

Southwark Brexit Panel

MINUTES of the OPEN section of the Southwark Brexit Panel held on Wednesday 3 October 2018 at 5.30 pm at Ground Floor Meeting Room G01B - 160 Tooley Street, London SE1 2QH

PRESENT: Councillor Victoria Mills (Chair)
Councillor James Coldwell
Councillor Maria Linforth-Hall
Councillor Margy Newens
Councillor David Noakes
Councillor Kieron Williams

OFFICER SUPPORT: Stephen Douglass, Southwark Council Brexit Officer
Julie Foy, Head of Human Resources
Aine Gallagher, Principal Policy and Public Affairs Officer
Harjeet Sahota, Policy and Public Affairs Officer
Tim Murtagh, Constitutional Officer

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies for lateness were received from Councillor Kieron Williams.

2. DISCLOSURE OF INTERESTS AND DISPENSATIONS

There were none.

The Brexit Panel invited expert witnesses to discuss and give evidence on the potential impact of Brexit on EU citizens and communities, as well as the impact on council services.

3. EVIDENCE SESSION - THEME: BUSINESS AND EMPLOYMENT

Lorna Gavin, Chair of Southwark Business Forum, spoke about the potential affect of Brexit on businesses in Southwark.

4. EVIDENCE SESSION - THEME: COMMUNITIES AND EU CITIZENS RIGHTS

This item was moved up the agenda running order.

The following participants spoke about Brexit and its affect on communities and EU residents rights in Southwark.

Patria Roman, Latin Elephant
Carlos Naranjo, Director of the Latin American Chamber of Commerce
Gordon McCullough, CEO of Community Southwark Council
Sally Causer, Southwark Law Centre
Ruth Budge, Southwark Law Centre
Isaac Bigio, Iberian American Alliance in the UK

Following initial statements from each presenter there was a discussion of issues with members of the panel.

Below is a summary of the issues discussed in the evidence sessions:

Business and Employment

- Employers are facing uncertainty over Brexit which is bad for business.
- While larger businesses may be putting contingency plans in place, SMEs in particular may need additional support, as they feel powerless to plan.
- The Southwark Business Forum has consulted members and a strong theme coming out of this consultation was the importance of championing inclusion and diversity as a rebuttal to hate crimes and hostility.
- An additional consideration in Southwark is the impact of Brexit on Latin American businesses – the Latin Quarter has almost 200 small businesses and Brexit has created insecurity for many of those businesses and their employees, many of whom have EU passports.
- Businesses generally are in agreement that they are unable to predict what will happen and are hoping to minimise any surprises.

Communities/EU residents' rights

- Southwark has a significant Latin American population and many Latin American residents in the borough have EU passports and therefore will be directly affected by Brexit in terms of their status to live and work in the UK. Elephant and Castle is a particular hub for Latin American businesses.
- According to expert witnesses, many Latin American residents work in cleaning services with 11% earning less than the National Living Wage and 70% earning less than the London Living Wage.

- Witnesses raised concerns about the vulnerability of some Latin American residents, particularly those who are unable to speak English, working in precarious conditions or with uncertain immigration status.
- EU citizens still face significant uncertainty about their rights and status following Brexit, particularly in the event of leaving the EU without a deal, and the process for the government's settled status scheme is still unclear.
- Like many areas, Southwark saw an increase in hate crime following the EU referendum result and witnesses highlighted the importance of continuing to monitor this.
- As well as EU citizens rights, there is significant uncertainty about funding for the voluntary and community sector following Brexit. Some projects supporting vulnerable people are EU funded and the future of that funding beyond March 2019 is unclear. A high proportion of people working in the charitable sector in London are from the EE area.
- There are significant concerns around vulnerable groups whose rights will be affected by Brexit but who may not be aware of the steps they will need to take, including some elderly and disabled people, those who do not speak English and children in care. Some people may struggle to navigate the process, including through digital and financial barriers, and legal aid will not usually be available to support those individuals.
- Southwark Council does not record the nationality of employees, but like most London local authorities the council workforce is likely to be significantly impacted by Brexit and the council has been taking steps to raise awareness amongst staff and working closely with trade unions.
- Community groups highlighted the importance of having the right information easily available for residents to inform and reassure people in this time of uncertainty.

Southwark Council

- As an employer the council does not differentiate between UK and EU workforce – data has only been collected since the EU referendum.
- The council is working to raise awareness amongst staff and is working closely with trade unions.
- The council has concerns about workforce shortages particularly in social care, construction and IT and is monitoring skills shortages.
- In terms of community cohesion, the council is visibly encouraging inclusion and is a zero-tolerance employer when it comes to intolerance/hate crime.

5. SOUTHWARK COUNCIL'S RESPONSE TO BREXIT

The panel received verbal updates from Stephen Douglass, Director of Communities and Southwark Council Brexit Officer and Julie Foy, Head of Human Resources, Southwark Council.

6. BREXIT - IMPLICATIONS FOR ADULT SOCIAL CARE

The Panel received a written briefing from Jay Stickland, Director of Adult Social Care at Southwark Council, on the implications Brexit may have on adult social care.

7. LGA REGIONAL BREXIT SOUNDING BOARD - 30 OCTOBER 2018

It was reported that a LGA regional Brexit sounding board meeting would be held on 30 October 2018.

The meeting ended at 7.36pm

CHAIR:

DATED: