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Minority Viewpoint: Capturing Ethnic Minority Voices in Renfrewshire

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Abstract

The research reported in this paper is an abridged version of a study exploring the views of ethnic minority communities in Renfrewshire. The study provided a voice to these communities in relation to their awareness of Renfrewshire Council's services and initiatives targeting ethnic minority groups. The study also surveyed the extent to which ethnic minorities engage with ethnic minority organisations designed to support their needs, the challenges they face and how they feel they are viewed by the indigenous 'white' community. Based on a series of focus groups, the findings reveal a lack of awareness among participants of Council services and initiatives aimed at ethnic minority communities. There is a varied level of engagement with ethnic minority voluntary and third sector organisations, a range of challenges including language barriers, perceived and actual racism, and some apprehension as to how ethnic minority groups are perceived by the indigenous white community. There are implications for key stakeholders such as the Council and others who should review their policies and practices to ensure that the needs and concerns of ethnically diverse communities in Renfrewshire are being addressed.

Keywords: Ethnic minorities; diversity; integration; service provision; refugees; Renfrewshire

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Introduction and contextual background

Like many regions of the UK, where big towns and cities are located, Renfrewshire has witnessed an increase in the ethnic diversity of its population, especially over the past decade (Payton, 2016). Factors contributing to this include the arrival of refugees and asylum seekers, most recently from Syria under the UK government's resettlement policy (Full Fact, 2018), economic migrants particularly from EU countries such as Poland, and students from outside the UK including from the Indian-subcontinent and Africa. In addition, the rise in the birth rate among settled and UK-born ethnic minority communities and the resettlement of ethnic minorities from other parts of both Scotland and the rest of the UK, have also played a role in Renfrewshire's increasing racial and ethnic diversity (Renfrewshire Council, 2015).

The most reliable data on the size of Renfrewshire's ethnic minority population comes from Scotland's Census. The 2001 Census identified Renfrewshire's ethnic minority population to be 1.2% (NRS, 2018). The 2011 Census shows that this has more than doubled to 2.7% (NRS, 2018). Whilst no current official data exists providing a more up to date picture of Renfrewshire's level of ethnic diversity, there is general agreement based on anecdotal evidence, observation and accounts from ethnic minority organisations that have emerged in Renfrewshire over the past few years, that the number of people from ethnic minority communities has increased further since 2011 and this is likely to be reflected in the results from the next Census due in 2022 (WSREC, 2019).

Despite the increase in Renfrewshire's ethnic and racial diversity as recorded in the last census exercise, the area's ethnic minority population of around 2.7% is below the national average of around 4% (NRS, 2018). However, it should be noted that in the census, there were people who identified themselves as 'White non-British' who would not be considered as belonging to an ethnic minority group, as this group is usually defined as those who are non-white. This would include people from Europe such as Polish and other European nationalities. In this research, this white non-British category has been included to broaden the definition of ethnic minority to include both 'visible' and 'invisible' ethnic minority groups such as the Polish. Further exploration of the census data in relation to Renfrewshire reveals that the number of people of Polish origin (0.7%), of Asian origin (1.9%), and those identifying as 'other' ethnic group (1%) is below the average for Scotland for each of these groups (NRS, 2018). Another indicator that Renfrewshire's ethnic diversity is below the Scottish average can also be seen in census data which reveals that those identifying themselves as 'White Scottish' (91.3%) is higher than the national average for this group at 84% (NRS, 2018).

