

JOINT CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEE WITH ETHNIC MINORITY ORGANISATIONS
27 JANUARY 2010

(7.15pm – 9.25pm)

PRESENT: Councillor Tariq Ahmad) (in the Chair); and Councillor Henry Nelles.

Ms P. Anderson, Mr H. Ejaz, Ms J. Mintah-Sem, Mr A Savage,
Mr M.S. Sheikh, Mr.S. U. Sheikh, Mr A Savage

ALSO PRESENT: Superintendent Peter Dobson (Metropolitan Police); and
Norman Urqia (for Merton Unity Network)

Council Officers:

Kim Brown (Deputy Head of Human Resources),
Dean Shoemith (Joint Executive Head of Human Resources),
Ms Evereth Willis (Diversity & Community Cohesion Manager);
and M.J.Udall (Democratic Services).

Apologies for absence were received from:

Councillors Agatha Akyigyina, Edith Macauley and David Simpson; and
Mrs M. Ahmed; Mr N. Islam and Mr M.A. Karim; and
Maureen Branch-Davis (Diversity and Community Cohesion Officer)

1 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST (Agenda Item 1)

No declarations were made.

2 MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 21 OCTOBER 2010 (Agenda Item 3)

RESOLVED: That the Minutes be agreed as a correct record.

3 MATTERS ARISING (Agenda Item 4)

(a) Revision of the Corporate Equality Scheme (Minute 6) -

Ms Evereth Willis advised that the Scheme had been refreshed and was available on the Merton web-site; and that there would be a launch event on 9 February 2010.

Further to a query regarding the proposed action on community safety and the fear of crime, particularly amongst older people (end of 4th paragraph of Minute, top of page 5, refers), Ms Evereth Willis advised that she sat on the Hate Crime Board for Safer Merton and would take these issues forward, and would report back to the JCC in the medium/longer term.

(b) Employment of BME Staff and Actions to Improve Representation (Minute 7) -

Mr S. U. Sheikh indicated that he had not received the promised data on the workforce reduction programme broken down by grade and ethnicity (3rd paragraph of Minute refers). Dean Shoemith indicated that recruitment data was readily available and that hard copies of the data (in the form of a double-sided A4 sheet) had been brought to the meeting. Copies were then circulated to those present.

(NB. This data was later discussed under Item 6 – The Council's Restructure and its

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impact on BME Employees – See Minute (5) below.)

4 PRESENTATION ON CRIME IN MERTON (Agenda Item 5)

Superintendent Peter Dobson gave a presentation on Crime Performance statistics for Merton and highlighted various issues including the following:-

- (a) Total Offences - Merton was the third safest Borough of the 32 London Boroughs and there had been a downward trend for the last 5 years;
- (b) Residential Burglary – Current figures equated to 2.7 burglaries a day; and due to Merton's low figures a small increase/decrease in offences could represent a large percentage change;
- (c) Robbery – Previous gang related problems (including a murder) had led to joint working with Wandsworth; and currently the main issues were school boy on school boy incidents and problems at transport hubs;
- (d) Common Assault – A lot of offences were associated with the night time economy and were fuelled by alcohol; and action to deal with this included having an Alcohol Strategy and a Town Centre Strategy and liaising with Local Authority licensing officers.
- (e) Racist and Religious offences – The current figures (179) were the lowest for the last 5 years, and, whilst there was still work to improve this position, the detection rate was around 50%, due to extra resources allocated in such cases.
- (f) Criminal Damage – A lot of the decrease could be due to work of the Safer Neighbourhood Teams (SNTs) and the Safer Neighbourhood Panels setting the priorities for SNTs.
- (g) Theft of Motor Vehicles - A lot of the decrease could be due to better locks/alarms on vehicles and more secure car parks through use of cctv etc.
- (h) Most Serious Crimes – Detection rates.
- (i) Homophobic Offences – Figures low and good detection rates.

Hard copies of his presentation, in the form of power-point slides, were circulated at the meeting. (NB. A copy of the presentation was subsequently put on the Council web-site and can be found with the other agenda papers for this meeting.)

