

2022

Bristol Muslim Conference Report

**BMSLG**
Bristol Muslim Strategic
Leadership Group

Bristol, North Somerset
and South Gloucestershire
Integrated Care Board

IN PERSON

2022
**BRISTOL
MUSLIM
CONFERENCE**

A face-to-face conference designed to bring together Muslim communities and leaders around Bristol for increased engagement in understanding the issues facing Muslims.

The conference will discuss major issues facing Bristol's Muslim communities such as the cost of living crisis, tackling islamophobia, environmental challenges and how Muslim communities can work together to support our local communities.

Contact us: info@bmslg.org

Location:
Enterprise Park One
(Near MOD roundabout, follow signs for HP Estate)
Long Down, Stoke Gifford, BS34 8RB
FREE PARKING

**SATURDAY,
OCTOBER 15TH**
11AM - 4PM
LUNCH IS PROVIDED

Speakers:

- Asher Craig, Deputy Mayor
- Sarah Crew, A&S Chief Constable
- Museji Ahmed Takolia CBE, CoRE

GUEST SPEAKER



**ZARA MOHAMMED,
MCB SECRETARY GENERAL**

THE CONFERENCE WILL INCLUDE

**KEYNOTE SESSION**

**WORKSHOPS**

**ART EXHIBITION**
(featuring local Muslim artists)

REGISTRATION:
[BIT.LY/BMSLGCONFERENCE](https://bit.ly/bmslgconference)

Organised by the Bristol Muslim Strategic
Leadership Group (BMSLG)

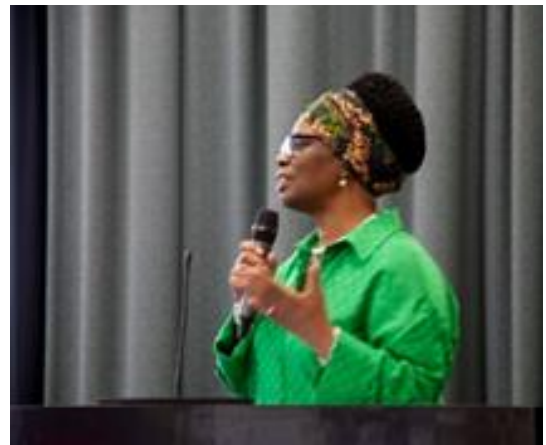
INTRODUCTION

The 2nd of our Bristol Muslim Strategy Conferences was held on the 15th of October 2022. This followed on the success of our first conference in May 2021, which was held by Zoom due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

The previous conference report noted, Muslims have been part of the fabric of Bristol for many decades. Muslims are the third largest religion group in Bristol and include 31,776 people, which is 6.7% of the populations in Bristol and like the England and Wales average of 6.5%. The Muslim population in Bristol has increased from 5.1% in 2011 to 6.7% in 2021. ***See www.bristol.gov.uk/statistics.** The latest census will tell us more about Bristol's Muslim communities.



In the meantime, however much of our concerns remain the same. The statistics¹ on the outcomes for Muslims does not make good reading. For example, only 17.9% Muslims are in full time employment than the Bristol average (36.6%). Muslims also have a lower proportion of people in managerial and professional occupations (19.8%) than the city average (43.8%). Furthermore, almost a quarter (23%) of Muslims have never worked or are long-term unemployed (Bristol average 5.5%). Many Muslims (44.4%) live in social rented accommodation, a higher proportion than the population as a whole (19.6%). People from Muslim backgrounds are increasingly in need of mental health and psychological services but struggling to access it. This is only set to get even worse with the current cost of living crisis.



¹ See www.bristol.gov.uk/statistics

It is for these reasons that we feel it is imperative for members across Bristol's diverse Muslim communities and our partners to come together to discuss how we can take a strategic partnership approach to tackling some of these issues. The object of the conference is to build on the work done with the local partners and stakeholders to create a positive change for the Muslims in Bristol.

Page | 2

The Conference was well attended at over 72 delegates with a diversity of different Muslim communities, sectors and partners present to discuss the key issues of concern for Bristol's Muslim communities.

Guest speakers included:

- ❖ Asher Craig (Deputy Mayor of Bristol)
- ❖ Zara Mohammed (Secretary General, Muslim Council of Britain MCB)
- ❖ Superintendent Mark Runacres (Area Commander, Avon & Somerset Police)
- ❖ Museji A. Takolia CBE, Chair of Bristol Commission for Race Equality (CoRE).