It is difficult to ascertain the future demographic profile of Renfrewshire in terms of the ethnic makeup of the population. This is because not all ethnic minorities living in Renfrewshire, visible or invisible, are likely to represent long term stayers. This is particularly the case with refugees, those seeking asylum, and students undertaking university and college courses. The 2011 Census data shows that of the 7,496 people living in Renfrewshire who were born outside the UK, more than half (53%) had been resident in the UK for less than 10 years (NRS, 2018). Notwithstanding the relatively low ethnic diversity of the Renfrewshire area, even allowing for the inclusion of ‘invisible’ ethnic groups such as the Polish, the presence of ethnic minority groups has implications for service provision, integration and community cohesion. However, at present there is a distinct lack of an evidence base as to what the growing population of ethnic minorities think about life in Renfrewshire and about the services provided by the Council and other service providers. Whilst the lack of evidence on what ethnic minority communities think about these issues may not be unique to Renfrewshire and the dearth of knowledge in this respect is evidence of this, nevertheless exploring the views of Renfrewshire’s ethnic minority communities may give us an insight and is a useful starting point. This research therefore attempts to address that gap by providing a voice for both ‘visible’ and ‘invisible’ ethnic minorities residing in Renfrewshire. Through planned focus groups with participants from a cross section of ethnic minority groups, the research explores views and perceptions held by Renfrewshire’s ethnic minorities. The value of this research is to provide a qualitative evidence base for Renfrewshire’s policymakers to help them target support and resources more optimally and prevent the marginalisation of ethnic minority communities through enhanced engagement with services and community life. The findings may also prove to be of value to other councils where ethnic minority communities reside. Coordination between Scotland’s local councils may therefore prove useful as part of a national approach to the issue.

Review of literature

Previous studies aimed at capturing the experiences of ethnic minority communities in the UK have tended to focus primarily on the views of refugees and asylum seekers or on perceptions of services in specific sectors such as health and social care (see King’s Fund, 2006; Spicer, 2010; Murphy and Vieten, 2017). Most of these have been in relation to other parts of the UK such as England and Northern Ireland. Although relatively limited, there have been some studies featuring the views of ethnic minorities based in Scotland. These studies have principally focused on Scotland as a whole or on areas which have the greatest ethnic diversity

in Scotland such as Glasgow and Edinburgh rather than areas like Renfrewshire where ethnic diversity is relatively modest (see Simpson and Parsons, 2016). Some noticeable research undertaken within an overall Scottish context over the past twenty years or so include the work of Hussain and Miller (2006) which explored the views of ethnic Pakistanis and English immigrants on the issues of devolution and nationalism. It found that devolution was more acceptable to ethnic minorities who believed it had made Scotland less xenophobic. Meer's study into multinationalism and multiculturalism examines where Scotland's ethnic minorities fit within the debate on nationhood and warns of the need to ensure that minorities are not excluded by the political elite in such discussions (2015). More recently, *New Scots* edited by Devine and McCarthy (2018) provides an historical overview of Scotland's immigrant communities and concludes that Scotland has successfully absorbed immigrants from a variety of cultures since 1945, aided greatly by their participation and engagement in various sectors of employment.

Methodology

The research deployed a qualitative approach as the aim was to elicit the perceptions of ethnic minority participants based in Renfrewshire. As stated earlier, both those classed as 'visible' and 'invisible' ethnic minorities were targeted. Although the research intended to gauge the views of ethnic minority groups in Renfrewshire, evidence from ethnic minority third sector organisations based in Renfrewshire and the 2011 census data (NRS, 2018) suggest that the majority of ethnic minorities appear to reside in the town of Paisley which is the biggest town in Renfrewshire. This is not surprising as other research shows that ethnic minorities often choose to reside in the cities and big towns of the UK and it is also where those seeking asylum and refugee status are often housed (Cocco and Endley, 2014). Therefore, the distribution of ethnic minority communities across Renfrewshire is partly based on choice and partly on government policy.

