

**RESPONSE TO QUESTIONS SUBMITTED IN ADVANCE – EDUCATION AND LOCAL  
ECONOMY SCRUTINY COMMISSION - 22 FEB 2021**

**Cllr Alice Macdonald, Cabinet Member for Communities and Equalities**

**Cabinet Portfolio**

To improve the council's engagement with all Southwark's communities, especially those who are hardest to reach. To be responsible for strengthening the voluntary and community sector, supporting volunteering across the borough.

To champion equality and diversity across the borough and be a champion for Southwark's varied and diverse communities. To lead on the council's work to tackle inequality and ensure that fairness and justice are the cornerstone of all the decisions we make. Working with partners and communities across Southwark, to lead on our work on neighbourhoods, including creating new neighbourhood charters.

To deliver the council's corporate programme to transform the way it works – to modernise, secure savings, improve customer services and deliver value for money for local residents and businesses. To ensure excellence in customer service for our residents.

The cabinet member will have particular responsibility for:

- Equalities
- Women rights
- LGBTQI
- Community engagement, participation & development
- Increasing the voice and influence of black, Asian and minority ethnic communities
- Neighbourhoods, including social regeneration charters
- Voluntary and Community Sector
- Faith communities
- Volunteering
- Civic issues
- Community grants and investment, including: Local Community Infrastructure Levy; Common Purpose Fund; Cleaner, Greener, Safer Fund; Democracy Fund; Neighbourhoods Fund; and, Resident Participation Fund
- Community and tenants & residents halls and centres
- Financial inclusion
- Digital inclusion
- Digital infrastructure & improving broadband
- Website
- Customer services
- Registrar's service
- Coroners service

## QUESTIONS

1. **Can you share a written overview of the main council equalities initiatives, including Southwark's Equalities Framework; Southwark's Equalities and Diversity Charter (and/or Southwark's 2016 Diversity Charter); the refreshes to Southwark's approach to equalities impact assessments and community impact assessments?**

A background paper is attached setting this out

2. **Can you update commission on plans for better understanding racial disparities in the Council and beyond?**

The Southwark Stands Together Programme is led by the Leader and cabinet members lead on individual workstreams within it. The below response has been provided by, Jasbinder Baddhan, Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Programme Lead, Chief Executive's Office

1. Phase one of the engagement approach that forms part of Southwark Stands Together (*Exploring the status quo*) involved looking at what we now knew from all the data and evidence from the summer listening exercise. We explored public perceptions, local sentiment, lack of trust and confidence, engagement practices, access to services, and continued cycles of disadvantage in our communities within the context of the recommendations. (Kings College London will be undertaking a deeper dive into this data). The second workshop (*Appreciative Inquiry*) is a strength-based approach to address change and is a constructive alternative to traditional problem solving. It provided us with a tool that enables deliberative engagement and helps us to think about what will success look like. This approach involves collaboration with a small group of residents/stakeholders that uses questions to build a vision for the future, focusing on past and potential future successes.

### Data, information and lived experience workshops

2. So far, we have held two internal workshops looking at our current use of data, as well as identifying and plugging gaps. We were supported by the head of I.T and digital services who joined in order to ascertain Southwark Stands Together data needs. The first workshop '*Incorporating the inequalities agenda into public health: case study*' focussed on the identification of health inequalities, understanding need and their impact on residents. The disproportionate impact of COVID-19 has further highlighted these health inequalities. Workstream leads also received an introduction to the Health Inequalities framework and how the approach is being embedded across the council.
3. Our second workshop '*Equality and Inequality Consciousness across the five phases of community engagement*' encouraged workstream leads to focus on our Public Sector Equalities Duty (PSED) considerations when engaging with our communities to fulfil our commitments around working collaboratively with our communities. In March, a third workshop '*Disproportionality within Southwark's Youth justice system*' will use key data sets to aim to understand cycles of disadvantage highlighted in October's cabinet report. It will look at key areas such as school exclusion, stop and search and first time interactions within the youth justice system. We will be applying knowledge and understanding around adverse childhood conditions and working to understand why on offending and reoffending and going into custody, the Black, Asian and Ethnic Minority population are still over represented.

4. We are identifying what data we have, what's missing in our understanding and how to plug these gaps. We also need to breakdown Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic terminology and highlight the disparities and successes across different minority groups in order to better understand them, build relationships and meet need. We are partnering with Kings College London in order to build this understanding as well as undertaking a deeper dive of the listening exercise over the summer. We are using a multi-disciplinary approach working across sectors such as Education, Policing, Health and Business. Workstream leads will map interdependences and develop a more nuanced approach to / between different social determinants around racism, inequalities and discrimination. Two activities will arise from these workshops: the Data and Digital working group and the next stage of our work in Breaking Cycles of disadvantage.

