

JOINT CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEE WITH ETHNIC MINORITY ORGANISATIONS

30 JUNE 2020

PRESENT: Cllr Edith Macauley MBE (CHAIR), Cllr Laxmi Attawar, Cllr Joan Henry, Cllr Omar Bush, Cllr Eloise Bailey, Cllr Agatha Akyigyina OBE, Cllr Brenda Fraser, Cllr Natasha Irons, Cllr Caroline Cooper-Marbiah, Revd Mrs Hannah Neale, Vijayan, Mr Jerry Hall, Mr Saleem Sheikh MBE, Mr Islam, Mr Tony Sandiford, Mr Fitzroy Dawson, Mr Abeyah Savage, Ms Nzingha, Ms Nuzhat Ali, Mr Slawek Szczepanski, Ms Naomi Martin, Ms Ethel Nadgwa, Ms Beau Fadahunsi, Ms Cynthia Olaitan, Brandie O, Js'Aubis Reiz, Ms Margeret Labinjo, Ms Sarah Amenyoy, Mr Paul Odell, Ms Gene Bovell, Mr Howard Baines, Ms Liz Hammond, Mr Ged Curran, Ms Rachael Wardell, Mr Logie Lohendran, Ranjit, Mr John Dimmer, Ms Evereth Willis, Ms Dagmar Zeuner, Ms Marilyn Massiah, Mr Simon Shimmens, Mr Barry Causer

1. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST (Agenda item 1)

None

2. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE (Agenda item 2)

Dr Aru

3. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING (Agenda item 3)

Agreed

4. COVID 19 IMPACT ON THE BAME COMMUNITY (Agenda item 4)

Cllr Macauley introduced the item and informed the JCC that she had been contacted by the community regarding the disproportionate impact of COVID 19 on the BAME population. She felt it necessary to ask a question of Hannah Doody, Director of Community and Housing. The issue was raised with the council before Dr Fenton's report was published. Cllr Macauley felt that also, due to the publicity nationally on the issue, she felt it necessary to have a discussion at the JCC.

A presentation was delivered by Dr Dagmar Zeuner, Director of Public Health Merton. She explained that (1) the initial data is being presented – outlining the impact of infections and deaths (2) Some data is very preliminary and is regularly updated. The data is modelled and epidemiological

We can get a clear picture from the available data. April had low figures and only represented hospital testing. Only the severe end up in hospital.

The data showed that actual deaths from 1 April 2020 to 12 June 2020 is 197. During mid-April there was a spike in non-Covid19 deaths. Registered deaths are now under last year's death rate.

Previous data released by Office National Statistics (ONS) calculated that between 1st March and 17th April, the difference in death rate per 100,000 residents between East and West Merton was 17.7 however the difference is now 9.6. The ONS data does not state ethnicity.

Dr Zeuner shared a summary of Public Health England's report into disparities in Covid-19 mortality rates. People from BAME backgrounds are disproportionately affected by Covid-19. Not only deaths, but also rates of infection and hospital admission are increased compared to White people. The main underlying determinants are deprivation, high risk occupations, overcrowded housing, and increased prevalence of co-morbidities such as diabetes. Black males have x4.2 risk, and Bangladeshi/Pakistani males x3.5 risk of Covid-19 related death compared to White males. South Asian people are 20% more likely to die once admitted to hospital in the UK than White people. Other minority ethnic groups did not have a higher death rate in this study.

Dr Zeuner informed the meeting that more qualitative research is needed to understand the impact of Covid-19 on BAME Communities and outlined the future work that is planned:

1. Development of Local Outbreak Control Plan - actions for preparedness e.g. engagement with VCS and response e.g. plan for potential outbreaks in high risk settings e.g. care homes, schools, hostels etc.
2. Continuing data analysis (led by HWB) - including indirect Covid-19 health impact (with focus on health inequalities)
3. Lived experience (led by HWB) - qualitative action research & engagement with local voluntary sector & community there will be a focus on BAME, older people and learning disabilities, other (tbd)
4. Action planning
 - a) Immediate - to protect from Covid-19 in case of further outbreaks e.g. targeted diabetes work
 - b) Short-medium term - to mitigate main adverse health impacts from Covid response
 - c) Medium-term actions - to shape safe, fair and green recovery for Merton people and as a place in line with our Health and Wellbeing Strategy and Local Health and Care Plan

Questions/Comments

If there is a second wave, how will clients in care homes be protected? It was noted that the charts do not show more black people dying, they show a larger number of white people dying.

