

**Black, Asian and
Minority Ethnic**

INEQUALITIES
COMMISSION



Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic Inequalities Commission

Report and
Recommendations
2021



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• Battle of Cable Street and graffiti protest images courtesy of Tower Hamlets Local History Library and Archives

CHAIR'S FOREWORD:

CLLR ASMA BEGUM, COMMISSION CHAIR

I'm enormously proud to introduce this report.

2020 was a year dominated by the deadly spread of the Covid-19 pandemic and it has had a profound impact on everyone. Then in the midst of the upheaval came the horrific scenes from the United States of George Floyd being killed after a police officer pressed his knee on his neck. People from across the world world expressed shock and outrage at what had taken place, and many took to the street to protest under the banner of Black Lives Matter.

These two world events came together as we heard alarming reports detailing the disproportionately negative impact of Covid-19 on Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic communities. Through local protests and proactive action to remove the statue of slave owner Robert Milligan from West India Dock, Tower Hamlets joined the calls of those demanding change.

It is in this context that the council responded to the voices across our community and I was honoured to be tasked in leading a comprehensive review into the inequalities faced by our Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic Communities.

This report examines where we are making progress, where we are stalling and where we are falling short. Also, it highlights the relationship between race and socio-economic disadvantage across several areas that impact on the experience of our residents.

I should mention that there has been considerable progress in many areas and the council and its partners must acknowledge and celebrate this. We all know that our greatest assets are the residents of Tower Hamlets. We understand and value diversity, and we are a borough with a rich history of welcoming communities from around the world. We want to ensure Tower Hamlets continues to be an inclusive place for people to work, learn, have fun and make this their home.



Moving forward we want to ensure that our partners put the voice and experience of all our communities at the heart of everything we do. We must do more to listen and understand their experiences and take action to improve outcomes for our residents, in particular listening to the quieter voices and smaller communities who often feel excluded. Through our Commission we looked beyond the data and listened to the real experience of our residents so that their concerns shape and drive any improvements we need to make.

Unfortunately, for many people from Black, Asian, Minority Ethnic communities, the pace of change has not been fast enough. People are tired of having to explain their experience because it is widely and publicly documented. Outlined in this report is a picture of inequality in opportunity that is an entrenched experience in education, health, employment and community leadership that has far reaching implications. The Commission heard from young people and women from Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic communities who are worried about their future employment opportunities and outcomes. The pandemic has raised the fear of being pushed further to the back of queue thereby exacerbating existing inequalities. Sadly, it is clear from national research and reviews about inequality, that race remains a significant factor impacting on outcomes, and the existence of structural injustice and discrimination in our society still has a devastating presence in too many of our residents lives.

As I listened to witnesses presenting to the Commission, from many different communities and sectors in the borough, I was struck by the passion in their words and ashamed that many felt they still live in a place where the colour of their skin determines their experience, opportunity and outcome. We all have an obligation to be better and we must do more to deliver changes to improve outcomes for our Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic Communities. I welcome the many public commitments to become anti-racist organisations as a result of the events of the last year. However, I want organisations in Tower Hamlets to be bolder and clearer about what this means in practice. This Commission represents the beginning of our commitment to be an anti-racist borough and to take collective action to tackle race inequality. As Chair of the Commission I feel it is important to call to action partners in

Tower Hamlets because change can only be achieved at pace if we are working together across communities and organisations.

This commitment is now even more urgent. The pandemic has had a devastating impact on our Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic communities and exposed stark inequalities they face. It has highlighted the interrelationship with poverty and race and has sharpened the focus of the existing institutional and structural racial inequality. I hope that as we move from pandemic to recovery, the impact on our Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic communities remains at the forefront of social and political discourse and any improvement must lead to a positive legacy from this terrible virus.

I would like to thank all those that contributed to this review and shared personal experiences of a very difficult topic in such a passionate, heartfelt, and commendable way. Commissioners understand that in sharing your stories with us you have placed your faith in us to deliver change and we do not take this responsibility lightly. I promise that we will aim to deliver on our recommendations with the same level of commitment and passion you showed. My commitment is to tackle race inequality in the borough, and I welcome the enthusiasm of the council and partners who have engaged in this. We will double our efforts to build a fair society where everyone of us, whatever our backgrounds, will work together in addressing the issues of inequalities.

MY STORY

On a personal level, chairing this Commission has been a journey of discovery for me. It has forced me to recognise and confront the barriers I have faced and suppressed in my life. I grew up in Tower Hamlets and was raised by a single mum which, as an Asian Muslim, meant that I faced many cultural challenges. I have been judged because of the colour of my skin and experienced trauma because of racist abuse. I still remember the time people threw eggs at me as I walked to school, and when live fireworks were posted through my letterbox. We are in a different place today and sadly racism still exists, but it has evolved and is just as destructive. It is more sophisticated, covert, and entrenched in society. As a young woman entering politics and engaging in civic life, I also experienced discrimination because of my race, faith and gender and felt the sense of imposter syndrome that many witnesses confessed to feeling because I didn't see other people who looked like me paving the way or standing beside me. It saddened me to hear that this is still the experience for many.

As I listened to witnesses, I realised that I have suppressed much of this discrimination and became blind to it, not by choice, it just became my norm. In recent weeks many people have commented that I have a newfound confidence and credit for this must go to this Commission. It has changed my perspective and empowered me to challenge the discrimination which I have always tolerated or dismissed. I am determined to pave the way for the next generation of Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic people. My story is also one which is populated by the opportunities given to me by allies and the benefits of integration and cohesion, where people have looked beyond my ethnicity, gender and family background and supported me. I know people from Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic backgrounds simply want the same opportunity to excel. I implore all of you reading this report, regardless of your background, to consider how you can play a role in ensuring a fairer society for all and provide the opportunity for everyone to excel.

TIME FOR ACTION

The events of 2020 have had a profound impact on many of us. They have forced us to hold difficult conversations that laid bare uncomfortable truths which we must not lose sight of. However, we must now move quickly to take action in 2021 and begin a collective journey to close the inequality gap that exists for so many of our residents. As one of the most diverse boroughs in the country we are determined to take a leadership approach and be at the forefront of addressing race inequality. I hope our recommendations and calls to action will ensure there are systems in place to tackle this urgently and prevent escalation of tensions between our communities. This Commission focused on Tower Hamlets but the issues it identifies are felt all over the country. I hope this will be a beacon for other local authorities to follow.

Finally, this Commission would not have been possible without the commitment, wisdom and passion of my fellow Commissioners. I would like to take this opportunity to thank them all for their time, energy, and contributions.

Cllr Asma Begum, Commission Chair
Deputy Mayor and Cabinet Member for Children, Youth Services and Education

COMMISSIONERS



Cllr Asma Begum, Chair

Deputy Mayor and Cabinet Member for Community Safety, Youth and Equalities



Cllr Mufeedah Bustin

Cabinet Member for Planning and Social Inclusion



Lord Simon Woolley

Director of Operation Black Vote



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Chair of Tower Hamlets Housing Forum



Graeme McDonald

Managing Director of Solace and Solace in Business

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Commission would like to thank everyone who attended the Commission meetings, our focus groups, and residents and local organisations who submitted written evidence. We are extremely grateful for your insights and lived experiences which have shaped the Commission’s findings and recommendations:

List of Focus groups

- BAME Women’s Groups from Account3
- School Governors – Representation from schools across the borough
- Health & Social Care Patients
- Schoolteachers
- Young People from the youth council - LBTH
- Public & Private Sector Employees

Health

Dianne Barnham, CEO, Healthwatch Tower Hamlets
Dr Jackie Applebee, Chair, Tower Hamlets Local Medical Committee
Lorraine Sunduza, Chief Nurse, East London Foundation Trust
Alwen Williams, CEO, BARTS Health NHS Trust
Mahmud Hasan, CEO, APASEN

Employment

Sandra Kerr CBE, Race Equality Director, Business in the Community
Will Tuckley, Chief Executive, LBTH
Amanda Marcus, Divisional Director of HR, LBTH
Divya Patel, Outreach Recruitment Manager, London Fire Brigade
Jess McNicholas, Head of Global Inclusion and Diversity at State Street
Metropolitan Police

Community Leadership

James Thomas – Corporate Director of Children and Culture, LBTH
Jeremy Crook OBE – Chief Executive of Black Training and Enterprise Group
Chris Banks – Joint chief Executive, Tower Hamlets GP Care Group
Peter Okali – Chief Executive - THCVS
Naureen Bhatti – GP Tower Hamlets
Babu Bhattacharjee – Director of Communities & Neighbourhoods, Poplar HARCA

Education

Dr Halima Begum – Chief Executive, Runnymede Trust
Kim Nguyen and Gabriel Osamor – ELBA
Kabir Miah – Deputy Head Swanlea
Stephanie Marshall- Vice Principle, Education, Queen Mary University
Julie Hutchinson, Deputy Chief Executive, East London Business Alliance

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Commission was set up in September 2020 to examine the inequalities experienced by Tower Hamlets Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic Communities. The lived experiences, opportunities and outcomes for Tower Hamlets' Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic communities differ detrimentally from those of their White peers. Structural and institutional racism remains a debilitating issue facing the borough and its residents. Many Tower Hamlets' Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic communities have neither had equal access to services or employment nor fair treatment and opportunities.

The Commission was keen to concentrate on a few pivotal areas where it can have a real impact and held an engagement event with a range of stakeholders in the summer of 2020 to explore the key issues. From this it was agreed the Commission would focus on community leadership, health, education and employment. Our data and community insight identified these areas as the most pressing and significant for Black, Asian and Ethnic Minority communities. The Commission engaged extensively with the community and prioritised the voices from those who live and work in the borough to understand how we can deliver tangible and lasting improvements.

The Commission heard about the many great and commendable things which have been happening. There has been progress in many areas, but it has been too slow and there are questions about whether the programmes have gone far enough or are targeted appropriately. We must do more, and we must do it better and faster. As one of the most diverse boroughs in the country, Tower Hamlets is well placed to assume a leadership role in this space. Through the borough's residents, businesses, public sector and voluntary sector, Tower Hamlets has the unique assets which allows it to lead in addressing the inequalities facing Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic communities.

"The labour market has nothing to do with skills, education or experience."



KEY FINDINGS

It is clear that there has been significant progress in the borough, most noticeably in educational attainment, and the Commission heard many examples of best practice. However, the pace of change has not been quick enough, nor has it been radical. Much of the evidence suggests that racism is a key barrier in accessing services and progression in life and employment. Many Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic residents do not have access to same social capital as their White peers and the impact from this permeates into many areas of their life.

The Commission recognises that Tower Hamlets is a borough which celebrates its diverse communities, but it needs to do more to understand the nuanced and divergent experiences of different Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic groups. This is particularly relevant when considering data, targets and representation which emerged as a reoccurring theme across the Commission's areas of focus. Many organisations are not collecting comprehensive, disaggregated ethnicity data which would allow them to understand their progress and deliver services which accurately responds to the needs of those who use them. Furthermore, the lack of representation in many areas of public life, or ambitious targets to increase representation, has a profound impact on the way residents perceive, interact and experience services. Every organisation in the borough must engage in ethnic minority pay gap reporting and be transparent about the composition of their boards and structures to help drive targets.

It is clear there is real commitment and passion to improve outcomes for Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic communities. Whilst this report makes many important recommendations, it is the intention of the Commission to prioritise to make Tower Hamlets an anti-racist place, where organisations share a vision and plan to make changes at pace. In practice, this will be showcased by an anti-racist pledge which will include tangible actions to drive improvement in employment, services, and procurement. This will involve establishing a race equality network, setting challenging targets, collecting and publishing disaggregated ethnicity data, increasing representation and better utilisation of organisations buying and influencing powers. By the end of 2021 we expect all public sector organisations in the borough to sign up to this.

COMMUNITY LEADERSHIP

Engagement from the community is vital to ensure Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic voices shape decision making. Many are unaware of the opportunities available to them. For others, they are disheartened by the lack of representation and feel that the opportunities are not for people from their community. Moreover, many people from these communities are from disadvantaged backgrounds and feel that they do not have the time or skillset to effectively engage. Further work is needed to develop the infrastructure which grows and supports people to engage with their community. In order to do this, community leadership needs a long-term commitment and investment. There needs to be a systemic plan on how this can be resourced and a clear objective and commitment which states what the borough wants to achieve.



HEALTH

The constraints of structural racism are most apparent when considering health outcomes of our Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic residents which are worse than those of White residents in many areas, with many Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic residents suffering from a higher burden of multimorbidity.

A considerable emphasis needs to be placed on improving the partnership approach to tackle the wider determinants of health, with too many Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic residents experiencing poorer employment and housing conditions. Furthermore, access to health services needs to be improved by ensuring services meet the cultural needs of our diverse communities and developing strong and effective relationships with these community. Digital exclusion is a prevalent access barrier, exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, alongside ineffective communication and inadequate translation services. The need to work with our Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic communities should be at forefront of our recovery agenda ensuring we deliver real improvement in health outcomes.

“Surgery staff questioning if I have the right to be here in front of everyone made me feel like a criminal - all I wanted was to see a GP.”



“Our surnames lead to discrimination”



EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic children are achieving good academic success however this has not translated into good employment. There are clear limitations in social capital, with many children from Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic families lacking the confidence and networks to compete with their White peers. Too many young people from Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic families are unfamiliar with the testing and recruitment processes employers undertake, and have not been exposed to the professional, corporate world. Pipelines from primary schools through to university and into employment need to be strengthened and there must be a considerable obligation placed on employers in Canary Wharf and the City of London to engage. Large employers must consider how they can develop pipelines, structures and support to engage Black, Asian and Minority young people and how they can accelerate the pace of change. Representation in these organisations must significantly improve and the structural barriers must be removed. Efforts to increase the capacity of young people in education settings will not succeed so long as the structural barriers remain.

