

JOINT CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEE WITH ETHNIC MINORITY ORGANISATIONS  
8 SEPTEMBER 2020

(Time Not Specified - Time Not Specified)

PRESENT Councillor Edith Macauley (in the Chair),  
Councillor Eloise Bailey, Councillor Omar Bush,  
Councillor Joan Henry and Councillor Laxmi Attawar  
Councillor Marsie Skeete, Councillor Agatha Akyigyina,  
Councillor Stan Anderson, Councillor Brenda Fraser, Councillor  
Owen Pritchard, Councillor Natasha Irons, Chellaian Lohendren,  
Councillor Caroline Cooper-Marbiah, Councillor Anthony  
Fairclough, Hannah Neale, Fitzroy Dawson, Ranjith  
Sivapragasm, Aiden Mundy, Slawek Szczepanski, Nusrul Islam,  
Billy Christie, Ben Butler, Dr Arumugaraasah, Jerry Hall, Jocelyn  
Cruywagen, Grace Oyerinde, Sandra Sinclair, Naveed Lone,  
Beau Fadahunsi, Simon Shimmens, Rachael Wardell, Liz  
Hammond, Nick Steevens, Barry Causer, Sarah Amenyo, Robin  
Ramen, Evereth Willis (notes)

1 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST (Agenda Item 1)

None.

2 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE (Agenda Item 2)

Apologies were received from Mr Saleem Sheikh.

3 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING (Agenda Item 3)

The minutes were agreed.

Councillor Alambritis introduced the meeting by reaffirming the council's commitment to equality and zero tolerance for hate in the borough.

The committee is important to guide the council. He acknowledged that BAME communities had been disproportionately impacted by COVID-19 and informed the meeting that the council is in 'listening mode' to work with communities to tackle issues identified. He also highlighted that councillors from all parties are supporting the JCC.

4 MERTON COUNCIL'S RESPONSE TO BLACK LIVES MATTER - RACHAEL

WARDELL, DIRECTOR OF CHILDREN, SCHOOLS AND FAMILIES/LIZ  
HAMMOND, HEAD OF HUMAN RESOURCES (Agenda Item 5)

Rachael Wardell updated the meeting on the measures that have been implemented or are proposed to respond to the issues raised by the Black Lives Matter campaign. Merton's response has two strands: Community and Staff. There is a focus on increasing senior leadership. The council has developed Risk Assessment for staff, re-established the BAME staff forum.

Liz Hammond informed the meeting that a package of HR measures went to the Corporate Management Team (CMT) and will go to Cabinet in October. HR is meeting with the BAME staff forum to discuss the range of measures proposed.

Cllr Alambritis informed the meeting that the Civic Centre was lit up after George Floyd's death. Patrick Hutchinson who protected an anti-BLM protestor, showed human kindness. Mr Hutchinson, a Croydon resident who works in Merton is going to be recognised by the Labour Party. The council is working with Operation Black Vote and will report to the Labour Party Review, led by Baroness Doreen Lawrence. Merton has referred the closure of St Helier Hospital to the Equality and Human Rights Commission. The borough continues to take action to 'Bridge the Gap'. The Windrush Day celebrations were a success. Cllr Alambritis thanked BAME Voice and Hannah Neale.

### **Questions/Comments**

C: It is important to follow up on the data, people are feeling stigmatised, getting the data will give clarity.

C: The impact is a manifestation of inequalities in society – BAME staff are in frontline roles. Regarding the lack of BAME senior managers a solution could be taking on Trusteeships. Being a trustee would give management and strategic experience. This has the dual aspect of strengthening local charitable organisations and make them more diverse.

Q: Individual cultures in the borough are classed as BAME. How is BAME reflected in Merton? Some cultures may not be getting the right support to see who is disproportionately represented.

A: BAME is not a helpful descriptor- the name is place holder for now. How much do conversations need sub dividing. 7 communities are the focus for the COVID-19 work. It is acknowledged that the disproportionate impact is linked to wider inequality. The council is open to the suggestion about Trusteeships. The council is looking at itself as an organisation, there should be no focus on candidates being the problem.

Q: How is the message of BLM cascaded across Merton? How will the wider community be involved? There needs to be an exchange between the voluntary sector and council to promote the message.

Q: Does the council use Name Blind Recruitment?

Q: Is there a Conscious Bias programme and who will it be delivered to?

A: There is wider messaging about Merton as Leader of Place. Suggestions are welcome about initiatives responding to BLM. Future updates to the JCC could include an Education update. The borough can't instruct schools but can support and engage them through School Improvement.

A: We actively recruit for diversity, a challenge is to make the council marketable as an employer. HR will ask the BAME staff forum to comment on the Rooney Rule (having a BAME person on recruitment panels). Mentoring and Coaching Pan-London is an option. The number of applicants doesn't reflect there is a problem, it is at senior level. Unconscious Bias training will be for all staff. Other initiatives include Anti-Racism training for the Senior Leadership Team (the top 80 managers). The unions are involved in the Workforce Strategy and receive the ethnicity and grade data. The programme to address issues raised by BLM is now ahead of the strategy. Some reports will be done annually and can be shared with the JCC.

