

Item No. 3.1	Classification: Open	Date: 15 July 2020	Meeting Name: Council Assembly
Report title:		Community Evidence on the Themed Debates	
Ward(s) or groups affected:		All	
From:		Proper Constitutional Officer	

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Introduction

1. Council assembly business panel agreed the themes for the 15 July 2020 meeting of council assembly are "Southwark Together: Council Response to COVID-19 pandemic" and "Southwark Stands Together: Southwark's commitment to tackle racial inequalities".

Community evidence on the themes

2. The deadline for community evidence was 12 midnight, 9 July 2020.
3. The following requests have been received by the deadline for consideration by this meeting and they are listed in the order received below.
4. Which community evidence shall be considered and the length of each submission will be established by way of a programme motion at the start of council assembly. Community evidence shall be conducted under the existing rules for public participation.

Submissions: Southwark Together: Council Response to COVID-19 pandemic

1. Alhaji Tajudeen Salami, Chief Imam of Old Kent Road Mosque

I have chosen to talk on COVID-19/Islam.

2. Felicia Boshorin, Central Southwark Community Hub

With regards to Southwark Council's response to COVID-19, I believe that that it appeared initially to be slow, but it quickly gained momentum and brought a number of local organisations together. Working across the borough with regular meetings and a support mechanism put in place to ensure a coordinated and support process to ensure that no one in Southwark went without food and other essential necessities. Financial support was offered and made available to ensure the finance did not hinder the processes at hand which meant for Central Southwark Community (CSC) Hub we were able to buy in appropriate personnel to respond to the increased need. We were offered essential food items too which has continued at a lesser degree than initially. We have been spending approximately £5,000 per month on topping up food items as we offer a weekly supply of food to clients who were referred to CSC Hub to ensure that people were encouraged not to go out in search of more food.

I am aware that lockdown has eased, however, we are left with a huge crisis and I would like Southwark Council to focus even more on addressing the issues of food insecurity

In order to tackle food insecurity in Southwark, we must first tackle racial inequality. The Coronavirus pandemic has brought to light the harsh realities of these pre-existing inequalities. Since the start of the pandemic, 60.1% of new referrals have been from the Latin American community in Southwark whilst 30.8% have been from Black communities, particularly West African families. In this case, people of colour are nine times more likely to experience food insecurity than their white British counterparts. And sadly, the problems do not stop here. At Central Southwark Community Hub we've often struggled with the Eurocentric discourses attached to food banks. Is it right that everyone, regardless of their race, origin or religions, should receive the same generic food parcel containing spam, baked beans and tinned soup? We strive to challenge these practices in our food banks to work toward a fairer society. Governments must also do more to consider the wider inequalities and their contribution to food insecurity to truly understand and help the problems we face on a day to day basis.

3. Chris Price, Pecan

Pecan is a Southwark community charity. Our hourbank, employment and women's teams have adapted their services over the last three months to provide virtual support to clients. We also host Southwark Foodbank and Peckham Pantry, these have been very busy over these months as part of the community hub set up in the borough. I would like to explain our response to Covid 19 and talk about future plans not being focused on food poverty and supplying free food for people, instead we need to focus on the drivers of poverty.

4. Eloise Dickens, Anima Youth

My name is Eloise Dickens, I am the Founder of Anima Youth, an organisation working to support young people from less privileged backgrounds, navigate smoothly into independent adult life. Our *beingHer* project, a Gang and Sexual Exploitation Prevention programme working with vulnerable girls living in Southwark, is funded by Southwark Council's Positive Future Fund.

Myself and three other organisations funded by the Positive Futures Fund, would like to attend your next Council Meeting to talk on the theme of Covid-19/Southwark Together. We would love to share how additional funding provided has enabled us to respond, to support young people in Southwark, during this current pandemic.