The Commission spent a lot of time speaking to the leading organisations in the borough and the lack of Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic representation, particularly those from Black African and Caribbean groups, was shocking. The Commission calls for the development of a leadership programme to nurture the next generation of Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic leaders. Alongside this, organisations must embrace a cultural shift at all levels. The need for a safe space to have open and honest discussions about race is vital.

VISION

By 2025 Tower Hamlets is an anti-racist borough where organisations work together to make radical changes that close inequality gaps by advancing opportunities and ensure the experience of racism within structures and institutions is eradicated.

The Commission makes recommendations which aim to ensure:

- Organisations in Tower Hamlets are publicly committed to addressing race inequality in access to their services, employment, and decision making boards.
- Organisations in Tower Hamlets are using disaggregated data and targets to identify and address inequalities.
- Organisations in Tower Hamlets are using their spending power and influence to ensure their suppliers and partners deliver against race equality commitment.
- Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic individuals in Tower Hamlets are empowered and have access to digital skills and equipment to access services and employment.
- Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic individuals in Tower Hamlets are skilled and supported to access community leadership positions and progress in employment.
- The Tower Hamlets Partnership speaks with one voice locally, regionally and nationally on race equality.
- The Tower Hamlets Partnership operates effectively and addresses wider determinate of health inequalities.
- Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic residents are engaged in the design and delivery of services which impacts them.
- Local employers are undertaking positive active actions to diversify their workforce at all levels.
- The Tower Hamlets Partnership holds to account local organisations on progress on race inequality.

DELIVERY

The recommendations set out in this report will be delivered through the Tower Hamlets Partnership Executive Group. The council will assume a lead role and will act as a facilitator to engage and support partners in both the public and private sector to respond to these recommendations. However, achieving true equality in the borough is not a feat the council can achieve alone, and the collective efforts of all partners is critical in ensuring the successful implementation of these recommendations.

The Commission therefore recommends that a sub group of the Tower Hamlets Partnership Executive Group be established to lead on delivery of the recommendations and work with the voluntary and community sector Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic Network to ensure the voice of the community is reflected in the delivery.



“A lack of minority communities in leadership leads to an invisible psychological ceiling.”

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Commission has made 23 recommendations. The Commission was mindful of the need to make recommendations which will have a tangible impact on experiences, opportunities and outcomes for our residents. However, as you read through the narrative of the report you will find further suggestions of actions organisations must take to address the inequalities facing our Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic communities. The Commission expects all organisations in Tower Hamlets to respond to these findings and hopes that regional and national bodies will carefully consider how these issues play out at a broader level.

GENERAL	
Anti-Racist Borough	Organisations within Tower Hamlets commit to becoming an anti-racist borough. This will include a commitment to work at pace to address inequality and access to services. It will recognise the individual needs of each Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic Community and it will be delivered through a race equality pledge, race equality network, challenging targets, disaggregated data, increased representation and better utilisation of an organisation’s influence through its supply chains, employment practice and services.
Race Equality Pledge	Organisations in Tower Hamlets, especially those that comprise the strategic partnership and work in partnership with the council, sign up to a shared commitment on race equality by the end of 2021. Organisations who sign up to this pledge will support and deliver the commitments set out in the Commission’s recommendations. This will enable greater collaboration and support between organisations and strengthen accountability and transparency of commitment and progress. As part of this recommendation, a local award scheme should be established which recognises best practices amongst organisations and individuals. The council and partners should lobby national and regional organisations to set up a high-profile national recognition programme to recognise achievement and drive up standards.
Race Equality Network	A partnership Race Equality Network be developed that monitors the delivery of the Commission’s recommendations, influences policy and decision making and enables a safe place for on-going conversation about race equality in Tower Hamlets and drive improvements
Targeted Interventions	In delivering the recommendations of the Commission, organisations should recognise the variety and nuances within the needs of the borough’s Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic communities and tailor interventions which address the challenges facing each community, recognising that at present the Somali Community is the biggest Black community.
Targets	Organisations signing up to the Race Equality Pledge must set ambitious targets for addressing inequalities which deliver real change and year on year progress. Organisations must use effective performance management to monitor progress and report publicly.
Data	Organisations signing up to the Race Equality Pledge must collate, disaggregate and analyse data in a granular way to understand areas of inequalities facing Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic groups. This data should be disaggregated to ensure we understand needs of different Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic communities.
Influence	Organisations signing up to the Race Equality Pledge must utilise their influence with contractors, those they give grants to and work in partnership to ensure they comply and meet the standards of the borough equality pledge.

RECOMMENDATIONS

COMMUNITY LEADERSHIP	
Organisational Culture	Organisations must create a culture which values diversity and provides the space and environment which enables Black, Asian and Minority people to develop into community leadership roles within the governance of the organisation.
Training, Development and Peer Support	Organisations should provide support, training, mentoring and development opportunities for Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic individuals to access leadership roles and be effective in these roles, with a specific focus on a programme for young people. This needs to be at every level from entry to moving into senior roles such as chairs.
Role Models and Allies	That local people are empowered to become role models and allies as visible inspiration and create effective networks for the Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic communities to leverage support.
Awareness	Develop and deliver a targeted communications campaign to raise awareness of opportunities available which includes profiling of other black, Asian and Minority Ethnic residents who have succeeded and made significant contributes. Organisations must demonstrate where they are now and evidence year on year progress.

RECOMMENDATIONS

HEALTH	
Digital Exclusion	Organisations address digital exclusion facing Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic communities which is having an impact on their ability to access services, employment, engage in community life and achieve their life outcomes.
Campaign & Social Determinants	Lead a high-profile local campaign for the government to provide adequate funding to address health inequalities including socio-economic factors. Lead a high-profile local campaign for the government to provide adequate funding to address health inequalities including socio- economic factors.
Hostile Environment	Local NHS organisations to lead a local campaign for the government to review hostile environment policies which seeks to reduce the profile of the checking of immigration status of service users it is statutorily required to undertake.
Partnership	That partnership structures and strategies are reviewed to deliver radical changes at pace on health inequalities in the borough.
Representation	Tower Hamlets Partnership to develop initiatives to support more Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic residents to become health professionals (particularly underrepresented and smaller Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic communities).
Research	The Health & Wellbeing Board, by the end of 2021, undertake detailed external research on causes of health inequalities amongst Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic communities which puts engagement of the community at the forefront of its work to identify issues and solutions.
Clinical Training	Review and strengthen clinical training in order to increase understanding of different cultural needs and deliver better health services to all communities.
Co-designed Services	That NHS organisation undertake meaningful engagement and involvement of Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic communities in design, development and delivery of services. Health organisations need to improve the way services are understood and support Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic residents so that they are empowered and confident to access them. This may mean they need to change the way that services are configured to make them more culturally appropriate.
Communication	NHS organisations review their communication and engagement strategy which ensures guidance and important message is culturally appropriate and available in different languages and uses different approaches to ensure message is reach to different audiences.

RECOMMENDATIONS

EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT	
Engage Canary Wharf and City of London	The Tower Hamlets Partnership to engage leaders in Canary Wharf and City of London to consider what they can do to accelerate the pace of change and develop a systemic plan to ensure the required step change to increase the representation of Black, Asian and Ethnic Minority employees in senior positions within their organisations takes place.
Testing and Assessment	Local employers and employment support agencies work with Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic young people to better prepare them for testing and assessments.
Awareness	Educate parents, carers and children and young people on the range of career options available
Education Bursary Scheme	Building on existing bursary scheme the council works with local organisations to further develop this to support more Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic students from low income family to progress into higher education and professional qualifications.
Leadership Development	Explore opportunities for local employers to come together and work with QMUL to develop a programme which supports Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic people across different sector move into senior leadership positions.
Recruitment Processes	Organisations to review their recruitment processes to ensure they are well designed and removes any opportunity for bias.
Representation	Tower Hamlets Partnership to collate and jointly publish disaggregated data, including pay gap and the ethnic profile of their senior leadership, and monitor progress in addressing race inequality amongst senior leadership.
Diversity in Schools	Schools in Tower Hamlets deliver programmes to recruit more Black, Asian and Minority school governors and support them into senior positions. Schools also need to support more Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic teachers into leadership roles include Head and deputy head roles.
Safe Space	Organisations commit to creating a culture which creates a safe space for open and honest conversations about race within their organisation.

1. INTRODUCTION

Tower Hamlets has always been a borough committed to creating a cohesive, fair and inclusive community. For many years new communities have settled in Tower Hamlets, because of the opportunities to trade, do business and raise their families, creating a vibrant and diverse borough. One of the borough's' biggest strengths is its proud history of fighting racism and fascism and its continued commitment to diversity. With over 137 languages spoken and 43% of residents born in over 200 different countries Tower Hamlets is one of the most diverse places in the country.

However, recent events have once again shone a spotlight on racial inequality and forced everyone including leaders of public, private, faith, voluntary and community sector organisations and institutions, to consider their position and what more must be done. The public death of George Floyd, and subsequent Black Lives Matter demonstrations, has brought race to the forefront of an international conversation. Additionally, the disproportionate impact of COVID-19 on the Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic population has served to expose the severe consequences of the unacceptable structural disadvantages and discrimination faced by these communities. Despite numerous studies, commissions and changes to legislation in the UK, racism and inequality remains pervasive, insidious and is the experience for many Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic people, especially in key areas such as housing, employment, education and criminal justice.

In Tower Hamlets, for all the successes and advancements that have been made, for many people equality remains difficult to achieve. Just look at the stark disparities in health outcomes or employment for Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic women to understand the borough must work harder to address inequality experienced by different groups of people. Institutional and structural racial discrimination has meant some people have neither had equal access to services or employment nor fair treatment and chances. The lived experience and outcomes for Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic people in Tower Hamlets still differ significantly and detrimentally from



- At around the peak of first wave of the pandemic, compared to White Londoners, Black Londoners had around two and a half to three times the risk of dying with COVID-19 (within 28 days of diagnosis) and people of Asian ethnicity had up to twice the risk.
- In the second wave, we are seeing a higher risk in Asian Londoners at 1.7 times the risk of dying from COVID-19 (within 28 days of diagnosis) compared to the White population. For Black Londoners, the risk is 1.5 times higher, but less than in the first wave.

[Click here to read the Public Health Matters blog on tackling London's COVID-19 health inequalities.](#)

1. INTRODUCTION

those of their White peers. Whilst we have seen significant progress in educational attainment, employment and housing, Tower Hamlets still has the highest rate of child and pensioner poverty in the country. Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic residents represent a high proportion of those who are most deprived and experience higher levels of unemployment, overcrowding and health issues alongside this. The longer-term impact of COVID-19 is likely to be significantly more detrimental to this group and they must be at the forefront of our response moving forward.

In Tower Hamlets, the Black Lives Matter demonstrations manifested in a protest in Mile End Park and the removal of a statue of noted slaveholder Robert Milligan outside of the Museum of London Docklands. Mayor John Biggs also commissioned a review of the borough's public realm which included a resident consultation to identify monuments, plaques, buildings, roads which celebrated legacies which are not in keeping with the borough's values of diversity. The consultation also sought to identify those legacies and backgrounds which could be better represented. An action plan is currently in development to ensure the council and our partners are taking positive steps to ensure that diversity is better reflected in the borough's public realm.

In recognition of the need to do more the council and its partners held an engagement event in July 2020 to consider the pressing issues impacting Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic communities and identify the key areas of focus for the Commission. Over 35 key stakeholders attended the meeting, including representatives from Tower Hamlets Clinical Commissioning Group, Queen Mary University London, University of East London, Barts Health NHS Trust, Canary Wharf Group, Tower Hamlets Community Voluntary Services, Tower Hamlets College, Operation Black Vote and representatives from voluntary and community sector groups.

It was agreed that the Commission should concentrate on a few areas to enable it to remain focused on delivering real change and improve outcomes for the borough's Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic communities. It was decided that the Commission would consider community leadership, health, education and employment. The council's data analysis and engagement work highlighted the significant inequalities for Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic communities in each of these areas. The engagement meeting shared the council's understanding of these areas and helped map a framework to enable real action through the Commission. While criminal justice was a pressing issue in the discussions it was felt that this had been an area of focus for the borough's Community Safety Partnership Board and a review was being undertaken concurrently by the Youth Justice Board and therefore due to the limited capacity of the Commission this would not be in scope.

The Commission was formally launched in September 2020 by Mayor John Biggs with Commissioners selected to bring expertise, skills and networks on the areas of focus, with a clear role description to help them fulfil their role. The council is determined to lead by example and pledges to ensure that Tower Hamlets Council is an anti-racist organisation, leading in making the borough an anti-racist place. However, the council is unable to achieve this feat alone and needs the commitment, collaboration and support from leading organisations in the borough as well as residents.

BOROUGH ETHNICITY PROFILE

More than two-thirds (69%) of the borough's population belong to a minority ethnic group. Tower Hamlets is ranked as the 16th most ethnically diverse local authority in England out of 325 local authorities.

