



Havering
LONDON BOROUGH

Councillor Tele Lawal
Heaton Ward Councillor
Havering Town Hall
Main Road
Romford
RM1 3BD
Via email: tele.lawal@havering.gov.uk

Andrew Blake-Herbert
Chief Executive

London Borough of Havering
Town Hall, Main Road
Romford
RM1 3BB

t 01708 432223
e Andrew.Blake-Herbert@havering.gov.uk
text relay 18001 01708 432223

www.havering.gov.uk

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Dear Cllr Lawal

Thank you for your email. The matters you raise are of the highest importance to us both. It is very disappointing however that you write to us after publishing your email without the courtesy of waiting for our response.

We will not respond to the threat implicit in your letter that undermines the respect and trust that normally exists between elected Members and Officers.

Given that all Members receive our daily internal update, you will have seen the Chief Executive's comment to BAME staff on Monday and the Leader's public statement this week. You will also have seen the [Chief Executive's letter](#) to the Romford Recorder in January explaining both personal and the Council's total opposition to racism. All of those statements have been unequivocal in our total opposition to racism.

It is of course essential that we all do more to increase cohesion within our communities generally and specifically to confront and eliminate racism. But that should not undermine the work underway in Havering.

Some of that work is visible: it is in our community cohesion forum and internal staff forums. It is in the library and council chamber events celebrating Black History Month. It is in the Mayor's civic work supporting the borough's BME forum. It is in the events planned to celebrate Commonwealth Day in our marketplace that was unfortunately cancelled due to COVID-19. It is in the COVID-19 leaflet we produced with all communities represented in the design imagery. And of course it is represented institutionally by the Cabinet which agreed the cohesion strategy 2018-2022. This was a watershed moment for the Council, the first time such a strategy has been developed and agreed.

Much of the work we are doing is less visible. We are proactively targeting hate crime, working with police partners on Prevent to identify and refer far right activity and remove hate messages and incitement on social media. We are learning through partnership with our Black and Minority Ethnic Communities to understand how the borough is changing

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and make sure our plans and policies are accompanied by robust evidence and evaluation because it is that evidence that shows we are making a difference, not a press statement.

Internally we have developed BAME forums for colleagues to take an active role in helping the Council move forward. We have made specific considerations in our risk assessments for COVID-19 recovery for how we can protect BAME staff and have surveyed staff on their concerns. And Officers have taken personal action to dismiss colleagues who do not conform to our values of respect for everybody.

It is those statements about zero tolerance of racism, those actions that help bring communities together and understand the 'why' as well as the 'what' that matters. You know as we do that these are complex and sensitive areas. As we move into a different phase of COVID-19 we will need to do a lot of learning, both on cohesion in general and how the pandemic has affected Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic residents. We will also need to look at other areas of cohesion, particularly intergenerational conflict.

Both because of the pandemic and the fact that we are at the mid-point of the cohesion strategy period, it is the right time to give this the focus and detail the issue deserves. We would value your views in the spirit of partnership as to how we go about that.

In the meantime, our views are clear: Black Lives Matter and this Council is focused on building stronger links and working as one to be a safer, prouder, more harmonious and welcoming borough to all.

Yours sincerely



Andrew Blake-Herbert
Chief Executive



Councillor Damian White
Leader of Havering Council
Squirrels Heath Ward Councillor

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