



Joining Forces:

A Conference on Collective Action and Progressive Partnerships

**TACKLING
RACIAL
INEQUALITY**
Working Group

**LONDON
COUNCILS**

Introduction

For our annual event this year, the Tackling Racial Inequality programme welcomed colleagues from across London local government and our key partners to the Local Government Association on 28 March 2023. The event explored innovative, pan-London solutions to the challenges facing diverse staff and communities in London and was split into three parts:

- In the morning we held a facilitated session by trainers from the Staff College for senior leaders across London local government. This thought-provoking and action orientated session featured discussion on the role of leaders in the fight against racism. You can see reflections from this session at the end of our report.
- The afternoon started with a panel discussion chaired by Stuart Love (Chief executive of Westminster and Chair of the Tackling Racial Inequality Programme) and featuring guests Shazia Hussain (Deputy Chief executive of Waltham forest and Deputy Chair of the tackling Racial inequality Programme), John Azah OBE (Chief Executive of Kingston's Race Equality Council), Jonny Newton (Head of Governance and Policy at Community Safety Trust), and Tracey Connage (Chief People Officer at London North West University Healthcare NHS Trust). We heard a range of experiences and initiatives from the panellists, particularly around the themes of intersectionality, the challenges of working in partnerships, and how to ensure you both represent and address the complex range of experiences of racism.
- For the final part of the day, we held a networking and refreshments session in the open council. It featured interactive marketplace stalls from all the working groups on the programme, giving attendees a chance to learn more about the work we have been doing and how to get involved.

If you would like to learn more about the event or the Tackling Racial Inequality programme, please contact [London Councils People and Inclusion Manager Swazi Kaur](#).

Event Opening

Luann Donald, Senior Advisor, Workforce at the Local Government Association, introduced the event by discussing the LGA's diverse by design programme, a 15-step guide to support local authorities to become fairer and more inclusive employers. It was noted that 92% of councils are struggling to recruit to key posts, making it more important than ever to improve recruitment processes so authorities can hire talented and diverse candidates.

Stuart Love, Chief executive of Westminster and Chair of the Tackling racial Inequality programme, then delivered his opening speech with an emphasis on the theme of joining forces; it is our ability to work in partnership and drive collective action that will truly drive change. Although the programme has made great progress since its foundation, Stuart highlighted that there is an assumption that the public sector is good at tackling racial inequality when it is in fact not, quoting the opening line of the Staff College report that referred to the "snowy white peaks of the public sector". Efforts to ensure racial equality often fall by the wayside when pressure is placed on the public sector, but Stuart called for it to be a focus in everything we do – the perception that it is not part of people's day jobs needs to change. The recently published Casey report and its finding on the lack of diversity within the metropolitan police force is an indicator of how far we have to go, with Dame Louise Casey saying that the report is a call to action to local government to not sit on the side lines and to hold the police to account.

We then heard from the chairs of the working groups that make up the programme on what they have achieved recently and where they will be focusing their efforts in the upcoming year.

Juliet Amoa and Yvonne Okiyo, Chairs of the Demonstrating Leadership group, talked through the statement and standard pilot scheme – a new peer assessment initiative being run between councils to improve their work on tackling racial inequality. They noted that the reflection sessions being run for those nominated to facilitate the scheme in each local authority were proving to be an invaluable safe space for the people undertaking the self-assessment to share best practice and create an open dialogue. They also highlighted the findings of the [language and terminology report](#) conducted with employees across the public sector which can be found on the London Councils website.

Jennifer Samuels, Co-Chair of the Challenging and Improving Practice group, spoke about the repository of [14 different examples of good practice](#) collected from London boroughs showcasing what they have done to address challenges and improve race quality. She also spoke about the focus group they recently held around black-owned businesses and the about the need to diversify procurement practices within councils.

Musrat Zaman and Julie Foy, Chairs of the Large Employers' group, talked about [the racial trauma guidance](#) recently published by the group. The guidance details the emotional and mental injury that someone can suffer from racial trauma, how it can impact them in the workplace and their day-to-day life, and provides suggestions around what organisations can do to support employees using existing structures.

Steve Davies and Courtney Richards, Chairs of the Data task group, discussed their use of metrics to identify the spread and depth of diversity and representation across councils. It was noted that Black, Asian, and Multi-Ethnic staff in leadership is not very strong across London local authorities and is not proportional to the diversity of staff in less senior positions. They emphasised the importance of turning data into insights, which can then be turned into change.



Above: Chairs of the Tackling Racial Inequality Working Groups (l-r) Musrat Zaman, Julie Foy, Jennifer Samuels, Juliet Amoa, Yvonne Okiyo, Courtney Richards

Panel Speeches – Key Points

Shazia Hussain (Deputy Chief Executive of Waltham forest and Deputy Chair of the Tackling Racial Inequality Programme)

Shazia's speech focused on her personal experience of racism. She first became aware of the inequalities it produced at secondary school where she noticed that the White students tended to be in higher streams with better teachers, with lower streams being more diverse but lacking in the kind of support and attention the students needed from teachers.

These institutional inequalities have followed her into her career; she spent a significant amount of time as a director within a council with a 50% ethnically diverse population, yet she was the most senior ethnically diverse member of staff in the authority. She felt the need for greater diversity in the workforce acutely during the pandemic when Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic residents within her borough experienced large numbers of death within the community. Ultimately, she emphasised, the political will to fight racial inequality exists within local authorities, but it is about enacting the change from that.

John Azah OBE (Chief Executive of Kingston's Race Equality Council)

John's speech detailed the lack of action being taken by local government before George Floyd's murder and the subsequent allyship that has emerged as a result, with an effort towards strengthening the partnerships that we have.

