

<b>Item No.</b> 4.	<b>Classification:</b> Open	<b>Date:</b> December 7 2005	<b>Meeting Name:</b> Council Assembly
<b>Report title:</b>		Deputation requests – officer comments	
<b>Ward(s) or groups affected:</b>		All	
<b>From:</b>		Chief Executive (Borough Solicitor)	

### **Deputation request from the Black Awareness Group**

1. The deputation request from the Black Awareness Group states: -

“The Black Awareness Group would like to bring to the attention of the council the failure to engage with BME communities and businesses in the implementation of Lord Ouseley's report. In particular, the group wish to make representations about the future of the Equality and Diversity Strategic Reference Group and its detailed recommendations to resolve the problems faced by small businesses in Camberwell and the Elephant and Castle.

“The deputation is considered urgent since the final meeting of the Cross Party Working Group (Ouseley Review) is scheduled to take place on December 14.”

### **SUPPLEMENTARY ADVICE FROM OTHER OFFICERS**

#### **Comments from the chief executive – the Black Awareness Group deputation**

2. Shortly after publication of Lord Ouseley's report, the executive set up a cross party member working group, chaired by the leader, to take forward its recommendations. Following discussions with a number of community organisations, the working group meeting on May 31 2005 agreed to set up an equality and diversity strategic reference group (SRG) of community stakeholders with expertise and leadership roles within the community across the equality dimensions of race, disability, gender, age, faith and sexual orientation. The purpose of the SRG was to discuss implementation of the 35 recommendations in Lord Ouseley's report. There was no recommendation in his report to establish an advisory group of this sort but members of the working group felt that it could provide a useful additional means for engaging with BME and other communities as a complement to all the existing avenues.
3. While several of Lord Ouseley's recommendations relate to planning and regeneration more generally, none of them are specifically concerned with the position of small businesses in Camberwell or the Elephant & Castle.
4. The SRG met for its inaugural meeting on June 22 and again on July 19 2005. A meeting proposed for October 4 was postponed, although an informal meeting did take place involving five or six SRG members (including the acting chair), to

which some members of the public who were not SRG members were also invited. Following discussions with the acting chair and a number of other members of the group, it has been agreed that the next meeting will take place on December 12 and that this will include a review of the council's progress in implementing Lord Ouseley's recommendations.

5. The terms of reference of the SRG were debated but not agreed at the two meetings in June and July. Notwithstanding the absence of any formal framework, some members of the group agreed to form a "regeneration sub-group" at the close of the July meeting, in order to look at issues affecting traders in the Elephant & Castle area. This sub-group has since met on a number of occasions, although the Council has had no direct involvement, and it has written to the council with a set of recommendations, which are said by it to have been ratified by the informal meeting held by some members of the SRG on October 4.
6. These sub-group recommendations are primarily concerned with enhancing BME stakeholder involvement in different aspects of regeneration and with securing financial compensation for a) traders in and around the Elephant & Castle shopping centre, b) the proprietors of the former Imperial Gardens Nightclub and c) other (unidentified) current or former traders on Camberwell New Road.
7. With regard to BME stakeholder involvement, the council has very extensive arrangements for consulting and engaging with both residents and traders, particularly where major regeneration is planned. It has always conducted its business in an open and transparent way and has taken account of the widest possible range of views in developing its policies and plans. For example, the regeneration programme at the Elephant & Castle is accompanied by continuous consultation, communication and engagement activities including exhibitions, market opinion surveys, newsletters, research programmes, and detailed housing referencing centered on the Heygate Estate. However, the Council is continuously seeking to improve the breadth and depth of its community engagement and to ensure that all sections of the diverse local communities are reached. Two of Lord Ouseley's original recommendations relate to these issues and progress on implementation will be presented to the SRG on December 12.
8. With regard to the Elephant & Castle traders, the council aims for existing businesses to stay in the area and wants to support and assist them to continue trading through the transition and to establish themselves in new, improved locations. It is not council policy to seek to close them down and pay them off. The council has specifically rejected a developer-led 'Bluewater' model that favours national multiples. Instead an open-streets approach is being pursued that will be more able to nurture small/medium sized independent businesses, including existing BME businesses. This policy is in line with the aspirations of a substantial majority of the traders. In a survey undertaken in July 2005, 70% of businesses stated that they are eager to remain trading in Elephant and Castle.
9. The council has taken appropriate positive action to assist the traders where possible and continues to look for new opportunities to do so. This has included the establishment of a joint shopping centre liaison group as a forum for partnership working between the owners of the centre, the businesses and traders within the centre, the Chamber of Commerce, Business Extra and the