Participants for the focus groups were recruited through a combination of the researchers' contacts among Renfrewshire's ethnic minority communities and through established voluntary organisations set up specifically for ethnic minority communities in Renfrewshire. These include RENPA (Renfrewshire Polish Association) and REEM (Renfrewshire Effort to Empower Minorities). Liaison with these organisations allowed would-be participants using the services of these organisations to be made aware of the research and indicate whether they

would be willing to take part. Those who outlined their interest in participating were provided with a participant information sheet highlighting the purpose of the research and why their participation would be of value. The information sheet also outlined the voluntary nature of the research and the right of participants to withdraw at any point. The researchers contacted interested participants directly to arrange a suitable time and place to conduct the focus groups. During this process, the researchers were able to establish whether an interpreter would be needed. It was established that all participants from the Polish, Black-Afro Caribbean and Indian-subcontinent communities had sufficient proficiency in the English language to be able to take part in the focus groups without the need for an interpreter. However, it was noted that participants for the Syrian focus group would require the services of an Arab interpreter. This interpreter was recruited from the University of the West of Scotland who was fluent in Arabic. Every effort was made by the researchers to ensure that the profile of participants was reflective of the various age-groups, gender and professions based on those who indicated their willingness to participate. In total four focus groups were conducted. The researchers acknowledge that there were some groups who were difficult to reach and who were less responsive to the request for participation. These primarily included members of the Roma community and other ‘invisible’ ethnic minorities mainly from Eastern Europe but excluding Poland. Table 1 illustrates the sample size and gender profile of participants across the focus groups.

Table 1 about here

The study, which was undertaken prior to the pandemic, was given ethical approval by the lead researcher’s institution via its ethical approval process. The ethics application highlighted the safeguards that would be taken to ensure confidentiality, anonymity, dignity, respect and the need to obtain informed consent before the focus groups could be conducted.

Findings

In this section, the key findings from the focus groups are reported that are of relevance to the ethnic minority groups who participated in this research (see Appendix for themes explored in the focus groups). Issues of a generic nature were covered in the broader report that was submitted to Renfrewshire Council (Ishaq, 2018). When quoting, each focus group participant is identified by their gender and a number (e.g. ‘male participant 1’) to distinguish between participants whilst simultaneously protecting their identity. Quotes from the Syrian focus group

participants who answered in Arabic have been translated with the help of the interpreter who was recruited to undertake this role and who was also present at the focus group.

Awareness of services/initiatives implemented by Renfrewshire Council

Renfrewshire Council has been involved in the provision of various services and the adoption of initiatives targeting ethnic minority communities residing in the Council area. However, participants in three of the four focus groups were unaware of these services and initiatives. This was the case with the Black Afro-Caribbean, Polish and Indian-subcontinent focus groups. In the Polish focus group, none of the participants were aware of any initiatives or events arranged by the Council to support ethnic minority communities. A couple of the participants said that the only time they became aware of events was through RENPA, an organisation specifically set up to look after the needs of Polish people in Renfrewshire. Among the Black Afro-Caribbean focus group there was no one who was aware of any initiatives. A similar picture was painted by participants from the Indian-subcontinent focus group. Participants from the Syrian focus groups were the only ones who were aware of events and support provided by the Council. However, this was because they were given access to a dedicated support team as they were classed as refugees arriving under the government resettlement scheme.

Engagement with ethnic minority organisations in Renfrewshire

A number of third sector voluntary organisations have emerged in Renfrewshire over the past eight years with the specific remit of providing support to ethnic minority communities. As part of their service provision, these organisations are able to arrange interpreting and translating services which have proved very beneficial for those with language issues.

Focus group participants were asked about their awareness of these organisations and the extent to which they had engaged with them. In the Polish focus group, all participants had heard of RENPA and most had made use of its services. The following participant alluded to her positive experience of RENPA:

RENPA brings the Polish community together so you feel more comfortable and welcoming

(Polish focus group, female participant 1).

Four of the six participants had also heard of REEM but had never used its services. In the Syrian focus group, none of the participants were aware of the existence of ethnic minority organisations in Renfrewshire such as REEM or RENPA. They stated that the support team from the Council was whom they turned to if they needed any help or support. As a result, they

had no need to look into the existence of other support mechanisms as their needs were already being catered for. Among the Black Afro-Caribbean focus group respondents, all had heard of REEM as it was run by individuals from the Black Afro-Caribbean community, although its purpose was to serve all ethnic minorities. Male participant 2 who had arrived in Renfrewshire recently stated:

... when I met (reference to a fellow ethnic minority person) he took me to REEM, since then I come to know REEM . this is better for me ... they are marvellous

(Black Afro-Caribbean focus group).