Workshops

A range of Workshops were organised to discuss some of the key issues of importance to Muslims in Bristol today including:

1. the cost-of-living crisis.
2. breaking the silos when working with communities
3. environmental issues
4. tackling islamophobia and hate crime
5. promoting healthy living

Each Workshop generated a list of action points to take forward.

Art Exhibition

The conference also included an impressive Muslim Art Gallery displaying the works of local Muslim artists, and featured performances from Omari Douglas, a local Muslim comedian and Muneera Pilgrim. an upcoming Muslim poet.

Stakeholders

Partner stakeholders, such as the Bristol City Council, the NHS, Avon and Somerset Police and SARI all had stalls for information and communication.



CONFERENCE AGENDA

Welcome and Introductions

Page | 3

Introduction and aims for the Conference.

- Introduction – Bristol Muslim Strategic Leadership Group (BMSLG) members – Professor Adeela Ahmed Shafi and Sakariye Syedomer
- Cllr. Asher Craig, Deputy Mayor of Bristol
- Zara Mohammed – Secretary General, Muslim Council of Britain MCB
- Superintendent Mark Runacres, Area Commander, A&S Police
- Museji A. Takolia CBE, Chair of Bristol Commission for Race Equality (CoRE)

Breakout Rooms and Workshops

Cost of living crisis - where individuals will explore the cost-of-living crisis and its impact on ethnic and religious minorities.

Breaking the silos - this workshop follows up from the first conference last year by BMSLG. It involves looking into increased collaborative work between the different communities in Bristol.

Environmental issues - here we will look at what we can do as Muslims to help the environment and appreciate the impact individuals have on it.

Tackling Islamophobia and hate crime - this workshop will be led by SARI, BMSLG Police Task Group and by Avon and Somerset. It seeks to equip those who attend with information and skillsets that help tackle islamophobia and hate crime.

Promoting healthy living - this workshop navigates a few issues ranging from mental health, carer fatigue and strain, and both healthy living and happiness.



Creative Session

- Poetry by Muneera Pilgrim
- Comedy sketch by Omari Douglas

Speakers Summaries

Cllr. Asher Craig, Deputy Mayor of Bristol

Page | 4



Deputy Mayor Craig Asher thanked the BMSLG for holding the Muslim conference as Muslims are an important part of the community. She encouraged Muslims to build on the strong relationships that BMSLG have developed to ensure that Muslims get access to all services available from the council.

Zara Mohammed – Secretary General, Muslim Council of Britain MCB



Zara Mohammed, the first female Secretary General of the Muslim Council of Britain (MCB) reaffirmed the MCB's commitment to advocating for British Muslim communities. A primary focus of MCB's efforts is to lobby the Government for improved measures to address the pervasive and systemic issue of Islamophobia. Zara urged Muslims to actively participate in public life, correspond with their MPs, and ensure their voices are heard on important matters. The MCB will continue collaborating with civil society, Muslim organizations, and decision-makers to foster a more inclusive and beneficial society for all.

Superintendent Mark Runacres, Area Commander, A&S Police



Superintendent Mark Runacres thanked the BMSLG for organising the Muslim conference and the work the BMSLG group have been doing with partners like the A&S Police to raise the issues facing the Muslim community. Mark also acknowledged the BMSLG for developing the Police survey to get better understanding of what the Muslim community thinks about the A&S Police and encouraged all Muslims in Bristol to complete the survey.

Museji A. Takolia CBE, Chair of Bristol Commission for Race Equality (CoRE)



Mr Museji A. Takolia explained that the Mayor of Bristol has appointed him to lead the Bristol Commission for Race Equality (CoRE) and coming to the Muslim conference gives greater understanding of the issues facing the Muslims in Bristol. With the support of the mayor, we are developing a comprehensive policy and plan to improve Race Equality and to address the issues facing minorities on the bases of race.

Workshops and Key Action Points

Cost of living crisis Workshop

The Workshop explored the cost-of-living crisis and its impact on Muslims.

The workshop discussed how the current cost of living crisis will impact on Muslim communities and how they can be supported. In particular, the workshop focused on the new Bristol City Council Initiative Welcoming Spaces which is currently being rolled out across Bristol.



Page | 5

Key Points: The group discussed how to make such spaces more accessible and appealing to Muslim communities, in a way that could help avoid any potential stigma.

Top two key actions:

- It is imperative to get mosques on board as potential spaces for the future - but also to recognise that this may not appeal to all sections of the Muslim communities and so other venues also need to be available.
- need to consider how to make other types of spaces accessible to Muslim communities through building relationships with other Muslim organisations/groups.



There is an opportunity for Muslim communities to put forward volunteers to be trained as mental health and advocacy advisors, so I call for action for our communities.

