

Community Empowerment and Support Initiatives (CESI)- UK  
Greenwich Nepalese / Gurkha Integration Project  
(Funded by The Big Lottery Fund- Reaching Communities)

**Report on  
Housing and Welfare Benefits Event**



*Venue: The Salvation Army Hall, Plumstead, London*

**February 26, 2014**

## **Section 1 Introduction**

A one day Housing and Welfare Benefits Workshop was organised on 26<sup>th</sup> of February 2014 at the Salvation Army Hall in Plumstead, London. This workshop was attended by 74 people (male 35 and female 39) from Nepalese/ Gurkha community people. The workshop was started at 10 AM and finished at 3 PM.

CESI organised this community consultation event for the Nepalese Gurkha people, as part of "Greenwich Nepalese Integration project" awarded by Big Lottery Fund - Reaching Communities. The community consultation event was organised to provide Nepalese people with an opportunity to discuss issues related to Housing and Welfare Benefits with the Statutory and Voluntary organisation officials.

The main speakers were:

1. Mr Bill Sheffield - Principle Allocation Officer (Housing), Royal Borough of Greenwich
2. Ms Betty Osibo - Principle Allocation Officer (Housing), Royal Borough of Greenwich
3. Ms Marion Meinnis - Team Manager-Adults & Old people centre, Adoption Department of the Royal Borough of Greenwich
4. Ms Caz Colclough - Housing Benefit Officer, Royal Borough of Greenwich

The event was facilitated by Arka Raj Timisina- Project Administrator of CESI.

### **Event Aims and Objectives:**

The main aims and objectives of the workshops were:

- to provide a forum for Nepalese people to air their views on the issues related to Housing and Welfare Benefits;
- to provide service of translator/interpreter to make participants fully understand their queries and concerns over issues raised;
- to encourage discussion and consideration of all viewpoints;
- to accurately record the response of event participants.

Agenda for the community event was prepared taking in to account that effective consultation/discussion should recognise that individuals will have different interests and concerns which they will want to explore and everyone should have the opportunity to express their views and have these recorded.

## **Section 2: Event Presentation**

Project Administrator gave a brief introduction and objectives of organising this event and also discussed the agenda for the event. It was also explained that a Question and Answer session would take place at the end of the presentation.

## Presentation session

### 1. Presentation by Betty Osibo:

Ms. Osibo presented an overview of the housing situation in the Borough. She mentioned Greenwich council owns over 20,000 houses to allocate to the most needy residence of the Borough in addition to several thousand property available through Housing Association to let out when vacant. She further mentioned last year, 1700 houses were vacant for which there were 16000 people on list.



*Ms. Osibo presenting about council housing allocation*

She said everyone has to register on housing list to apply for Council housing. This has to be done online. Once registered, they receive a reference number and suggested to keep it safe as a proof of their application for housing. In 4-6 weeks council sends a letter of confirmation and asks for further documents to check their status to qualify for Council house. The documents required are:

- proof of 5 year stay in this borough
- proof of ID
- proof of address

Once council has received the above documents they are allocated a BAND. Initially they are given a C band and later upgraded to B and A based on their circumstances. Now they are on the housing list and bid for suitable houses when council advertises vacant houses every week on Wednesday.

### 2. Presentation by Bill Sheffield:

Mr. Sheffield presented the process to bid for council housing. He said council advertises the vacant houses, including vacant houses from Housing Association in Greenwich Times and online. The bidding opens every week on Wednesday and closes on Sunday. They can bid for house using the following methods:

- by automated phone
- by the council web site
- by text phone.



*Bill presenting about housing allocation provisions*

If someone finds it difficult they can come to Woolwich Centre in library and council staff will help them in this regards.

Once bidding closes on Sunday the housing allocation team selects the bidders based on criteria and their priority list such as people with worst health conditions, homeless, overcrowded. Once selected they inform the successful bidders in 3-4 days and give them a time to view the property. If the property is suitable for them then they get the

house. He further mentioned that during application if someone is flexible in housing choices then they have greater chance to be successful compared to those who are rigid.

Question and Answers:

1. Is there any priority for ex-British Gurkha?.

Regarding the above question Mr. Sheffield said there was no any special rule for ex-British Gurkha. Council follows the rule and it applies for everyone. However if ex-British Gurkha retires recently within five years, then they do not have to spend five years living in this borough to be eligible to apply for Council house.