Female participant 1 added that ethnic minority organisations faced hurdles such as lack of funding and resources yet they were very important:

... these groups are like the frontline services for the diverse minority groups

(Black Afro-Caribbean focus group, female participant 1).

Another organisation serving the needs of the Black-African Caribbean community in Renfrewshire is the African Association. Male participant 1 pointed out that there was a role for all such organisations:

Personally I think there is very much a need because the African Association cannot do everything on their own, REEM cannot do everything on their own

(Black Afro-Caribbean focus group).

Apart from the Syrian refugees, the participants from the Indian sub-continent were the least engaged with ethnic minority organisations and none were aware of the existence of REEM or similar organisations. As noted earlier, there are a number of other ethnic minority communities which this research was unable to reach but who were known to some of the ethnic minority organisations as there had been some limited engagement with them. Male participant 1 from the Black Afro Caribbean focus group - who volunteers for groups that help ethnic minority communities - noted a major challenge was trying to get all ethnic minority communities to engage with services and thereby ascertain their needs effectively.

Perceptions of challenges faced on a daily basis

In terms of challenges or issues encountered that could be construed as being specific to ethnic minority communities, the Polish group did not identify any such as issues. In contrast, participants from the other three focus groups made reference to a number of challenges they faced on a regular basis. Participants from the Syrian focus group raised several concerns. These included, feeling isolated and unable to fully integrate with the wider community. The language barrier and lack of association with the Scottish culture perpetuated those concerns.

The language barrier in particular was preventing participants from communicating and engaging with locals and hence unable to feel fully integrated within the community. There was also reference to the lack of shops that provided *halal* food to cater for the dietary needs of Syrian refugees. The following comments from Syrian participants highlight the issues identified:

... because we are all living in a kind of compound with other Syrians we are not really benefiting as everyone speaks the same language ... we are not therefore able to become accustomed to the culture and are not integrating in any way

(Syrian focus group, male participant 1).

... being homesick and trying to get used to the Scottish environment was a key issue ... I can't find any halal food'

(Syrian focus group, female participant 1).

Male participant 2 stated:

Some Scottish people do say 'hi' in the streets but we can't respond and socialise with them because of the language barrier

(Syrian focus group).

Overall, the Syrian participants, whilst appreciative of the support they had received from the Council, agreed that being dependent on the Council for everything was counterproductive because when they are required to leave their temporary accommodation they will have to be self-sufficient and independent but fear that they will not be able to cope.

In the Black Afro-Caribbean focus group, communication problems faced by ethnic minority people when using services was a major issue muted by participants. This was of most concern to participants of African descent rather than Caribbean as the former had less proficiency in English than their Caribbean counterparts. The issue of communication and language was raised by female participant 2 who also outlined the problem of getting access to translating services. Male participant 3 identified the language barrier and the different cultures given the diversity of Africa:

There is language barriers and cultural differences ...people have come from different countries. I've worked with people from Somalia, from Egypt and Libya, they all have different cultures

(Black African-Caribbean focus group).

Some of the participants from the Indian sub-continent focus group echoed the views of Syrian participants in relation to lack of access to shops that provided *halal* food to meet the dietary

needs of ethnic minorities of Muslim origin residing in Renfrewshire. The following comment highlighted this point:

The food, I feel some difficulty if I'm being honest when I try to get halal food. There is no ethnic shop

(Indian Sub-continent focus group, male participant 2).