A comment was made that BAME people are in frontline roles and are therefore more exposed to risk. Some people don't go to seek medical attention because they don't get treated well, therefore, there is a need to improve the care for people and how they are treated.

Dagmar replied that there is a support scheme for care homes, though a multi-disciplinary support team. The borough has worked closely with Public Health England.

How will PHE's report be implemented – social determinants of why we are where we are?

What is the council doing to protect BAME staff and what can the council do to reach out to small businesses?

Another representative commented that there have been many reports such as McPherson, we have an equality strategy and yet nothing has changed over the years – what is the Leader, Chief Executive and the Head of Policy, Strategy and Partnerships going to do?

Ged replied that the Marmot report outlined social determinants – society drives ill health. These issues are higher up the agenda because of:

- a) Covid19 – disproportionate impact
- b) Disproportionate enforcement policy

George Floyd's death showed a disproportionate approach on policing. The council is responding through measures such as reinstating the BAME staff forum. Ged stressed that this is the start of the process and he has sympathy for those who have heard it all before.

Rachael Wardell replied that there is a report going to the Corporate Management Team (CMT) regarding the staff forum. Staff risk assessments have been focused on BAME staff and the additional risk that they face.

A representative stated that they would like to see more effort to get Black groups to take charge of what needs to be done. They would like to see actions to bring in real change of what is needed, there is a need to empower people in the community.

Does the term BAME include Polish?

A request was made for a breakdown of the figures to see if Eastern European residents are at risk.

It was commented that Merton has a "culture of further research" and it was felt that "Black" should be separated from "BAME" to solve the issues identified. This is because Black people have a different experience to other minority groups. To date extensive research has provided no benefits to individuals. Also, the council should look at its own workforce because maybe there is an issue there, in terms of lack of BAME representation at the top. Merton should consider asking staff about the issues that they face.

Dagmar replied that the data showing the impact on all communities is not available, to get this information her team will analyse the death files. She acknowledged that

immediate action needed to be taken to protect people. Dagmar also shares the frustration about structural inequality.

Ged responded that there has been mixed progress but stressed that the Administration is committed to tackling the issues. However, the council has its hands tied behind its back, due to government imposed financial constraints. There has been a 50% decrease in resources due to central government funding cuts.

Ged recognised that it is not representative at senior levels and there has been reducing staffing levels due to having to make savings. He has been in post since 2004 and people stay in their roles for some time, therefore, there is little movement on the top and the lack of senior vacancies has an impact on representation.

A comment was made that the figures need clarifying and action needed to be taken.

What does BAME mean in real life – what criteria did we use?

A representative commented COVID19 has stigmatised Black people, it was felt that part of the problem is the lack of care nationally and locally – we are very reactive.

Dagmar clarified that “BAME” definition is based on Census ethnicity data.

5. IMPROVING REPRESENTATION OF BAME STAFF AT SENIOR LEVEL (Agenda item 5)

Cllr Macauley introduced the item and informed the meeting that this matter has been discussed numerous times at the JCC, most recently being 24 September 2014 and 5 December 2018

Liz Hammond presented a report regarding the top 5% earners in the council. Staff are regularly asked to update ethnicity data. In Merton 21% of the top 5% have not declared their ethnicity. An annual comparison with other London councils is done. There is a 17% Mean across London, Merton is at 14.1%. The proportion of BAME employed in Merton is 33.8%.

In terms of Recruitment and Selection (R&S) there is a low turnover at the top. Further monitoring of recruitment for posts graded MGC and above for the year 2018/19 covers 11 vacancies for which there were 46 applications. 44% of applicants were BAME, 40% of those shortlisted were BME and 33% of those appointed were BAME. It should be noted that there were just 8 appointments and with such small cohort variances of +/- one person can cause large percentage differences.

From the data that was available for posts graded MGC and above, the period of April to December 2019 covered 4 vacancies for which there were 19 applications. 15% of applicants were from BAME, 11% of those shortlisted were BME and 0% of those appointed were BAME. These figures cover such a small cohort of vacancies that even the difference of just one person can cause large percentage differences.