The borough's two largest ethnic groups are the White British and the Bangladeshi populations, each accounting for one third of the population. Tower Hamlets has the largest Bangladeshi population in the country

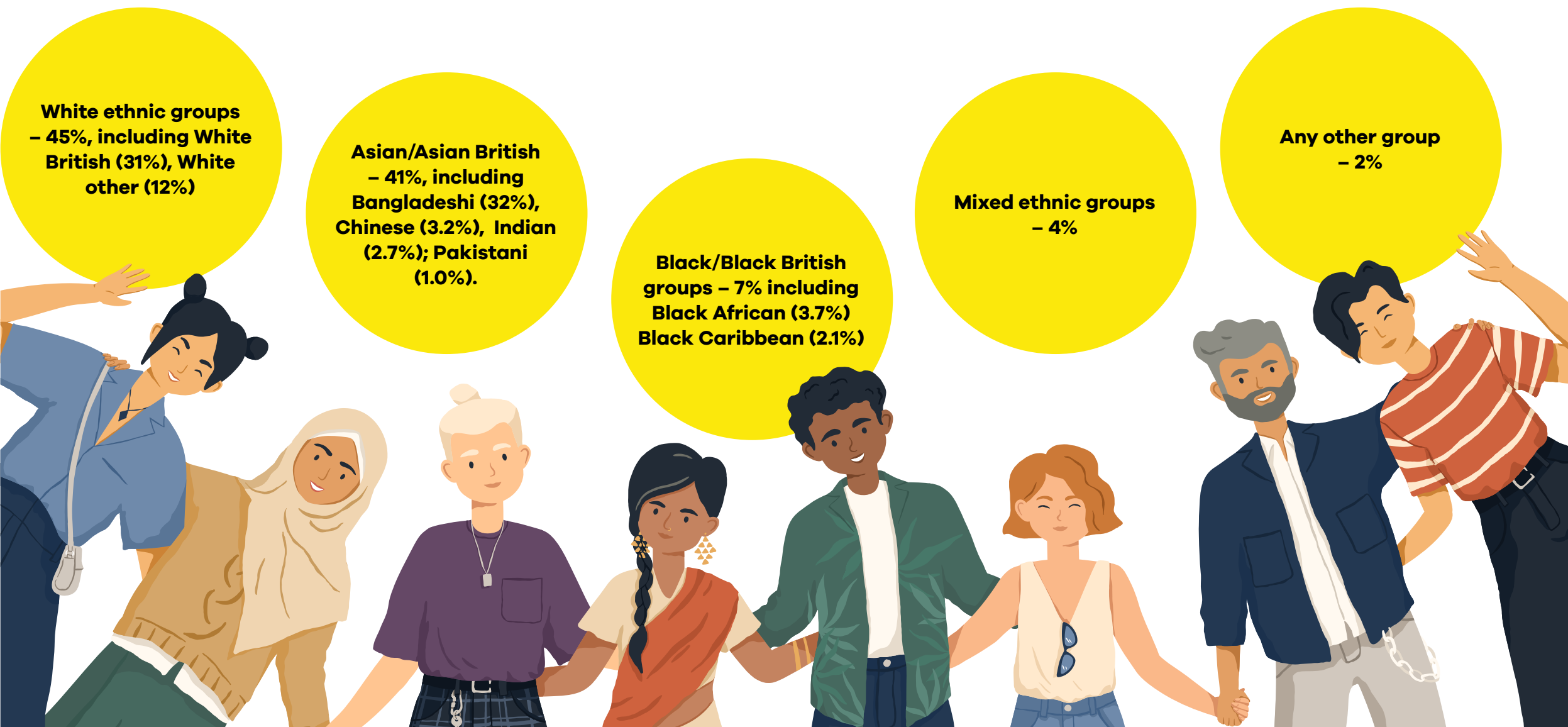
The third largest group is the White Other population, who account for 12% of the borough's population. This group is diverse and includes residents from a mix of ethnic backgrounds, Europeans, Australians and Americans.

A significant proportion of the borough's population are Somali, and they are the borough's largest Black group. The 2011 Census identified 2,925 Somali-born residents, 1.2% of the population. The overall size of the Somali population in the borough, including subsequent and second generations, is considerably larger, between 6,000 and 9,000 or 2-3% of the population.

- 70% of children and young people aged 0-24 are from a non white group.
- Bangladeshi residents made up almost half of all 0-24 year olds (46%) in Tower Hamlets compared with a third (32%) of all residents.
- The proportion of Black residents aged 0-24 (8%) was slightly higher than the proportion of all residents from Black ethnic groups (7%), while residents from mixed ethnic backgrounds aged 0-24 (6%) was higher than among the population as a whole (4%).

The Commission heard about the different experiences of Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic groups in the borough. In particular, the experience of Tower Hamlets' Somali community was picked up and identified as being open to discrimination from other minority groups. This was most apparent in education, but it is likely to occur elsewhere. Somali parents, who have experienced discrimination, despair at the constant criminalisation of their children based on racist attitudes and behaviour. There are limited numbers of Somali staff in schools to understand the needs of Somali families and their children. We also recognise that our Somali community is not accessing pathways into employment as effectively as other ethnic minority communities, including through government led schemes. Their needs to be better representation in frontline services, with relatable peers that inspire the community

The council working with partners is committed to delivering an extensive programme of improvement for the Somali Community. The work with the Somali Task Force is continuing through the Somali Working Group¹. Through the implementation of the Task Force recommendations significant progress has been made and a recognition that more needs to be done which will be taken forward by the Somali Working Group.



¹https://www.towerhamlets.gov.uk/ignl/community_and_living/Somali_Task_force.aspx

PURPOSE AND SCOPE

The Commission aimed to deliver tangible and practical actions which will deliver real change to the lives of our Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic communities, and allow the council and partners to champion the enormous impact these communities have had on the borough.

The Commission was shaped by three objectives:

ENGAGEMENT

Engage and operate at the heart of Tower Hamlets’ communities to hear about people’s lived experience and solutions, specifically Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic women and young people who experience higher levels of inequality

PARTNERSHIP APPROACH

Work with institutions to advance and prioritise race equality to achieve an inclusive, cohesive, thriving and representative Tower Hamlets

INFLUENCE CHANGE

Influence local, sub-regional and regional leaders who have significant influence on Tower Hamlets, particularly in the development of policy and strategy practices and the allocation of resources

APPROACH AND DELIVERY

The Commission’s work was conducted over four months, with the council website and social media channels used to provide information about the Commission and how to get involved. Evidence was collected through four formal hearings which engaged 27 key witnesses. The Commission placed an emphasis on capturing the lived experiences of our Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic residents and heard from 87 people through six focus groups with different sectors of the community. The Commission also received 78 written submissions from residents and organisations in the borough. Finally, the Commission considered previous and recent studies and reviews into race inequality both regionally and nationally.

The recommendations set out in this report will be delivered through the Tower Hamlets Partnership Executive Group. The council will assume a lead role and will act as a facilitator to engage and support partners in both the public and private sector to respond to these recommendations. However, achieving true equality in the borough is not a feat the council can achieve alone, and the collective efforts of all partners is critical in ensuring the successful implementation of these recommendations. The Commission therefore recommends that a sub group of the Tower Hamlets Partnership Executive Group be established to lead on delivery of the recommendations and work with the voluntary and community sector Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic Network to ensure the voice of the community is reflected in the delivery.



COMMUNITY LEADERSHIP

The first session considered the barriers preventing Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic people from engaging with their community and assuming positions of leadership. The Commission engaged with local organisations to explore how they are creating leadership opportunities and how they can be supported to deliver more. In their exploration of community leadership, the Commission met with residents and considered the issue of the minority within the minority, focusing on how women, young people, and smaller Black Asian, and Minority Ethnic groups can be engaged. The Commission listened to evidence from the GP Care Group, LBTH Children Services, Poplar Harca, Black Training and Enterprise Group, Tower Hamlets CVS and the Head of School for GP Training for North East and Central London. The Commission also held a focus group with a Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic women’s group and school governors.



HEALTH

The second thematic meeting considered whether racial biases in health care provision is preventing access and improvement to health outcomes. The Commission also considered the communication needs of different communities to understand what further action is needed to improve trust and access issues. The Commission heard evidence from Healthwatch Tower Hamlets, Local Medical Committee, East London NHS Foundation Trust (ELFT), Barts Health NHS Trust, and Apasenth. The Commission also held a focus group with health patients and social care users.



EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

The final two thematic sessions considered the barriers faced by Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic school, college and university leavers in accessing good employment, and racial bias during the selection process. Moreover, the Commission heard from employers and employees in public and private sector organisations to understand the barriers preventing Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic people from progression into senior leadership positions. In the education session, the Commission heard evidence from Runnymede, two former students who have recently gained employment, Swanlea School, Queen Mary University and East London Business Alliance. The Commission also held a focus group with young people which was chaired by the Deputy Young Mayor. In the employment session, the Commission heard evidence from Tower Hamlets council, Metropolitan Police, Business in the Community, London Fire Brigade and State Street. The Commission also held a focus group with schoolteachers and employees from public and private sector organisations.

“There’s an ignorance and insensitivity towards cultural differences.”



2. GENERAL FINDINGS

RACISM

Following the death of George Floyd and the Black Lives Matter demonstrations in the summer of 2020, many witnesses who engaged with the Commission recognised it as a watershed moment. They noted an appetite for meaningful and lasting change in all facets of society, which hitherto did not exist. The Commission was informed that for many Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic people, they were engaging in open, honest and challenging conversations about race with their White peers for the first time in their lives. These conversations acknowledged uncomfortable truths and it is therefore important for the Commission to recognise at the beginning of this report the pervasive nature of racism which exists in institutions and structures in Tower Hamlets.

The Commission heard many heart-breaking examples of racism and discrimination from residents and employees which has had a profound impact on them. It is a key barrier preventing access to services and progression in life and in employment. The Commission heard from:

- School teachers, afraid to share their identity, as they provided evidence detailing numerous examples of being overlooked for senior roles in favour of less qualified White peers.
- An employee in a large financial organisation who revealed a detailed analysis of his organisation’s pay gap, disaggregated by ethnicity, revealed the ‘darker the skin the wider the gap’.
- Witnesses who highlighted how the structural racism within the health landscape, and other structures in the borough, have led to Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic people experiencing poorer health outcomes, being overexposed to COVID-19 and more likely to suffer the economic consequences of the pandemic.

This report provides further anecdotes and data which suggests that racism is still, unfortunately, a pervasive and insidious issue which needs to be addressed. The



Commission heard many examples of best practice which are shared in this report in the hope that other organisations will follow their lead. However, the pace of change is not fast enough and as the Commission makes its recommendations it is mindful that they must help accelerate the speed in which equity and improved outcomes are delivered to our Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic communities.

The Commission noted the commitment and passion for change by all those it engaged and the need to build on this through a clear pledge for the borough. The pledge will form the basis of a strong commitment by organisations to ensure Tower Hamlets is an anti-racist place. It will provide a shared platform for support and challenge and deliver public accountability on progress. It was acknowledged that change will take time and it was important to continue the conversation about race equality beyond the lifetime of this Commission. Building on the council’s commitment to lead in this area, the council should work with other councils and the Tower Hamlets Partnership to lobby government for action on race equality including greater social mobility given the links with poverty, as well as ways of nationally recognising achievements/driving up standards.

DATA AND TARGETS

From each of the thematic areas it was clear that there are a wide range of factors which contribute to inequality, and indeed many of the themes and findings are closely interrelated. This is perhaps most evident when the Commission considered terminology, data and targets. Many witnesses commented that they do not like the term 'BAME' which engulfs all minority groups, helps to mask the non-inclusion of specific ethnic groups and fails to recognise the nuances and uniqueness of each community. There is a national debate about this, and the Commission notes it is important that we locally start to identify and address the needs of each of these diverse groups and begin to treat them as separate and distinct.

Under the Equality Act 2010, organisations have a duty to collect and annually publish information which shows their compliance with the Equality Duty. It was striking that none of the witnesses the Commission engaged with referenced this. As the Commission interrogated each theme, it was apparent that many organisations rely on census data and the collation of detailed, disaggregated ethnicity data is sparse.

Good quality data is essential in designing better services which accurately respond to the needs of those who require them, reduce inequality through improving access and allow for targeted interventions. This is also emphasised in several national and regional reviews including recent studies looking at disproportionate impact of COVID-19 on Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic Communities. The Commission, therefore, recommends organisations be more rigorous in the way they collect and analyse data. This will facilitate a better understanding of the areas of inequalities different Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic communities are facing and inform the design and delivery of services for each community.

Targets were highlighted as a potential game changing action, but the Commission realises that it is a complex and nuanced intervention. Some witnesses acknowledged that young people believe in meritocracy and they are not comfortable knowing they have received an opportunity or promotion because of their ethnicity. This sentiment was also shared by participants of the employee focus group who labelled targets as 'tokenistic' stating that for targets to be effective, there needs to be greater transparency and communication of the reasons they are needed. The focus group

stressed that targets have the benefit of allowing more accessibility into roles, enabling Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic employees to secure roles they see career progression in. The focus group also noted that most targets they are aware of tend to be at senior levels. Progressive targets are needed to influence the growth and development of Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic employees within an organisation, supporting them to reach executive levels.

The Commission heard from State Street, who demonstrated the significant strides they have taken to improve the diversity of their workforce through the collection of data and the use of aspirational targets which drives their leadership. They have set a target to triple their Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic leadership and a target to double their representation across the entirety of their organisation over the next three years. This will ensure they have a diverse pipeline of employees to develop into the future leaders of the organisation. State Street highlighted that similar interventions to improve the gender composition of their senior leadership were successful and stressed the importance of collecting data to help understand the makeup of your population and drive change, noting, 'if you can't measure it, you can't change it' and 'what gets measured, gets done'.

The Commission endorses the McGregor Smith review, which underlined the need for ethnicity pay gap reporting and targets. The Commission is disappointed that neither of these are mandatory and will push for organisations in Tower Hamlets to lead the way in implementing this. Organisations must collect, scrutinise and be transparent with data and targets to help define how they are performing and demonstrate a meaningful commitment to diversity and inclusion. The Commission recognises the benefits targets can bring and calls on all organisations in the borough to set ambitious targets which are proportionate to the size of the organisation and the borough they serve.