Participants' views on how they are perceived by the indigenous/'white' community

Participants in each of the focus groups were asked about how they felt they were perceived by the indigenous 'white' community. Although Polish participants did not identify any specific challenges related to their ethnicity as reported above, interestingly they did feel that they were viewed differently because they belonged to an ethnic minority group. Even although they would be classed as an invisible ethnic minority group as they would be categorised as 'white', they did experience bullying and verbal harassment when they spoke the Polish language, as highlighted by the following comments:

Female participant 4:

I went to catch some wi-fi to the local pub and the guy heard that I speak Polish via Skype with my family and he started to yell and shout that go back to your country
(Polish focus group).

Male participant 1 also shared his experience:

When I was working at Pizza Hut I was at the counter serving the customers and one customer, a woman, mocked me about my way of speaking and told me to go back to Poland and said many bad things

(Polish focus group).

In the case of the Syrian focus group, there were mixed experiences. Male participant 2 stated that he had not personally experienced racism as he stays in the temporary accommodation provided but he had heard from friends who had left the accommodation that:

... they received mail telling them to behave in a certain kind of way as they were now in Scotland

(Syrian focus group).

Female participant 1 in the Syrian focus group commented that she and other Syrian people were more conscious of their identity and ethnicity when they went out, especially when venturing out as a group. She cited people staring and giving 'funny looks'. This was more blatant when the women went out together with female participant 2 adding that this was

probably because the females all wore headscarves and this attracted unwanted attention. Cultural differences also prevented the opportunity to integrate because Syrian people are primarily Muslim and do not consume alcohol and eat only *halal* meat.

Black African Caribbean participants had mixed views on how they were viewed by the ‘white’ community. These views were shaped to an extent by whether they had faced racism or racial discrimination. Female respondent 2 had never personally encountered racism despite having been here for more than ten years. She felt that complaints from other Black Afro-Caribbean people about being racially discriminated against was often based on perceptions of the service they had received from a service user. In contrast male respondent 3 stated:

I've had examples of racism and I've managed to deal with it in the past ... racism is racism, it's not something that is going to go away today

(Black Afro Caribbean focus group).

Participants from the Indian sub-continent focus group stated that they had not faced any major discrimination and did not feel they were perceived differently because of their race or ethnicity. However, this was more down to the participants in this group having either been born in Renfrewshire or been resident in the area for a substantially long period of time. Male participant 4 who had been brought up in Renfrewshire and had lived there all his life said he could not think of any occasion where he had been treated differently or abused ‘aside from the odd drunk customer’ who used his shop. Female participant 2 shared this sentiment and said:

I don't have any problems with people...they are very helpful ... even when I am walking I talk to them ... they are very good

(Indian sub-continent focus group).

Discussion

The views captured in this research raise a number of issues faced by ethnic minorities residing in Renfrewshire. The findings reveal that participants from all focus groups, except the Syrian focus group, were not fully aware of the services provided by Renfrewshire Council that targeted ethnic minority communities. This supports previous research in England which revealed a similar lack of awareness of local services among ethnic minority groups (SCIE, 2009). The Polish, Indian sub-continent and Black Afro-Caribbean participants also indicated that there was a lack of communication from the Council and that the Council was not very

effective at making communities aware of services on offer. This concurs with Chahal who found a desire among ethnic minority groups for more information from service providers (2004). It is clear from the focus groups that ethnic minority communities had little or no awareness of specific initiatives implemented by the Council to support them. It was only through the work of ethnic minority voluntary or third sector organisations like REEM and RENPA that particular initiatives and events had come to light.

The importance of managing service delivery to ethnic minority groups has been well documented in the work of Collier (1998) whilst the challenges of delivering public services to diverse communities was noted by research conducted by the National Audit Office (2004). The Syrian participants were an exception in this research because as new arrivals they had been allocated a support team who provided them with the necessary information. There is a wider implication here that the Council must do more to engage with other ethnic minorities who do not have access to support teams. Research conducted into service delivery to ethnic minority groups in Northern Ireland and Scotland has already demonstrated that increased engagement with minority ethnic communities is essential for improving the uptake of services (CCBS, 2006).