2. If someone is living on council house and wants to move in another council house as the current accommodation is not enough/appropriate for them.

Relating to this question Mr. Sheffield replied they need to register again on housing list and follow all the bidding process.

3. Presentation by Ms. Caz Colclough:

To start with Ms. Caz asked the participants - what do they know about housing benefits?.

The participants seemed quite clear as they said council benefits included house rent and council tax.

Ms. Caz further explained that the council pays house rent and council tax to eligible people irrespective of their types of accommodation (council house or private house) and they do not need to be in this borough for five years to be eligible for the benefits. She also informed the participants to tell this message to their friends who are not present here and in case of any issues come to Council office on any Monday at 1 pm and their issues will be resolved.



*Ms. Caz explaining about housing benefit issues*

Questions and Answers:

1. The housing benefits given by council is not enough to pay the rent while living in private house. we have to add extra money to pay the house rent.

Ms. Caz clarified that Council had its own criteria for house rent and it applied to everyone. However, she asked them to come and see her if she can do something to sort it out.

2. one of the participants Mr. Tek Bahadur Pun said he visited the council two times to solve his issues related to housing but it was not yet done.

Relating to his issues she noted his name in her diary and asked him to come and see her on Monday and she will try to sort it out.

#### 4. Ms Marion Meinnis

Ms. Marion presented the overall objectives and scope of work of Greenwich Social care service. She informed that to be eligible to this service they must register to their local GP. In case of any social care help the GP will make a referral case to us and we will contact you and help you out. She also informed that they can directly call them and we can assess their situation and provide help. She mentioned the areas where they can help include the following:

- Health needs
- Social care needs
- Help with daily living- washing, prepare food, feeding etc.
- Help with mental health issues
- Help with drunken alcohol issues

In case of fall and broken arms they provide help for Reablement for 6 weeks to help with washing and clothing/dressing. She further mentioned that they also provide Telecare. It is a 24 hours service. Pandem is provided to them. In case of emergency care (such as fall or any other physical problems) for elderly people who are alone in house, they can just press the pandem and this will directly contact to concerned department and somebody will immediately attend them and provide help needed. She gave the office phone number to participants and asked them to contact in case of any social care needs. At the end she made appointment of two people namely Mr. Krishna Bahadur Gurung and Tek Bahadur Gurung to see her. She also informed participants when they come to council on Monday, she can also be available to see them if they have issues related to social care.



## **Section 4                      Participant's Views - Feedback and Analysis**

This section records the results of participant's views and feed back of the event.

As noted in question and answer session, there was a good deal of discussion particularly during the discussion sessions and it was very encouraging to see so many points of view aired, reflecting different opinions of the local community.

At the end of the event a feedback form was distributed to participants, 60 of which were returned.

In general most of participants found the event interesting and useful. Some remarked on the lack of time and the need for more detailed information on a variety of issues.

### **4.1    General comments:**

"I am encouraged that you are working towards building a better community -keep going"

"This is the first event of this kind organised for Nepalese Community- very useful"

"We need to have such kind of event organised on a regular basis"

"CESI should do some programmes/activities to improve the life of Nepalese elderly and also for youth and women"

# ***Event Schedule***

February 26, 2014

## **“Housing and Welfare Benefits”**

### **Programme**

10.00 - 10.30	Participants Registration and Tea/Coffee
10.30 - 10.35	Welcome to the participants and Objectives of the programme– Mr. Laxman Sah
10.35 - 11.05	Presentation by Mr. Betty Osibo, Principal Allocation Officer, Royal Borough of Greenwich
11.05 - 11.25	Open Discussion
11.25 - 11.55	Presentation by Bill Sheffield, Principal Allocation Officer, Royal Borough of Greenwich
11.55 - 12.15	Open Discussion
12.15 -12.45	Presentation by Caz Colclough, Training Officer, Housing and welfare benefits, Royal Borough of Greenwich
12.45- 13.05	Open Discussion
13.05 - 13.35	Presentation by Mariam....., Assisting Team Manager, Adult and Older people services, Greenwich Social Services
13.35 - 14.00	Open Discussion
14.00 - 14.15	Programme Evaluation
14.15 - 15.00	Lunch