REPRESENTATION

Lack of representation at all levels in society and in organisations is a critical barrier for Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic people accessing services and employment. The Race at Work Survey (which engaged 24,310 respondents) showed that only 33% percent of Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic people saw representation at the highest levels of their organisation². Noticeably, there was a distinct absence of senior Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic leaders to invite to give evidence to the Commission, and even fewer when trying to identify female leaders. The Commission noted the absence of Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic community leaders, teachers, nurses, doctors, reception staff, school governors, Chief Executives and senior managers. Business in the Community echoed the findings and data presented in the McGregor-Smith review, informing the Commission that increasing levels of representation will not only better connect residents to vital services, but will also help to increase productivity and boost the economy by up to £24 billion a year.

“The public sector already recruits BAME people into jobs – but are they able to stay in their job or develop into senior roles?”



There is an absence of people who understand the community they serve. This contributes to widespread mistrust in institutions, lack of role models and the provision of culturally inappropriate services. At the focus group with health patients, many highlighted that they do not see people from their community in senior positions or even in middle management. Many witnesses commented how they are often the only Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic face at the table when they attend meetings. Furthermore, they talked about feeling a sense of imposter syndrome on some occasions, as they feel like certain positions or environments ‘are not for them’. Teachers shared similar sentiments, noting that across the 71 primary schools in the borough, 1.6% of headteachers are Bangladeshi, 4.8% are Black, and 85% are White. At Deputy Head level, 9.6% are Bangladeshi, 3.8% are Black, and 84.6% are White. At Assistant Head, 13.6% are Bangladeshi, 1.6 % are Black, and 71.2% are White³.

Swanlea School emphasised the significance of representation and presented an awareness in this area which many other organisations can learn from. The School regularly reviews its workforce and noted the importance for a school where the majority of students are Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic, to look at the composition of staff and people in positions of authority to ensure it was diverse and signalled the right messages to its students. Similarly, they consider staff in lower positions such as cleaners, teaching assistants, dinner ladies, office staff and ensure they are not over-populated by Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic people. It’s a subtle message but one that is crucial in the perception of young people.

²<https://www.bitc.org.uk/report/race-at-work-charter-survey-report-2020>

³Data provided by teachers that attended the focus group

INFLUENCE

Organisations in the public and private sector hold the ability to help shape and influence the equality policy and objectives of other organisations through their supply chains and their purchasing power. State Street stood out as an exemplar which other organisations must learn from. They informed the Commission that they will increase their spend with diverse suppliers across the globe in the next three years and are holding themselves accountable for strengthening Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic owned businesses.

In the past, State Street used their voting rights to successfully hold organisations to account if they did not have sufficient female representation on their boards. They have now written to the thousands of companies where they have voting rights and asked them to demonstrate what actions they are taking to increase Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic representation on their Board. If they have not taken steps to do so, State Street will refrain from voting.

Similarly, Barts Health NHS Trust have recognised the responsibility they have to ensure that their values are mirrored in their sub-contracted organisations. They have introduced constraints within their contracts which take account of how well organisations apply equal opportunities and have a diverse workforce. Many of the staff in their ancillary services are frontline, from Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic backgrounds, and are exposed to the higher risks of COVID-19. The Trust has ensured that they are included in the risk assessments which have taken place for their staff.

The Tower Hamlets Partnership need to learn from these examples, reviewing their contract compliance to set out what senior staff should look like and implementing a contract of 'diversity compliance.' This needs to be a borough

wide approach, driven through the anchor institutions. The council can develop best practice guidelines for every organisation to follow. Successful bidders must be able to evidence their commitment to diversity and inclusion and this will be considered during commissioning when tender submissions and/or grant funding submissions are assessed.



MISTRUST IN INSTITUTIONS

Mistrust in institutions, and particularly in policing, was repeatedly mentioned by witnesses as an issue which has a profound impact on Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic communities. The Commission is pleased that the Metropolitan Police engaged in an open way and in a robust and honest conversation, because without this we cannot make progress. The Commission acknowledges that significant progress has been made by the local police to build community relations and work with local partners to address community concerns. Local Police are a key part of the borough's partnership and play a crucial role in improving outcomes for local residents. While the Commission did not have the opportunity to hear from the local police leaders, it was noted that they do have a number of projects to engage the local community through ward panels, local policing and schemes to support people into careers in policing.

Despite this, it was noted that some individuals from Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic communities do not apply to work for the police because they feel a lack of trust in the Police and think that their friends and family will treat them differently. The Commission believes that representation at all levels within the police is vital to create better connections with communities and facilitate greater levels of trust. There is more work required in the recruitment of Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic police officers and emphasis needs to be placed on the retention of these officers once they have been recruited. The Commission recognised that interventions are in place to address this, but the pace of change needs to be faster. It was pleasing to note that there are a substantial number of Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic applicants currently in recruitment pipeline and it is hoped this will result in more Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic Police Officers working in London and Tower Hamlets.

On policing, the Commission invited representatives from the Metropolitan Police Central Inclusion and Engagement team as the focus of the session was on employment. The Commission was pleased to hear that the Police are trying to ensure sufficient support is in place to help retain officers, including mentoring and strategically placing officers so they can be better prepared to move through the ranks, and ensuring they are well insulated from any bias which takes place within the organisation. The Commission also supports initiatives for their media department to promote more positive images, particularly of Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic officers

working in the community. The Commission welcomes the fact that the police are undergoing unconscious bias training and working with leading academics and practitioners to help officers put their own experiences to one side in order to understand and filter new information, breaking down deeply engrained bias. This will not only help them as an employer, but also in the way they police the streets and interact with residents.

However, it is clear there is still significant work to do to attract and retain Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic police officers. From the Commission's evidence gathering, it was concerning to hear that Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic Police Officers need better legal assistance to support them when they experience discrimination in the workplace and more Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic representation in the Metropolitan Police Federation (MPF) is needed. It is the Commission's view that without adequate representation of Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic Officers in the MPF, the current cohort of MPF leaders will not be able to effectively represent and advocate for Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic officers as they fail to comprehensively understand the nuances of the discrimination individuals are facing.

Equally concerning were comments that many in supervisory positions do not feel empowered to make the right decisions to support their colleagues when they report workplace discrimination through fear of being ostracised by colleagues. There needs to be better scrutiny of internal complaints and how they are investigated as often, complaints are investigated, and the results end up in favour of



the perpetrator. Unless an officer is prepared to fund their claim themselves than they often end up leaving the organisation. If officers do not have the ability to challenge discrimination through correct and appropriate processes, then the change which is needed will never be delivered.

Whilst we heard powerful evidence in relation to experiences within the police force, this theme of lack of support to complain and pursue grievances by Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic people was repeated in employment focus groups and written submissions from employees working in other sectors across in the borough. The Commission believes that all employers must have fair and transparent grievance processes that are free of discrimination and racial bias; but acknowledges that this is most strongly needed in those sectors that have the biggest impact on Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic people's lives.

Often, mistrust in institutions is developed at a young age and can have a perpetual impact on an individual's life, preventing them from accessing key services. The Black Training and Enterprise Group presented that there are far too many stop and searches of young black and Muslim men, and they work with many clients who have suffered a significant psychological impact from this which leads to them feeling disconnected.

East London NHS Foundation Trust detailed a project looking at how young Black males engage with their service, many of whom do not voluntarily access their services for help and experience the same journey through the system. Significantly, black people are over four times more likely to be detained under the Mental Health Act 1983 and over ten times more likely to be subject to a community treatment order, with young black men more likely to be sectioned than other groups⁴. In many cases, problems begin when they are approaching the end of primary school and at a point when they are more likely to be excluded and start to encounter different challenges. This follows into secondary school where the police start to play a role and already children are placed into a position where institutions and services have not catered for their needs.

Subsequently, when they start to feel symptoms which would require them to visit a GP or mental health service, they are unlikely to do this, exacerbating their health issues further until they are forced into institutions by the criminal justice system. This begins a different relationship where an individual enters a mental health service under duress and is more likely to be secluded, given higher doses of medication, and restrained. Once again, this has created the cycle of mistrust in institutions and services to the extent that when people are discharged, they are less likely to engage and even if they do seek help, they are not always given the option of talking therapies. The Commission endorses the proposals to introduce culturally appropriate advocates as part of reforms to improve the Mental Health Act which will empower people to have more control over their treatment and allow people from Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic backgrounds to be better supported by people who understand their needs.



“We need to take complaints seriously and understand that some conditions can present differently in non-white people.”

⁴ Mental Health Act Statistics, Annual Figures England, 2018-19, <https://files.digital.nhs.uk/00/66FBD2/ment-heal-act-stat-eng-2018-19-summ-rep.pdf>

RECOMMENDATIONS

GENERAL	
Anti-Racist Borough	Organisations within Tower Hamlets commit to becoming an anti-racist borough. This will include a commitment to work at pace to address inequality and access to services. It will recognise the individual needs of each Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic Community and it will be delivered through a race equality pledge, race equality network, challenging targets, disaggregated data, increased representation and better utilisation of an organisation’s influence through its supply chains, employment practice and services.
Race Equality Pledge	Organisations in Tower Hamlets, especially those that comprise the strategic partnership and work in partnership with the council, sign up to a shared commitment on race equality by the end of 2021. Organisations who sign up to this pledge will support and deliver the commitments set out in the Commission’s recommendations. This will enable greater collaboration and support between organisations and strengthen accountability and transparency of commitment and progress. As part of this recommendation, a local award scheme should be established which recognises best practices amongst organisations and individuals. The council and partners should lobby national and regional organisations to set up a high-profile national recognition programme to recognise achievement and drive up standards.
Race Equality Network	A partnership Race Equality Network be developed that monitors the delivery of the Commission’s recommendations, influences policy and decision making and enables a safe place for on-going conversation about race equality in Tower Hamlets and drive improvements.
Targeted Interventions	In delivering the recommendations of the Commission, organisations should recognise the variety and nuances within the needs of the borough’s Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic communities and tailor interventions which address the challenges facing each community, recognising that at present the Somali Community is the biggest Black community.
Targets	Organisations signing up to the Race Equality Pledge must set ambitious targets for addressing inequalities which deliver real change and year on year progress. Organisations must use effective performance management to monitor progress and report publicly.
Data	Organisations signing up to the Race Equality Pledge must collate, disaggregate and analyse data in a granular way to understand areas of inequalities facing Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic groups. This data should be disaggregated to ensure we understand needs of different Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic communities.
Influence	Organisations signing up to the Race Equality Pledge must utilise their influence with contractors, those they give grants to and work in partnership to ensure they comply and meet the standards of the borough equality pledge.

3. COMMUNITY LEADERSHIP

Community Leadership is the golden thread which stretches across the Commission’s priority areas. To ensure racial justice in all aspects of life, the Tower Hamlets Partnership needs to ensure that at every level where power is held and in every way it is exercised in the community, it includes Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic voices. The Commission noted the progress made over the years with representatives involved in a range of roles including within the council, schools, NHS and community organisations.

The Annual Residents’ Survey 2019⁵ provides an indication of residents’ views of the borough and their involvement within the community. The 2019 Survey found the following:

	Satisfied with area as a place to live	People from different backgrounds get on well together	Feel I can influence decisions	Volunteering in Tower Hamlets in last 12 months
White	74%	79%	52%	15%
Mixed	53%	70%	47%	30%
Asian	67%	78%	50%	17%
Bangladeshi	66%	67%	49%	17%
Black	70%	75%	55%	13%
Others	67%	74%	67%	26%
BAME	66%	77%	52%	17%

- There was a difference of up to 21% between different ethnic groups in terms of being satisfied with Tower Hamlets as a place to live. This was highest amongst residents of White ethnicity (74%) and lowest amongst residents of Mixed ethnicity (53%).
- There was a difference of up to 12% between residents of White ethnicity (79%) and residents of Bangladeshi ethnicity (67%) in terms of agreeing that people from different backgrounds get on well together.
- Encouragingly, residents from Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic backgrounds were equally likely to feel that they could influence decisions with 52% agreeing with that statement.
- Residents from Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic backgrounds (17%) were slightly more likely than residents of White ethnicity (15%) to have volunteered within the borough, but residents of Black ethnicity were the least likely to have volunteered (13%)

⁵ https://www.towerhamlets.gov.uk/ignl/community_and_living/borough_statistics/Annual_Residents_Survey.aspx

3. COMMUNITY LEADERSHIP

The Government's Race Disparity Audit⁶ found that Black adults were among the most likely to participate in some form of formal volunteering on a regular basis, which involves providing unpaid help through groups, clubs or organisations at least once a month. One in four Black adults and almost as many White adults regularly participated in formal volunteering in 2016-17, and they were more likely to do so than those of Asian or Mixed ethnicity, of whom around one in six volunteered formally on a monthly basis. There were marked differences between ethnic groups in the extent to which people felt able to influence local decisions, with Black adults feeling the most able to influence them and White adults, the least. In 2016-17, 44% of Black adult agreed they could influence decisions affecting their local area, compared with 25% of White adults.

The Joseph Rowntree Foundation study into community engagement and cohesion in England⁷ concluded that ethnic minority communities are particularly at risk of not having their views heard effectively including migrant workers, refugees and asylum seekers. Barriers cited include difficulties in the use of English, lack of information on engagement opportunities and time. Significantly, it was noted that these barriers are exacerbated by the growing fluidity and fragmentation of governance structures. For new arrivals, the shifting landscape of service provision and governance is even more bewildering, making community engagement correspondingly more problematic.

