

BAME STAFF NETWORK POSITION STATEMENT

We want to see an end to racism in Leeds City Council

The BAME Staff Network members are sharing this statement with our Corporate Leadership Team and non BAME colleagues following the horrific murder of George Floyd in America and the subsequent global events in relation to Black Lives Matter.

We would urge managers and staff to read our position statement, so they have a better understanding of how injustices of this type, brings into sharp focus the unacceptable racism that Black, Asian and other ethnic minority staff members face every day. We have taken some time to put this message together as we needed to reflect on the global response and the substantial outpouring from BAME staff about their day to day experiences of working for Leeds City Council. Some examples include; micro aggressions, lack of progression and lack of development opportunities etc.

Unfortunately, George Floyd's murder and the Black Lives Matter movement typify the ongoing atrocities of this type of treatment and the impact it has on our BAME communities.

Articulating this strength of feeling within the network, has been extremely difficult as members have felt mentally, physically and emotionally drained by these events. We have to bring 'ourselves' to work where racism and prejudice is rife. We therefore, feel compelled to show leadership and speak out about racial discrimination in our workplace. These challenges are not easy for our BAME staff members to deal with as challenge often results in direct and indirect reprisals by colleagues, managers and senior leaders.

We need your support because we are tired and exhausted. Race inequality is centuries old, it is rooted in practices such as slavery, apartheid and colonialism, so we know it's very complex. It is rarely acknowledged and discussed openly that all of these things are inherent in the history of Leeds today. The BAME Network acknowledges the rich diversity of Leeds but we want the city to acknowledge the contributions and sacrifices made by our BAME communities to make Leeds a great city.

Unravelling these issues and shaping a way forward to deliver the transformation we need is going to require strong leadership, from those who hold the power and a shift in mindset for all of us.

For our non BAME colleagues, we are aware the events of the past few weeks have not been easy to take in and digest. You might be questioning yourself as to why you have not noticed this before. You might be feeling a sense of responsibility to do something to change the course of history but wondering what exactly you can do or say. We also know that there will be some non BAME colleagues who may not understand their position of white privilege and how this compares to the lived experience of BAME staff in the workplace.

It is important to understand that no amount of learning or training about racial discrimination, will ever compare with the learning one can get from a conversation with someone with a lived experience.

So, we want to encourage you to start having these important conversations within your teams and with your BAME colleagues, so we can begin to build a 'critical friend' working relationship. We know this may be uncomfortable at first, but we want you to feel able to have open and honest conversations so we can move forward together.

Now is the time for us to act. We need to build a supportive, high challenge, high support relationship with our senior leaders that recognises and raises the awareness and importance of this opportunity. If we use this opportunity as a catalyst for real change, we can make a commitment to ourselves and each other to step out of our comfort zone and start dealing with these challenges.

In conclusion, we hope all our colleagues and senior leaders accept this position statement and the spirit within which it is being promoted.

Every voice raised against racism chips away at its power. We can't afford to stay silent. Choosing to ignore it is a form of racism.

We have provided some links below that might act as great conversation starters:

Why I'm no longer speaking to white people

<https://www.amazon.co.uk/Longer-Talking-White-People-About/dp/1408870584>

The school that tried to end racism

<https://www.channel4.com/programmes/the-school-that-tried-to-end-racism>

Talking about white privilege

<https://www.cbc.ca/kidsnews/post/watch-why-the-twostepsforward-meme-has-people-talking-about-white-privilege>

White senior leaders: 12 practical things you can do this week to create a supportive culture for your Black/BAME colleagues

<http://salmapatel.co.uk/healthy-teams/white-senior-leaders-practical-things-to-create-supportive-culture-for-black-bame-colleagues/>