The results of the focus group reveal a contrasting picture of awareness and engagement with ethnic minority organisations based in Renfrewshire. Whilst the Black Afro-Caribbean and Polish participants were most aware of ethnic minority organisations, the Syrian and Indian sub-continent participants were least aware. This had a direct impact on levels of engagement with the Syrian and Indian sub-continent indicating negligible engagement with such organisations. In the case of the Syrian participants it should be stressed that the lack of engagement may simply be down to those participants' needs being adequately catered for via the Council's support team referred to earlier. Longer term there is a concern that once the Syrian refugees in Renfrewshire do not have access to the support team - as this team is only available for a specified time period - they may be left on their own unless they are made aware of the existence of ethnic minority organisations. The experience of the Syrian refugees in terms of having access to a support team contrasts with the experience of refugees in other parts of the UK which has revealed a greater reliance on voluntary organisations and a lack of a formal coordinated support service to help refugees during their initial period of arrival in the UK (Doyle, 2014). The work of Black and Ethnic Minorities Infrastructure in Scotland (BEMIS) recognises the important role that ethnic minority voluntary and third sector

organisations can play in supporting and empowering diverse communities (2010). It is clear from this research that some groups are missing out on support from these organisations.

Respondents in all the focus groups identified specific challenges including the language barrier, feeling of isolation and the lack of retail facilities including shops catering for the dietary needs of some of the Indian sub-continent community and Syrian refugees. The challenges cited by the Syrian and Indian sub-continent participants were also noted in a study of refugees conducted in the Yorkshire and Humber region (Dwyer, 2009). There has been much debate in the UK about the importance of all ethnic groups gaining proficiency in speaking English (Foges, 2017). In this research, participants from the Syrian focus group highlighted their lack of proficiency in English as a key challenge in their attempts to integrate. This was a message relayed during the focus group via an interpreter and via a refugee participant who had some proficiency in English. Indeed, the lack of language skills as a contributory factor in less favourable outcomes for new migrants and refugees was noted in a study of successful approaches to integration by the Centre on Migration, Policy and Society (see COMPAS, 2006).

Participants' views on how they were perceived by the indigenous community revealed that some individuals from the ethnic minority groups represented in the focus groups had experienced actual or perceived racial discrimination either from the general public and from both service users and service providers. This concurs with previous studies of minority ethnic groups which have highlighted similar experiences (Hussain and Miller, 2006). Some of the Polish participants had faced direct racism from young people especially when they were heard speaking in their mother tongue. In the case of the Syrian refugees most of the perceived racism was based on their opinion that they were viewed differently as witnessed in the body language of members of the white community. The racism therefore was more 'perceived' rather than actual. Syrian female participants were more conscious of being seen 'differently' due to how they dressed. The importance of ensuring that there are adequate mechanisms in place to help refugees integrate has received widespread attention in recent years (see Hale, 2016). Indeed, in 2013, the Scottish Government outlined 'a strategy which provides a clear framework to support the integration of refugees and asylum seekers to rebuild their lives in Scotland and make a full contribution to society' (Scottish Government, 2013).

Limitations

It is acknowledged that this research is based on what is a fairly modest sample size. However, this was essentially a scoping study, exploratory in nature, and such studies are often based on

small samples (see Saunders, 2018). Furthermore, it should be stressed that ethnic minorities in the UK traditionally have lower rates of participation in research and that access to such communities, especially where these communities are relatively small in number is challenging. It is hoped that this study will be a precursor to greater engagement with Renfrewshire's ethnic minority communities by the Council and other organisations in order to determine their needs. The research therefore represents a useful platform that affords a voice to ethnic minority communities in Renfrewshire, an area not traditionally synonymous with ethnic diversity.