⁶ https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/686071/Revised_RDA_report_March_2018.pdf

⁷ <https://www.jrf.org.uk/report/community-engagement-and-community-cohesion>



DATA, TARGETS AND AWARENESS

Feedback from witnesses highlighted lower levels of representation and a general lack of awareness of the opportunities available to engage in positions of community leadership. The issue of ‘privilege’ was highlighted as most Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic people do not have early access to resources, networks and confidence to navigate opportunities. More needs to be done to communicate the possibilities available and encourage, empower, and support those from underrepresented groups into positions of leadership, whether it be in schools, community groups, magistrates, NHS Boards, company boards, governors or local councillors.

Community leadership needs investment and there needs to be a systemic plan which maps how this can be resourced and implemented across the borough. Poplar Harca highlighted promising projects delivered by organisations in the borough to improve residents’ engagement often fail due to a lack of resources or staff turnover. A long-term vision to create a system of support for community leadership, which will not necessarily realise results instantly, is required. This may involve Chief Executives of key anchor organisations in the borough making a commitment to support and empower leaders.

Currently, there is a distinct absence of a plan or vision and defining what good looks like in this area needs to be the starting point. There must be a clear objective and commitment which states what Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic people engaging in their community and assuming leadership positions in Tower Hamlets looks like. This combines with issues of insufficient data as it’s hard to know what good looks like, or how close the borough is to achieving it, without the data to tell us. For example, anecdotal evidence details that the Black community in the borough is not well represented in leadership positions, but comprehensive data is needed to highlight where the gaps are and where interventions must be targeted. The Commission would like within a year, organisations in Tower Hamlets to understand how many positions are available across the borough and set ambitious targets to ensure these are reflective of the community.

RECOMMENDATION :	
Awareness	Develop and deliver a targeted communications campaign to raise awareness of opportunities available which includes profiling of other black, Asian and Minority Ethnic residents who have succeeded and made significant contributes. Organisations must demonstrate where they are now and evidence year on year progress.

“We need to show people that their contributions - large or small - are important and valued”



YOUNG PEOPLE

Young people must be engaged and developed to ensure that they are ready to assume leadership positions in the community. The current generation of young people offer the opportunity for generational change. They are dynamic, smart, politically aware, full of ideas and innovation; however, we need to provide fertile ground to develop them and ensure the infrastructure is in place to support them to engage in their community. There are already several encouraging projects underway to support this and promising signs from the borough's young Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic communities that they are ready and willing to engage. The council's strategy for children and young people places empowerment as priority and their voice should be influential in service design and delivery. Tower Hamlets has a longstanding and vibrant Youth Council and the current composition of it is all Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic. Tower Hamlets also has a very active Children in Care Council which is made up of representatives from Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic backgrounds.

A significant barrier for children and young people engaging in the community is poverty. Tower Hamlets has the highest rate of child poverty in the country and the impact of this is felt largely by Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic communities. There are strong links between advantage and opportunity which means that children from

disadvantaged backgrounds do not benefit from the same social capital as those from advantaged backgrounds. Access to social capital is a theme which is at the forefront of each of the Commission's priority areas and is particularly evident when considering education and the barriers into good employment. The council and its partners need to develop a corporate parent approach whereby they make their networks available to deprived Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic communities and connect them with better resources which will provide opportunities for development.

It was also noted by some witnesses that there are internal barriers within communities restricting new voices from being heard. In some cases, older, conservative voices are threatened by young and innovative voices. Further work with Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic communities is required to ensure there is a diverse range of voices within the makeup of the borough's community leaders and there is a clear pathway for young people to engage.

ORGANISATIONAL CULTURE

Organisations must create the environment for their employees and residents to engage in their community and they need to review how they shape routes into community leadership through volunteering programmes, through their governance structures and in scrutiny of their work. The Commission heard from Poplar Harca who recognised the importance of making room for development and being active in the local community, encouraging all their staff to do this. They also lean on the borough’s young people and engage them to run many community events and interact with issues which are most important to them.

It is not simply enough to engage or recruit people from Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic communities. They must be supported and provided with meaningful opportunities to impact their communities. Organisations across the borough must scrutinise themselves to ensure they are doing all they can to enable people to have a voice and engage in decision making. This includes a clear commitment with set of actions to address inequality and on-going review and platform to discuss and challenge progress. Unfortunately, the current sentiment of some of the witnesses suggests their engagement has no impact. School Governors shared their experiences and felt that their involvement was tokenistic and became disempowered once they were on the Board. Moreover, the Black Training and Enterprise Group reported that public bodies do not value the contribution of leaders as much as they should, and some Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic residents are disengaged when they see community leaders struggle to be heard by those in power.

“People of all races need to feel that they can contribute”



RECOMMENDATION :	
Organisational Culture	Organisations must create a culture which values diversity and provides the space and environment which enables Black, Asian and Min people to develop into community leadership roles within the governance of the organisation.

VOLUNTARY AND COMMUNITY SECTOR

There is a substantial role for the voluntary sector to play in supporting Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic communities into leadership positions, both in terms of providing residents with the training and development for them to succeed and also in ensuring their organisations are representative. There is currently insufficient data on Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic leadership or the ethnic profile of the workforce in voluntary organisations. Data needs to be collected within the voluntary sector to enable the council and its partners to map the resources and networks operating in the borough's communities.

The Commission was pleased to hear that Tower Hamlets CVS (THCVS) is working with partners to build greater community leadership. Currently, only 20% of the organisations THCVS work with are led by a Black, Asian or Minority Ethnic person. THCVS are developing a peer network for women, providing funding to support community start-ups and building capacity of Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic community groups. Furthermore, in response to COVID-19, they are working with Public Health on a Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic leadership programme.

There is a direct link between supporting and growing the voluntary sector and developing new community leaders. The Tower Hamlets Partnership need to ensure voluntary sector organisations have the resources, support and appropriate developmental plans in place to provide people with the capacity, skills and experience needed to succeed.



MENTORING AND ALLIES

Mentoring and support networks are important to encourage confidence in people taking community leadership positions. Many witnesses highlighted a lack of time, skills deficit, and poverty as key barriers preventing Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic residents from engaging with their community. Some witnesses commented that they saw themselves as ‘parents and not as black leaders,’ illustrating that they do not have the time to engage and/or they don’t have the confidence to engage. Significantly, school governors informed the Commission that they were not provided with effective support to succeed in their role and suggested that a network of community leaders who can discuss challenges and share advice would help to give them the skills and confidence to succeed. The Tower Hamlets Partnership need to train a pool of potential leaders from Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic backgrounds and use local initiatives to support them into positions. Additionally, they need to consider civic leadership projects run by Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic organisations.

It is important that the development of networks and mentors is not grown exclusively within Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic communities. People from White communities need to be empowered to become allies and create effective networks with Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic communities which can be used to leverage support and help deliver sustainable change.

“Community leadership should make sure that no one is left behind.”



RECOMMENDATION :

Role Models and Allies	That local people are empowered to become role models and allies as visible inspiration and create effective networks for the Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic communities to leverage support.
Training, Development and Peer Support	Organisations should provide support, training, mentoring and development opportunities for Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic individuals to access leadership roles and be effective in these roles, with a specific focus on a programme for young people. This needs to be at every level from entry to moving into senior roles such as chairs.

4. HEALTH

There are significant disparities in health outcomes for our Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic communities. Data collated by general practices shows the prevalence of diabetes, high blood pressure, heart disease, chronic kidney disease and asthma all to be higher for our Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic communities. Significantly, many of these conditions are linked, meaning that the combination of these conditions place a higher burden of multimorbidity on Black, Asian and Ethnic Minority communities than White groups are facing.

We know that housing conditions have a significant impact on residents' health. For example, asthma prevalence is higher for those in social housing, housing in multiple occupation, poor quality living environments, smoking households, benefits households or if you are on the housing waiting list⁸. The council has the 7th highest waiting list

"Healthcare workers assume we aren't educated and don't involve us in discussions about our care."



nationally. There are 18,808 households on the council's housing waiting list . Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic households account for 78% of all households on the housing register. We also know that many Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic households are living in overcrowding, with 31% of Asian/Asian British and 19% of Black/African/Caribbean/ Black British households living with fewer bedrooms than required compared to 8% of White households.

Unfortunately, it is now too clear that COVID-19 has a disproportionate impact on Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic communities. In Baroness Doreen Lawrence's review of the impact of COVID-19 she highlights how Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic people have been overexposed and under protected and attributes the horrific impact of COVID-19 to the culmination of decades of structural injustice and discrimination. Many of the health issues which have arisen were not born out of COVID-19 but were pre-existing, socio-economically patterned, and exposed by the pandemic, and described by Baroness Lawrence as 'foreseeable and inevitable'⁹.

This is supported by the Public Health England 'Beyond the data: Understanding the impact of COVID-19 on BAME groups' report¹⁰. This review found that the pandemic has exacerbated longstanding inequalities affecting Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic groups in the UK and highlighted the strong association between economic disadvantage and COVID-19 diagnoses, incidence and severe disease. Given the level of deprivation and health profile of many of our Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic communities, it contextualises the significant risk our residents face. The Commission noted the findings from both these reviews and expects local organisations to take forward the recommendations. In recognition of this, the Commission narrowed its focus on health to access and communication, and the impact of racism, with the emphasis on hearing local peoples lived experienced on these two areas.

⁸ https://www.towerhamlets.gov.uk/ignl/community_and_living/borough_statistics/Borough_profile.aspx

⁹ <https://www.lawrencereview.co.uk>

¹⁰ https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/892376/COVID_stakeholder_engagement_synthesis_beyond_the_data.pdf

ACCESS AND COMMUNICATION

Many Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic residents expressed concerns about access to health services, with many reporting experiences of unconscious bias among health care workers. There is a distressing issue of a lack of trust and confidence in the health sector because of this. In the focus group with health and social care users many highlighted significant barriers preventing them from effectively accessing health services including communication, access to translation services, lack of representation and digital exclusion.

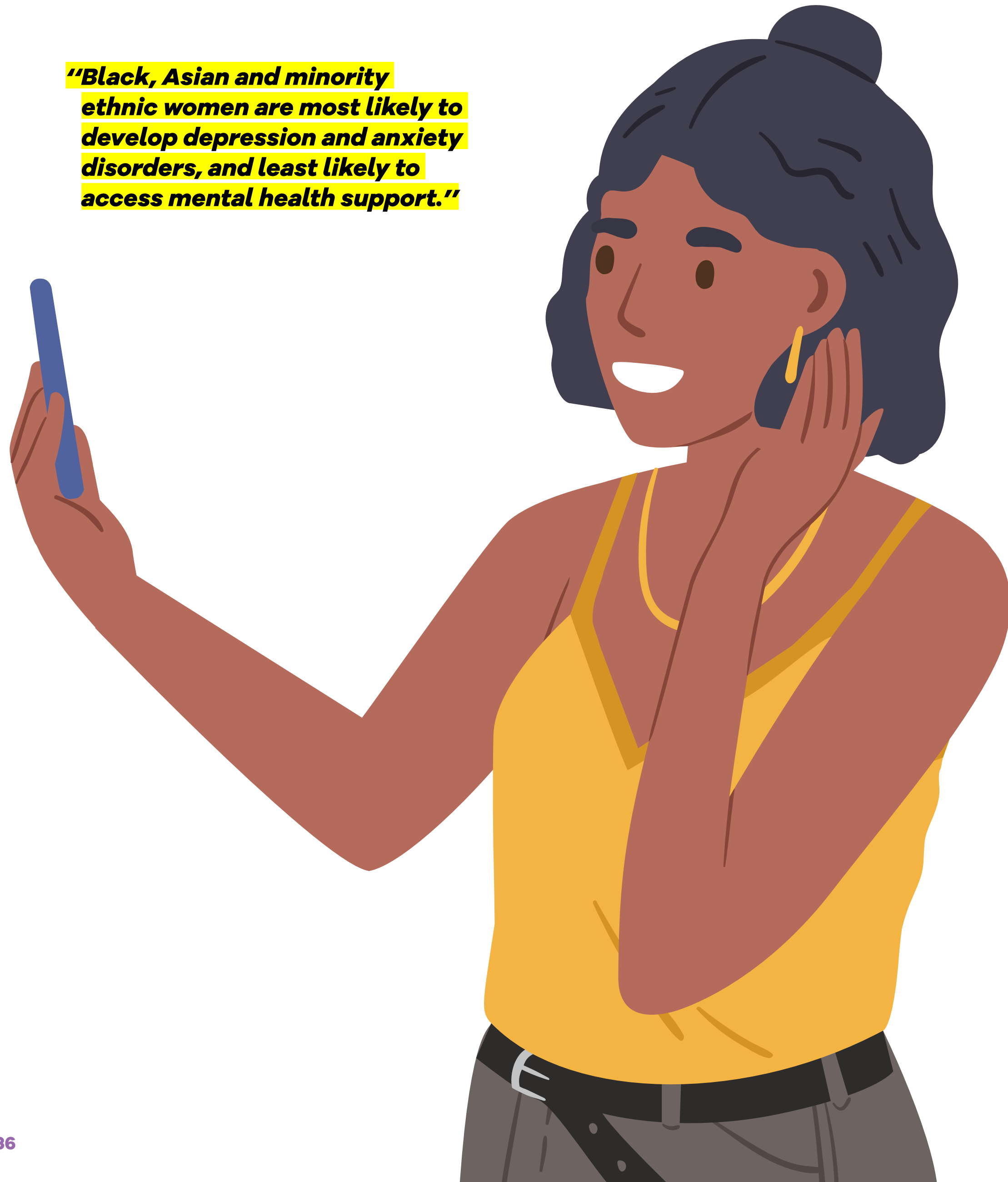
Healthwatch Tower Hamlets informed the Commission that Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic residents reported poorer experiences of health and social care services than White British residents; with many reporting long waiting times to access care. In a survey conducted with 704 residents, 64% of Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic residents were confident they could access physical and mental health services regardless of their identity compared to 74% White British people, 62% of Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic people felt they could access safe and high quality services when they needed them compared to 70% White British people, and 68% of Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic people were confident that those providing their care are competent, happy and kind compared to 78% of White British people.

