

Sheffield for Democracy

Submission to the Sheffield Race Equality Commission

Sheffield for Democracy is an informal group set up by local campaigners. We seek to engage and encourage greater participation of the public in democracy at a local level in Sheffield; to campaign for improvements in democratic structures both local and national; and to identify and inform the public of how these issues are relevant to their lives.

As a group, we are not politically aligned to any party, and welcome supporters of all political parties or none.

We are linked to the national organisations the Electoral Reform Society, Unlock Democracy, Make Votes Matter and Open Democracy. These campaign for greater democracy, an informed populace, citizens' rights, a fairer voting system and more accurate representation of the public will in Parliament.

We have a supporter base of around 180 who receive our "Updates" several times a year and we email local Councillors & MPs. There is a broader range of support from 298 members in our social media groups.

As an organisation we are aware that some of our wider membership are from the Black & Minority Ethnic Communities; we wish this was greater and broader and included representation from across the cultural and ethnic diversity of the city. We remain however a broadly white membership and currently (though not always in the past) our Steering Group is entirely white. We do better in gender and age demographics but we recognise that the BAME communities generally find themselves disadvantaged when it comes to democratic representation and therefore in all other aspects of their lives. The hostility, from some elements of the British public, against the Black Lives Matter movement illustrates this.

We understand that black communities are the least likely to vote and minority communities in general have low political engagement, leading to under-representation in political institutions and being unable to voice their opinions through legitimate organisations or representatives. We would like to think that improving engagement would lead to better outcomes for the communities, when politics is being done 'by the community' rather than 'to the community'.

Where we struggle is in how to achieve this, both for our organisation and for the city in general.

We have two initial thoughts:

1. A **'Friend & Facilitator'** role within the city to help organisations within the communities and the broader city to connect over issues of common cause.
2. A **'Mentor'** approach to allow communities to guide and help organisations with low BAME representation to learn to be better with their own engagement. Ideally drawing mentors

from the full spectrum of communities.

In this we will try to be guided by the Commission's findings and will aim to learn, in partnership, how to encourage better connections between the diverse communities of the city.

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