Supt. Peter Dobson then responded to various queries, including regarding:-

- (1) fluctuations in the figures for burglaries;
- (2) initiatives to assist elderly or vulnerable people to combat burglary;
- (3) the police presence on the street and the role of SNTs (Safer Neighbourhood Teams) to patrol all areas, including private roads; and the need for the public to alert SNTs to problems such as people hanging around at certain locations;
- (4) action taken to reduce school boy on school boy incidents of robbery, including confirming the availability of a breakdown of incidents by race/ethnicity

Mr Savage indicated that he worked at the Ethnic Minority Centre and referred to problems with a racist element and four attacks on a Tamil person (within Merton), where the police had attended each time and taken evidence, but nothing else had happened. Supt. Peter Dobson indicated that he should have systems at the police station to identify such repeat victims, so even if there was insufficient evidence for a

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prosecution, the police could consider what intervention might be appropriate to help prevent future incidents. He requested that Mr Savage give him further details outside the meeting.

Mr S. U. Sheikh requested that figures be circulated in hard copy in advance of the meeting, and that the figures for Racist and Religious Offences be separated out and not combined. Supt. Peter Dobson confirmed that this could be done, if desired. The Chair confirmed that figures should be separated out in future.

The Chair requested that, in view of the low attendance at this meeting, a letter be sent to all JCC members -

- (a) enclosing the police statistics submitted to the meeting; and
- (b) requesting that JCC members advise officers if they had any further feedback on the statistics.

The Chair concluded by commending the police for their work in relation to dealing with tensions around mosques due to the rise of Islamic phobia etc.; and by thanking Supt. Peter Dobson for attending.

5 THE COUNCIL'S RESTRUCTURE AND ITS IMPACT ON BME EMPLOYEES (Agenda Item 6)

Dean Shoesmith (Joint Executive Head of Human Resources) introduced the report, including highlighting that the restructure to date hadn't had a disproportionate impact on BME staff; and in particular that fewer BME employees (as a percentage) had elected to take voluntary redundancy than are represented in the whole Council workforce, which meant that in percentage terms the overall BME employee representation in the Council's workforce had increased.

Kim Brown (Deputy Head of Human Resources) then outlined the mechanisms and packages put in place to support staff affected by the restructure programme.

Officers then responded to queries, including on the issues outlined below.

Dean Shoesmith explained that the figure in Table 3 of 57 employees at risk of compulsory redundancy didn't necessarily mean that number would eventually be made redundant, as the figures included, for example, cases where two employees were seeking one remaining post, and at present both employees would be included in the "at risk" figure. He confirmed that the number of BME employees at risk (as a percentage) was slightly higher than are represented in the whole Council workforce, but this figure was subject to change and would be monitored.

Various JCC members commented that tables 4 & 5 appeared to show that the numbers agreeing to voluntary redundancy and at risk of redundancy were concentrated in lower grades, with few in the management grades. Dean Shoesmith suggested that this reflected Merton's pyramid staff structure and that the upper part of grades SO1-PO6 included middle management.

In this connection the more general issues of the recruitment of BME staff and the lack of progression of BME staff to senior management were raised, and the Chair

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suggested that these issues should be considered at some future meeting.

There was also reference to the effect of cuts in staffing on services, and the feasibility of providing a high level of services with fewer staff.

Recruitment data: There was extensive discussion of the recruitment data broken down by grade and ethnicity circulated at the meeting. (NB. See also *Minute (3) above.*) It was noted that the hard copies available at the meeting were in the form of a double-sided A4 sheet, whereas it should have been printed out as one page in landscape format.

Norman Urqia requested a breakdown of the figures into external and internal candidates. Dean Shoesmith undertook to ascertain if such data was available.

Mr S. U. Sheikh highlighted the 0% successful appointments in some ethnic categories. Kim Brown referred to the ongoing “Ambassadors” programme and the Council’s wish to work with communities on the issue of completing application forms. Dean Shoesmith also referred to the need for a general review of Merton’s recruitment processes, and the use of application forms, and the use of more practical tests for some posts.

There were queries as to the accuracy of some of the figures now circulated, such as the percentage figures calculated for the “Chinese or Other” category. Dean Shoesmith undertook to check all the figures and re-circulate the paper, correctly formatted (onto one page), to all JCC members prior to the next meeting.