The new Applicant Tracking System (ATS), Hireserve, has an improved reporting functionality and therefore future reporting will be more readily available. Hireserve went live on 6th January 2020 and therefore data within the system is building up to enable meaningful reporting to be commenced. Since the Hireserve ATS was implemented on the 6th January we have advertised and recruited to two MGC posts, of which the successful applicants, one was BAME and the other was not = 50%.

Since March 2020, there have been no new roles advertised at grade MGC and above. The role of Head of South London Legal Partnership was being prepared to be recruited to, but the campaign was put on hold without being advertised due to Covid-19.

It is a requirement that all panel members and chairs who take part in the recruitment and selection process must have undergone the relevant recruitment and selection training; regularly refreshing their skills every 2 years. It is the responsibility of the 'chair' of the panel to check that all panel members have attended such training. In the case of member-level appointments (Director and Chief Executive posts) training is provided to all panel members.

Merton is currently in the process of designing and procuring a new on line recruitment and selection course which we will ensure addresses how to avoid unconscious bias in the recruitment process. Managers will be required to refresh this training every 2 years.

The Council have piloted at senior level Blind Recruitment where the name and any distinguishing characteristics have been removed from the candidate's CV so that the recruiting manager has no awareness of whether the candidate is male or female or their ethnicity. However at senior level this process fails because it is common practice for interested candidates to want to speak to the recruiting manager in advance of submitting an application to find out more about this role, the organisation and the aspiration the recruiting manager has for the post before applying. At the point of the telephone call the recruiting manager may find they know the candidate already, or – as the candidate will usually identify themselves and introduce themselves by name, current position and place of work – they may make inferences (correctly or incorrectly) about age, gender or ethnicity which could introduce bias to their selection.

The Council have also reviewed whether blind recruitment could be conducted throughout all recruitment carried out. CMT agreed at their meeting on the 12th November that due to the limitations that blind recruitment brings to the recruitment process and the risk of potential unintentional discrimination that Merton will not adopt blind recruitment. However every effort will be made to ensure that our

recruitment processes remain free of any unintentional bias or discrimination as outlined in the actions section of this report.

Liz informed the meeting HR is currently exploring with CMT the viability of producing career pathways for existing staff so that they can clearly see what they would need to do and be able to demonstrate in order to progress, along with any training and support that would be available to them. This has been a large piece of work that is now nearing completion and career and learning pathways are in the process of being uploaded onto the Merton HUB.

The council continues to ensure that when appointing agencies for senior recruitment that we ask them to demonstrate their track record in producing BAME candidates and the number of successful BAME appointments. This is a practice that will continue.

The BAME profile amongst senior managers is still below that of the whole workforce. Therefore, actions are being taken to ensure we have good practices in place and that these are adhered to. Liz informed the meeting about some of the measures that are being implemented:

- a) Sample checks will be introduced to ensure all shortlisting and interview panel members have up-to-date recruitment and selection training. This check will be undertaken in all cases for appointments at MGC and above. This training will include awareness of unconscious bias in the recruitment process.
- b) Introduction of an on-line diversity and cultural awareness programme including training, with the aim to achieve a more cohesive workforce able to serve our communities better, this includes actions being developed at departmental level.
- c) Where external recruiters are used for senior appointments – they are instructed to conduct additional searches and through their channels encourage applications from BAME candidates.
- d) The Council will seek to introduce diversity in panel representation for senior appointments and this can be done by panel participation or introducing stakeholders' panels.
- e) The Council is currently reviewing its leadership development offer and will explore adopting cultural competency as an element within the programme.
- f) There are opportunities to offer mentoring to promising but unsuccessful candidates to assist them in their ongoing professional development. This has been taken up on one occasion in the past year to support an unsuccessful candidate, with a good eventual outcome.

- g) HR will continue to remind and encourage staff twice yearly to update their personal equality data on iTrent so that our monitoring can be 100% accurate.
- h) The BAME Staff Forum is being refreshed and the group will be used as a safe environment for BAME staff to raise issues and as a reference group for new initiatives.

Liz stated that 48% of training uptake is from BAME staff.

Questions/Comments

Why is there only 1 White councillor on the JCC membership? 99% of councillors are BAME – until we shift the conversation there will be no change- it is not just a BAME issue.

