

## **Deputy Minister & Chief Whip chaired Wales Race Forum Covid 19 Meeting**

**22 April 2020**

**11:30-1:00pm**

**Skype Meeting**

### **Meeting Notes:**

Jane Hutt AM (Chair)

Deputy Minister & Chief Whip

### **Race Forum Members**

Rocio Cifuentes	EYST
Prof Emmanuel Ogbonna	
Kay Denyer	RCC
Patience Bentu	RCC
Iolanda Viegas	Black History Month
Riaz Hassan	Regional Community Cohesion Coordinator
Holly Taylor	Welsh Refugee Council
Shahien Taj	Henna Foundation
Sunil Patel	Show Racism the Red Card
Aled Edwards	Cytun
Laura O'Keefe	Race Equality First (REF)
Maria Mesa	Women Connect First
Isaac Blake	Romani Cultural & Arts Company
Prof Robert Moore	NWREN
Shavanah Taj	Wales TUC

### **Welsh Government Officials:**

Alyson Francis	Communities Division
Emma Bennett	Equalities Branch
Hannah Fisher	Equalities Branch
Heather Payne	Dept Health and Social Services
Andrew Holmes	Dept Health and Social Services
Uzo Iwobi	Specialist Policy Advisor, Equalities
Steven Macey	Knowledge and Analytical Services
Sue Leake	Knowledge and Analytical Services
Kevin Francis	Dept Health and Social Services
Usha Ladwa Thomas	Dept Economy Skills & Natural Resources

## **Welcome by Deputy Minister & Chief Whip**

1. The DMCW expressed her thanks to attendees for joining the meeting at short notice. The meeting would focus specifically on the impact of Covid 19 on BAME communities. The DMCW recognised that 22 April as being Stephen Lawrence Day and a celebration of the life and legacy of Stephen Lawrence who was killed in a racist attack at the age of 18.
2. The DMCW was aware that BAME communities were facing unprecedented challenges and today's meeting was important in terms of feeding concerns in relation to current issues from a Welsh perspective. The DMCW referred to the Written Statement issued on 21<sup>st</sup> April by the Minister for Health and Social Services. <https://gov.wales/written-statement-covid-19-and-bame-communities>

## **The impact of Covid-19 on BAME communities**

3. The DMCW noted the reports of disproportionate numbers of BAME individuals being impacted by the virus. The DMCW noted the significant amount of work underway at the Welsh Government on this matter and provided reassurance that the data was being taken extremely seriously. She noted the issue was also discussed in her meeting with Wales TUC and Equality leads the previous day.
4. Rocio shared that EYST were engaging with communities and organisations to assess the impact on BAME communities via weekly, themed forum meetings. She referred to a report that EYST had circulated to members which covered every domain of life and highlighted that it was not only the virus which disproportionately affected BAME people, but the lockdown measures also. She noted existing inequalities have become exasperated and it was imperative that we all do what we could to mitigate impacts.
5. The DMCW thanked Rocio for sharing her report.
6. Prof. Ogbonna thought focusing on the health impact was key. He queried whether Wales could take the lead in relation to action while further evidence to emerged. He suggested advising BAME retired professionals not to come back to work if they had underlying health conditions or to post staff in places where the likelihood of infections was reduced.
7. The importance of data was discussed and Health officials noted that as many sources of data were being brought together as possible. For example, Workforce colleagues were looking at data in terms of employment

protections and were looking at whether interventions like vitamin D should be actioned.

8. Shavanah noted that under Health & Safety legislation there were statutory duties placed on employers in relation to safety of employees within the work environment. She noted a high proportion of BAME women were affected as they were front line workers. She said there was evidence that if individuals had underlying health conditions should not be in the frontline. She said the Royal College of Nursing were looking to begin legal action as they felt a higher proportion of BAME staff were being pushed into frontline work even though they were known to have health issues.
9. Prof Moore noted there were a number of complex issues when looking at numbers and added it was also important to look at what needs to be done in relation to research and policy once the pandemic is over. He felt it was evident that higher numbers of BAME people were being affected by the virus, which could be because they were more exposed to it due to being in front line. He felt there was a need to move from numbers to proportions and that exposure could be a factor rather than BAME status. He also felt that stress and anxiety had not been considered as a factor which made people vulnerable to infection. He added that he thought the BAME population were already subject to a hostile environment.
10. In relation to a comment in the chat function expressing concerns about NHS Digital England sharing data which was then used to detain and deport individuals Shavanah queried whether Health Boards in Wales were sharing patient data with the Home Office Immigration service. The DMCW said she understood this data was not being shared and that she would confirm in writing.
11. Holly noted there was a need to look beyond multigenerational families and also to look at unrelated families living together. She explained many did not have suitable outdoor space and so were reliant on parks and were struggling. In addition, she noted they were unable to afford IT or access wifi as they were surviving on £37 a week. She felt the situation was impacting on them meeting their other needs and would make them more exposed to the virus due to their poor health.
12. Isaac shared his concern and outrage in relation to the impact of the recent Dispatches programme that aired on Channel 4. It is important if Welsh Government could come out with a statement in relation to this as the focus was associating crime to ethnicity.