Q: Information needs to be shared with residents. Is it a staff forum?

Q: How long is the £5,000 funding for the forum for? Will the forum be able to get any more?

Q: Is Succession Planning being done as there is no evidence of it across the council?

A: Not all BLM events are organised by the council. £5000 is annual funding for the forum for meetings and development needs. The forum is for staff and is facilitated by Black staff and provides a safe space for staff to discuss their experience.

Q: Has unconscious bias been encountered and how was it addressed?

A: Overt racism has not been seen and would be challenged if seen. Unconscious bias is harder to detect.

## 5 MERTON COVID-19 COMMUNITY RESPONSE HUB - HEATHER BEGG, BUSINESS PROCESS LEAD, LBM (Agenda Item 4)

Heather gave an overview of the work of the Community Response Hub. The hub was set up on March and went live on 23 March; it was one of the first to set up in the county. The hub has been extended until December.

The hub was set up to help vulnerable and isolated residents and is led by Age UK Merton, Wimbledon Guild, MVSC and other organisations.

It operates on 3 Tiers of Support to address both immediate and longer-term needs. It responds to queries about shielding, supporting hospital admission, prehabilitation & discharge. There has been an increased demand for Befriending

Heather informed the meeting that she is seeking to promote the service more widely. There is a need to develop and sustain the volunteering capability going

forward, including working the with Mutual Aid Group and other community networks. New partners are needed to join the Community Fridge Network.

Heather asked the JCC for the following help:

1. Ideas for future partnership working with all communities in Merton
2. Ideas for engagement
3. Help to communicate service and offer to wider community of Merton
4. Strengthen referral pathways
5. To help ensure the Hub meets the needs of the diverse communities in Merton

### **Questions/Comments**

Cllr Alambritis acknowledged the work of the hub and the support of the partners organisations including: Commonsides Food Bank, Elim Pentecostal Church for the Wimbledon Food Bank and AFC Wimbledon –Dons Local Action Group. The MPs for Mitcham and Wimbledon have been supportive of the hub.

Q: How are residents being catered for? The communications need to improve.

Q: There needs to be engagement and awareness raising.

Q: How are mental health issues being responded to?

A There has been an article in My Merton about the hub and the support offered. The aim is to make it culturally appropriate and engage with supermarkets and barbers to promote the service widely.

There are 8 facts sheets outlining the local offer – one of them deals with mental health. Volunteers are needed.

Q: Are faith groups being linked to also?

A: Confirmed that faith groups have been involved and partnership working is key.

JCC representatives were encouraged to contact Heather if they want to get involved.

### **6 LOCAL OUTBREAK CONTROL PLAN - BARRY CAUSER, PUBLIC HEALTH COMMISSIONING MANAGER/NICK STEEVENS, HEAD OF REGULATORY SERVICES PARTNERSHIP (Agenda Item 6)**

Barry Causer updated the meeting on Public Health's (PH) work and the Local Outbreak Control Plan.

There have been 1027 positive test, the cases peaked in April but have reduced with only small increases. The PH teams look at data daily, including: positivity of results and hospital data. The analysis is feeding into the Outbreak Control group. The

borough's cases are slowly increasing but is not on a Watch List. Up to the 1 August there were 205 deaths.

Barry gave an overview of the Local Outbreak Control Plan was published in July and is in place until March 2021. The JCC members were asked to get involved in keeping Merton safe.

Nick Steevens gave an overview of the services provided. The Regulatory Services team of experts have been working closely with Public Health during the pandemic.

During the pandemic food services have had to close or change their business model. He outlined COVID-19 secure measures to protect customers. Most premises are compliant but if there are any concerns JCC members were urged to contact [RSP@merton.gov.uk/020 8545 3025](mailto:RSP@merton.gov.uk/020%208545%203025). Staff not wearing face coverings is a particular problem in hairdressers and barbers.

Nick stressed the 4 E's approach : Engage, Explain, Encourage and Enforce.

### **Questions/Comments**

Q: How are the numbers broken down by the BAME community – is the infection rate higher?

Q: how many deaths are people who had no underlying causes?

C: Some people, e.g. Asylum Seekers are living close with others who have not been tested.

A: There are exemptions that some have applied for.

A: Barry has not got the figures to hand. The LOCP identified high risk settings. People refusing to wear a mask is a Police matter.

Q: Is there a way to encourage schools to make children use face coverings?

Q: How about Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMO)

A: HMOs are linked through the LOCP, the council is working with partners to mitigate risks. The Children Schools and Families (CSF) department receive regular updates from the Department of Education that are sent to schools in the borough. Face coverings are not appropriate for young children – the situation is being monitored.

Q: Are the enough flu vaccination stocks in Merton?

Q: What support is offered to local charities?

A: There is a sufficient stock of flu vaccinations.

A: Charity shops should contact the RSP to get advice through a Webinar.

## **7 ANY OTHER BUSINESS (Agenda Item 7)**

A Black Learning Centre has been launched in August by Grace Oyerinde. It supports children going into year 11 and will also be for children aged 7 to 16 from lower socio-economic backgrounds.

The meeting closed at 9.33.