

**Executive summary**

# **Disproportionate impact of COVID-19 on Black, Asian and minority ethnic communities**

June 2020

Mid-point findings and framework

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# Introduction

Camden is one of the most diverse areas of the country, with a history of fighting for equality and progress.

The COVID-19 pandemic has both revealed and exacerbated existing structural inequalities that have disproportionately affected people from Black, Asian and minority ethnic backgrounds. We recognise that these inequalities vary across different groups. We have been reviewing our work on cohesion and equalities, recognising both the need to respond to the crisis in an immediate sense, and to ensure we foster a collaborative approach in our wider work on tackling inequalities.

In response to emerging evidence, Camden Council launched a programme of work focused on how Black, Asian and minority ethnic residents in the borough have been disproportionately affected by COVID-19, and what actions we must take, in collaboration with our partners and communities, to ensure individuals are protected, and to bring about systemic change.

This work is being overseen by a senior level working group that is chaired by Councillor Abdul Hai (Cabinet Member for Young People and Cohesion) and Julie Billett (Director of Public Health).

The Black, Asian and minority ethnic Inequalities and COVID-19 working group aims to develop and oversee a framework of coordinated action across the system to tackle the inequalities identified through the focussed assessment of the evidence base.

## The six areas in scope include:

- the lived experience of Black, Asian and minority ethnic residents
- health inequalities
- employment and the labour market, including our own workforce
- schools and education, including the digital divide
- our most vulnerable residents – shielding and Adult Social Care clients
- housing supply and overcrowding.

The work of the group will also contribute to national work and feed into the Government inquiries.

**“Any recovery and renewal process must consider how to respond to growing inequalities, or risk deepening the divide within our society.”**

Councillor Abdul Hai, Cabinet Member for Young People and Cohesion

# Tackling inequalities in Camden: Camden Council's work to date

Tackling inequality sits at the heart of Camden's overarching values, ambitions and strategies. Camden 2025 sets out a vision for the future of the borough, where everyone contributes to achieving a safe, fair, creative and active community – a place where everyone has a chance to succeed and where nobody gets left behind. Our Camden Plan articulates Camden Council's core purpose as addressing and reducing inequality, where we will fight inequality and the barriers it creates by working with individuals, families and communities to open up the opportunities they need to get on in life.

In January 2020, the Council's Cabinet agreed a paper outlining our approach to cohesion and equality over the remainder of the year. This included developing a council-wide strategic approach, joining the European Intercultural Cities programme, and exploring the range of inequalities across Camden, including socio-economic inequality.

Camden's Annual Public Health Report 2019/20 '[Going further on Health Inequalities within Camden and Islington](#)' continues the conversation from previous work on this theme, looking at what progress has been made to date on health inequalities locally, and considering what else we need to do and how we might need to work differently in the future to reduce these long-standing disparities.

Key to all our efforts to reduce inequalities in Camden is the regular and meaningful involvement of our diverse communities. Involving communities as equal partners in priority setting, planning and decision-making can lead to services and programmes that are better matched with need, and in turn to improved life outcomes. Additionally, as a local authority we believe we should be providing opportunities for our citizens working in their own communities, as well making sure that our workforce reflects our diverse communities. Supporting our Black, Asian and minority ethnic staff is a top priority and we are committed to be an employer that champions diversity and creates an environment for our staff to thrive.

**“We must ensure we do not homogenise the differing experiences of different communities under the Black, Asian and minority ethnic umbrella. Inequalities are experienced in many different ways.”**

Athian Akec, Camden Youth MP

# COVID-19 pandemic: Camden Council and partners' response to date

During the pandemic, the Council and our partners have continued to support our Black, Asian and minority ethnic communities in a variety of ways. Some of this includes ensuring that effective and accessible communications are shared with communities, including producing a toolkit for voluntary and community sector leaders to create their own communications, videos and WhatsApp messages, recognising the different media channels that people use. We have also promoted and disseminated a diverse range of communications in a number of different languages. Our Cabinet Member for Cohesion and Young People, Councillor Hai, participated in an interview on Bengali TV (Channel S) in April emphasising that people follow Government guidelines, maintain social distancing and only go out if it's essential.

In schools and education, access to laptops and Wi-Fi have been provided to disadvantaged children, and paper and other resources provided to families in need where possible. Some schools have provided physical Free School Meals (FSM) vouchers to families and pre-paid food purchase cards to families experiencing food hardship. Over 11,000 food hampers have been given to families.

We are supporting our Black, Asian and minority ethnic workforce by sharing regular communications with the Camden Black Workers Group, commencing staff focus groups to understand Black, Asian and minority ethnic colleagues' experiences throughout the pandemic, provided a comprehensive wellbeing offer to all staff, and ensured that all frontline staff have access to Personal Protective Equipment (PPE).

