

Committee: Joint Consultative Committee (JCC) with Ethnic Minorities

Date: 8 September 2020

Wards:

Subject: Merton's response to Black Lives Matter

Lead officer: Rachael Wardell, Director of Children, Schools and Families

Lead member: Councillor Edith Macauley, Cabinet Member for Community Safety, Equalities and Engagement

Contact officer: Evereth Willis, Equality and Community Cohesion Officer

Recommendations:

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1. That Members of the JCC note and comment on the contents of the report.
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1 PURPOSE OF REPORT AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1. To provide an update on Merton Council's response to Black Lives Matter.

2 DETAILS

- 2.1 The issues highlighted by Covid-19 and the death of George Floyd have led to a challenge from our own BAME staff and residents to ask whether we could do more to tackle the injustices and racism that they see in their everyday lives.
- 2.2 The Council is committed to supporting Black Lives Matter and has taken some immediate steps to demonstrate this including:
 - Developed an individual risk assessment for staff which specifically addresses the Covid risk for BAME colleagues;
 - Prepared the Employee Assistance Programme to respond well to staff whose concerns encompassed structural injustice and racism;
 - Reminded all staff that Equality and Diversity training is mandatory for all staff;
 - Worked to re-establish a BAME staff forum, which had operated in the past, but which had ceased to function several years previously.
- 2.3 The Council is committed to taking practical steps to reduce inequalities and to continue the fight against racism within the council itself and in the communities we serve. We want get a better understanding of the issues that affect our staff and residents and to engage them in the practical steps we can take.
- 2.4 We are working closely with the new BAME Staff Forum to develop a Medium-Term strategy and in particular how we improve the diversity of our senior management team and develop our own BAME staff as future leaders in the sector. Also, we have commissioned BAME Voice, to understand the lived experience of BAME communities in relation to Covid-19 and the practical measures that those communities can take to make themselves

more resilient and how the council working with its partners can enable and empower our BAME communities.

2.5 **Governance**

2.5.1 The Cabinet Member for Women and Equalities Women has overall responsibility for the Council's Equality Strategy. The JCC will have oversight of the development and implementation of the Council's response to Black Lives Matter.

2.6 **Merton as an employer**

2.6.1 The Council is committed to the following measures:

- The re-establishment of Merton's staff BAME Forum that gives an opportunity for direct communication with the Corporate Management Team (CMT).
- A programme of cross-council anti-racist education and action will be led by CMT
- The Council has agreed to adopt a suggestion from the BAME Forum that the NHS's Workforce Race Equality Standards (WRES) be adapted and adopted to measure and monitor performance on race equality
- A Medium term strategy (3-5 years) will be developed to ensure that there is ongoing commitment to this agenda and that the council builds the confidence and trust of its BAME staff

2.7 An initial focus will be a proposal for the CMT on practical measures to increase the diversity of the Council's senior leadership including CMT itself. The Head of HR has developed proposals in the following areas:

- Improvements to equalities monitoring information to present a comprehensive picture in relation to all areas of employment.
- Initiatives to increase the number of BAME applicants applying and being shortlisted for vacancies at senior management level.
- Increasing BAME representation on recruitment panels and practical proposals for how this can be achieved in Merton.
- Training and development for BAME staff and consideration of the following: reverse mentoring, leadership development programmes, talent management, succession planning, unconscious bias training. This is in addition to the Equalities and Diversity Training which has already been rolled out to all staff.

2.8 **Merton as a Leader of Place**

2.8.1 At the JCC meeting held on 30 June there was a feeling from participants that the BAME community should be empowered to develop and take forward initiatives, working in partnership with the Council and other statutory bodies.

2.8.2 Having reflected on this the Council has commissioned BAME Voice to develop a Community Resilience Programme to help reduce the risk of infection and improve health outcomes for BAME communities. As part

of the borough's Local Outbreak Control Plan (LOCP) BAME Voice will work closely with the Council, Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) and BAME communities if there is a spike in infection levels in Merton. This project will specifically undertake the following actions:

1. Design and deliver a 'bottom- up" Community Resilience Programme for people of all ages, across Merton's BAME communities.
2. Target the following seven communities as they represent those most affected by COVID-19 - Bangladeshi, Pakistani, Caribbean, Sri Lankan/Tamil and communities from East, West and Southern Africa.
3. Understand the impact that COVID-19 has had, and build resilience among the communities
4. Identify any stigma or structural barriers experienced by the communities and help
5. Identify practical policy responses or local actions to address specific concerns, including opportunities to support and work with BAME communities on these responses.
6. Be an intervention in its own right, helping support building of trust, signposting to appropriate support programmes and to identify community leaders who could have a wider role in the approach.
7. Provide taster training and support for BAME key workers to tackle workplace bullying, racism and discrimination
8. Work with partners across Merton to increase engagement with and the reach of communications to vulnerable and higher risk communities on key COVID-19 related issues
9. Work with key health promotion and disease prevention services and programmes to understand barriers to accessing services, expand the reach of these services and increase the take up of prevention services to assist BAME communities to improve their health and wellbeing thereby improving their resistance to Covid-19 e.g. Healthy weight, flu, physical activity, smoking cessation, mental wellbeing and effective management of chronic conditions including diabetes, hypertension and asthma.

2.9 The disproportionate impact of Covid-19 underlines the importance of small community led voluntary groups in Merton both to support and engage with more marginalised communities. As part of our response to Black Lives Matter we commit ourselves to recognising the contribution of small community groups to tackling inequalities and that we will change the way

that we award funding through the Strategic Partner Grant Programme to ensure a fair and balanced distribution of resources. We will work closely with the voluntary and community sector to create a more collaborative and cooperative approach where larger organisations are working in partnership with smaller organisations to deliver better outcomes for our residents.

3 ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

No other options have been considered as the Council recognises the importance of addressing the issues raised by Black Lives Matter.

4 CONSULTATION UNDERTAKEN OR PROPOSED

- 4.1. The discussion at the JCC will inform a Cabinet report outlining the Council's response to Black Lives Matter.

5 TIMETABLE

- 5.1. A report outlining the Council's response to Black Lives Matter will be discussed at Cabinet on 12 October 2020.

6 FINANCIAL, RESOURCE AND PROPERTY IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1. The BAME Staff forum will be given an annual budget of £5,000.

7 LEGAL AND STATUTORY IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1. On 6 April 2011 the Equality Act 2010 introduced the Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED) which requires the Local Authority, when exercising its functions, to have due regard to the need to eliminate discrimination, harassment and victimisation and to advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations between persons who share a "protected characteristic" and those who do not. "Protected characteristics" are age, disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation.
- 7.2. Implementing measures to respond to Black Lives Matter contributes to the council delivering the Equality Duty.

8 HUMAN RIGHTS, EQUALITIES AND COMMUNITY COHESION IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1 Implementing measures to respond to Black Lives Matter contributes to Bridging the Gap and tackling inequality.

9 CRIME AND DISORDER IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1. None.

10 RISK MANAGEMENT AND HEALTH AND SAFETY IMPLICATIONS

10.1. None

11 APPENDICES – THE FOLLOWING DOCUMENTS ARE TO BE PUBLISHED WITH THIS REPORT AND FORM PART OF THE REPORT

11.1 None

12 BACKGROUND PAPERS

12.1. None

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