

Minutes of the How do we make Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic Lives Matter in Torbay? - Review Panel

8 December 2020

-: Present :-

Councillor Jermaine Atiya-Alla (Chairman), Councillor Andrew Barrand, Councillor Steve Darling, Councillor Robert Loxton, Kevin Dixon, Maia Thomas and Kofi Yeboah-Aidoo

(Also in attendance: Councillor Anne Brooks, Councillor Margaret Douglas-Dunbar, Councillor Cordelia Law, Councillor Barbara Lewis, Councillor Chris Lewis and Councillor Mike Morey)

16. Apologies

Apologies were received from Councillor John Thomas (Vice Chair of the Panel).

17. Action Notes

Notes of meeting held by the panel on 25 November 2020 were agreed as a correct record.

18. How do we make BAME lives matter at Torbay's public organisations?

The key responses from Devon and Somerset Fire and Rescue Service (DSFRS) representatives are detailed below:

- That DSFRS had undertaken work with the Eastern European community and found that a significant issue was the language barrier for this community to engage and understand key messages from the Fire Service such as what to do in a fire and who to call (it was stated that only one third of the Polish population knew to phone 999 in case of fire). DSFRS found that the best way to engage and communicate with this community was to do it via 'community gatekeepers' who the community trusted
- DSFRS are now very aware of the issue of language and that many in their community do not have English as their first language or have little or no English language skills and the Fire Service now they are working on a multi-language website
- DSFRS stated that they had no evidence of racial abuse of their staff but that they did have a recording process in place to capture this data if it took place

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- DSFRS explained that in terms of recruiting for staff they previously just used local postcodes as a restriction but now they have removed this restriction to encourage staff recruitment from as wide a range of areas as possible
- DSFRS also explained that they had dropped the need for formal qualifications from their recruitment process and that instead they tested candidates to see if they met their thresholds – the reason for doing this was that they wanted to encourage candidates who may have qualifications from other countries who would find it problematic to apply with qualifications from their country of origin
- DSFRS uses relocation packages for some jobs to attract candidates from outside Devon and Somerset
- DSFRS explained that they were aware that the BAME community were under-represented in their workforce and that there were a number of barriers to recruiting BAME staff and these were:
 - Because of austerity and cuts their recruitment has been piecemeal and this has made it difficult to mount a high profile campaign to attract BAME candidates
 - In relation to firefighters the need for some to live 5 minutes from their fire station was a challenge as many of the stations are in rural locations where the BAME community is poorly represented
 - There is a lack of BAME role models in the Fire Service both locally and nationally
 - Perception in community that only role in Fire Service is being a firefighter and therefore more needs to be done to promote the wider set of roles in the service and the career progression within the service to the BAME community
- DSFRS recognised that they need to do more to engage with the BAME community in Devon and Somerset but that previous attempts had been difficult and disappointing as it was really hard to reach and speak to many sections of the BAME community. However, DSFRS is establishing a project with some of their stations to encourage them to regularly meet with their local communities but this has been temporarily paused due to the pressures of the COVID-19 pandemic
- DSFRS explained that the London Fire Brigade had started to use 'Culture cards' to enable firefighters to have the skills to engage with the BAME community
- DSFRS stated that the significant part of their interaction with the BAME community was in relation to compliance and enforcement activity on businesses in the hospitality sector and that in Torbay they worked with the council on a scheme known as 'Better Business for All' which sought to support BAME businesses to comply with fire and environmental health laws. However, DSFRS admitted that they needed to do more on this area and

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take a position of supporting and educating business owners rather than just enforcing the rules

- DSFRS explained that retaining their staff was also important as once you have attracted candidates to the Fire Service you need to ensure you retain them by making support available. To facilitate this the Fire Service has established a Multicultural Staff Support Network which is undertaking support and activities such as promoting Black History Month within the Service
- DSFRS stated that they are looking to improve their recruitment of BAME staff by better utilising social media and advertising in locations where BAME people were more likely to see the advert such as Asian or Eastern European food supermarkets
- DSFRS explained that they did not have recruitment targets in relation to BAME staff as they want their staff to be appointed on merit
- In conclusion DSFRS identified a number of areas where it could do better on BAME issues and these are:
 - Identify and gain the trust of and work with the 'community gatekeepers' in the BAME communities
 - Get better at collecting data on the BAME community so services can be adapted and shaped to meet the needs of the BAME community
 - Continue to support the existing BAME staff via the staff network but look at others way to support BAME staff
 - Develop key performance measures and indicators on BAME issues so the DSFRS can see how it is doing on this issue and address any poor performance
 - Continue to constantly explore different ways to attract BAME candidates to the Fire Service in Devon and Somerset such as BAME open days and challenging old recruitment methods such as word of mouth in rural areas

The following actions were identified by the panel:

- Review Panel to consider visiting a Torbay fire station when safe to do so to promote BAME issues.