- council itself. Also, through the Elephant Links SRB programmes, the council has established Business Extra to provide independent professional advice to local businesses and co-sponsored events and activities to promote businesses in the centre. Community wardens have now been deployed in and around the shopping centre and the council has appointed a business regeneration manager for the Elephant and Castle.
10. Through the shopping centre liaison group SCLG, the council has briefed businesses on the overall project, invited their input and has been able to adapt and prepare proposals based on guidance and advice from the businesses themselves. The arrangement with Business Extra is through a contract valued at £447,000. Over the two and a half years they have been operating, they have worked with 874 clients (existing and start-up businesses). The great majority of these have come from the Elephant Links SRB area, which is wider than the core area of the physical redevelopment, but which could be affected by it. Of these, 579 were BME owned businesses of which 44% were Black African, 28% Black British, and the remainder from Caribbean, South America, Asian and Black European origin.
  11. At the same time, the council wants to see the owners of the shopping centre make commitments to match its own actions. Although the council cannot dictate to them, the kind of commitments sought include active management to ensure the fullest possible occupation of the centre, a healthy mix of businesses able to occupy at rents that reflect actual trading conditions and rent levels that reflect the difficult circumstances faced by the traders.
  12. As well as supporting the traders in their dealings with their landlord, the council is doing everything in its power to secure continuity for local businesses in the local area. In particular, it is using its position as the local planning authority to require all new commercial developments in the locality to offer a proportion of their units to shopping centre businesses on a first refusal basis. The success of the Elephant and Castle project in attracting new investment has led to a number of major schemes coming forward in the immediate area around the shopping centre and this gives the council confidence that sufficient opportunities will arise for all businesses who have expressed a wish to stay in the area. Subject to the grant of planning permission, a scheme proposed for the New Kent Road has the potential to begin the process of establishing existing independent traders in a new and central location. If all goes well, these units could become available towards the end of 2008 and it is anticipated that a number of other, similar opportunities will come forward over the coming months.
  13. In addition to this, the council is ensuring that these premises are made affordable to existing businesses by providing for “stepped rents” that rise gradually over a number of years to market levels in order to provide time for the businesses to adjust to new market circumstances.
  14. Likewise, the council recognises that relocation can be expensive, particularly where there are fitting-out costs or specialist adaptations to be paid for. For those businesses that will not be compensated for these matters by their current landlord, it is proposing to set up a fund that will provide grants or low cost loans to assist with these transitional costs. The council will be discussing at the

shopping centre liaison group how precisely this should be administered in the best interests of individual businesses.

15. The proprietors of the former Imperial Gardens Nightclub have formally lodged their claim for over £9 million with the High Court and the council will continue to comply with the statutory procedures and timescales for responding to it. In these circumstances, it would be inappropriate for any stakeholder forum, however constituted, to seek to influence the outcome of the case.
16. Camberwell is a much smaller area than the Elephant & Castle and is not the subject of any major council sponsored regeneration scheme. It is unclear what businesses are being referred to by the sub-group as Camberwell New Road traders.

## BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

Background Papers	Held At	Contact
Deputation Request File	Town Hall, Peckham Road, London SE5 8UB	Lesley John 020 7525 7228

<b>Lead Officer</b>	Ian Millichap, Constitutional Team Manager
<b>Report Author</b>	Lesley John, Constitutional Officer
<b>Version</b>	Final
<b>Dated</b>	6.12.05