The Chair suggested that the revised paper be also included for discussion on the agenda for the next meeting, and that Dean Shoesmith be invited to attend again.

6 REFRESH OF MERTON’S BLACK AND ETHNIC MINORITY STRATEGIC PLAN (Agenda Item 7)

Ms Evereth Willis (Diversity & Community Cohesion Manager) briefly outlined her role in the refresh of Merton’s Black and Ethnic Minority (BME) Strategic Plan (2010-2013) including encouraging Council officers to participate in the refresh and liaise with Merton Unity Network who were undertaking the work on the refresh (on behalf of Merton’s BME Forum).

Norman Urqia (for Merton Unity Network) then introduced the report including, when outlining the key priority issues identified in 2006 (listed on agenda page 20), highlighting the low attendance at this JCC meeting and the need to improve attendance at JCC meetings generally and to have a vibrant JCC.

Ms P. Anderson (Merton Unity Network) then briefly referred to the challenges for 2006/09 (listed on agenda page 26).

Norman Urqia then concluded his introduction by requesting JCC members to identify possible new issues that should be considered as part of the current refresh of the Plan for 2010/13; indicated he was willing to come and speak to individuals or organisations; and highlighted the need to develop solutions and action plans for the various issues (identified for inclusion in the refreshed Plan).

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The Chair thanked Norman Urqia for his presentation and suggested that, whilst those present were welcome to make comments at this meeting on the report, in view of the low attendance at this meeting -

- (a) the report be again circulated to all JCC members, with an introductory letter from officers and with a request that JCC members submit their comments, including their views on the challenges for 2010 and key priorities (*See also final para. below.*);
- (b) if needed, further meetings be arranged (to progress development of the challenges etc); and
- (c) officers assist Norman Urqia in contacting JCC members, if necessary.

The Chair also suggested that the report/Plan should make reference to the successes in Merton such as in respect of crime, integration, assimilation etc.

Mr S. Sheikh made comments including the following -

- (i) the report/Plan should be consistent in its use of the terms BME and BAME, one or the other should be used, not both, and an explanation given of what is meant by the term used;
- (ii) he was unaware of any organisations which had received the funding referred to by Councillor Samantha George in the quote on agenda page 22;
- (iii) many of the issues identified in the report had existed for a long time; and
- (iv) there was need to identify where the funding would come from to assist with the challenges and issues identified.

Ms Evereth Willis (Diversity & Community Cohesion Manager) referred to the need to get BAME groups involved in the decision making processes of the Council; and how this linked with work to engage BAME groups in connection with the Council's Corporate Equality Scheme.

Ms P. Anderson (Merton Unity Network) referred to the forthcoming Seminar on 26 February 2010 to assist with the refresh of the Plan (see agenda page 13); the aim to get as many BAME organisations attending as possible; and the need for meaningful discussions at the Seminar on not just the issues, but also possible options/solutions for the future; and requested that therefore the letter re-circulating the report go out before the February Seminar. The Chair confirmed that this would be arranged.

7 REPORTS FROM OUTSIDE BODIES (Agenda Item 8)

Ms J. Mintah-Sem advised that she had attended meetings of the Schools Forum (on 5/10/09 & 15/12/09) which considered the following matters:-

- (a) Claw-back of School Revenue Balances (by Local Authorities from schools) – Mandatory as from 1/4/10 and would apply to 2009/10 budgets (for primary and secondary schools balances over 8% & 5% of budget respectively). Merton also reserved the right to claw back monies in balances not fully committed to specific projects within 3 years. The Schools Forum would hear any appeals and have discretion on re-allocation of claw back monies.

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(b) Dedicated School Grant –Financial pressures on the 2010/13 Grant; and Proposed review of the Grant mechanism; and

(c) Cross-Rail Scheme – Requirement for 2% of the Dedicated School Grant (equivalent to £50,000 in Merton) to be submitted towards the cost of the Cross-Rail Scheme. The Schools Forum opposed this and had requested Merton to oppose this and write to the appropriate bodies.

Mr S Sheikh gave details of the work of the Housing Partnership Board for Vulnerable People including ongoing projects and also indicated that the funding for the Board was decreasing.
