 16-24 age range, 22% of Muslims have 'no qualifications' compared with 16% for all people. Muslims also have the highest percentage of people without qualifications¹. There is clearly a failure in the system, though other factors of course have an impact, such as parental involvement. This underachievement and the lack of employable skills results in economic inactivity: the full-time employment rate among Bangladeshis and Pakistanis is 17% and 27% respectively - compared with 43% on average². There are hard-to-reach Muslim communities such as the Somalis – perhaps with a population of around 150,000 in London. The scale of the challenge cannot be underestimated and there is no room for complacency with policies and practices of yesteryear.

Secondly, there is added urgency because of the 2012 Games. These will bring with them significant employment opportunities for those with the right skills and in the right trades. If positive action is not taken for disadvantaged populations in areas where the Games are to be sited, then local populations will lose out on these opportunities at their doorstep. This clearly affects the Muslim community because of its concentration in the four London boroughs with Olympic facilities (see Appendix B). The Muslim population in these boroughs in 2001 was about 190,000. By 2011 it is most likely to have increased by a further 120,000. This is an amazing availability of a labour force – but only if the right investments and vision for their education and training commences today.

Thirdly, there is need for new leadership to shake up a conventional attitude of mind that considers it sufficient for the Asian ethnic workforce to find jobs in service industries such as catering and transport. Of course the restaurant business is a lifeline for the Bangladeshi Sylheti community, but is this realising the human potential of people? There must be a determined effort and focus to

¹ 'An introduction to Muslims in the 2001 Census', Serena Hussain, 2004
http://www.bristol.ac.uk/sociology/ethnicitycitizenship/intromuslims_census.pdf

² DMAG Briefing 2004/16, August 2004, '2001 Census Profiles: Bangladeshis in London'; DMAG Briefing 2005/4, January 2005, '2001 Census Profiles: Pakistanis in London'. It should be noted that 93% of both these ethnic groups are Muslim (2001 Census).

open up pathways for young ethnic Londoners in the trades and engineering, in finance and other professions.

Fourthly, it is well recognised that there is a problem of economic inactivity amongst women in the Muslim community. Among ethnic minority groups, Black Caribbean women aged 19-59 have the highest levels of full-time working at 45%, while Pakistani and Bangladeshi women had the lowest, at 14% and 9% respectively³. The MCB would like to see the issue of Muslim women unemployment tackled in a holistic way: to upgrade education and vocational training in sixth form and FE colleges, particularly Muslim girls schools, thereby offering a better fit with suitable employment opportunities; the provision of short-period employment to help women experiment with the use of formal or informal child care etc (the MCB has several proposals that can be brought to the table when appropriate). But again this requires a level of coordination, particularly with employers, that cannot be provided by existing arrangements.

Clearly, the statistics indicate that the existing regime of a Learning Skills Council (LSC) with regional and local structures has not risen to the problems thus far and is not equipped with the focus to do so in the future. An approach is needed which is tailor-made for London and the once-in-a-generation opportunities that lie ahead.

The MCB believes that Option 4 – major structural change with the devolution of current LSC powers to the Mayor offers the best way forward.

In making this recommendation, the MCB would seek assurance that the needs such as those outlined above are translated into delivery programmes reflected in GLA business plans and operational strategies, with an institutional role for representatives of various communities in the management and review process

Housing

Q1: Should the Mayor be able to decide the allocation of the affordable housing portion of the Regional Housing Pot? If so, what would be the benefits?

Q2: Would there be benefits in the London Housing Strategy becoming a statutory strategy, and does having a statutory strategy raise any difficulties?

The housing situation for Muslim Londoners is very different from the average profile in several respects. Firstly, Muslims are proportionately the largest sector of society using social housing – both rented from Council and Housing Association (HA)-based. The majority of Bangladeshis in London (63%) live in social rented accommodation, which is the highest of all ethnic groups – the

³ 'Muslim in the UK Policies for Engaged Citizens', p. 211. Open Society Institute, 2004/5

national average is 23%. Only 26% of Bangladeshis own their own homes – the London average is 57%.

Secondly, there is a chronic problem of over-crowding. To some extent this arises because council housing tends to be limited in size. A further factor is the size of household: the average number of Bangladeshis per household is 4.5 (2001 Census) compared to the London-wide average of 2.4.

Thirdly Muslims tend to occupy the lower quality housing stock. Nationally, one-third of Bangladeshi and Pakistani homes are deemed unfit and 12% of Muslim homes have no central heating.

Fourthly, there is a substantial unmet demand for home ownership among Muslim HA tenants – and they are ready to make financial sacrifices to achieve this – 24% of Muslim tenants aspire to be homeowners in 10 years time⁴

Finally, little is known about the problem of homelessness amongst Muslims. Is this only a problem with newly arrived asylum-seekers, or does it affect the more settled communities as well?

