

JOINT CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEE WITH ETHNIC MINORITY
ORGANISATIONS
9 JUNE 2021

PRESENT Councillors Councillor Marsie Skeete (in the Chair),
Councillor Omar Bush, Councillor Eloise Bailey,
Councillor Joan Henry and Councillor Agatha Mary Akyigyina

Cllr Laxmi Attawa, Stella Akintan, Hannah Neale, Edward Maliki,
John Dimmer, Jerry Hall, Dagmar Zeuner, Cllr Edith Macauley,
Chris Lee, Slawek Szczepanski, Liz Hammond,
Dr Moham Sekeram, Simon Shimmens,
Sivapragasam Shivaranjith, Cllr Cooper-Marbiah,
Beau Fadahunsi, Fitzroy Dawson, Logie Lohendren, Mr Nawaz,
Barry Causer, Bishop Copeland, Evereth Willis, Grace Oyerinde

1 DECLARATION OF INTEREST (Agenda Item 1)

None.

2 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE (Agenda Item 2)

Apologies were received from Mr Islam, Supt Roger Arditii and Mr S Sheikh,
Dr Arumugaraasah

3 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING (Agenda Item 3)

Agreed.

4 FINDINGS OF THE BAME VOICE COVID-19 COMMUNITY RESILIENCE
RESEARCH (Agenda Item 4)

See item 5.

5 BAME VOICE PRESENTATION - HANNAH NEALE, CHAIR BAME VOICE
(Agenda Item 4a)

Hannah Neale and Edward Maliki gave an overview of the BAME Voice research and the report. The research was designed to deliver a genuine insight into the lived experience of people across Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) communities in

the Merton and surrounding area as a result of COVID-19 and related issues, working with the communities identified as being most affected by COVID-19 - Bangladeshi, Pakistani, East, West, Southern African, Caribbean including Tamils and other BAME communities.

The programme ran from August 2020 to February 2021 and interviewed 300 people - 45% young people, 180 female and 120 male.

FINDINGS

- Initially found no evidence deaths and hospital admissions of BAME residents were disproportionate to their numbers within the borough but subsequent information has shown Merton's figures to be in keeping with other parts of London.
- Communities most affected by the virus were similar to those in other parts of London, however, projected high levels of infections among Caribbean and African communities have not occurred in Merton.

The Council's actions were valued in a number of ways.

- Swift action in working with everyone to provide much needed support averted any chaos or confusion
- Setting up of 'Merton Giving' a collaborative effort by the community for the community helped many organisations and groups help their respective communities.
- The Merton Community led by the Council coming out to support and help each other.
- The Council, Clinical Commissioning Group and other agencies wanting to learn from the losses suffered by BAME people.

However, the research found the historic issues of systemic racism to be the overriding factor in the inequalities which BAME communities encounter; this view was expressed by 80% of those interviewed. Real anger was expressed that long identified and promised changes to the inequalities in East Merton had not materialised.

With the anger, there was also hope that this time, the reality of life for BAME communities, highlighted by the pandemic would bring about much needed change. They echoed the cry of the majority of people of colour in the UK.

The key recommendations fall into four themes:

- Health
- Education
- Employment

- General

Hannah thanked the residents of East Merton for their support and participation in the research.

The presentation concluded with Hannah stressing that it was time for the talking to stop as it was now time for action.

6 NEXT STEPS AND THE LOCAL OUTBREAK MANAGEMENT PLAN (LOMP) - LBM DAGMAR ZEUNER, DIRECTOR OF PUBLIC HEALTH (Agenda Item 4b)

Dagmar Zeuner gave a Covid update and outlined the next steps. The community in East Merton is more vulnerable. Compared to other boroughs, Merton had lower cases, but the numbers are now rising.

Vaccinations is the biggest tool for tackling Covid and data shows that ethnic minorities are lagging behind. However, the vaccination rates of ethnic minorities is now increasing. The community programmes have helped to increase the take up of the first vaccination.

It has to be acknowledged that Covid has highlighted structural inequality in society and it particular housing and job security is needed.

There is a commitment from the council and partners to use the report's findings to shape the short, medium and long term priorities.

Dagmar commented that '**don't think of us as a problem**' was a good point made in the report.

Short term priorities included:

- Merton Covid Local Outbreak Management Plan (LOMP) –Reducing the disproportionate impact of COVID-19 and inequalities.
- Community engagement and clear communication, to increase adherence to control measures and uptake of vaccinations. The council has confirmed funding for Phase 2 of the BAME Voice led resilience programme - £165k funding for an expanded programme of strategic support and co-delivery of immediate actions. Actions already underway: Community Hub; Merton Giving; Community Champions; 'On-street' engagement; Funds and support for LBM Race Equality Network; Cultural and heritage programmes / activities e.g. Windrush Day; 'Bundling' testing and vaccinations.
- Merton Health and Wellbeing Board -Priority for a fair and green recovery. Committed to working with our communities, to build resilience. The East Merton model of health and wellbeing led by the NHS - developed with the

community. There is focus on prevention - local skills development as part of an integrated wellbeing service.

John Dimmer outlined medium to long term actions – the focus will be reducing inequalities supported by measures such as:

- The refresh of the Equality Strategy - community insight will be part of the evidence base for developing specific actions
- Your Merton Ambition – community engagement and development of a community led vision and priorities.
- Transforming How We Work With Communities – co-produced with the Voluntary and Community Sector to strengthen community resilience through an asset based approach. Pooled funding - 16 community organisation are being funded to help with transforming how we work with communities.