**“At Camden we took a strong position early, in standing with the call for an end to racial injustice around the world. However, these calls must translate into real change.”**

Adejare Oyewole, Camden Black Workers Group

# Key headlines: What we have found so far

Across the Council, services have gathered early findings on the impact of COVID-19 on Black, Asian and minority ethnic residents, which have been considered at length by the Black, Asian and minority ethnic Inequalities and COVID-19 working group. The following is an outline of some of the insights that have been presented to date. We will be producing a final report, which will outline all of the findings in greater detail.

## Health inequalities

The pandemic has put a spotlight on the entrenched health inequalities that exist in the UK. Pre-existing health inequalities, and the interrelationship with deprivation and other social, economic, cultural and environmental determinants of health, are likely to underpin the differential experience and health outcomes of our Black, Asian and minority ethnic communities.

Although Camden has a COVID-19 age-standardised mortality rate that is significantly lower than the London average (55 versus 86 per 100,000) and has one of the lowest COVID-19 mortality rates amongst all London boroughs, the emerging evidence shows that there are wider health and wellbeing impacts of the pandemic, and that these are disproportionately experienced by Camden's Black, Asian and minority ethnic communities.

**“This pandemic has put a spotlight on the long-standing, entrenched health inequalities experienced by Black, Asian and minority ethnic communities in Camden.”**

Julie Billett, Director of Public Health for Camden and Islington

National evidence showed that people of Bangladeshi ethnicity had around twice the risk of death than people of White British ethnicity. People of Chinese, Indian, Pakistani, Other Asian, Caribbean and Other Black ethnicity had between 10 and 50% higher risk of death when compared to White British.

These analyses did not account for the effect of occupation, comorbidities or obesity. Local analysis of death registrations in North Central London similarly show a higher percentage of COVID-19 deaths in people born in Africa or Asia, compared to those born in the UK or Europe.

The prevalence of key long-term conditions that increase clinical vulnerability to COVID-19, such as diabetes, heart disease and high blood pressure, is higher in some Black, Asian and minority ethnic groups than their White counterparts.

There has been a decrease in people accessing NHS services for a range of conditions that are not related to coronavirus, including people attending A&E for urgent and emergency medical issues, such as strokes and heart attacks. A Health Foundation survey found access to health services for people with pre-existing conditions was 20% lower during the COVID-19 peak period – 10% said that they were unable to get an appointment and 22% cited concerns over contracting or transmitting the virus, or worries about breaking the lockdown. Not accessing care due to fear of contracting COVID-19 was higher for patients with diabetes (27%), heart disease (28%) and mental health illness (30%).

# Key headlines: What we have found so far

Locally, the Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) have heard from residents that the cancellation of hospital appointments for people with pre-existing health concerns has left many people with worsening health conditions. Additionally, some Black, Asian and minority ethnic residents feel unable to attend hospital if they experience non-COVID-19 sickness, out of a belief it is not available to them or will make them worse.

There is considerable concern in some communities around leaving the home, which is having a significant impact on physical health and mental wellbeing now and for the future.

We have heard from the VCS how some mothers who do not speak English as a first language have been taking guidance to stay at home literally, therefore not exercising or going shopping.

Many residents are reporting feeling more stressed, anxious, isolated or depressed as a result of COVID-19. Additionally, local evidence indicates that Black and Asian residents in Camden rate having a supportive community as being more important for their health and wellbeing than White residents, suggesting lockdown might have a greater negative impact on residents who value community interaction more highly.

**“Evidence of the [disproportionate] impact is being felt in everyday life, on the health and wellbeing of Camden’s Black, Asian and minority ethnic residents, including a reduction in the number of people accessing health services and deteriorating mental health, which has led to high levels of anxiety.”**

Anna Wright, Healthwatch Camden

## Employment and the labour market

According to a [House of Commons Library](#) report, the UK unemployment rate was 3.9% in January to March 2020. The rate was 3.6% for people from a White background compared to 6.3% for people from Black, Asian and minority ethnic backgrounds, although there was substantial variation between different minority ethnic groups.

Whilst 77% of businesses continue to trade, a high proportion of those in accommodation and food service, and arts, entertainment and recreation have closed or paused trading. These are known as ‘shut down’ sectors. Workers in shut down sectors are the lowest paid across the workforce – typical pay for workers in those sectors is less than half that of those able to work from home.

**“Black, Asian and minority ethnic communities are over-represented in high-risk occupations, from construction to care, and are being asked to place themselves and their families at greater risk returning to workplaces soonest.”**

Yusuf Deerow, Chair of Somali Youth Development Resource Centre

# Key headlines: What we have found so far

Analysis suggests that Camden has one of the lowest levels of 'at risk' jobs – 23% of jobs. Despite this, we know retail, hospitality and construction have a high percentage of Black, Asian and minority ethnic workers. These are sectors facing huge challenges such as social distancing, which will limit the ability of some types of business to operate effectively, and behavioural change may limit long-term demand in these sectors because of fears of gathering. Additionally, acceleration of trends could have a negative impact on them, for example greater working at home, less business travel, and greater reliance on online retail.

