



ENGAGING WITH LONDON'S DIVERSE COMMUNITIES

CONFERENCE REPORT



FOREWORD



Ian Twinn

Former Chairman of the London
Conservatives

Engaging with London's diverse communities is a terribly serious issue and unless we reach out to people who identify differently from us the Conservative Party is never going to get anywhere.

I represented Edmonton as their Member of Parliament in the 1980s. It was a very ethnically diverse area. I even had a young schoolboy batting for the school where I was a governor called Syed Kamall and look how he ended up!

We need change within our Party. Firstly, we need to be inclusive, challenge ourselves and not judge people. By opening our doors and allowing new people through them we open ourselves to all sorts of new ideas that they will bring. That's challenging, especially for associations who are used to doing things in a certain way, but it's also exciting. We cannot simply carry on doing what we've been doing, while everything around us changes, and expect us to still be relevant to our community and still be relatable to those who live in it.

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We need to focus on the things that we have in common, instead of our differences. We need a clear message that demonstrates that we identify with each other, that we care about the same things and that we have the same vision for the future.

But, we need to go further than that. We need to show our local communities this, rather than simply tell them. We need to re-engage by doing things that are relevant to the communities who are not voting Conservative. It worked before, when I was elected to serve the residents of Edmonton, but that was because I represented a Conservative Party that had policies that were relevant to the voters.

There are lots of things we need to do, but we need to remember that we can't do everything in a day. This conference is a start in the right direction. As the debate continues about engaging with different communities, we need to look into our souls and think; what are our conservative principles which inform the way we develop policy? And then we need to work from there. ■



INTRODUCTION



Syed Kamall

MEP for London and Joint-Chairman
of the ECR Group

“ WE ARE MADE UP
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I hosted this conference to bring Conservative Party members from across London together to discuss how we, as a Party, can better engage with the many diverse communities London is a home to. I was spurred on to make a stand by the many members who had contacted me who felt they didn't have a voice within the Party. I have seen so many great examples of the work of 'Friend's Of' groups and it is to be applauded as grassroots engagement is often in challenging areas in London where

there is often little resource or support from the Party. After the General Election result in 2017, I felt compelled to action.

In 2015, we were buoyed by the fact that, for the first time, we seemed to be doing better than Labour with Sikh and Hindu voters, but that overlooked

the fact that we were still behind with other communities such as Caribbean and Muslim voters.

Our party has always struggled with the issue of attracting different communities as the demographics have changed, and while for a time we seemed to be engaging and finding new support, that trend is reversing again as Labour are winning new support across London.

Historically, Labour actively recruited community leaders while our party had two responses: either complete disengagement or not feeling comfortable articulating a new message for those newly settled in the UK for fear of categorising individuals as different to us. For too long we merely said "We have an open door...", then sat back and wondered why few people from under-represented communities stepped through it.

I used to think that if we could get enough people from our diverse communities elected we could do better. As the first ethnic minority leader of a political group in the European Parliament and having served as a London Member of European Parliament for the last 12 years, I used to think that just being in office was enough to pave a way for others. I now realise I was wrong. We all need to do more.

It's clear the message of Conservatism hasn't been getting across to the people of our city and it's time we offered people not just a brand, but a solution to London's problems and to communicate that to the people of this city whatever their background.

When I look at our Party in London, we are made up of members from all walks of life, backgrounds and religions who all share a common goal. By providing a platform to hear the experiences, challenges and suggestions from those who are campaigning on the ground we can address the tough questions about what has gone wrong for us in London and what needs to change.

I'm a pragmatist. After the election and the deep concern that I think every Conservative felt about the direction London was heading there was much lamenting and complaining. I have always felt that complaining and whinging achieves nothing and if we want change, we need to be part of it, rather than sitting on the sidelines moaning.