Dr Sekeram works in East Merton and commented that the report will be helpful to target areas for the Primary Care networks.

Comments/questions

C: Eastern Europeans are not in the BAME community figures, this community has been affected too and must not be forgotten.

C: The methodology is impressive especially as young people were involved. It is important that the recommendations will be part of the equality strategy.

C: It is a good report that hopefully will result in things being done properly and won't be a tick box exercise. Things need to be done properly. The 16 groups that have been funded need to continue to be supported and not just in the short term.

Q: **What percentage of people in the community have No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF)?** Some of the people receiving food parcels have NRPF.

A: The precise figures are not known, the Tamil community has been particularly affected. Food banks and clothes banks provided a live line for many.

Q: The report is to be celebrated for its robustness and in depth capture of residents' views. It is an approach to acknowledging racism. **How will the borough deal with the issue going forward? How will the issues raised in the report and the recommendations be addressed?** The community now needs to see actions that balance out the issues highlighted.

A: The community led approach to conducting the research worked well. The council is now looking to build on this insight and is engaging with the communities through the Transforming How We Work Together project to inform a funding model that delivers long term sustainable funding.

Q: The report is to be commended. The community has led by supporting Hannah, but power doesn't lie with the community. **Who is going to be bold and drive the report?** It can't just be glossed over. Black authentic history should be taught in schools, young people need to be taught their history. **How do we ensure there is a change in the curriculum?**

A: The council recognises that the recommendations require tangible responses.

Q: How do we ensure that the Eastern European community are part of the community led approach?

A: Post Covid the council will be looking to work with the East European community e.g. through funding from the Local Outbreak Management PLAN (LOMP).

Chris Lee addressed the meeting – it is his first time at the JCC, he outlined how Merton intended to take things forward. The Business Plan and Service Plans will address the issues raised. There are numerous engagement pieces such as this report and the Mencap report that have highlighted issues of inequality in the borough. They are not new issues and will require funding. The report will be understood by all department and the actions will be woven into strategies to get deep seated change.

7 HUMAN RESOURCES UPDATE - LIZ HAMMOND, INTERIM HEAD OF HUMAN RESOURCES (Agenda Item 5)

Liz Hammond presented the first Annual Equalities report. The staff survey results have been shared from a BAME perspective. The reporting also follows the Workforce Race Equality Standards (WRES) framework.

The report looks at equalities across a range of indicators. The data showed that BAME staff are more likely to move on but there is no difference in promotion.

The report went to the Corporate Equality Steering Group and an action plan will be developed. The data will go to all departments.

The Race Equality Network (REN) Chairs have proposed that BAME staff should be on all panels for jobs over £50,000.

The feedback from the staff survey is quite positive for BAME staff, but not for disabled staff. Liz explained the Rooney Rule and explained that all panels would require a Female and BAME person – not all staff declare their ethnicity, so there is a gap in internal intelligence. Corporate Management Team (CMT) will not be implementing the Rooney Rule, the council wants to look to other organisations that use the Rooney Rule to see if it can be adopted.

Questions/Comments

Q: Has Unconscious Bias training been rolled out?

A: The training has been halted because the Race Equality Network (REN) didn't think that the proposed training was sufficient. The REN asked for a wider approach to be taken.

Q: Are BAME staff more likely to say positive things about work?

A: BAME staff are less likely to promote Merton as an organisation to work for.

Q: Why are the grievances and disciplinaries affecting BAME staff more? What's going to be done?

A: There are numerous reasons. One example is a restructure that had a high percentage of BAME staff in the team and generated Employment Tribunal claims. Also Covid related issues have also affected the statistics.

Q: Have BAME staff historically earned more than £80, 0000 per year? What underlying issue is that showing?

A: Yes, a former Assistant Chief Executive and a Head of Community Safety earned close to that figure.

Q: The workshops run by BAME Voice found that some BAME staff were not happy with how they are being treated. Has a support group been set up?

A: No there is no specific support group.

8 COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT - SUPERINTENDENT ROGER ARDITTI,
NEIGHBOURHOODS LEAD, SOUTH WEST BCU, METROPOLITAN POLICE
SERVICE (Agenda Item 6)

Due to illness this item has been deferred to a later date.

9 ANY OTHER BUSINESS (Agenda Item 7)

Dr Sekeram assured the JCC that he and his colleagues want to improve relationships with the BAME community and asked what could be done?

A: Doctors need to start listening to patients because generally GPs do not listen.

A: Follow the recommendations in the BAME Voice report. An outline should be given at the next meeting also an update on Unconscious Bias training.

Q: How can people who have experienced racism get support – where do they go to raise their voice?

A: it depends on the context, it could be reported to the Police, or a Law Centre. The council has a Hate Crime strategy and the borough has Third Party reporting sites.

Q: There should be an organisation in the borough that can give the appropriate support. BAME Voice should be funded to initially engage with residents that have been the victim of racism. Currently there is nowhere for the community to go to get support. There needs to be an organisation that a community member can reach out to. Often mental and emotional support is needed. There is a gap in the borough for supporting people that are experiencing racism.