He felt that the Gypsy Roma Traveller community were again being targeted and, as a result, are frightened to come out and express concerns. As a response to the channel 4 Dispatches programme, Isaac's organisation are asking community members to send in statements to them.

13. The DMCW responded that she was shocked about this and that this will be taken back to Comms colleagues to look at how Welsh Government can raise concerns about this.

Welsh Government issued a tweet yesterday -@WG\_Communities

14. Aled added that in the Gwent police forum yesterday they shared that they were picking up horrific examples of hate crimes against the Gypsy Roma Traveller community. This needs to be recorded with clear messaging and action.

**Action:**

DMCW to confirm, in writing, that Health Boards in Wales are not sharing patient data with the Home Office Immigration service

**The implementation of the Covid-19 Moral and Ethical Advisory Group (CMEAG)**

15. The DMCW outlined that the Welsh Government has established a Covid-19 Moral and Ethical Advisory Group for Wales (CMEAG-Wales). The group was providing expertise, experience and advice in relation to an ethical framework for practice. The C-MEAG and its sub groups aimed to produce guidance to help ensure that risk of unfair discrimination towards any part of the community would be reduced or removed.
16. A Welsh Government sub group of the C-MEAG (the Funeral and Burials group) has convened to consider the potential faith and cultural aspects of funerals and burials.
17. The DMCW enquired whether it would be helpful to know if forum members would wish to input into this subgroup and the issues discussed.
18. Aled noted that from a Christian community perspective both groups had been useful. He added that daily conversations were taking place with faith leaders to ensure awareness of hard to reach groups e.g. asylum seekers and refugees.

**Update on work to support BAME faith communities**

19. The DMCW noted there would be a meeting of the Faith communities forum taking place the following week. She also noted that Ramadan would begin on 23<sup>rd</sup> April and that this year it would be observed in a different way.
20. Riaz outlined concerns in relation to the celebration of Ramadan, particularly in relation to food and social gatherings. He noted mosques had multiple communication channels which could be used to share messages.
21. The DMCW noted that the First Minister had recorded a message for Ramadan. She also agreed to write a letter to Imams addressing the points which Riaz had raised.
22. Shahien noted she had been asked to join a Ramadan Comms working group with the Cabinet Office. She also welcomed the recognition of the diversity of Muslim communities and felt reassured that the DMCW would be writing to Imams.
23. The DMCW noted that she was not aware of the Comms group and asked officials to find out more.
24. Prof Moore added that NWREN had been in touch with all the North Wales Mosques and offered them whatever support was possible within present restrictions.
25. Kay raised concerns in relation to the shielded patients list. She noted that although they could register for government food support parcels very few BAME individuals had responded or were receiving parcels
26. The DMCW noted that a letter was sent to 88,000 people in Wales and that local authorities were contacting these individuals. She asked that if there were examples of people not being contacted please could they notify officials. Sue added that Knowledge and Analytical Services were currently looking to see if analysis could be undertaken by BAME group.

**Actions:**

- Officials to coordinate a letter from the DMCW to Imams in Wales
- Officials to find out more information in relation to the Ramadan Coms Working Group
- Officials to follow up break down of data in relation to ethnicity with KAS colleagues