This conference is the start of our fightback. I want to start a debate to look at what we have been doing wrong as a Party and to learn from each other how we can once again reengage with the vibrant and exciting city that is London. ■

KEYNOTE SPEECH



Bob Blackman

Member of Parliament for
Harrow East

I grew up in North-West London and went to school with children who arrived in the 1970s from East Africa. Those young people arrived from East Africa looking very bemused and confused by snow, which they'd probably never seen in their lives. They spoke better English than we did, they were better educated than we were, and they excelled at school. I am still friends with my classmates today and they have gone on to be remarkably successful, yet many of them are completely disaffected from the Conservative Party. This is despite the fact that it was a Conservative Prime Minister who allowed Ugandan Asians to come to the UK when Indira Gandhi, the then Prime Minister of India, refused to allow them to return to their ancestral home.

During this period of immigration to the UK the Labour Party went "Welcome! Come into this big tent". The Conservatives, however, said "We don't want you here! Ok, you're in this country, but we'd rather you went somewhere else". In Leicester they even went to the extremes of putting adverts in newspapers saying, "Don't come here! You're not welcome!" and now of course Leicester has one of the biggest Indian populations outside India, and North-West London has become home and a beacon to people from literally all over the world.

As someone who represents a seat where everyone is a minority, I want us to recognise our failures in London. In 2010, the biggest single reason not to vote Conservative was because you were non-white. In 2015, we saw a huge change as the majority of British Indians

voted Conservative. However, we still haven't made inroads in other elements of our BME communities. In 2017 we've gone backwards. We need to examine why that happened?

I have been involved in politics from school onwards and the most important thing I have learnt is that you need to speak the language of the people that you're speaking to by communicating with people in words that they understand, with words that they appreciate.

When I was President of the University of Liverpool undergraduates as a Conservative, I spoke then about the price of chips and the price of beer. That's what mattered to students and funnily enough, I got a warm endorsement, because of that fact. We need to speak the language of what matters to people. It doesn't mean changing your policies or your philosophy, but it does mean relating to people in a way that they understand and talking about subjects that they want to hear about. It is no good talking about hypothetical economical ideas when someone's worried about the state of the streets. It's no good talking about foreign policy in a part of the world that people don't care about, when they really care about what's going on with their relatives coming into the UK. We need to be quite open here in thinking about our approach. We don't need to change our philosophy, because most of the audience that we need to approach believe in our fundamental philosophy.

We believe in freedom and enterprise, standing on your own two feet, looking after extended family and that education is vital to get on in life.



WE BELIEVE IN WORKING FOR A LIVING AND HAVING A WELFARE STATE THAT PROTECTS THOSE WHO ARE VULNERABLE. WE BELIEVE IN PROVIDING EXCELLENT PUBLIC SERVICES BUT KEEPING TAXES LOW. WE BELIEVE IN ENCOURAGING ENTERPRISE.

We believe in working for a living and having a welfare state that protects those who are vulnerable. We believe in providing excellent public services but keeping taxes low. We believe in encouraging enterprise. When you go out and speak to people, it doesn't matter the race or background of the person, we all share that same philosophy. But unfortunately, as soon as you say that's the Conservative philosophy, often the response is "Oh God, if it's the Tories, forget it!" However, if you speak the language, talk about the things they care about, funnily enough, they say "Yes! We agree with you!"

We need to understand that, unfortunately, some people still think the Conservative Party's brand is toxic. We need to overcome this and focus on the fact that our fundamental philosophy is one that they share.

Secondly, we need to examine London's constituency base. We need to analyse those areas and make sure we're communicating in the right way. For 30 years, I've been enjoying Hindu festivals, and have always found the Hindu community welcoming. However, there is the cliché with politicians that they visit a temple, Gurdwara, mosque or church and simply tick them off the list believing the visit alone got them onside. The chances are that they are not. Of course, they will welcome you and listen to what you have to say, but like everyone, they are interested in what you are going to deliver for them. It's about friendship and building a relationship and far too few of our politicians go out and listen, learn, and immerse themselves in the different elements of their constituency.

It's vital that we listen, learn, and absorb those messages to relate to the different elements of the constituency that we seek to represent. Without that, we will never be able to serve those communities effectively.

Now there are people who have called me divisive because I relate to certain communities. The simple fact is that I cannot be everything to everyone. I take a strong stance on certain issues which polarises me from some communities. I believe that we need to be outspoken and try not to be all things to all people. That doesn't mean to say we have to change our fundamental philosophy, it doesn't mean to say that we should be nasty and unpleasant to other communities. Far from it. However, I think it is important to stand for something. If you try and be everything to everyone you end up speaking for no one. I advocate thinking about what you are going to support and then speaking out loudly on their behalf.