Many witnesses highlighted language barriers, poor translation and lack of culturally appropriate services as a significant barrier. Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic groups are more likely to speak limited English and therefore face systemic and complex barriers to accessing primary and other healthcare services. Interpreters are not always available, particularly at short notice. Booking and triage systems in general practices rely on online symptom checkers, online booking and doctor-led telephone call back which are challenging for patients with a low level of English and lack of digital skills and tools. This has been exacerbated during the COVID-19 pandemic, where an increased number of general practices have adopted this model.

"Using terms such as 'minority' can mean that people are viewed as being 'less than'."



“Black, Asian and minority ethnic women are most likely to develop depression and anxiety disorders, and least likely to access mental health support.”



Even when residents have access to an interpreter (professional or family), people who speak limited English can face challenges. Due to time pressure and cultural barriers, patients may find it harder to communicate with doctors. Patients may feel reluctant discussing sensitive topics such as sexual or mental health in front of family members or people they know acting as interpreters. Interpreters need to be independent and specially trained. Witnesses noted that over time there has been several forms of interpretation and advocacy schemes in Tower Hamlets. However, over the years, in periods of austerity, these services have been reduced, as opposed to more essential clinical services, and the level of service has gradually deteriorated. A shift to more digital services provides opportunities to improve provision, as specialist interpreters will not need to be based in the borough to do their job effectively. This needs to be explored and balanced against the digital literacy needs of the Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic population.

It is imperative that translation and advocacy services receive funding in order to enhance the link between institutions and communities and improve the access issues many communities are facing. The inadequacy of translation services and appropriate communications strategies targeting Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic communities was one of the most widely reported institutional failures cited in our interviews. The government should act on this area by commissioning a review of the availability of translation and advocacy services, working with community groups and Healthwatch England. It is important that this is not just about the provision of written translation as sometimes literacy is poor. Some people can speak the language but reading it may still be difficult. More advocates with the language skills to help Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic communicate with people within NHS are required.

Additionally, if the Tower Hamlets Partnership can support people to speak and learn English they can engage more in all areas of society which impact them, such as a school governor or community leader. Closer working with voluntary and community sector organisations, supported by targeted funding and resources, would provide an immediate opportunity to co-produce community-facing COVID-19 messaging and secure the rapid availability of translation services. Locally we need agreed target spends by the NHS on such services which should be protected spends.

Many witnesses reported that Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic residents are more likely to be digitally excluded (either through low IT literacy or lack of access to devices). Additionally, many Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic communities live in multigenerational households which can be overcrowded and restrict people from having open conversations when their family is close by and they are required to do an online consultation. This is also supported by two research reports by Healthwatch Tower Hamlets on digital inclusion which found Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic community amongst group that are more likely to be digitally excluded and in need of support of accessing through digital means. The council and its partners need to ensure access to services is fair and equal. One possible option may be to utilise voluntary sector buildings to hold more intimate and confidential conversations in privacy.

The Commission heard through formal meetings and a focus group that the current communication channels and methods do not always reach our diverse communities. Most communication is only in English which excludes people with language barriers. At the focus group it was suggested that using videos in different community languages will reach vulnerable groups who may need to rely on their children and others to provide information. It was clear that local health organisations need to work with the community to develop their communication and engagement strategies, ensuring guidance and important messages are culturally appropriate, available in different languages and mediums and utilise different approaches to mitigate fears and mistrust.

During the focus group with patients and service users, many voiced their frustration and mistrust in services caused by low levels of representation. A Somali resident told the Commission that ‘it is hard to find a receptionist who speaks Somali let alone find a nurse or a doctor who is Somali.’ He noted that if he looks at his White 80-year-old neighbour, she can visit her own general practice without hesitation because she knows she can find someone at the reception who can speak her own language. On the contrary, ‘the Somali elderly woman will think twice or three times because she will not be able to find someone who will understand her’. Many of the people who attended the focus group previously relied on local voluntary and community organisations where they could be supported by community members speaking their own language and this meant that ‘someone who came to this country had no problems getting their forms filled in’. Reductions in funding to these organisations have left many Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic residents without any support to access key health services. The voluntary sector has a bigger role to play and the council and its partners need to consider how they can work across the partnerships to identify the organisations that have a wide reach amongst different Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic communities and resource them better to deliver essential provision.

RECOMMENDATION :	
Digital Exclusion	Organisations address digital exclusion facing Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic communities which is having an impact on their ability to access services, employment, engage in community life and their life outcomes.
Communication	NHS organisations review their communication and engagement strategy which ensures guidance and important message is culturally appropriate and available in different languages and uses different approaches to ensure message is reach to different audiences.

SOCIAL DETERMINANTS OF HEALTH

There are stark disparities in health outcomes for the borough’s Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic communities. Clinical improvements and better access to services alone will not address these disparities. The Tower Hamlets Partnership must focus on addressing the elements of structural and institutional racism which has led to people from Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic backgrounds positioned in the worse housing and employment and prevents them from achieving their full potential and best health.

The government, through the Health and Social Care Act 2012, required local areas to establish a Health and Wellbeing Board to work in partnership to reduce health inequalities. While our local Board has made progress in some areas given the impact of COVID-19 on our Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic Communities it is clear it has not been significant or the pace our residents rightly demand from us. Significantly, Barts Health NHS Trust informed the Commission that when patients present at the acute stage at the Royal London Hospital people from all ethnic groups are likely to experience the same outcome. It is not simply access to health care and treatment which needs to be improved, but also access to education, employment and housing

The links between health and housing were highlighted by witnesses as a key wider determinant of health which needs to be addressed. Many Black, Asian and Minority

Ethnic residents in Tower Hamlets live in poorer housing, which may be overcrowded, damp and in a state of poor repair. This has a significant impact on health outcomes. There are many housing issues within Tower Hamlets, with the number of people on the housing register significantly higher than the availability of affordable social housing. The borough has done good work to regulate the private renting sector and this is important to help address the supply and demand issues within social housing. Accepting the constraints of poverty and housing, the council and its partners need to identify what they can do within these parameters to help people achieve better health outcomes. For example, they need to ensure there are good quality open spaces for those in particular without their own garden or sufficient space within their home, or encourage people to have a better awareness of their health to seek interventions early and not be afraid of having conversations (especially where there are cultural stigmas).

While the work the Tower Hamlets Partnership has undertaken through the Health & Wellbeing Board is making progress to reduce health inequalities and the wider determinates of poor health, it was clear from the evidence the Commission heard that this has not been done at pace or been radical enough. The Commission therefore recommends that a review be undertaken of partnership governance structures and strategies to increase the pace of change and ensure this has long lasting impact

RECOMMENDATION :	
Campaign & Social Determinants	Lead a high-profile local campaign for the government to provide adequate funding to address health inequalities and the social and economic factors.
Partnership	That partnership structures and strategies are reviewed to deliver radical changes at pace on the health inequalities challenge in the borough.
Research	The Health & Wellbeing Board, by the end of 2021, undertake detailed external research on causes of health inequalities amongst Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic communities which puts engagement of the community at the forefront of its work to identify issues and solutions.

CULTURALLY APPROPRIATE SERVICES

In addition to language barriers, many witnesses empathised cultural and health beliefs as a barrier to Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic patients receiving the treatment they need. This links to the lack of representation as staff are unable to appreciate the culture of the people they treat. An observation made during the focus group with health patients stated that some practitioners have demonstrated unconscious bias including being dismissive of symptoms and not sympathetic of cultural norms. Written submissions received also highlighted peoples experience of being mistreated by reception staff which has a subsequent impact on an individual’s confidence to access services.

The Commission was informed of actions some services are taking to ensure they are culturally appropriate; however, this needs to be extended across all provision in the borough. The Commission was pleased to hear about the approach taken by Barts Health NHS Trust to listen, respond and work with local communities. Led by their community engagement group, they have increased the ways they listen to local people. They gathered a significant amount of anecdotal evidence of poorer experiences of people from ethnic minority communities, particularly the Somali community, and are acting on feedback to improve services. This has led to service adaptations including

accessible appointments and culturally sensitive communication. Several services have been transformed to ensure they are accessible for Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic communities. A common theme across each of these services is that they proactively reviewed their provision and involved local communities in educating and advocating on behalf of patients. The Trust recognised the need to put in place greater structures to ensure their work with the community is embedded and sustainable. To this end, they have appointed a new Director of Insight which will enhance their work with Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic communities and improve patient experience.

General practices in Tower Hamlets have a diverse workforce which helps to cut across racism and cultural ignorance. General practices use the doctor’s toolkit to promote and educate people on issues such as access and they are making every effort to maintain non-digital access. The Commission notes that while the clinical side of the general practice is diverse, more work is needed to ensure the reception staff are trained to appreciate the cultural difference of patients. One member from the health patients focus group noted how a receptionist showed no regard for his privacy as she questioned him on his immigration status for the rest of the surgery to hear.

RECOMMENDATION :	
Clinical Training	Review and strengthen clinical training in order to increase understanding of different cultural needs and deliver better health services to all communities.
Co-designed Services	That NHS organisation undertake meaningful engagement and involvement of Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic communities in design, development and delivery of services. Health organisations need to improve the way services are understood and support Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic residents so that they are empowered and confident to access them. This may mean they need to change the way that services are configured to make them more culturally appropriate.

ANTI-RACIST COMMITMENT

The evidence the Commission heard from local people about their experience of racism in NHS organisations it is clear that this is both pervasive and insidious which is having a detrimental impact on trust and relationship for our Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic communities. This in turn is leading people not accessing health services or being supported to improve their health outcome. It was therefore, encouraging when many witnesses detailed how their organisations are amending their policies to encourage greater diversity and equality. Barts Health NHS Trust have made a clear public commitment to be an 'anti-racist organisation' and the Commission encourages more organisations to take similar action.

The Commission was informed of numerous changes they have made to demonstrate their commitment to this pledge. The Trust has challenged itself to do more on race inequality and tackle inequalities within the organisation and services they provide. They are taking direct action to create an organisational culture where everyone feels they belong and improve the experiences of their staff and patients from Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic backgrounds. Consequently, the Trust has revised its Human Resource processes including:

- recruitment and progression,
- diversity in senior leadership (currently 32.5% Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic senior leaders, with an aim to increase to at least 56% by 2028),
- reverse mentoring programme for 200 staff,
- developing culturally intelligent leaders,
- eliminating discrimination in formal disciplinary processes,
- COVID-19 risk assessment for all staff and sub-contractors and a safety plan for all,
- psychologically safe workplaces,
- shared governance with staff so that colleagues affected by inequality share in the leadership and oversight of the change towards full inclusion.

"I want to make a difference as public services alone can't cater for the community."



Reducing inequalities experienced by staff and people using health and care services will require concerted action by the NHS, government, and wider public sector, working at scale and in a systematic and targeted way with communities. Integrated care systems have a key leadership role in this and must be supported to lead on this work.

It is important that organisations who make anti-racist pledges continuously, and transparently, demonstrate their commitment to this. The Commission highlighted the ‘hostile environment’ as one such area in which organisations can take actions in line with the spirit of their pledge. Currently, immigration health charging acts as a barrier restricting access and creating a sense of fear for the patient that they will be deported if they use a service. Failure to lift ‘hostile environment’ policies, such as eligibility checks and NHS charges for overseas visitors, was seen as a contributing factor to access. Concerns were raised over their potential to promote direct and indirect racial discrimination, deterring people from seeking care when needed, particularly among migrant and refugee communities.

To break down barriers to accessing healthcare, the government should take immediate steps to review the potential for hostile environment policies to be a vehicle for tackling institutional racism¹¹. It also feeds into a broader sense of confusion among both patients and providers who do not know which services are free and which services require payment. Some general practices require people to present documentation to prove who they are or where they live in order to sign up to a surgery when they are under no statutory obligation to do so. There needs to be widespread and constant education to ensure health workers are aware of cultural differences and migrants rights. Local NHS organisations should commit to continuously aim to reduce the profile of the checking it is statutorily required to undertake by lobbying Government to review its hostile environment policies.

In the short term organisations must ensure these policies are implemented in a sensitive and customer focused way, which, as the previous anecdote from a witness who was loudly questioned about his immigration status in the GP surgery revealed, is not always the case. They must also consider how these policies are implemented locally. This takes on added importance in a time of COVID-19. The hostile environment will make it more likely that marginalised sections of our community will not come forward for COVID-19 vaccines, if they believe by giving names and addresses, they will more likely be deported from the country.

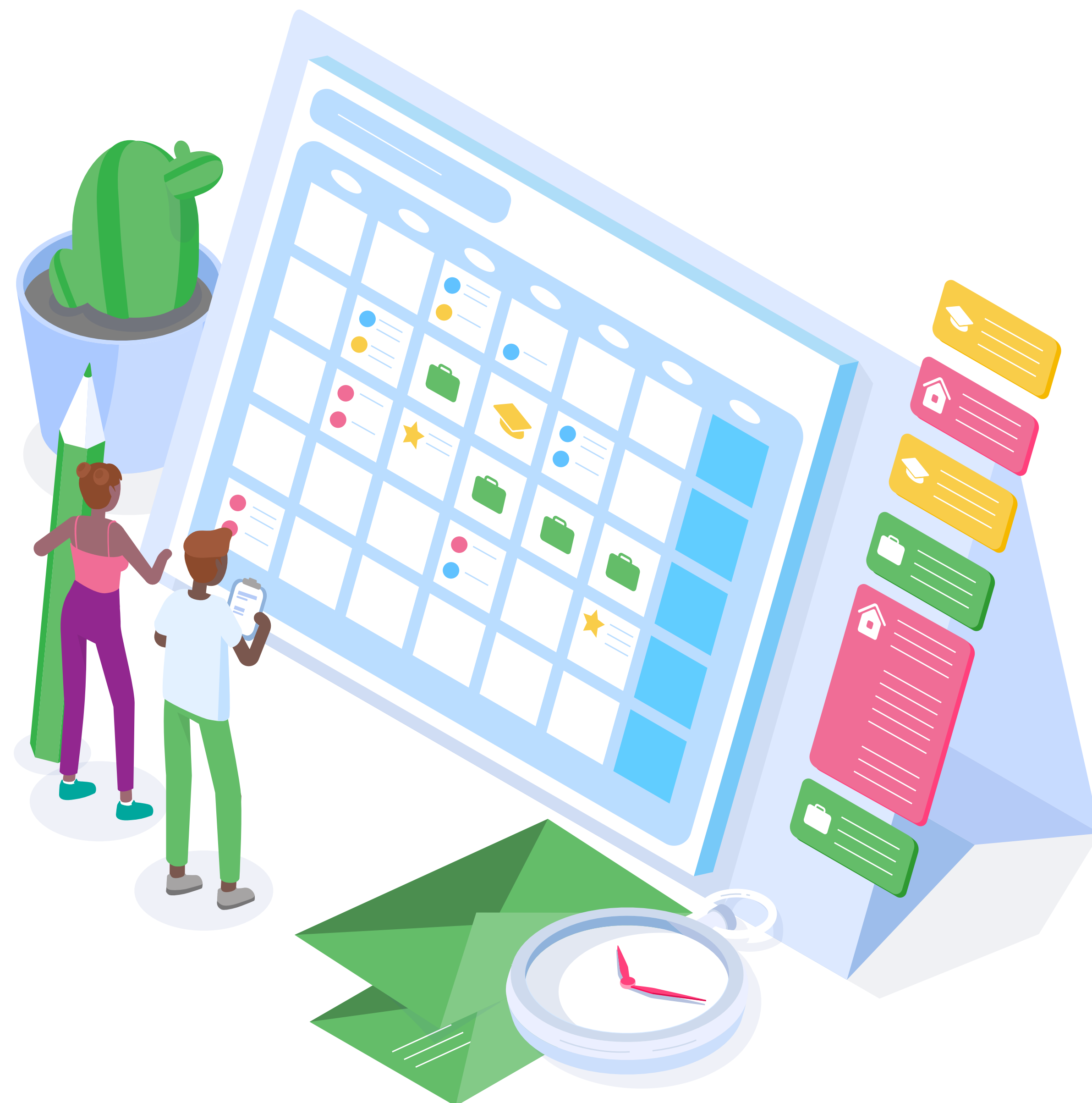
¹¹ https://www.nhsconfed.org/-/media/Confederation/Files/Publications/Documents/Perspectives-from-the-front-line_FNL_Dec2020.pdf

RECOMMENDATION :	
Hostile Environment	Local NHS organisations to lead a local campaign for the government to review hostile environment policies which seeks to reduce the profile of the checking of immigration status of service users it is statutorily required to undertake.

DATA AND TARGETS

As set out in the general findings section of this report collation of data which is broken down by different ethnic groups is important to understand and design interventions which meets the needs of the local community. The Commission noted good examples of some of this work around diabetes and vaccination. However, this is not widespread, and the Commission recommends that local health organisation must improve on this and collate data for all services to address health inequalities. This is consistent with the Public Beyond the data: Understanding the impact of COVID-19 on BAME group'.

Also as in the general findings section the Commission recommends that local NHS organisations set targets to improve diversity in their governance, and workforce management at all levels, while making it clear that “Black Faces in High Places” on its own is insufficient to eliminate structural racism. Every NHS organisation needs to profile its workforce at all grades and set targets about where they want to be in one year, three years, five years, and ten years.



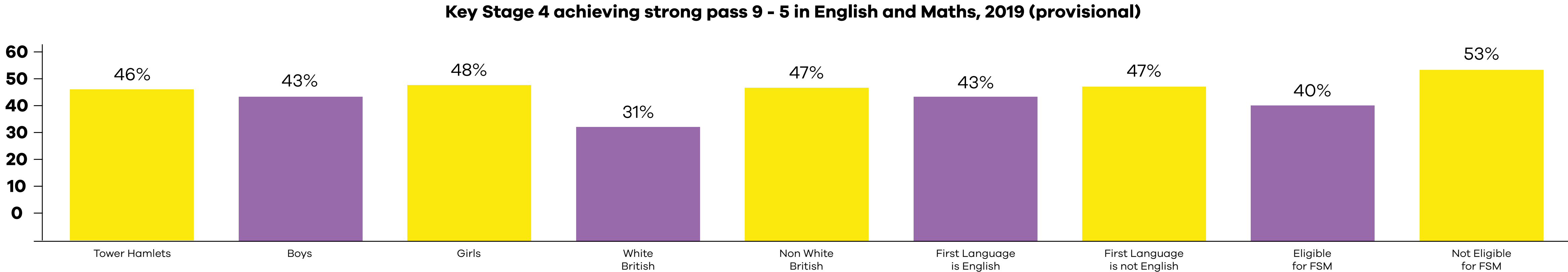
5. EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

EDUCATION

Despite high levels of deprivation and inequality, many of the borough’s Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic students are achieving good qualifications at all key stages in primary and secondary education. The Commission heard from Swansea School, where many students are high on the deprivation indicator and approximately 90% come from homes where English is not the first language. Despite these challenges, Swansea’s Progress 8 scores are +0.84 which puts them in the top 120 schools in the country based on progress.

Attainment within schools is better for students from Non-White British backgrounds than for students from White British backgrounds and better for students whose first language is not English

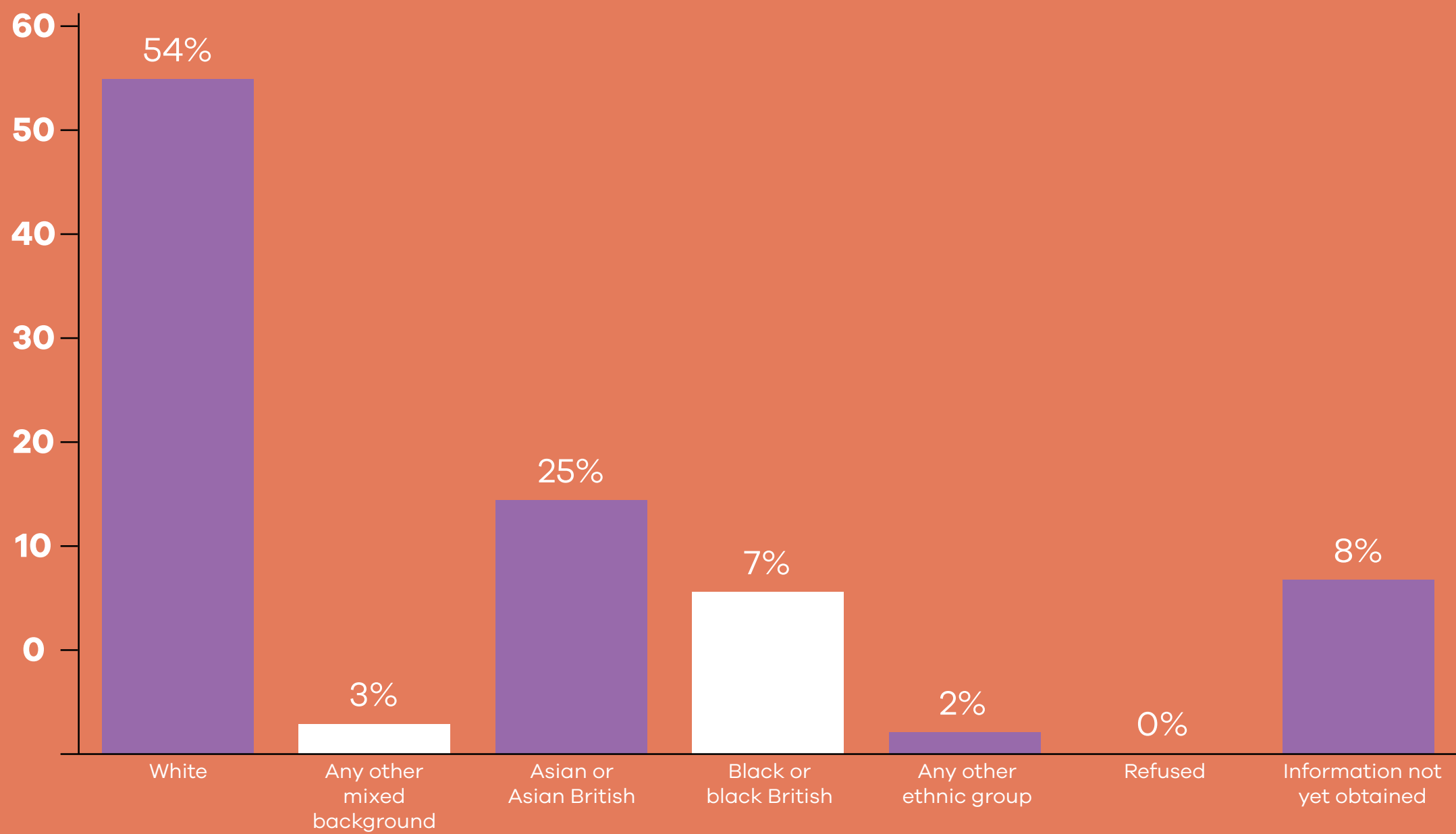
However, Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic students’ academic success is not translating into good employment. By ‘good employment’ we mean a position which recognises and uses the qualifications, knowledge and skills a person has developed. It is not acceptable to assume that as more people achieve good qualifications this will filter through into employment norms and practices. The problems are rooted deeper than this and are systemic. If it is left to ‘the passage of time’ there will be a generation of school leavers who are left without equitable support.



KEY STATS

Whereas the large majority of pupils in Tower Hamlets schools are from Non-White backgrounds, over half of the teaching workforce are White.

Ethnicity of teachers in Tower Hamlets state funded schools as a percentage of total headcount, 2019/20:



- In 2018/19, 59.58% of young residents progressing to higher education were Bangladeshi, 15.94% were White, 9.7% were Black African and 4.62% were of Mixed ethnic origin.
- There was a sharp rise in higher education progression from young Bangladeshi residents between 2012/13 and 2015/16, but this has subsequently plateaued over the past four years.
- The proportion of young residents progressing to Russell Group institutions varied considerably. Whereas 60% of Chinese young people entering higher education went to a Russell Group institution, only 13% of Black Caribbean, 16% of Black African and no Black Other young people did so (the latter being a small sample size).
- 80% of graduating young Tower Hamlets residents of White ethnicity achieved a good degree in 2018/19 compared with 63.9% of Bangladeshi ethnicity, 70% of Black Caribbean ethnicity and 66.3% of Black African ethnicity.

AWARENESS RAISING AND PARENTAL BARRIERS

Many Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic young people face cultural and parental barriers that the majority of their White peers do not have to navigate. For some students, parents do not want their children to move far from home when they go to university. Often, young people act as the adult in the family, have care responsibilities or are the only member of their family capable of accessing services. Furthermore, for many first and second generation Black, Asian, Ethnic Minority parents, they have parochial ideas about employment pathways and only place value in high-end professions such as medicine, law, banking or engineering. The council and its partners need to consider how they manage expectations and broaden young people’s, and their parent’s, choices without damaging their aspirations.

One witness who provided evidence to the Commission recently graduated from university and gained employment. She described the battle between cultural values as a challenge which not only impacted her outlook on career choices but also inhibited her views and actions in the professional setting. Through her own cultural experiences, she was taught not to speak up and always respect her elders and this minimised her voice. Another witness suggested conversations with schools are needed to better educate children on pathways into jobs. For example, it was pointed out that construction is a huge recruitment area, but many Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic communities are not accessing these jobs.



RECOMMENDATION :

Awareness	Educate parents, carers and children and young people on the range of career options available
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SOCIAL CAPITAL, CONFIDENCE & EXTRACURRICULAR ACTIVITY

Witnesses highlighted the importance of social capital, confidence and extracurricular development. Many young people from disadvantaged backgrounds experience a lack of confidence and feel like they do not fit in or have the same experiences or networks as their more advantaged peers. This was certainly conveyed by the recent graduate. She was low in confidence, felt insecurities from her background and did not have the work skills employers look for, such as how to construct an argument, public speaking, critical thinking and creativity. This insecurity was particularly pressing when she attended university and was surrounded by peers who came from different backgrounds to her and had access to more social capital. She felt 'a sense of imposter syndrome' and felt that university 'was not for her'.

It is important to promote and profile working class and Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic working-class leaders so they can signal to the rest of the population that it's ok to be who you are, and you can aspire to be a leader without having to code switch (adjust their style of speech, appearance, or behaviour, in order to improve their experience)

The lived experiences shared by recent graduates who met with the Commission was marked by the support and access they were given to greater social capital. The importance of connections, networks and informal connections was a similar and striking aspect in each of their journeys. One of the graduates participated in the East London Business Association (ELBA), Parity Project designed to support young Black men into work. It helped him to develop confidence and an understanding of how to act in a corporate setting. He developed a number of soft skills such as how to give a presentation, networking and relationship building skills. He was also given access to networks and organisations who presented him with employment opportunities in the finance sector which he would otherwise have found very difficult to access if left to navigate the employment landscape by himself.