**Ongoing work of Equality and Inclusion grant funded organisations in response to Covid 19**

27. The DMCW explained she was aware that all partners had amended their delivery plans in light of the current Covid-19 situation to address pressing and urgent matters.
28. Shahien said she was currently working part time with Women Connect First as well as Henna Foundation. She highlighted that through their community networks she was looking at why high numbers of BAME communities had been affected by Covid-19. She proposed a BAME Covid Helpline that could triage calls and refer people to relevant agencies
29. Heather noted colleagues were actively working on the possibility of issuing guidance on vitamin D supplementation during lockdown for all, with specific reference to communities with darker skin. She asked for views on the proposal and suggestions of how best to disseminate the advice.
30. Uzo suggested that information should be sent out through all the members of the Wales Race Forum, BAME Covid 19 Group, Faith Forum, Disability Forum and BAME Cultural Hubs across Wales.
31. Maria noted most services were online and shared examples of projects which included a hate crime project to reach out and understand issues and fears. She noted that 35 languages were used, and the project aimed to identify issues in relation to hate crime and how it was affecting clients. She noted that there currently was not capacity to support all clients and so WCF would support the proposed helpline.
32. Riaz felt it was evident that hate crime was on the increase and noted there was new social tension- community policing of the lockdown measures. As an example, in the Western Bay area, between 1<sup>st</sup> and 15 April 60 ASB cases were reported – 44 related to Covid 19 - this showed a shift. He asked about the current status of the Hate Crime Awareness in Schools project.
33. Sunil responded to explain the WLGA had extended the work until March 2021, he said it was crucial that charities continued to work with schools after lockdown. He noted much of the work could not take place online, for example, EYST's report outlined the increase in stress levels in relation to access to IT as well as factors such as domestic violence. Sunil noted a new online training programme had been developed for teachers and was being rolled out.
34. The DMCW asked to have the links to the online training so that she could share them with the Minister for Education.
35. Prof Moore noted NWREN had taken its WLGA work online.

36. Patience raised the issue of hate crime towards the Chinese community with regards to Covid-19. She said that although there was a reduction in hate crime, the Chinese community had indicated this continued to cause them much worry and anxiety.

**Actions:**

- **WLGA to provide new timeframes for Hate Crime in Schools work**
- **Sunil to share the link to the new online teachers programmes so that the DMCW can share with the Minister for Education**

37. Prof Ogbonna said that when the pandemic was over there would be a pressing need to look at Equality Act again.

38. The DMCW noted that there was ongoing work in relation to strengthening and advancing equality and human rights.

39. Shavanah asked about support for self-employed people and shared the example of taxi drivers. She said a large percentage were in Cardiff and NCP had demanded that they pay £547 to update permits although they were not working and Universal Credit was not available immediately. She thought a helpline would address many of the issues people were facing and it was a way of providing support.

40. Shahien noted the EYST report highlighted the issue of young people and drugs, she said it was difficult for parents to keep teenagers inside in line with the measures.

41. The DMCW drew the meeting to a close and said she would share the minutes with her ministerial colleagues. She thanked members for attending and suggested meeting again in a few weeks time. In the meantime, she asked members to continue to raise important issues which arose.

**Action:**

- DMCW to share the issues raised with ministerial colleagues
- Officials to arrange the next meeting.

## Comments and Questions Received via Skype Chat Facility

### 1) Isaac Blake (IB)

Gypsies, Roma and Travellers are concerned about:

- \* Impact upon education and outcomes for Romani and Traveller children away from school with little or no support – do not have access to Internet and online learning resources
- \* Impact upon economy of Gypsy, Roma, Traveller communities as self-employed and 'gig economy' disappears
- \* Difficulty of obtaining water, electricity, gas and utilities, many of which are paid by metres or paid through tokens
- \* Obstacles to accessing health and wellness provision, as detailed in our report, only exacerbated by current coronavirus crisis and pressure upon health services in Wales
- \* Attitudes to Romani and Traveller families as 'less deserving' of care only exacerbated by current coronavirus crisis
- \* Housing and accommodation issues, as over-crowding and multiple occupancy dwellings the 'norm' for most Roma families, already impacted by Brexit and the process of EUSS applications
- \* Information from Public Health Wales not available in Romanes (Romani language), nor in Czech, Slovak, Polish, Bulgarian, Hungarian, Albanian, Serbian or Turkish, only Welsh or English

### 2) Rocio Cifuentes (RC)

Well said Robert - completely agree that the Hostile Environment policy, like Austerity actually kills

### 3) Shavanah Taj (ST)

As I expressed during the WTUC meeting yesterday with the Minister, we need confirmation from WelshGov that they will not be sharing any patient data with Home Office Immigration services as are NHS England digital programme. This is the reality of the hostile environment continuing during covid19. NHS England are continuing to share this data which means communities who need health support will not access those services.

### 4) Patience Bentu (PB)

In support of what Robert has said, we also know that there are asylum seekers and refugees who have professional skills that they can offer in times like this. As we have discussed in some meetings, it is worth looking at training opportunities that will enable them utilise these skills to help with the present challenges.

### 5) Maria Mesa (MM)

Supporting Holly about the restrictions in space and budgets, keeping healthy and sane under very restrictive conditions.