Equally, we need to be authoritative. It is important to be across the issues by putting in a lot of hard work, research and in-depth understanding. By doing that you relate to people, and you send a signal that you are interested.

I know from experience that communities are willing to listen, and they want to get involved and be supportive of us. Our communities across London want to engage, but, it is up to us to go out and engage with them. We need to make the first move. ■



SESSION 1

HOW DO WE START THE DIALOGUE?



“ Engaging effectively with London’s richly diverse communities is essential to our Party’s long-term success.

Cllr Gotz Mohindra
Chairman of the London Conservatives



“ London has changed, and we must change with it. We have worked hard at local engagement; we knocked on every door in every house and we finally started to see local residents positively show their support for us. Even those who had never voted before began to support us. But, we have started to lose this support and go backwards. We can harness these voters, even the younger members of our communities, if we have policies that help them. We need to do more.

Mags Joseph
Chairman of the Conservative Friends of the Caribbean



“ The Conservative Party has so much to offer BME communities, yet we haven’t always been successful at showing it. I would say to people: come down and check us out. You might be surprised.

Shaun Bailey
AM, Londonwide Assembly Member,
GLA Conservatives

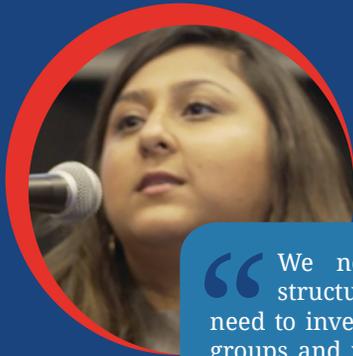


“ I think that if we ever want to turn London blue again, we have to look at London differently. There has been a lot of talk recently about promoting the positive case of conservatives, which I am fully in support of, but I think it is also important that we also need to look at how to be more inclusive and more diverse, while remaining meritocratic and democratic.

Calvin Robinson

SESSION 2

HOW TO BUILD A TARGETED CAMPAIGN?



“ We need to rethink the structure of outreach, we need to invest in our ‘Friend’s of’ groups and we need support and encouragement from the top. We need to get out in our communities and listen to what they want to hear, but not to patronise people and just say things we think they want to hear. We need to go to the temples and celebrate festivals, because it educates us about the makeup of the community that we are engaging with, but we also need to follow this up with serious policy and one to one discussions with people.

Mayuri Parmar
Conservative Friends of India

“ In general, BME groups are less likely to vote, and less likely to vote Conservative than others. As a party, we need to have our best people coming together to work out how we can change this and attract more members, and voters.

Resham Kotecha
CPF Champion for the BME community



“ As members of the BME community, we are a part of the wider community we live in. We need to be campaigners, people who get things done because actions speak louder than words! We need to join local organisations and be a part of our community, not apart from our community. By rolling up our sleeves and getting stuck in at ground level, we will know what needs to be done and we can make a difference to the things that really matter. Be the change. Set the example. Make the difference.

CIlr Mimi Harker OBE



“ We need to develop substantive, practical but most importantly Conservative policies which we can then pass down to local campaigns, to councillors, and to candidates. We need to talk about the issues that are of most concern to Londoners. This means talking about affordable housing, home-ownership and public transport, and packaging these policies in ways people will relate to. As a Party we need to develop a localised infrastructure.

Nabil Najjar
Director of Conservative Progress



SESSION 3

HOW CAN WE BUILD NETWORKS IN THE DIFFERENT COMMUNITIES?



“I’ve been knocking on doors and people tell me ‘How can you support the Conservative Party? A party that doesn’t like you and doesn’t want you here?’ I explained that the Conservative Party is not against Europeans. When they see and speak to me I am an example that the Conservative Party is not racist. We need more diverse members who can knock on doors and tell people that ‘Yes, I am an example of a Conservative!’”