Conclusions and recommendations

This research has provided a platform for Renfrewshire's main visible and invisible ethnic minority communities to express their views on key themes such as awareness of Council services and initiatives designed to support them, level of engagement with ethnic minority organisations, challenges encountered, and perceptions of how they are viewed by the 'white' local community. Given the increasing ethnic diversity of Renfrewshire, this research is a pivotal opportunity for key stakeholders such as the Council and other service providers to shape their policies and practices to ensure that the needs of diverse communities are being catered for. Whilst Renfrewshire has lower percentages of minority ethnic groups than the Scottish average, and most of its inward migration comes from other areas of Scotland and the UK, nevertheless the documented increase in the overall number of ethnic minority individuals who have come to Renfrewshire over the past decade or so has implications for community cohesion, integration and for service providers. The Council's own research revealed that 'minority ethnic community groups often struggle to sustain themselves without adequate support particularly in areas like Renfrewshire where minority ethnic communities are perceived to be small' (Renfrewshire Council, 2013).

Whilst there are already statutory requirements on public sector organisations such as local councils to address equality and diversity issues, this research has highlighted shortcomings that require attention. In the light of the findings and limitations of the research, what recommendations should be considered? What should be recommended for policy and practice going forward? What subsequent research might be of benefit? Whilst the recommendations discussed below are aimed primarily at Renfrewshire Council, there may also be lessons for other councils in Scotland to take on board and indeed for other stakeholders including the Scottish Government.

Although the focus groups in this research are representative of most ethnic minority communities in Renfrewshire, there were still some groups whom it was not possible to gain access to or who did not engage with this research. Renfrewshire Council, policymakers and researchers should aim to engage with such communities so that they can ascertain their needs effectively and prevent the marginalisation of these groups. The Council in particular would benefit in terms of more effective planning of resources if they could establish the needs of all groups.

Educational authorities in Renfrewshire should provide cultural awareness classes to children at an early age so that they can learn about the rich and growing cultural, racial and ethnic diversity of Renfrewshire. This could be further facilitated through more community events where the indigenous white community and ethnic minority groups can interact and gain a greater understanding of each other's cultures and values.

Given the language barrier cited by some participants in this research and the well documented role that language can play in helping to facilitate the integration of ethnic minorities communities into mainstream society (Foges, 2017; Morrice *et al.*, 2019), the Council should look at ways to improve the provision of English classes to ethnic minority communities.

There are also implications for ethnic minority organisations both in Renfrewshire and across other Scottish Council areas which need to make greater efforts to target those groups not engaging with their services. More outreach work is required in this respect and local councils should provide more targeted support to such organisations to help build capacity.

The Council should consider how it communicates with ethnic minority communities and what steps it can take to raise awareness of any initiatives or activities that are implemented for the benefit of such communities.

Overall, all councils should demonstrate commitment to the race equality agenda by protecting their work in this area from the impact of austerity and the current pandemic which are likely to place financial pressures on budgets.

Although the central focus of this research was the area of Renfrewshire, there are implications for other council areas in Scotland as the findings draw attention to issues that can emerge in relation to ethnic and racial minority groups. Whilst this research was conducted prior to the pandemic, Covid-19 has highlighted the inequalities and disadvantages experienced by ethnic minority groups across both Scotland and the UK as a whole (Razai *et al.*, 2021). As a result, there is even more responsibility on both local and national governments to implement policy approaches to address racial inequalities and social exclusion and advance the equalities agenda

and help realise the much-publicised Scottish government backed campaign: ‘One Scotland, many cultures’ (Scottish Executive, 2005).

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Appendix – Focus group schedule/prompts

1. Awareness of services/initiatives implemented by Renfrewshire Council to support ethnic minority communities
2. Awareness of and engagement with ethnic minority organisations in Renfrewshire
3. Perceptions of main challenges faced on a regular basis
4. Views on how ethnic minorities in Renfrewshire are viewed by the indigenous/ ‘white’ community?

Table 1: Sample size and gender of respondents by focus group

Focus group	Sample size	Gender	
		Male	Female
Polish	6	2	4
Syrian	7	3	4
Black Afro-Caribbean	5	3	2
Indian sub-continent	6	4	2
Total	24	12	12