In view of the above, the MCB believes that the current arrangement of Regional Housing Boards has not provided adequate solutions to these pressing needs and gaps in delivery. The focus of the RHBs is most likely on the majority middle class constituency, rather than the harder-to-reach sections of society. The MCB would thus support Option B – transfer of responsibilities of the London Housing Board to the Mayor, together with control on the Regional Housing Pot.

This would tie in with the preference for Option 4 for Learning and Skills. There are well-established relationships not only between housing and educational attainment, but health, employment and transport issues too. For example, overcrowding impacts on children's ability to do homework, while transport links directly affect access to jobs. Partnerships are key – take for example the opportunity now available to Muslim homebuyers to take-up shariah-compliant home purchasing schemes from various financial institutions. A central leadership would recognise the interconnections and tackle inequalities in a holistic way.

While the MCB has confidence and trust in the present Mayor to take account of London's diversity and in tackling inequalities, institutional continuity is needed to safeguard various benchmarks and commitments. The MCB would support appropriate reserve powers vested with the Secretary of State, whom stakeholders could lobby if a Mayor is seen not to deliver.

⁴ 'Muslim tenants in housing associations: feedback and engagement', Sector Study 46, November 2005, Housing Corporation

Health

Q28. Should the Mayor be given further powers relating to health improvement, building on the existing responsibility to take the health of Londoners into account and to improve their health, and if so, what would these be?

The 2001 Census included a question for a self-assessment of a person's health. Within the Bangladeshi and Pakistani populations, persons in the 50+ age bands have a general health that is much worse than average. Notwithstanding several studies and proposals – for example the Acheson report⁵ (1999) and the Department of Health's 'Tackling Health Inequalities: A Programme for Action'⁶ (2003) - one is left with the feeling that year on year the health inequality gaps are widening rather than reducing.

There are national priorities and targets for example to tackle heart disease, diabetes, child health, sexual health and problems of the elderly, but there are perhaps two reasons why health inequalities persist. Firstly, the need is for a level of coordination that cannot be provided by the existing separate organisations with their different lines of reporting. Secondly there is need to work at the level of communities – to take account of cultural sensitivities, physical settings for the provision of health advice and language chosen to deliver the health messages. The health issues that are the focus of national priorities and targets are prevalent within the Muslim community. The MCB has a vision of 'Healthy Living Centres' in mosques that are accessible to men and women for health advice and health screening.

The MCB has a concern too with the well-being and humane care of the refugee population, a large number being concentrated in London. This is a very vulnerable group, whose health conditions are exacerbated by periods in detention centres while seeking asylum⁷.

The MCB believes that responsibilities for addressing health inequalities should be assigned to the Mayor of London because this would clarify accountability and responsibility. The GLA's track record in working for social inclusivity means that the type of outreach described above would be realised.

⁵ Independent Inquiry into Inequalities in Health Report, Chairman: Sir Donald Acheson, 1999

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http://www.dh.gov.uk/PublicationsAndStatistics/Publications/PublicationsPolicyAndGuidance/PublicationsPolicyAndGuidanceArticle/fs/en?CONTENT_ID=4008268&chk=Ad%2BpLD

⁷ Amnesty International UK: Seeking Asylum is not a crime: Detention of people who have sought asylum, 2005

Appendix A – Index of Deprivation and Muslim population

	Total Pop.	% Muslim		IMD 2004
Tower Hamlets	196,106	36.4		4
Newham	243,891	24.3		11
Waltham Forest	218,341	15.1		44
Hackney	202,824	13.8		5
Brent	263,464	12.3		88
Redbridge	238,635	11.9		174
Westminster	181,286	11.8		48
Camden	198,020	11.6		25
Haringey	216,507	11.3		15
Ealing	300,948	10.3		104
Enfield	273,559	9.6		97
Hounslow	212,341	9.1		95
Kensington and Chelsea	158,919	8.4		150
Islington	175,797	8.1		8
Harrow	206,814	7.2		235
Southwark	244,866	6.9		18

The lower the IMD 2004 value, the greater the deprivation.

Source: <http://www.alg.gov.uk/upload/public/attachments/272/Revised%20briefing%20for%20ID%202004.doc>

Appendix B

2012 Games and Muslim demographics (2001 Census)

2001 Census Data	Total Population	Muslim Population	Muslim %	All 0-15 years	Muslims 0-15 years
Tower Hamlets	196,104	71,389	36.4	44,891	27,434
Newham	243,888	59,293	24.3	63,841	21,565
Waltham Forest	218,341	32,902	15.1	46,868	10,529
Hackney	202,818	27,908	13.8	47,431	8,853
		191,492			68,381