#### Data and Digital working group

5. This group is an off shoot from the Community Support Alliance (CSA)/Community Hub coordination group. The CSA are currently working to implement 16 recommendations arising from the review of the work undertaken in the summer. In order to carry forward the 16 recommendations there are five working groups being created, the first meeting is next week.

#### Breaking Cycles of disadvantage

6. We are working internally with data analysts and colleagues from different workstreams and across the council. We are looking at the data and evidence and breaking down Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic Communities terminology to identify the disparities across ethnic minority communities. The next step are small roundtable sessions to see how we can break cycles of disadvantage working to implement early interventions and solutions as well as longer term measures.
7. The first 'cycles of disadvantage' that we are focussing on is a ***focus on school exclusion, youth justice system, stop and search and criminal justice system***. While there have been some successes in offending and re-offending rates there is still over representation of Black, Asian and Ethnic Minority people in the youth justice/criminal justice system. We will be looking to see how we can better understand and use/design specific risk/protective factors such as adverse childhood conditions and which early measures we can implement.
8. The second 'cycle of disadvantage' that we are focussing on is ***the impact of housing conditions/overcrowding and wider determinants on the impact of COVID-19 on Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic communities*** (Health and all workstreams including wider council colleagues). We are looking to work with '*It takes a Village*' project and incorporating a wider integrated response to increase impact towards people experiencing multiple disadvantage and implement fast track personalised support.
9. There will also be a whole programme of actions arising from the SST Workforce stream to help address developmental opportunities and under-representation of staff from Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic backgrounds in the top 500 managers in the Council workforce. The SST workforce stream is also looking at a range of data sources in employment and training areas. Further deep dives of data are currently being planned.

**3. Can you clarify your role in addressing equalities related issues in the Council's workforce report, and subject to that response, what your priorities are?**

The Workforce strategy is politically led by the Cabinet Member for Finance and Resources located under the Chief Executive and Strategic Director for Housing & Modernise, with officer lead from Head of HR & Director of Modernise/Head of OT respectively. As Cabinet Member of Equalities my focus is on putting in place and championing a framework for the council to meet its equality ambitions and duties which will help address equalities related issues in the Council's workforce report.

**4. Can you outline how your team are contributing to addressing the many equalities related issues arising due to the Covid-19 pandemic? What priority areas are you contributing to the response on, and how?**

The communities and modernise teams are working on a number of equalities related issues arising due to the COVID – 19 pandemic. In addition the development of the refreshed equalities framework, as referenced in the attached paper, will ensure in both the response to and recovery from COVID we embed equalities in everything we do. Priority areas currently include:

- **The Community Support Alliance:** In response to the COVID-19 pandemic and resulting lockdown, the Southwark Community Hub was set up to provide support to many thousands of vulnerable Southwark residents. This included social and welfare support and access to essential food and other supplies. Initially a local authority initiative, the Southwark Community Hub rapidly developed to become a joint-initiative between council services, voluntary and community sector (VCS) and health providers. Following a review, it was recommended that we should develop a Southwark social/ community support alliance that is focused on providing social support that delivers long-term reductions in inequality, building on the successes of the Community Hub. The communities team is playing a lead role in the Alliance - both in continuing to respond to immediate need and building a long-term model to address inequalities.
- **Tackling Digital Exclusion:** COVID-19 has highlighted the issue of digital exclusion within Southwark communities. With a third national lockdown underway, the demand for devices and affordable broadband is considerably high. As an immediate priority, we have been working across the council to tackle digital exclusion affecting children. We launched a crowdfunding initiative to help raise the money needed to get every child a laptop which has raised over £100,000 so far. This is being match funded up to £250,000 by the Council. We have also been working with internet providers to access free broadband connections for families. A longer-term digital inclusion plan will be developed as part of our forthcoming digital strategy
- **Engaging and supporting the VCS Sector:** Our voluntary and community sector have played an amazing role in response to the COVID crises. The communities team is focussed on continuing to ensure we have a vibrant and diverse community sector through working with partners like Community Southwark to understand gaps and constraints and address them. We will be conducting a review of our the council's grants to make sure they develop the best value for communities and remove barriers to equal access to funding, particularly for Black, Asian and minority ethnic groups

- **Engaging communities in the Covid response:** COVID has laid bare the stark health inequalities that exist in our society. The communities team has been working with the public health team on this with a particular focus on community engagement to address vaccine hesitancy.