Given the impact of limitations in social capital and confidence, the Commission was pleased to hear evidence from Swanlea School who described their work to build up students’ soft skills and provide them with greater equity and social capital. Swanlea recognises that the curriculum is the starting point and the most powerful tool schools have to help drive social equality. This means students need a grounding in a diverse and high-level curriculum which doesn’t compromise because they come from disadvantaged backgrounds. Students who are not able to stand up as credible academics and representatives of excellence in their subject area will be exposed when they get to university and this links back to issues of self-esteem and confidence.

However, Swanlea have also placed an emphasis on creating a personal development and extracurricular programme which other schools can learn from. They took a decision that focusing on exam qualifications and the academic route alone was not effective enough to support children to thrive and progress in employment. There was a need to integrate this with employability skills and strengthen children’s social capital. They have focused on students’ self-leadership, confidence and resilience. Swanlea noted that as students may not have access to the networks that more advantaged students have, schools need to be more entrepreneurial and help create these networks. Swanlea have recruited dedicated ‘Aspire Coordinators’ who source opportunities and networks for their students to access. Many organisations have a social responsibility to integrate and work with the community and schools need to utilise this.

“You need to know where you’re from, to know where you’re going.”



RECOMMENDATION :	
Education Bursary Scheme	Building on existing bursary scheme the council works with local organisations to further develop this to support more Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic students from low income family to progress into higher education and professional qualifications.
Recommendation: Leadership Development	Explore opportunities for local employers to come together and work with QMUL to develop a programme which supports Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic people across different sector move into senior leadership positions.

EMPLOYMENT

- There is a difference of 27 percentage points between the Employment rate for White residents (81%) and the Employment rate for BAME residents (54%)
- The Employment rate for BAME women in Tower Hamlets is much lower than the employment rate of BAME women in London (38%- BAME women in Tower Hamlets, while 59% BAME women in London), leaving a gap of 21% points.
- The gender gap amongst the White population in the borough is far narrower than for BAME - 74%-White women vs 88% White men.
- In 2011, there were significant differences across different ethnic groups between the proportion of residents working in managerial, professional and associate professional occupations.
- Whereas, 65% of residents of White ethnicity who were in employment were in a professional or managerial occupation, this fell to 43% of Asian residents and 40% of Black residents.

The McGregor-Smith review¹² provides a clear roadmap for employers in the public and private sector to improve diversity within their organisations and ensure they offer a more equitable experience to their employees. The review calls for organisations to gather and publish better data, take accountability through aspirational targets and executive sponsorship, improve recruitment processes, improve supply chains, and raise awareness through unconscious bias training, mentoring and inclusive networks. The review also calls on the government to support organisations through legislative changes including the requirement to publish data i.e. ethnicity pay gap and work with Business in the Community and others to develop an online portal of best practice. It also calls for government to write to all institutional funds who have holdings in

FTSE companies and ask them for their policies on diversity and inclusion and how they ensure that the representation of Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic individuals is considered across the employee base of the companies where they hold investments.

In 2018, the Mayor of London launched the Workforce Integration Network. It is part of the Mayor's Strategy for Social Integration and aims to help employers tackle underrepresentation for different groups of Londoners. The Inclusive Employers Toolkit builds on this, providing practical guidance and encouraging employers to review their commitment to diversity, recruitment, retention and progression, and the diversity in their supply chain¹³. The toolkit specifically focuses on employers in construction and technology as these are two growth sectors of London's economy and will play a significant role in London's economic recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic. Black men make up 4% of young men in construction and 5% of young men in technology.

The Race at Work Survey provides insight into the barriers facing Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic employees and shows a clear need to mobilise organisations to act. The survey of 24,310 responses highlighted:

- 52% of Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic people felt they needed to leave their employer to progress.
- 70% felt progression is important to them
- 43% wanted to be fast-tracked however only 10% had been fast tracked
- 33% saw representation at the highest level within their organisation
- 38% felt their employer was comfortable talking about race and ethnicity and 22% were receiving help to talk about it
- 31% of Black employees wants a sponsor compared to 12% of White employers
- 33% of Black employees felt their ethnicity was a career blocker compared to 1% of White employees.
- 49% of Black employees felt they get credit for their work compared to 57% of White employees.
- 34% of Black people have to wait for more than three years to be promoted compared to 24% of other ethnicity groups.

¹² https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/594336/race-in-workplace-mcgregor-smith-review.pdf

¹³ <https://www.london.gov.uk/what-we-do/workforce-integration-network-win/inclusive-employers-toolkit>

¹⁴ https://www.london.gov.uk/sites/default/files/voices_of_the_underrepresented_fa.pdf

¹⁵ <https://www.bitc.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/bitc-report-race-raceatworkchartersurvey2020-Oct20.pdf>

EMPLOYERS AND CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

Large organisations must look inwardly and consider their internal structures and role in nurturing Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic young people into employment. Actions which focus on improving young people’s confidence, soft skills and social capital, place a higher burden on individuals. Whilst these are all important, without the systems issues being addressed first and the appropriate infrastructure put into place, efforts to increase the capacity of young people in education settings will not succeed as they will be met by the same barriers. The Race at Work survey illustrated the systemic blockages Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic employees feel. Progression was important to 70% of respondents however 52% felt like they needed to leave their organisation to progress.

“We need to shake up the internal structures of organisations”



Many young people in Tower Hamlets are left looking at Canary Wharf and City of London as two economic powerhouses that are beyond their reach. The council and its partners need to engage leaders in Canary Wharf and City of London and hold an honest conversation about what change is needed across the system to allow the required step change to take place. Large employers must consider how they can develop pipelines, structures and support to engage more young people in their workforce, and they must consider what they can do to accelerate the pace of change. There needs to be a systemic shift in the way organisations work. For example, the Canary Wharf Group has invested in redevelopment, housing and community projects but there has not been a structured conversation with all FTSE 100 companies in Canary Wharf to set out a Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) programme, at a systemic level, which will draw in young people from Tower Hamlets into their workforce. These organisations have huge CSR portfolios and there needs to be a direct conversation between them and the council to identify what needs to happen to give young people access to these organisations.

There is significant value in developing a partnership between schools and organisations in Canary Wharf and City of London to bring them into classrooms. This needs to be a structured and creative programme and it must not be a short-term investment and period of engagement. This needs to ensure that once companies engage schools they stick with young people as they go through their education journeys and provide a pathway into employment.

RECOMMENDATION :	
Engage Canary Wharf and City of London	The Tower Hamlets Partnership to engage leaders in Canary Wharf and City of London to consider what they can do to accelerate the pace of change and develop a systemic plan to ensure the required step change to increase the representation of Black, Asian and Ethnic Minority employees in senior positions within their organisations takes place.

ETHNICITY PAY DATA

The Commission reviewed the work the Bristol Race Equality Strategic Leaders Group¹⁶ who in taking forward the recommendations from the McGregor Review have looked at the race diversity of staff in public sector agencies across Bristol. They published reports which showed individual organisations and the collective race diversity of all public sector staff working in Bristol. This was compared to the population of Bristol to see how representative the public sector workforces are. The report includes:

- ethnicity of employees,
- differences in pay by ethnicity,
- sickness data by ethnicity,
- grievance and disciplinary by ethnicity.

In taking this work forward they have set up action groups made up of Directors and Senior HR leaders from the public sector organisations to look at the data findings. They'll work together to increase the diversity and improve the inclusion of staff across all organisations. The Commission expects as part of the Race Equality Pledge those organisations that are part of the Tower Hamlets Partnership Executive Group should commit to collectively publish workforce equality data with the first report published by the end of 2021.

¹⁶ <https://www.bristol.gov.uk/policies-plans-strategies/bristol-race-equality-strategic-leaders-group>

“BAME people work twice as hard but that does not translate into senior positions in the workplace”



RECOMMENDATION :

Representation

Tower Hamlets Partnership to collate and jointly publish disaggregated data, including pay gap and the ethnic profile of their senior leadership, and monitor progress in addressing race inequality amongst senior leadership.

DIVERSITY IN SCHOOLS

The Commission was fortunate to hold two focus groups with school governors and teachers from the borough. It was clear from these focus groups that significant progress has been made over the years to improve educational attainment of particularly Bangladeshi children in Tower Hamlets but like London there is an attainment gap in particular for Black boys and White British Children particularly those on free school meals. It was also noted through a range of local schemes there has been progress in recruiting Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic teachers across the borough’s schools and some progress on school governors. It was clear from the focus groups that more needed to be done to recruit more school governors from the Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic communities and support them to progress including into chair positions. The Commission recommends that local school review their current governance members profile and set ambitious target to address this over the next few years. Schools need to also consider how they will support and empower new governors so they feel they can have an impact.

The focus group with schoolteachers highlighted the real issue of pervasive and insidious racism experienced by some teachers. All the teachers that joined the focus group did not reveal their identity despite some of them being in senior roles in their respective schools due to fear of repercussion on current job and future career aspirations. Across the board participants from the focus group highlighted their personal experiences of being overlooked for promotion in favour of less experienced and qualified white colleagues. They also presented data which showed a lack of diversity in senior roles within Tower Hamlets Schools. The Commission therefore recommends that schools need to look at how they can support more Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic Community teachers into senior leadership positions.

“Senior black scholars are few and far between”



RECOMMENDATION :

Diversity in Schools

Schools in Tower Hamlets deliver programmes to recruit more Black, Asian and Minority school governors and support them into senior positions. Schools also need to support more Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic teachers into leadership roles include Head and deputy head roles.

TESTING AND RECRUITMENT PROCESSES

Too many young people are unfamiliar with testing and the recruitment processes of employers. There is a significant class barrier when it comes to young people understanding the process and options available to them, and the intersectionality of class and ethnicity is apparent when looking at intentional or unintentional racial bias during the recruitment process. Well designed, carefully managed face-to-face assessments exhibit no discernible bias. Badly designed or managed face-to-face assessments can lead to blatant bias. Online methods of assessment, such as psychometric tests and application forms, are superficially fair but do in fact tend to indirectly disadvantage candidates from lower socioeconomic groups and Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic groups.

ELBA highlighted how many Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic young people are unaware of the time needed to apply for further education and employment opportunities such as apprenticeships, graduate programmes and fast track programmes. Individuals with ethnic sounding names need to send between 60-90% more applications than White candidates to get one response¹⁷. ELBA are working with young people to raise awareness about how much work is required to gain employment and are trying to increase their ‘job search’ capacity.

¹⁷ Di Stasio and Heath, 2019. *Are employers in Britain discriminating against ethnic minorities?* Summary of findings from the GEMM project. http://csi.nuff.ox.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/Are-employers-in-Britain-discriminating-against-ethnic-minorities_final.pdf

Research has shown that anonymised recruitment has increased the chances of Black Asian and Minority Ethnic people being recruited. The Commission was pleased to hear that the council is introducing a new applicant tracking system which will help to eliminate unconscious bias from the recruitment process. Organisations across the borough need to scrutinise each stage of their recruitment process and ensure that the opportunity for unconscious bias is removed and is fair at every level.

“People are more likely to employ people like themselves”



RECOMMENDATION :	
Testing and Assessment	Local employers and employment support agencies work with Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic young people to better prepare them for testing and assessments.
Recruitment Processes	Organisations to review their recruitment processes to ensure they are well designed and removes any opportunity for bias.

INTERNAL CULTURE

Many witnesses highlighted the importance of improving the internal culture of organisations to enable people to bring their ‘whole self’ to work and not feel pressured into code switching. Increased levels of representation, aspirational targets, better collection of data and improved progression pipelines all serve as key mechanisms for change, however there will still be a significant number of Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic employees at lower levels whose experience will only be improved if the organisational culture takes a seismic shift.

Individuals need to feel comfortable to speak up if they experience bias or discrimination. The need for a safe internal space where open and honest discussions can take place about race is vital. The Race at Work survey revealed that 38% of Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic employees felt their employer was comfortable talking about race and ethnicity and only 22% were receiving help to talk about it. This was certainly felt in the Commission’s focus group with employees. Some felt that conversations surrounding racial inequality are still very much private and secretive discussions. Organisations remain afraid or unwilling to have an open dialogue in public and expose their faults. Many employees attending the focus group agreed that the discussion is taking place at the middle and lower levels in organisations rather than at the top level where it is most needed. Others commented that people are unsure of the correct language and need to get comfortable using the word ‘Black’ and ‘White’.

This links in with wider observations witnesses made about interventions needed to transform and improve the internal culture such as reverse mentoring, better complaints handling, unconscious bias training, and discussions about White privilege, code switching, recruitment processes. The Commission was informed that one of the key points to come out of the council’s Black Lives Matter ‘open door session’ was the importance of reverse mentoring to help understand the experiences Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic staff and the opportunities they have (or don’t have) within the organisation. The Commission noted that if the council, or any other organisation in the borough, is going to implement this in a meaningful way, it needs to be appropriately planned to appreciate the complexities of a junior officer providing guidance to a senior members of staff. Junior members of staff will need support to manage this relationship.

Similarly, open discussions around white privilege needs to be carefully managed but are a necessity to change behaviours. Many Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic people are tired of having to tell their story and feel the obligation is on them to raise awareness and deliver change. Their needs to be a reciprocal effort from senior white leaders. To develop allies and confront nuanced and structural racism, White people must understand that there are issues and topics they do not have to worry about, including racism. This must be a carefully constructed discussion which acknowledges that having white privilege is not racist, but you must be aware of how racism impacts other people and how we can ensure society is a fairer place. This discussion will be uncomfortable and must force people to consider how their actions maintain and support racist systems and structures (regardless of intent).

RECOMMENDATION :	
Safe Space	Organisations commit to creating a culture which creates a safe space for open and honest conversations about race within their organisation.

Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic INEQUALITIES COMMISSION

In partnership with:

