



## INCLUSIVE EXETER

### Better Connections Project - Year Two Steering Group Meeting #1

**Date:** 22 May 2025

**Venue:** Phoenix Suite, Wonford Community & Learning Centre

**Time:** 7:00 PM -9:00 PM

**Chair:** Kate Hannan

**Attendees:** Kate, Mahi, Mahsin, Mathew, Neomi, Shahar, Mishkat, Hakimi, Arlene, Abhinav, Joy, Edith, Alan

### Meeting Minutes

#### 1. Welcome & Apologies

The meeting opened with a warm welcome and congratulations on entering the second year of the Better Connections project, with apologies received from Aga, Chloe, Muktar, and Sophie.

#### 2. Approval of Previous Minutes

Previous meeting minutes were briefly reviewed and approved without objections.

#### 3. Events Held and Planned

##### Events Held:

- The Easter/Eid/Vishu event by EKC on 3rd May was successful, with over 250 participants. Positive feedback was shared.
- Challenges included a late start due to participant arrival delays and overcrowding in the venue.

##### Planned Events by Community:

##### Exeter Kerala Community (EKC) :

- **21 June:** Family Activity Day (Wonford Community & Learning Centre) & **06 September:** Onam Celebration .



- For the upcoming 21 June event:
  - Bouncy castle is planned: one outdoor.
  - Community members will be assigned to supervise the setup.
  - Better Connections funds will cover free snacks and drinks.
  - Cooked meals (privately funded) may be sold.
  - Ward Grant applications (Priority & Heavitree) are in preparation and will be submitted shortly—£350 each, totalling £700.
  - Flyers must include the Exeter City Council (ECC) logo.
  - Publicity and flyer printing will be supported by Better Connections.
  - Risk assessment submitted; waiting on public liability insurance.

#### **Afghan Community In Exeter:**

- Proposed event on **5<sup>th</sup> August**-Community Picnic
- Considering options for venues that allow barbecuing (e.g., Belmont Park) needs permission from Newtown Community Centre .
- Planning for a bouncy castle this year.
- Generator hire may be needed for bouncy castle setup.
- Details for generator hire : HSS Tools & Hire, Alphington Brook Road, Marsh Barton, Exeter, EX2 8RG, Tel: 01392 300262.
- Volleyball and children's activities are also planned.
- Performance by an Afghani singer.
- Balance left from last year : £380.
- 2000 pounds for the August 5 event and the rest of the fund allocated for Volleyball sessions.
- Ward grant application may be submitted if additional funds are required.

#### **Nigerian Community In Exeter (NCIE):**

- **19 July 2025:** Talent Show – "*Talent Hunting*" ((Wonford Community & Learning Centre) & **December 2025:** Christmas Celebration (Date -TBA)

Details for 19 July Event:

- Event Type: Talent show focused on singing performances.
- Includes one indoor and one outdoor bouncy castles.
- Scheduled AGM to plan the event on 14 June ,Mahsin to attend the planning meeting.
- Efforts to increase visibility and make the event more multicultural



#### Details for December Event:

- Venue Options: Clyst St. Mary (primary choice). Alternatives include local schools or Corn Exchange (depending on availability and funding).
- Applying for additional ward grant to support December event costs.

#### General Notes:

- Expected Attendance: Approximately 600 people.
- Logistics: Emphasis on parking management and thorough cleaning of the venue, especially for school spaces.

#### **Devon Bengali Association (DBA):**

- **22 June** : The New Exonian Heritage lottery funded event at St. James School.
- Meeting for finalising the event scheduled on 1<sup>st</sup> of June. Harvey to attend the meeting. Starts at 1:30 PM at Beacon Centre.
- 350 to 400 people expected
- Theme: Combination of Eid celebration and community gathering
- Bengali poetry recitation by children, awards for GCSE achievers, and screening of the New Exonian documentary (30-minute slot allocated)
- Planning to invite Richard as guest.
- Leftover Better Connection funds from year 1: £1,422,
- Total Better Connections allocation for 2025: £5,400 to be split across-August Picnic & Victory Day Celebration.