### 6) Hannah Fisher (HF)

Colleagues from the Welsh Government Knowledge and Analytical Service are on the call to ensure they feed comments from the forum directly into the data collection work.



**7) Patience Bentu (PB)**

As communication is very important during this time, I know that a lot of information about the virus was translated in various languages at the beginning of the lockdown but there has been a lot of updates since then. Can we collectively ensure that updates are continuously translated into as many languages as possible, for the benefit of non-English speakers?

**8) Isaac Blake (IB)**

Economically, these communities are completely vulnerable to the collapse of the self-employed or so-called, "gig" economy, existing very much as part of the 'precarious community' (the precariat as it has been dubbed), during this crisis. On caravan sites, residents are reliant upon tokens bought from site wardens to supply utilities; as these council staff are no longer on-site, this leaves residents with families or elderly Travellers without heating, lighting and water. With schools closed, the access to education for Romani and Traveller children is severely curtailed, as is their support from Traveller Education Services (where those still exist). Without the resources that other children have to online learning (the digital divide is more than three times greater amongst Gypsies and Travellers than the settled population), their education is likely to suffer catastrophically and teacher assessments are notoriously unreliable indicators of educational achievement, particularly if educators have low expectations.

**9) Aled Edwards (AE)**

Shares Isaac's concern

**10) Maria Mesa (MM)**

Agree with Isaac

**11) Hannah Fisher (HF)**

Isaac, I believe the WG tweeted on the matter yesterday, if not it will go out shortly.

**12) Shavanah Taj**

Nurses are reporting band 4-5 are mainly on wards without any discussion/consultation with them. Mainly BAME staff. Grades 7/6 'choose' to treat other illnesses not covid related.

**13) Isaac Blake (IB)**

Information available to the wider Welsh population is unavailable to many Romani and Traveller families, as it is primarily being delivered through social media and the World Wide Web. Public Health Wales' symptom checker, for example, is of no use, as it is another online resource. Telephone hotlines are available of course, and can be accessed through mobile 'phones, but without 'permanent' addresses, Travellers only have pay-as-you-go mobile services and waiting times are extraordinarily long at present. For Roma, there is some information available in Polish, Slovak and Czech, but none in Romani language, Bulgarian, Serbian, Rumanian, Macedonian, Albanian or Turkish, yet Roma from all these countries are in Newport, Swansea and Cardiff, to our certain knowledge.

**14) Alyson Francis (AF)**

Yes, tweet has gone out @WG\_Communities

**15) Shavanah Taj (SVT)**

This backs up what national representatives from BMA have eluded to in press to date. We need immediate actions/ health/race impact assessments for BAME staff in health and social care settings.

**16) Isaac Blake (IB)**

Our communities need additional support in ways that are not immediately obvious to those without these vulnerable populations. That support can best be provided through existing community and voluntary sector organisations that have their roots in these groups that have workers who are from the communities and can speak the languages that their clients speak. The cultural practices of Gypsies, Roma, and Travellers around cleanliness and purification are complex and will provide some protection, but nowhere near enough from what is an unprecedented and aggressive pandemic.

Working with local Gypsy churches & faith groups to develop good communication & effective dissemination of info should be a priority, many Romani & Traveller people will turn to their church or mosque for support & advice.

**17) Robert Moore (RM)**

NWREN has been in touch with all the North Wales Mosques and offered them whatever support is possible within present restrictions.

**18) Shavanah Taj (SVT)**

All workplaces in Wales must abide by the 2m legislation.  
This includes places of worship

**19) Kay Denyer (KD)**

Re shielded patients list mentioned we have had concerns that although if they register for gov food support parcels - very few BAME have responded or are receiving parcels

**20) Sue Leake (SL)**

KAS are looking to see what analysis can be done about the shielded population by ethnic group

**21) Isaac Blake (IB)**

Due to the #COVID19 crisis, the Romani Cultural and Arts Company have suspended all face-2-face delivery & we are moving content online to enable continuation for our service users.

**22) Laura O'Keefe (LO'K)**

REF have been providing information, guidance and updates; promoting isolation activities and exercises via our social media and 8 different WhatsApp groups

(intergenerational, physical activity) to beneficiaries in Cardiff, Newport and Vale of Glamorgan and working with Welsh Government to upload information and activities to The Hwb for school children and teaching staff across Wales. We're calling vulnerable beneficiaries, particularly those with dementia and language barriers for welfare checks, befriending and general support.