It was suggested that an audit of white councillors be done to see if they are doing anything about these issues. The issue needs to be brought to the next meeting.

Informed learning is important, they have been in the borough for 20 years, has the council considered learning from BAME staff and asking about their experience of working in the borough?

In which department have the 8 senior BAME officers been employed?

Liz replied that the information is not available to enable informed learning to take place. The council has to review exit interviews.

Rachael informed the meeting that the BAME Forum will be able to support staff, previously, staff had not had a forum to discuss racism and discrimination, Ged replied that Member representation needs to be thought out carefully.

It was suggested that a bottom up approach is needed to prepare communities to build resilience. The council needs to give the community confidence to speak to doctors and health professionals. Therefore if a second wave comes the community would be better prepared to deal with it by working with the council.

Why don't we mentor up and build on that? What are the blockers?

Liz said that there are 38% of BAME staff in junior roles. She outlined the difficulties associated with Blind Recruitment – HR would need to strip back things like the school attended etc. It is not just about removing a name, all clues to an applicant's background need to be removed to prevent wrong assumptions being made by the hiring manager.

Rachael reflected on her experience of R&S for an Assistant Director role. She knew the applicants because it is a small pool to recruit from. Diversity on the panel is important. Every effort has to be made to reduce bias, challenges exist but we should still stay to tackle them.

A comment was made about sitting on a Task Group to recruit Head Teachers – it has only been in the last 4 years that black heads have been recruited. The lack of progress on employing BAME staff in senior roles is embarrassing.

Another person felt that BAME voices are not being heard. The BAME organisations have not been receiving funding and so have no voice and have not been making headway. Without funding and support the organisations are on a “path of slow death”. There was a request for John Dimmer, Head of Policy, Strategy and Partnerships and the Chief Executive to give support.

Why don't we promote BAME people when positions come up?

Liz replied that staff have the same opportunities to apply for roles. She undertook to provide recruitment statistics at a future meeting.

Rachael stated that there are no overt reasons why BAME applicants would not apply for roles. Is Merton a place where BAME colleagues feel they can be appointed at a senior level and succeed? Rachael shared the fact that she is aware that in CSF some middle management have felt unsupported to apply for senior roles.

Action

Liz Hammond to present R&S statistics at the next JCC meeting

6. WINDRUSH (Agenda item 6)

Cllr Macauley updated the meeting on the council's actions to celebrate and support the contributions of the Windrush generation. In 2019 Merton celebrated over 3 days, including Windrush day. She thanked BAME Voice and WIFFA for organising and supporting the events.

The Leader of the Council responded to the Windrush Inquiry. Cllr Macauley received an enquiry from a resident who had seen information on the council's website about the EU Settlement Scheme and asked for Merton to take a similar approach for Windrush.

Cllr Macauley confirmed that there is now a dedicated page giving details of how residents affected by the Windrush scandals can get advice and support.

For Windrush Day 2020, Merton's Heritage had a display showcasing the contributions of the Windrush generation.

The Home Secretary has accepted all the recommendation of the Windrush review. All those who have applied for compensation will be paid in full.

Questions

The Windrush scandal is an example of Institutional Racism that affected a lot of people, primarily of Caribbean descent. Actions need to be monitored to prevent a reoccurrence.

It was suggested that Merton considers using the model followed by the Metropolitan Police to improve diversity in senior roles. The Police had similar problems and the council should consider the internal workings of why people are not applying for promotion and why are they not selected. The police looked at issues such as Supervisors' attitudes e.g. not seeing BAME officers as part of a team. BAME officers found themselves isolated and treated less favourably. There are lots of tools that can be used, including Positive Action.

Rachael welcomed the suggestions and acknowledged that the council's culture is different to that of the police, but some aspects could be tried. Work is being done across London to look at BAME leadership in CSF.

Look at changing the narrative, be colour-blind and represent modern Britain. We need to understand each other better and start to address issues from within. Understand what BAME people are bringing to the table. There is a lot of unintentional bias.

There was a suggestion to look at the structure of the JCC and make it more meaningful. People are not interested in the JCC, it needs to be balanced.

There was a comment about Unconscious Bias in society being that could be addressed through training to eliminate discrimination.

Consider looking at Conscious Bias and undertaking training.

7. ANY OTHER BUSINESS (Agenda item 7)

None,

Meeting closed at 5.09 pm

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