Breaking the silos Workshop

This Workshop follows up from the first conference last year by BMSLG and involves looking into increased collaborative work between the different communities in Bristol.

Since the last conference, it was noted that our organisations and mosques have started moving forward towards more cooperation and joint activities. However, it was agreed that this was not enough!

Workshop participants highlighted the following areas to be improved:

- a) Muslim ladies' involvement at leadership level e.g. More sisters in mosques committees
- b) More activities and programmes targeting young Muslims e.g., Children and teenagers.
- c) More activities and programmes targeting senior Muslim ladies.
- d) Finally, reoccurring workshops and meetings involving Muslim organisations and mosques leadership for continuous cooperation.

Environmental issues Workshop

A popular Workshop, looking at what we can do as Muslims to help the environment. The workshop's popularity reflects on the hard work and efforts made by BMSLG's Environmental Task group and its partners and resulted in an impressive list of action points.



The 2022 Plastic Free Ramadan Project was

undertaken in 7 mosques. There followed a general discussion on recycling plastic pollution in Bristol, covering aspects of cost and community apathy/



Sakariye laid out his future project of current environment inequality of social housing. He cited St Jude's tower blocks, as an example, being bordered by M32 slip roads, Easton Way, Old Market, and the Cabot Circus multistorey 6,000+ car park. The discussion moved to the urgent requirement for cheaper electric cars to enable the population to change and reduce transport pollution.

BMSLG member Sheila El Dieb discussed the last 2 years BMSLG work with the Environment Agency and 60+ UK organisation and the production of two reports, July 2021 and January 2022 submitted to DEFRA, on UK air pollution and pollution particulates which has been accepted and culminated in a included

the recent Defra report given to government to form part of the new 2023 UK Clean Air Act.

Figures given: 2018, transport pollution was given as 60% of UK air pollution, but research in 2021 now finds, transport pollution forms just 30% of overall pollutants absorbed in UK. However, the recent DEFRA 2022 report which includes our contribution, now reports that wood burning is now accepted to form 70% of the PM 2.5, the burning of wood etc mainly coming from wood burning stoves and open fires.

Sakariye then opened for questions and a discussion then ensued on



Page | 7

- a) questioning the believability of government research reports, where the researchers could be said to be only looking for answers that collaborated with their goals.
- b) The requirement for sensible incentives and workable subsidises to allow the population to buy electric vehicles.
- c) The requirement to bring forward the carbon footprint for mosques, without waiting for legislation, that more engagement there is important.
- d) The need to educate and include schools and involve all generations.
- e) The need to educate communities on the particulate damage created by wood burning stoves and incorrectly installed biomass boilers,
- f) the requirement for funding to be available for housing in green belt areas, so communities are no longer forced to live in polluted urban social housing.
- g) The requirement for vertical gardens and more green spaces in towns to enable urban communities to gain the mental benefit of green spaces.
- h) The requirement for potential 1st free re-usable cutlery in order to education about is single use plastic.
- i) The need to educate regarding the use of social media, and the need to identify false information.



Tackling Islamophobia and hate crime Workshop.

This workshop was led by SARI, BMSLG Police Task Group and by Avon and Somerset. It seeks to equip those who attend with information and skillsets that help tackle islamophobia and hate crime.

Page | 8

What can we do to help reduce Islamophobia?

- a) Report incidents and think beyond the one incident. Engage and promote unity.
 - b) Communities shouldn't view the police as a danger or threat. At the same time, efforts must be made for the police to engage with communities
 - c) Ensure agencies respond to Islamophobia by working in partnership.
 - d) Raise awareness of the support that exists already.
 - e) Address issues around Prevent training (especially for teachers!)
 - f) Increase representation in key workplaces. (Police, Schools etc.)
1. **How do we encourage more reporting?** Police to act and be seen to act and build trust in communities.
 2. Better understanding of reporting procedures



Promoting healthy living Workshop

The Workshop discussed the current hot topics surrounding healthcare and primarily diving into our access and interactions with it and ways in which it can be improved for our communities. This included issues such as mental health, carer fatigue and strain, and healthy living and happiness.

Key points:

- a) It is important to have translators and access to healthcare for non-English speakers so that they have every opportunity to engage. This isn't limited to just making and facilitating appointments, but extends wider to public health issues too.



- b) The increased digitalisation of services has reduced the feeling of community and human interactions. Such digital transformations are necessary in improving efficiencies for delivering healthcare, but it would be preferable for the human touch to be kept through other means.
- c) Public health initiatives surrounding preventative medicine should be better delivered to Muslim communities. Approaches that would be appreciated include group tasks, e.g. walking/running clubs or workshops that are delivered in multiple languages on important topics such as smoking or exercising more.
- d) The issues surrounding NHS dentistry and the lack of access to this is also an important topic which requires urgent attention.