Chris Vinante
Chairman of the Westminster Italian Conservatives

“In terms of solutions the Conservative Party needs to let local campaigns decide how to campaign. Local parliamentary candidates must research the communities in their constituencies and be provided with training. We need to have an action plan in place before candidates are formally selected so they can prove that they’re going to take engagement seriously. As a ‘Friend’s groups’ we are a national organisation, but as volunteers we’re trying to fundraise, we’re trying to organise events, we’re trying to build membership and we’re trying different ways of outreach in the community. We need more help and support from CCHQ, but we also need them to act as a conduit between us and the associations. We need that professional resource to be giving us greater help, so we can actually help the Conservative Party do a better job.”

James Hockney
Conservatives Friends of Bangladesh



“Plain vanilla BME campaigns don’t work. Each community is different. Good candidates speak on issues that matter to each one of them winning them over”

Dr. Arjuna Sivananthan
Chairman, British Tamil Conservatives

“We don’t need to reinvent the wheel when we have an amazing outreach department and have many campaigns currently building networks in the community throughout the country. We have a wide range of platforms out there with so many components, but we need to put them together and build a great mechanism to get to get things going. We need to engage with one another and learn from each other. It’s also not good enough for the Party to turn a blind eye and expect volunteers to show up and fight a campaign without support. The BAME community are ready for the Conservative Party, is the Party ready for the BAME community?”

Ash Zaman
Deputy Chairman,
Conservative Muslim Forum



“Over the years it seems that reaching different communities in our areas have been very much down to individual activists, including councillors, to do it alone. My message to the Conservative Party is be organised, give us the tools, be supportive to new ways of campaigning, listen to us, don’t put barriers up, don’t be forceful but engage with the communities rather than ignore them. Lead but don’t dictate to us when we have the knowledge and have been working in this field for a long time. We need new votes to win, so help us who are on the ground to do this!”

Cllr Joanna Dabrowska
Chairman of the Polish Conservatives





CLOSING SPEECH



Gareth Bacon

Leader of the Conservatives on the
Greater London Assembly

I think it is an undeniable fact that the Conservative Party still has a problem reaching out to minority communities in London. I use the word communities deliberately, because there is no such thing as a “BAME” community in London.

Labour’s approach to reaching out to different communities is to put people into pigeon holes and then make assumptions about them: if you are black, then you think in a certain way about certain issues and you do certain things; if you are Muslim you do the same thing; if you are a woman you are by definition a victim or think in a certain way.

This is clearly nonsense. Two of my close friends and former colleagues, James Cleverly and Kemi Badenoch, get very irritated when people make assumptions about what they might think simply by taking one look at their skin colour.

There is an amusing, but telling, example of this that Kemi shared with me recently. Kemi served on the London Assembly, before being

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elected to represent Saffron Walden as their Member of Parliament. Even at City Hall the reaction to her from the left-wing members when they saw that Kemi was a confident black woman was that she would therefore identify with their Labour policies. When she talked about being

tough on crime and showing her Conservative philosophy, they could not understand what was going on. However, on her first day in Parliament as a new MP, Jeremy Corbyn bounded across the lobby to greet

her only to back away at 100 miles per hour when he realised she was a Conservative. This was followed up by one of the Labour whips announcing to Kemi that he was going to be her whip and the look of confusion on his face when she said, “But I’m a Conservative!”. That shows very clearly the assumptions that people make on the Left about people of colour, any colour.

I think the Conservative answer to engagement needs to focus on what unites people, rather than what divides them. If you take myself and my colleague Shaun Bailey at face value you would see the colour of our skin makes us completely different. But, if you were to speak to us you would know that we are both men, we are both fathers, we both have a house in outer London, we both care about our families, we both want our children to do well and finally we are both Conservatives. There is an awful lot that unites Shaun and I, and the only thing that divides us is the colour of our skin. We need to tailor our message along those lines, if we want to relate to people and begin a dialogue with them.

Messaging is important. We cannot have a generalised message about an ethnic minority issue that will appeal to everyone. We are bound to get it wrong. We need to focus on a higher message, focus on our shared goals and aspirations and we need to be genuine. I have seen Bob Blackman speak at Conservative Friend’s of India events and I am absolutely astonished to hear the range and depth of his knowledge about issues effecting India. Bob, as you can readily see, is not Indian, yet he has a very deep understanding of the issues that affect Indians and can identify with their concerns. Bob demonstrates that we don’t have to go down the Labour route of simply

having someone that personifies a specific area to represent minority issues. We need people who understand, who are effective and who most importantly care. That is what people want to see from a politician.