In 2000, there were over 100 race equality councils worldwide, but now there are hardly any. This reduction is largely due to race equality not being seen as a priority by the government, but he did name some positive developments that have emerged in recent years including:

- South West London ICS Inequalities Board
- South West London anti-racism framework
- City Hall being declared an anti-racist organisation
- Race Action Plan by MOPAC
- Pan-London Tackling Racial Inequality Programme.

Jonny Newton (Head of Governance and Policy at Community Safety Trust)

Jonny spoke on the challenges facing the Jewish population currently, particularly in London. Many people do not realise that Jewishness is considered to be both a race and a religion under UK law. The nature of anti-Semitism has continuously changed over centuries and many orthodox Jews accept street level abuse as simply part of their existence. Although there are fewer than 300,000 Jews in the UK, the proportion of Jews affected by anti-Semitic instances is very high.

MOPAC support the work of the Community Safety Trust through CATCH, an initiative that has shown the importance of a coalition of communities and institutions to support people, reflecting the many intersectional elements to the hate crime that a person may experience.

Tracey Connage (Chief People Officer at London North West University Healthcare NHS Trust)

Tracey began her speech by reminding the audience that diversity does not produce equity; a more ethnically diverse workforce will not spontaneously produce an equitable workforce with equal opportunity. This need to drive action is a life and death matter in healthcare – it is not acceptable that a Black woman is four times more likely to die during childbirth. What is the point of healthcare if the outcomes in our care is still being defined by our ethnicity?

The need to break out of working in silos on inequalities also formed a key part of Tracey's message as she stressed that you cannot separate out a person's characteristics and deal with one aspect of their identity at a time. Our lives are the outcomes cumulatively of our different protected characteristics and how they combine to inform our unique experiences.

Tracey also spoke of the need to be more flexible with boundaries between local authorities and organisations and who has control; leaders need to commit to doing what leaders do – lead. She has been the only senior Black person at every organisation that she had worked in for the last 20 years, and she is still saying the same things that she did 20 years ago as the same issues still apply.



Above l-r: Tracey Connage, Jonny Newton, Shazia Hussain, John Azah, and Stuart Love (chair and host).

Panel Discussion

The panellists then went on to discuss some of the challenges and opportunities of working in partnership to tackle racial inequality. An essential aspect of any successful partnership is an acknowledgement and an acceptance of the different experiences and factors that play into different groups; it is about bringing together different voices and not only allowing them to speak but ensuring that they feel like they are truly being heard. This can be a challenge when organisations of various sizes and levels of establishment come together, but if it is approached with an open mind by those involved, then it is much easier to learn from the experience of other communities. Tackling racial inequality is also often seen as voluntary work and not the main job by many, which poses challenges in maintaining momentum within groups. Having a clear vision, goals and leadership, as well as commitment from members, will drive the success of the partnership.

To ensure that the activities in partnerships aren't led by dominant organisations, it is important to identify the communities without a dominant voice and give them a forum to ensure that we are listening to those who truly understand the issues on which they are speaking. This is also how we create equal voice and equal opportunity, which in turn creates equal responsibility. Tracey spoke about the marginalised communities that exist within the workforce and the importance of representing their views so that all perspectives are taken into account on workplace issues. Shazia emphasised that it should not only be executives whose voices are being heard and how we can use staff networks to ensure that staff members are being listened to.

The panel closed the conversation with questions from the audience, where they reinforced the importance of recognising how racist practices are affecting our communities. John spoke about the killing of Chris Kaba and how much further we still have to go in both recognising and confronting the oppression experienced by many in London and across the UK. Tracey, Jonny and Shazia further spoke about those from ethnically diverse backgrounds dying disproportionately in the Covid-19 pandemic, highlighting the catastrophic impacts when racial inequality is not factored into work and policy.

Resources mentioned:

[Diverse by Design \(LGA\)](#)

[Race Equality: Good Practice \(London Councils\)](#)

[Race Equality, Language and Terminology Consultation Report \(London Councils\)](#)

[Racial Trauma Guidance \(London Councils\)](#)

Learning and Development Session

Christine Wint: Associate, The Staff College

Christine's session focused on how the attendees, who were all in position of leadership across local government, can shape how their team's work and how they are managed. It was a discussion and commitment to exploring what it means to be, and stay, an inclusive and fair leader, understanding how multi-dimensional racism affects children, colleagues and communities, and making an enduring difference in our local contexts.

The session started by going around the room and asking participants to share their name and what it means to them. This led to an exploration of our cultural identity and history and a recognition of the diverse backgrounds of those we work with and how it shapes their personal and professional identities. Participants were then asked to discuss what their definitions of Equality, Diversity, Inclusion and Equity, with one participant commenting that they see it as creating "equal opportunity to thrive".

The second part of the session focused on what we can do as leaders to enact change. Christine spoke about the importance of creating an environment where everyone feels valued and where their uniqueness is known and appreciated, including recognising and taking action on micro-aggressions that create an exclusionary work environment. We then looked at examples of anti-racist leadership practice, such as acknowledging and correcting your own implicit biases, doing the work with and on yourself (reading, studying, learning), advocating when disadvantaged groups are not in the room, and being open to making mistakes and being corrected.

Audience Reflections on the Day

"I was stimulated by the depth of insight and expertise that was on display throughout the event. From each keynote speaker to the final panel discussion, everyone brought a unique perspective to the table and challenged me to think more critically about the ways in which we can work together to effect change in local government. It was lovely to reflect and discuss the emerging themes with colleagues during the networking session. I left feeling energized and inspired!"

"I found the panel discussion incredibly inciteful and really valued the range of experience and perspective that it offered, both personally and professionally. The event made me reflect on the importance of the initiatives that the programme is creating and the wider work being done across the sector, as well as how I can get involved in creating an equitable future."

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