Of our 6000 beneficiaries, only 5 have contacted us with issues around food, money and the lack of school meals. For these people, we have made referrals to Foodbanks and charitable organisations/church groups. The Biscuit Foundation has helped one of our clients with a one-off charitable donation and Cwtch Baby Bank are helping with baby formula and nappies. We've struggled getting through to HMRC, Cardiff Council and DWP. Only one person has contacted us regarding issues around registering for Universal Credit.

We have had no reported deaths or hospital admissions from COVID 19 through our groups so far.

**23) Isaac Blake (IB)**

We are sending information out via our social media platforms to Gypsies, Roma & Travellers- to help GRT keep themselves safe from coronavirus.

**24) Laura O'Keefe (LO'K)**

REF are working with the NHS Wales Equality Team and Social Care Partnership on developing a Wales-wide research project on healthcare inequalities and we will be working directly with healthcare professionals and community members, advocating for both sides around culturally responsive healthcare across Wales.

**25) Iolanda Viegas (IV)**

We've applied to several funding applications to support with online shopping etc, but haven't heard from any funders yet, there's many people in need for food and other medical attention, non covid 19 related, the language barrier is an issue to carry on medical phone calls appointments as well to access to universal credits.

**26) Heather Payne (HP)**

Colleagues are actively working on the possibility of putting out guidance on vitamin D supplementation during lockdown for all, with specific reference to communities with darker skin. Could we have feedback on this proposal and suggestions of how best to disseminate the advice?

**27) Hannah Fisher (HF)**

We've shared previously but this is the link to WG third sector funding streams: <https://wcva.cymru/covid-19-two-new-funds-announced-to-support-voluntary-organisations/>

**28) Kay Denyer (KD)**

Likewise we are trying to access funding for simple IT equip to distribute with data packages as those with no access to wifi - and online contact - especially our younger groups who are falling further behind with their education

**29) Alyson Francis (AF)**

The criteria for the Communities Facilities Programme has been expanded, you can apply to this for support with IT equipment

**30) Uzo Iwobi (UI)**

Re Heathers question, please send out information through all the members of the Wales Race Forum, BAME Covid 19 Group, Faith Forums, Disability Groups, BAME Cultural Hubs across Wales

I can assist with officials to pull together a list and link up with members here

**31) Iolanda Viegas (IV)**

Hate crimes are increasing online. More than ever before

**32) Laura O'Keefe (L O'K)**

Re WLGA, the timeframe has been amended for the school sessions. We've been told that it might be delayed until March 2021

**33) Alyson Francis (AF)**

Here's the link to the CFP <https://gov.wales/coronavirus-covid-19-support-for-the-third-sector-html>

In response to the coronavirus, the under £25,000 grant will now allow funding to be spent on purchasing or replacing equipment. This could for example include purchasing ICT equipment to allow staff and volunteers to work remotely and continue to deliver services

**34) Patience Bentu (PB)**

There is also the issue of Hate crime towards the Chinese community with regards to Covid-19. Although we are witnessing a reduction in Hate crime, the Chinese community have indicated this is causing them a lot of worry and anxiety.

**35) Heather Payne (HP)**

As part of our engagement with data collection and analysis I have been asked by Prof Ronan Lyons of SAIL (information data linkage work based in Swansea University) to ask for a nomination from the BAME community to advise on a research project investigating the shielding process. Please could the group identify a nominee to join the Project Advisory group? Needs academic expertise. I can take offline with Uzo to finalise details if acceptable.

**ACTION** – members to send suggested names to Bal and Uzo to link up with the team to assist

**36) Isaac Blake (IB)**

The Romani Cultural and Arts Company is currently doing the maximum to support the Gypsy, Roma, Traveller communities in Wales, by delivering information, public health guidance & healthy practice (our short video messages are reaching 15,000 people at present).

**37) Robert Moore (RM)**

Research and enquiries after the pandemic will probably be dominated by clinicians - we need to watch this and make sure impacts on BME are set in their wider context (medics are not always very good at this).

**38) Iolanda Viegas (IV)**

It would be appreciated if the WG could support the elders BAME/EU with IT support in North Wales.

**39) Hannah Fisher (HF)**

There is a scheme available. I will send details.  
<https://www.digitalcommunities.gov.wales/>

**40) Patience Bentu (PB)**

Going forwards with research and other solutions to mitigate the challenges, can we also bear in mind the fact that there are some people who may not self-identify as BAME and we will need to factor this in. I find this confusing when we take stock of deaths especially, and the question of whether these people actually self-identify as BAME or are we making perceptive judgements?

**41) Maria Mesa (MM)**

We have been working with our Golden Years project and could share our experiences.