The Conservative Party is nothing if it is not the party of aspiration, and London is the most aspirational city in the world. If the Conservative party is to succeed in London, then we need to have a message of aspiration. That upbeat message was missing in the general election and we suffered because of that, especially in London.

I believe that we need our own message for London. One that celebrates our great city, but also recognises our challenges. We need to have a London party within a party, with a distinctive message going out, although, it's important to note that there is no such thing as a London that is one entity with no differences whatsoever. London is made of very different communities with different people living in them who all have different concerns. However, it's important that the message we send out to Londoners is not necessarily the same message - without any variation - that we send out to the rest of the country without any thought about what Londoners want to hear.

It's important to note that while it sometimes helps to break down barriers when the person knocking on the door is from the same background as the person answering it, this is not the be all and end all. It is important for us to realise that we cannot point to our Conservative politicians and say we have resolved all our problems. It is clear we haven't.

One of our biggest problems is how we communicate our message. Unless we get into our local communities and talk to people, it doesn't matter how articulate our message is if it not reaching the people we are trying to talk to. There should be no "no go" areas for the Conservatives. We should be reaching out, engaging, and talking to people in every community in London.

It is time for us to get out there into our communities and talk to people, communicate our message and most importantly, to listen as much as we speak. It's our responsibility to get out there and make the best of our local elections to get the best result for our Party. ■

CONCLUSION



Syed Kamall

MEP for London and Joint-Chairman of the ECR Group

I found this conference fascinating and was inspired by all the ideas and wisdom shared by everyone who attended. I stressed at the time that this was not going to be a one-off event; I don't want to organise talking shops. To that end, I will aim to work with fellow Conservative Party members to deliver the adjacent action points and to be part of the change we all want to see happen.

There was a consensus that we need more networking opportunities, training and support and so this will be the first of many events that I will be organising in the future to provide these objectives.

The conference itself sparked a number of suggestions for associations, CCHQ 'Friend's Of' groups, candidates and the voluntary party. I will aim to bring these points together in one or more reports clearly outlining what needs to happen to successfully engage with our diverse communities.

I will be hosting roundtables with the 'Friend's Of' groups, discussing my reports with the relevant departments at CCHQ, raising these issues at future London Conservatives regional meetings as well as emailing any reports out to all associations, MPs and everyone who attended the conference.

I hope this is just the start of a new approach to community engagement for our Party. It is long overdue. ■

CALL TO ARMS

WHAT CAN WE DO?



We need to get out into our local communities and talk, listen and engage. We have to be willing to have a dialogue and be willing to take action.



Join organisations in our local communities; rather than spread the message, let's be the message. By working alongside residents, we can show them who we are, and dispel some of the myths they may have about Conservatives.



We need to work together more, to learn from each other and share good practice. There needs to be a better network between Conservatives so that we can work together, rather than being isolated in our local areas.



We need to help our local candidates more; by sharing knowledge, helping them to engage more effectively and campaign alongside them to help them create relationships within their communities.



We need to trust the advice of those members within our party who are from different backgrounds and religions, or have experience of engaging with different communities. We need to be willing to do things differently and try new approaches.



We need to welcome new people through our doors and be open to giving up positions and titles to allow new members to help shape the direction of our associations. We have to remove all barriers to letting in new members and be open to the new ideas they bring.



We need to work in those areas where we have no representation and focus on the long game to build up support. We need to be willing to campaign and help areas that are not on our doorstep or are not familiar to us. There can be no "no go" areas and we should not just focus on engaging with our core support.



Run events to encourage people to be part of our local teams such as "Become a Conservative councillor" workshops in the local community to attract new people into the Party. Offer support and mentorship to ensure new members flourish and feel welcome.



To find out more on what Syed Kamall is doing, keep in touch with him via his website, where you can sign up for regular updates and invites to future events: www.syedkamall.co.uk

