

### **Member Champion: Equality and Diversity Annual Report 2015/2016**

I was pleased to take on the role of Member Champion for Equality & Diversity from Councillor Cecilia Love in October 2015. I was born in Bangladesh, but moved to Cardiff as a child and have lived in Cardiff for 38 years. I have found Wales a welcoming place, but recognise that people from various backgrounds and with protected characteristics face barriers and problems that can limit their wellbeing and participation in Cardiff's society.

So I wanted to focus my work as Member Champion on using the contacts that I have made to benefit people facing difficulties in their lives, and opening opportunities for them both individually and at a community level.

#### Diversity in Democracy

I have supported the Welsh Government's Diversity in Democracy Project, designed to bring about significant change in the diversity of people putting themselves forward for election, both at county and community level. I have attended the Project Steering Group, and its launch, and have enjoyed mentoring two Cardiff residents, one from the Pakistani community, and another from Bangladesh. Both had a real appetite to learn what was involved in being a Councillor, and I hope I was able to provide some insight based on my experience. One of these gentlemen is now actively seeking selection to stand as a candidate in the May 2017 Council elections.

#### Linking Communities with the Council

I have been fortunate through my work as a Councillor for Butetown to meet people from so many different ethnic and faith backgrounds. This for instance has given me the opportunity this year to help the Greek Orthodox Church and the Ward's two Mosques by securing permission for the communities to fund directional signs signposting people from Bute Street to their buildings.

I wanted to build connections between the Council and the city's different faith communities, and have spent a lot of time meeting different groups. I starting within my own faith of Islam, and have visited all of the city's Mosques to share worship and to meet the leaders and worshippers.

I have now begun to reach out to other faith communities, to make sure they feel included in the city's life, are well connected with Council services, and to see if there were any barriers or problems that those communities are facing.

This has put me in contact with Rev Aled Edwards, Chief Executive of Cytun, and I have attended the Interfaith Network on a number of occasions. I was delighted to attend the Interfaith Dinner at City Hall on Monday.

My most recent visit was to the Sanatan Mandal Hindu Temple in Lewis Road, Splott, where I was invited to attend a ceremony to bless the new deity idols

that the community had raised money to buy. I have also regularly visited the Samaj Centre in Grangetown. I wish to continue to develop my own understanding of other faiths, and have asked officers to explore further opportunities for me to meet faith groups I have yet to encounter.

### Countering Hate Crime

I have had a long relationship with Cardiff's PREVENT Team, and have been active this year supporting the PREVENT agenda to counter radicalisation of young Muslims.

Shortly after the Brexit Referendum in June, I was walking through Roath when a man racially abused me. At first I felt shocked and afraid, but quite soon I realised that many people from ethnic minority backgrounds, including my friend Ashley Govier, were also experiencing the same ignorance and hate. I felt that as Chair of United Against Fascism Wales and co-Chair of Stand Up To Racism Cardiff, I was in a position to stand up against this treatment, and have gone on record in the media to challenge racism.

I am pleased that there are robust partnership arrangements in place locally counter hate crime, and support victims, and that the Council, Police and Public Services Board partners have since Brexit commissioned a task and finish group to reinforce their efforts in this area.

### Supporting Homeless People

Charity is a very important part of Muslim culture. I have been networking with city Mosques and homeless charities like the Salvation Army to develop the principle of "Sharing Ramadan". Muslims like to give back to other faiths and communities during the holy month of Ramadan. I was pleased that several Members of this Council and the Chief Executive joined me in various Mosques to share the food we enjoy at the end of the daily fast.

For next year, I have arranged for local restaurants to sponsor free food at the Homeless Bus at least once a month. I also want us to follow some other cities who are building this into a very visible and significant project, helping support vulnerable people, but also spreading goodwill and understanding of the positive values of Islam that are often forgotten by the media.

**Councillor/ Cynghorydd Ali Ahmed**  
**October 2016**