Submissions: Southwark Stands Together: Southwark's commitment to tackle racial inequalities

5. Nicholas Okwulu

The reason for my wanting to attend and participate in the council forum is that I have been delivering to the community for over ten years, having finished running the community pop up shop the local community have attended. I am also the founder and initiated the Livesey Exchange on Old Kent Rd, organiser and project lead for a Southwark Untold a community event that takes place annually at the Tate Exchange, and organiser of the Big Lunch Peckham which was attended by Prince Charles and Camilla. I have set up Ten point Five at Peckham levels, and initiated Sunbeam

(Southwark Unified Network of Black and Ethnic Minorities consisting of over 12 core members). Our events are attended by the local community and over the widest participation of the local community over the years.

6. Ebenezer Mensah

I grew up in Southwark and I was unknowingly subjected to inequality. I view this as an opportunity to talk about my experiences and present solutions that may benefit other minorities in the community suffering from inequality.

7. Dr Victor Olisa QPM

The point on which I would like to give evidence is on the disproportionality in police enforcement against Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) people and how councillors could work with the police to improve community engagement and dialogue between police and BAME communities.

8. Ayesha Ahmad, Southwark Scholars

Southwark Scholars will be speaking on inequalities within higher education and as new graduates in the work place.

9. Oliur Rahman, Active Communities Network

I will be speaking about race and inequality in Southwark, especially regarding young people in communities during this pandemic and in the past.

I have would like to share my experience growing up in Southwark and why I set up a charity to work on this agenda with young people.

10. Written submission

Hello there

My dear friends, I would like to share my sad experience. Just to give some background, I have over 15 years of work experience in the financial services industry across countries and have engaged with prestigious clients including Government agencies, World bank, and regulatory bodies. A few years back, I interviewed at this reputed investment company based in the city. Like all competitive banking interviews, I went through several rounds of interviewing and speaking with many management people. It was very disappointing that as soon as I joined, I was taken aside in a room and told to change my Indian accent! I was shocked because I have been generally regarded as comprehensible and I had not hidden my accent during my interview.

My career growth has been stunted and I don't get invited to client meetings during these years. On top of it, I was forcibly made to attend accent training classes in which I had to spend hours doing mouth and tongue exercises to change the way I spoke. The company has a "so-called" communication coach who has put enormous pressure by way of verbal abuse to force me to change my accent. This has also been constantly mentioned in the yearly appraisal. Lastly and most gravely, I have been indirectly threatened that I could be fired if I tried to be vocal against it. I have spoken to many Indian friends and it is prevalent across industries and companies in United Kingdom.

Following points are disappointing to me with regards to UK law and legal enforcement:

- There is no explicit law for discrimination against accents in UK.
- The conviction for racial discrimination cases is very low at less than 15% in UK.
- The compensation is not high enough to take the risk of going against the company.
- Solicitors are not willing to be supportive and take such cases. They only offer to negotiate a departure settlement. I called up 8 barristers and solicitors discreetly to check on this.
- People in UK don't support their ethnic minority colleagues for sake of their own careers. In fact, and sadly, they use it to their advantage to push you out so that they can progress on your shoes.

I have suffered mental and emotional harassment over the years, and I feel very sad that this can happen in a country which prides on liberalism and Human rights. Thank you for listening to me.

With best regards,
Anonymous.

BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

Background Papers	Held At	Contact
Constitution	160 Tooley Street London SE1 2QH	Constitutional Team constitutional.team@southwark.gov.uk 020 7525 7228

APPENDICES

No.	Title
None	

AUDIT TRAIL

Lead Officer	Chidilim Agada, Head of Constitutional Services	
Report Author	Virginia Wynn-Jones, Principal Constitutional Officer	
Version	Final	
Dated	13 July 2020	
Key decision?	No	
CONSULTATION WITH OTHER OFFICERS / DIRECTORATES / CABINET MEMBER		
Officer title	Comments sought	Comments included
Director of Law and Democracy	No	No
Strategic Director of Finance and Governance	No	No
Cabinet Member	No	No
Date final report sent to Constitutional Team		13 July 2020