

## Joint Consultative Committee with Ethnic Minority Organisations

Monday 05<sup>th</sup> December 2023

### MINUTES

Present: Councillor Edith Macauley (Chair), Councillor Eleanor Stringer, Councillor Marsie Skeete, Councillor Joan Henry, Councillor Agatha Akyigyina, Councillor Jenifer Gould, Councillor Hina Bokhari, Rev Hannah Neale, Inspector Kevin M L Chambers, Asad Mushtaq, Kris Witherington, Tom Underwood, Anthony Hopkins, Zoe Gallen, Keith Burns, Amy Dumitrescu, Sarah Amenyo (clerk)

#### 1. Declarations of Interest

None.

#### 2. Apologies

Fitzroy Dawson, Abayeh Savage, Susan Botros, Octavia Lamb

#### 3. Minutes

Agreed.

#### 4. Hate Crime Update / Update on Israel/Gaza

KC - Inspector | SW BCU | Merton Safer Neighbourhoods, gave a brief update on Hate Crime and current situation in Israel / Gaza on behalf of the Metropolitan Police. He commenced by informing all present that Hate Crime is listed in the Mayor of London's Policing Plan and is delivered through the New Met Plan which emphasis on more trust, less crime and high standards through increased community engagement. Definition changes highlighted and outlined in the Joint Consultative Committee papers circulated for this meeting with examples.

Hate Crime data shared with committee members with a month-by-month comparison since Sept 22 – Dec 23. The start of the recent conflict between Palestine and Israel can be a time when the number of incidences may be reported increase amongst community groups perceived to be linked to the countries. Note since 1<sup>st</sup> Oct 2023 a total of 65 cases have been reported in LBM. Operation Brocks throughout London to heighten police visibility and support local faith communities.

Met Police acknowledge that there are other crimes affecting different faith / beliefs and hope that the engagement / communication strategy plans the future will ensure everyone in the community is made safe. Lots of work still

to be done but this can only be done if incidences are reported, trust / confidence exist between the police and communities thus enable the reporting of crime for the police to deal with them.

### **5. JCC Budget Engagement:**

The Executive Director for Finance and Digital, AM introduced the report aided by KW – Community Engagement Manager.

AM gave an overview of the council's budget situation following a mid-year Cabinet update last month. The update focused on four core priority areas which included our budget position, priorities for 2024/25, our investment aims and how the communities can get involved going forward. Note our operating environment continues to be challenging with continued reduction in central government support.

KW informed all on Budget 2024 engagement consultation with residents, local organisation / businesses and anyone in the borough with ideas on how we can best invest to maximise future / long-term returns. The engagement included an online survey and a series of events at various local venues to gather the views of as many residents as possible prior to the budget setting process for 2024/25 starting. KW invited all those with views and ideas to directly get in touch with the Community Engagement Team and directed those with further queries to visit Budget 2024 website.

The update was very well received and Cllr EM asked for the presentation slides to be made available to the committee.

**Actions: Share presentation slides with committee members.**

### **6. Borough of Sanctuary:**

The Co-Chair of Merton Citizens, TU, provided the updated. Accreditation process run by the Cities of Sanctuary to ensure Merton embeds welcoming policies throughout the borough for refugees and people seeking asylum. Our aim is to submit the application in June 2024, but the deadline is flexible to ensure the best process / application possible with three main elements which include learn, embed and share.

The BoS working group would welcome new members from this committee, especially those with lived experiences both past and present.

Rev HN asked whether consideration have been made to Gabriel Selassie's settlement in Merton. TU meets with AH about our history of supporting refugees and how this can be linked to refugee week. Welcomed those with any information about Merton's history to come forward.

TU informed all that Merton was the first borough to sponsor a family to enter the borough through the Community Sponsorship Scheme 7 years ago.

TU mentioned Islington council as a good practice example, having put together a handout to support those with asylum seeker status but at risk of being issued with seven-day notification for those who living in Islington. It's

hoped that Merton will also adopt a handout to support those at risk of homelessness.

Cllr ES also thank and praised TU / Merton Citizens et all for their efforts.

Cllr EM also thanked TU and the BoS working group on the work to date but also informed the committee that only recently did the 1<sup>st</sup> person get their citizenship.

Cllr JH asked whether the Home Office notifies councils of status changes and concerned over the short notice period. TU not sure whether councils are made aware of status changes but again this is a national problem. KB reconfirmed that status changes are never shared with councils and again it is a national problem. Though the council may want to help, its hands are tied in relation to single individuals.

Cllr ES lobbying the government for better support but again help is current limited especially in cases when responsibilities are pushed onto councils.

### **7. Borough of Culture:**

The Head of Heritage and Adult Education Service, AH, introduced the report on the Borough of Culture bid. The Initiative is part of the Greater London Authority (GLA) initiative with funding solely for the purpose of improving the culture of the boroughs and not used for capital projects. Note Merton were previous recipients of the Culture Impact Award, Croydon current winners. Applications for 2025 and 2027 now closed.

AH aim to build on the Borough of Sport work by improving community sporting facility, become the Borough of Sport by 2026 and be the Borough of Sport for the next round of funding. Application timeline shared with committee as well as a programme of activities / events in support of our application.

Currently undergoing consultation / engagement with residents to include the youth, organisations and online surveys with key emerging themes so far being connectedness, outdoor space and diversity / multiculturalism.

Cllr EM thanked AH for the work on BoC to date and putting together a comprehensive bid.

### **8. Violence against Women and Girls (VAWG):**

The Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) and MARAC Lead, ZG introduced the report giving a brief overview of the work of VAWG. The new VAWG Strategy was launched in December 2022 with five key priority areas - raise awareness and co-ordinated partnership working, early intervention, support for victims, hold perpetrators to account and improve victim safety. For more information please visit - <https://www.merton.gov.uk/communities-and-neighbourhoods/crime-prevention-and-community-safety/vawg>.

Working in partnership with four other local boroughs and have successfully applied for the Home Office Safer Streets fund which enabled the launch of the Walk and Talk sessions (to identify what concerns women in our community) amongst other projects to improve community safety in our streets. Merton is also now a White Ribbon accredited borough which is a promise / commitment to stop violence before it starts against women and girls. Annual 16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence campaign.

Continues to work in partnership with seven other boroughs to bid successfully for the Prevent and Change (PAC) fund from the Home Office for £2m over two years to hold domestic abuse perpetrators to account. For more advice and training in relation to VAWG, please contact ZG directly.

The Chair commended ZG / Team on the work to date and a thoroughly comprehensive presentation to improve the safety of women.

**9. Holocaust Memorial Day 2024 Programme:**

Interim Assistant Director Customers, Policy and Improvement, KB introduced the report. Holocaust Memorial Day is the international day in memory of the victims of the Holocaust and subsequent Genocide and is annually commemorated on 27<sup>th</sup> January each year, this year Merton is having its civic event to mark Holocaust Memorial Day on Monday 29<sup>th</sup> January 2024 by invite only. This year's theme is "Fragility of Freedom" and the programme is attached for information.

**10. AOB**

Windrush - KB informed all that the Windrush celebrations takes place in June 2024, the deadline for funding to support the Windrush activities has now closed and was led by SB our Equality and Community Cohesion Officer.

**Next meeting date**

Tuesday 19<sup>th</sup> March 2024 in Committee Rooms B, C and D from 7:15pm  
Access through the back of the Civic Centre