#### **Filipino Community Association (FCA):**

- **23–24 August**: Sports Fest, Venue: Isca Academy.
- Seeking top-up funding via ward grants to make it bigger to accommodate other community members.
- **September**: Family Fun Day planned at Exmouth. (Date TBA)

#### **4. Venue Booking & Costs**

- Ongoing challenges in finding affordable and suitable venues.
- School venues require strict cleaning standards post-event.
- FCA raised concern about the increased venue costs at Isca Academy compared to last year.



- The Corn Exchange was noted as a good venue, but its high cost (~£800) makes it less accessible; a 10–15% community discount was mentioned
- Kate will speak to Councillor Matt Vizard regarding community venue pricing support and will explore inviting him to the next meeting.

## **5. Public Liability Insurance (PLI)**

- Kate raised the issue of continued delays with insurance documentation.
- The delay is causing issues with finalising venue bookings.
- Follow-up sent to provider; considering alternate insurers next year.

## **6. Ward Grants and Top-Up Funding**

- Mahsin offered to help with drafting ward grant applications.
- Additional publicity support is available via Better Connections.

## **7. Drop-in Support Service Update**

- Neomi shared usage statistics since March 2025. April was quieter due to the annual Easter closure.
- The drop-in continues to support a range of issues, with housing being the most common, often tied to financial struggles like Universal Credit applications.
- Beneficiaries include both one-off cases (e.g., visa forms, driving tests) and repeat visitors who require ongoing assistance.
- The team noted growing support requests from non-target groups (mainly White British residents) for complex benefits like PIP, which would require additional funding to accommodate.
- Councillor Laura Wright may be consulted further on this.
- Neomi praised Sophie for her excellent support work. The team aspires to establish the drop-in as a permanent service and hopes to reach more underrepresented communities moving forward.

## **8. Budget Update**

- Mahsin presented the Year 2 budget, confirming it is fully up to date and reconciled with no issues.
- Year 1's budget is also in good order, with the final review completed before Year 2 funding was received.



- A small surplus from Year 1 has been identified, and discussions are underway with the National Lottery about its potential use.
- A portion of the budget remains ring-fenced in case of redundancy, though it's unlikely to be needed.
- Salary lines have balanced out, with one overspend offset by two underspends.
- Some partner budgets (e.g., DBA and Afghan groups) remain unused; Mathew holds the specific details.
- The Year 1 closing balance has been carried over into the Year 2 budget.
- Neomi added that expenses for a work mobile used for drop-in services have not yet been submitted but will be included going forward, with a low-cost tariff identified under £10/month.

## 9. AOB/Next Step

- Better Connections funding is expected to remain unchanged for the next 18 months, with each community continuing to receive £4,000 annually.
- National Lottery has launched a new funding strategy prioritising multicultural and cross-community activities. Future funding applications should emphasise diversity and inclusion rather than single-community or religious celebrations.
- Kate and Mahi are starting background work on shaping a new funding bid for 2027–2028, which may involve wider collaboration and redefined community targets.
- Communities are encouraged to focus on inclusive themes such as multicultural picnics, collaborative events, and shared activities rather than standalone cultural festivals.
- Emphasis was placed on using language like "activities" instead of "sports" to align with the Better Connections project objectives.
- An independent evaluation of the project will be carried out in Year 3. Consultant Richard Malfait will conduct surveys and focus groups to help demonstrate project impact and inform future funding applications.
- The group discussed community representation gaps and the need to include underrepresented groups such as the South Indian, Turkish, and Romanian communities in future plans.
- Suggestions were made for a future Café/Restaurant project to generate independent income for community activities.
- Preparations are ongoing for a visit by MP Steve Race on 11 July. Community members will develop and submit questions in advance through Kate to ensure a well-structured and respectful dialogue. Emphasis will be placed on local issues such as housing, NHS access, and discrimination.



- Everyone was reminded that registration for the MP visit is mandatory due to parliamentary security requirements.
- The next Steering Group Meeting will be held on either Monday, 8 September or Monday, 15 September 2025; final confirmation to follow.

**The meeting concluded at 9:20 PM, with Kate thanking everyone for their contributions and participation.**

