

# RESPONDING TO THE IMPACTS OF COVID 19 ON WATFORD'S BAME COMMUNITIES AND STREET NAME POLICY REVIEW TASK GROUP

2 November 2020

Present: Councillor Councillor Favour Ezeifedi (Chair)  
Members: Councillor Dawn Allen-Williamson, Councillor Peter Jeffree, Councillor Asif Khan and Councillor Jennifer Pattinson

Officers: Senior Democratic Services Officer  
Democratic Services Officer (JK)

## 1 Apologies for absence

None.

## 2 Disclosures of interest

None.

## 3 Introduction and terms of reference

The task group considered that the two motions were difficult to combine into one piece of work. One was about BAME issues and council processes and how well the council included different communities without direct or indirect discrimination and what could be learnt from the first wave of COVID-19. The other related to the street scene and ensuring that WBC policies encouraged a more diverse view of street names going forward. One was more fundamental and the other related to the implementation around planning policies.

It was agreed that the work would need to be split into two parts starting with the wider work around BAME communities as this was the more urgent issue. Dealing with each aspect of the work separately was preferred. The work programme and meetings would need to be structured to reflect this. Part one of the work would be the focus until January.

Some members further agreed that the name of the task group did not accurately reflect the work it sought to carry out and should be changed to 'Impact of Covid on BAME communities and street name policy review task group'. It was requested that the Senior Democratic Services Officer speak to the Chair of Overview and Scrutiny about this revision.

The task group needed to work to a tight timeline; the work had to be completed in time to go to Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 4 February 2021 to ensure the task group finished its work before the pre-election period which would begin on 19 March 2021. The Chair and scrutiny officers would develop a work programme to meet these deadlines.

Members made some suggestions in relation to how the terms of reference were structured and worded. It was noted that the remit and focus of task groups did develop as they started their work and it was not unusual for aspects of the terms of reference to be curtailed over time. Officers agreed to circulate a revised version which reflected members' comments.

Turning to the work on the BAME communities, the task group felt it would be useful to make recommendations about how WBC could safeguard and minimise the impact of COVID-19 on BAME communities through its policies and procedures. This could include communications work and looking at what was successful and what could be done better.

Hertfordshire County Council (HCC) was undertaking a similar piece of work in its capacity as the responsible authority for health. This work was reviewing the relevance and impact of the findings of the recent Public Health England report on the impact of COVID-19 on BAME communities. The review was expected to create an action plan that would focus on addressing health inequalities. WBC officers were already working to ensure that Watford communities were fully engaged and considered in this work.

It would therefore be important to define the different roles of WBC and HCC so the task group could make recommendations in areas where there was the opportunity to influence policies and avoid duplication of effort. Housing and access to housing support could be priority areas. It was suggested that there could be consideration of the effectiveness of WBC's partnership working with HCC. The task group would also benefit from the most recent data on deprivation and ethnicity in this regard.

The WBC equalities policy would be an important document for the review. It was noted that there was a policy statement on the website but that there may be other policies and documents which underpinned this. Officers undertook to establish what policies were in place. Equality Impact Assessments (EIAs) were carried out with the introduction of new policies; the task group were interested in those that were done during lockdown and how effective these EIAs had been.

Considering the outcomes for the street names part of the review, it was suggested that:

- some existing street names could be reviewed
- the legal consultation process, were the council to agree to change any street names, should be understood, including the cost implications for businesses. Lessons could be learnt from the approaches of other authorities which had chosen to rename streets previously named after contentious individuals
- consider the council's street naming policy to ensure that future street names reflect Watford's diverse community and values – not all streets were, or should be named after people and it was important to be sensitive to the background and merits of those being memorialised.

The task group agreed the use of the term BAME (Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic) and the definition used by the Institute for Race Relations which was 'people of non-white descent'. This reflected the evidence that these groups had been disproportionately affected by COVID-19.

The terms of reference were agreed subject to the amendments suggested by the task group.

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#### **Work programme**

Understanding the lived experiences of members of the BAME communities, and not just community group leaders, would be a valuable aspect of the review. The task group discussed potential witnesses for the review to include: Watford Afro-Caribbean Association, Watford Mosque, Black majority churches, the Sikh Gurdwara, representatives of the Hindu community and New Hope. Understanding the views of young people would also be important to this work. Task group members were asked to make suggestions for groups to be invited.

The task group suggested that evidence could be taken from local health bodies such as Herts Valleys Clinical Commissioning Group and the public health department of HCC, but it would be important not to overlap the work of HCC. Turning to the methodologies to be used; the task group agreed that a range of methods was needed possibly including a survey, focus group conversations and larger virtual meetings. It would be important to ensure the respondents were representative of Watford's communities. WBC's communications team could raise awareness on social media.

The task group addressed their availability; meetings would need to be either first thing on Mondays or in the evenings. Officers would take this into consideration when putting together a work programme.

5 **Background information**

The background information was noted.

The Meeting started at 6.00 pm  
and finished at 7.00 pm

Chair