Page | 9

The workshop raised many topics of discussion and we hope it left the Integrated Care Board (ICB) with ideas on how to shape healthcare with Muslims in mind.



Art Exhibition

Our Featured Artists



- ❖ Aumairah Hassan
- ❖ Riz Ahmed
- ❖ Safa Aslam
- ❖ Bushra Khan
- ❖ Afifah Aamer Saviour Cereal
- ❖ Manazzar Siddique.

Page | 10



Muslim Art display and samples of the collection

The Art exhibition was well organised and an amazing showcase for our local Muslim artists.





BMSLG

Bristol Muslim Strategic
Leadership Group



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Website: www.bmslg.org



Page | 11



Action and Decisions

The five workshops and subsequent open discussion led to a number of overall actions and decisions. These have been divided into what communities themselves can do and what statutory partners can do in their own services as well as how they can support communities to have their own agency and empower themselves to improve the lives of Muslims and other citizens of Bristol.

Page | 12

Actions		
Communities	Statutory Partners (SPs)	BMSLG
1. To take a pro-active stance in asking partners or service providers when needs are not being met. How: Muslim organisations can monitor when their communities are struggling with services and raise it on their behalf through organisations such as BMSLG.	1. To ensure that all communities are more aware of their services through greater and more sophisticated outreach work. How: by tailoring materials to reach a wider audience and accessing the medium through which those communities communicate.	1. To have high level discussions on a quarterly bases to ensure progress on the services needed by the community. How: Greater interaction with the Muslim community to build trust that they can discuss the issues facing the Muslims in Bristol.
2. To challenge the current cost of living crises, how can Muslims get access to support from the Bristol City Council.	2. Make the Muslim community aware of the support available in a clear and straightforward way, not hidden in a website. How: This can be achieved through flyers to the local mosques and other organisations, also by communicating directly through various talks	2. To work with SPs and to keep the issues high on their agendas. How: Through maintaining regular updates and meetings formally with SPs.
3. To be critical of oneself and consider where cultural practices might be hindering progress in e.g. education and employment. We know that our faith is not a restraining factor but a liberating one. How: by holding debates and workshops on how to reflect on oneself and one's culture.	3. Partners to engage with communities and understand their diverse needs.	3. To support mosques and other organisations on identifying their training needs for greater equality and diversity in their management and support them in accessing this expertise. 4. How: by working with Council of Bristol Mosques and other Muslim organisations in Bristol to identify what support they



			need e.g., through a survey. Possibly arranging a city-wide training event.
5. Improving the air quality in Bristol. Eliminating of single uses plastic	4. Support from the Bristol environment agency needs to develop a clear policy on the environment and the key priority for improving air quality. Cause of poor-quality air and how to improve it. Reducing global warming, what is the cause and what actions are required. Eliminating single uses plastic Educating the public	4. BMSLG has been working directly with the environment agency to review the air quality in Easton. Various reports have been produced and next steps are being worked on. Bristol Mosques carryout the plastic free Ramadan initiative. This initiative was a great success, and it is now being rolled out nationally.	Page 13
5. Islamophobia and Hate Crime What can Muslims do to reduce Islamophobia, this may require educating and engagement with wider community?	5. Police need to be more engaging with the communities. Promote awareness of existing help and support.	5. Close collaboration with all community organisations. Encourage the community to report hate crime. Better understanding of procedures	
6. Health and wellbeing. Get access and having healthy interaction with services available	6. Providing translation support for non-English speaking communities, in all areas of health care. Promote services available to communicated in different languages	6. Work with communities to understand their issues regarding health.	

Conclusion and Next Steps

Overall, the conference was seen by participants to be very successful at bringing together different Muslim communities, leaders, organisations with our statutory partners. Our partners such as Avon and Somerset Police, the NHS and Bristol City Council engaged with local Muslims and were able to hear about the challenges faced by Bristol's Muslim communities first-hand.



Page | 14

BMSLG has a strong and trusted relationship with the key stakeholders and partners in Bristol. By building up the trust with the Muslim community, we can play a pivotal role in improving the lives of Muslims in Bristol. Going forward, we will follow up the discussions from the conference with our statutory partners, and also make even greater efforts to listen to our local communities about what issues matters most.

We look forward to warmly welcoming you to our 3rd annual Bristol Muslim Strategy Conference in 2023!