Of those residents still claiming Jobseeker's Allowance (having not yet transitioned to Universal Credit) in December 2019, 46% were from Black, Asian and minority ethnic backgrounds and of the 821 council tenants that submitted Universal Credit claims since 23 March, 50% are from Black, Asian and minority ethnic backgrounds.

Other VCS organisations also told us how people who do not qualify for the Government's furlough scheme or other grants due to being self-employed for less than a year are causing some Black, Asian and minority ethnic residents to experience financial difficulty.

Notably, there is relatively little hard data on ethnicity in the context of the labour market.

## Camden Council's workforce

Analysis of the Council's staff sickness and self-isolation levels in May 2020 showed that Black, Asian and minority ethnic staff did not appear to be disproportionately affected by COVID-19. However, for a large amount of staff, ethnicity is recorded as 'Unknown', so this may not give us the full picture.

Our Camden Black Workers Group and national intelligence tells us that Black, Asian and minority ethnic staff are anxious about returning to work and/or about working on the frontline, which means we will not be complacent about the impact of COVID-19 on Black, Asian and minority ethnic staff.

## Other themes that have emerged from VCS organisations

We have heard early insights from VCS organisations into overcrowded households and education.

Some residents from Bangladeshi and Somali communities have large families living in overcrowded, cramped environments. This includes several generations under the same roof, with young children sharing rooms, and living with elderly grandparents, who are also most susceptible to the virus, meaning it is passed speedily.

Some Somali families who are predominantly living in overcrowded surroundings with school exam-aged children have the added difficulty of maintaining education and revision schedules without the space or equipment to do so – Wi-Fi, laptops, books, etc – making it difficult for children to learn effectively in this crisis.

The decision that exam results will be based on predicted results has also contributed to concerns. Some mothers are anxious that their children's predicted grades are lower than they should be, and that this method will be detrimental to their child. Children are showing signs of extra worry and anxiety as a result. A recent Children's Commissioner's report states that evidence has shown that the poorest students and Black students receive lower A-level predictions than their more privileged peers, and often perform better than their predicted grades in exams.



# Proposed actions

Our final report will provide full detail of the framework of actions we propose to take – both short-term, to reduce the immediate and future impact of COVID-19 on our Black, Asian and minority ethnic communities, and long-term, to tackle structural inequalities in Camden. These actions will be informed by the evidence collected and the feedback and recommendations of our communities.

From the evidence gathered so far, the working group has put some early thought into actions. These include:

## Healthy, independent lives

- We will communicate to our Black, Asian and minority ethnic communities that health services are available for non-COVID-related issues, encourage them to access these services, and make sure they feel safe doing so.
- We will do further targeted promotion of wellbeing messages and information about new or adapted services, such as the new North Central London suicide prevention helpline.
- We are committed to ensuring we work with people from Black, Asian and other minority ethnic backgrounds and our voluntary and community sector to shape key messages relating to the pandemic, and ensure information is accessible to all our diverse communities.
- We are committed to work even more closely with, and be led by, our residents, and ensure that residents' voices are heard through meaningful engagement.

## Strong growth and access to jobs

- We will continue to support our local businesses to practice safe social distancing, and share public health information with businesses to ensure employees and patrons are safe.
- We will scale up our 'neighbourhood approach' to employment. This builds on the Job Hubs that have been piloted in Gospel Oak and provide accessible, relational support that responds to a resident's specific needs.
- We will be transparent with our data on the labour market and trends, and we will lobby the Government to provide timely labour market information broken down by ethnicity, to enable us to support our Black, Asian and other minority ethnic communities who may be adversely affected by the pandemic.

We welcome our communities' feedback on, and input into, these proposed actions and will incorporate this into our final report. To share thoughts, comments and suggestions on our findings and actions so far, please email [cohesionandequalities@camden.gov.uk](mailto:cohesionandequalities@camden.gov.uk)

See the full evidence base for these mid-point findings at [camden.gov.uk/disproportionalityevidence](https://camden.gov.uk/disproportionalityevidence).

# Next steps

## Next steps

This executive summary presents initial indications – we will share more detailed findings around health inequalities, employment, workforce, education, adult social care/shielding, and housing in scope when we publish the final report.

23 June – 31 July	Ongoing
Collate findings and develop final draft report with action plan	Engagement and participation to co-design and co-deliver final action plan
Council to respond with calls to action based on evidence	Reporting against action plan to through relevant governance  Tailored engagement and participation approach to ensure that plans meet community needs and that residents can be involved in shaping and delivering (using an assets-based model)

