

# DORSET RACE EQUALITY COUNCIL



## Covid 19 Dorset Ethnic Minority Communities Need Assessment

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| What was the consultation about?                            | Dorset BAME community groups response to Covid 19 and needs assessment  |
| Over what period did the consultation take place?           | 2 <sup>nd</sup> to 24 <sup>th</sup> April 2020  |
| What consultation methods were used?                        | Direct telephone conversations with community leaders representing their community. Some contacts had to be made by email initially but ended up in a direct phone conversation   |
| How many responses were received overall?                   | 27 community leaders and one couple of individuals  |
| How representative is the response to the wider population? | The DREC Community Directory includes 36 different structured ethnic community groups within Dorset and 27 of them had the opportunity to respond directly to us, which is 75% of the groups so is a good representation. |
| Where will the results be published?                        | The report will be sent to all partners and will be published onto the DREC website <a href="http://www.dorsetrec.org.uk">www.dorsetrec.org.uk</a>  |
| How will the results be used   ?                            | The results will be used to inform statutory partners' Covid 19 response plans and will hopefully be used to develop more appropriate responses in the future   |
| Who has produced this report?                               | Dorset Race Equality Council team   |

## **Background of the report:**

Following the government announcement of the UK going on lockdown, Dorset Race Equality Council staff team embarked on a huge task of assessing how Dorset ethnic minority community groups and individuals are responding to the Coronavirus pandemic. It was sought to establish whether or not they understood the national guidance and restrictions on movement and social distancing; whether there were unmet needs; how vulnerable people were supported; and whether or not they had access to information relating to Covid 19. Dorset Race Equality Council is an independent race equality body that has been operating in Dorset since the 1990s. It has a lot of experience of dealing with people from different ethnic backgrounds and it constantly raises awareness with statutory partners of the need to develop customised responses to issues, as Dorset is not homogeneous and a one size fits all approach is not an inclusive approach. Dorset Race Equality Council knew that the initial response to the crisis by statutory partners would still fit the mould of a one size fits all and therefore would exclude people from different ethnic backgrounds. It, therefore, wanted to provide evidence of the issues facing people from different ethnic backgrounds.

*7<sup>th</sup> April Al Jazeera.com published an article saying that "One third of critically ill Covid 19 patients were from BME backgrounds"*

*9<sup>th</sup> April in the Science Media Centre, experts comment on BME groups and the risks of hospitalisation*

*On the 9<sup>th</sup> April the LGiU published a report for members only entitled LGiU local government and Covid 19 issues for disadvantaged groups. Report can be accessed on LGiU.org*

## **Research and analysis methods:**

The research method was of qualitative nature rather than quantitative, as we only interviewed community leaders who represent their community and did not want to know the number of people affected but rather the issues that the ethnic communities were facing. A questionnaire was designed to ensure that there was a certain level of consistency in the questions asked to all groups and individuals by the different members of the team. However, some of the questions were not asked as the member of staff made the judgement it was not appropriate or relevant to ask. The assessment was carried out by phone, and this took some time as it was not easy to get through to everyone in the first instance. Sometimes, some groups needed an initial contact by email and then needed chasing to finally get an answer. Some community members preferred answering the questions by email after the phone call and did not necessarily answer all the questions. Having a direct conversation with a community leader, enabled staff members to probe in more depth for certain questions therefore getting a better picture of the current situation. The DREC Community Directory includes 36 different groups and DREC has another 10 to 15 individuals that are not attached to a particular group, but who are from ethnic minority backgrounds. This report contains an analysis of the replies from 27 different groups and one couple of individuals.

We obtained responses from the following groups:

African/Caribbean Lunch Club -

Nigerian Community in Dorset  
 Kushti Bok  
 Umoja Arts Network  
 Bournemouth Jewish Representative  
 Southern Gypsy Council  
 Hannah Levy House (Jewish care home)  
 Bournemouth Reform Synagogue  
 Unity in Vision  
 Bournemouth Islamic Centre & Central Mosque  
 Dorchester Islamic Centre  
 Wessex Liberal Jewish Community  
 Breacc - Brazilian Educational and Cultural Centre  
 Ahmadiyya Muslim Association  
 Filbrits Community (Filipinos)  
 UK Nepal Friendship Society  
 Bournemouth Thai Language School  
 Dorset Bengali Association  
 Dorset Kerala Community  
 Rwandan & Burundi Community in the South of England  
 Muslims/multi-faiths  
 Portuguese Community mainly from Madeira  
 Community Alliances Romanian  
 Najib (Hungarian / Afghan) and his family based in Moordown /Winton  
 Dorset Polish Centre

The community leaders we spoke to represent their respective communities. The number of people it concerned is difficult to assess, as some communities are fairly small i.e. Rwandan community with only a few hundred people in Dorset, but others are fairly large communities i.e. Dorset Kerala community, the Polish community, the Bengali community, the Gypsy, Roma and Travellers with a few thousand people.

The report has been compiled after 3 weeks of progress of this project, 2<sup>nd</sup> April to 24<sup>th</sup> April 2020. It is a working document and the content might change as new information comes in and DREC is able to reach out to more groups. Updates will be issued as and when relevant.

## **Responses**

### 1) Communication within the groups – 21 responses

Most community leaders said that they were communicating with their members mainly by phone and emails. A few of them use social media platforms such as Whatsapp and Facebook. These communication channels were established prior to the Coronavirus Pandemic and they are generally used to communicating in this way. Some members of groups use Zoom for communication during the pandemic and restrictions on movement.

### 2) Access to information/ understanding of guidance – 20 responses

Most communities seem to be aware of the national guidance and get the information regularly through their own networks, which is positive. There are a lot of health professionals within ethnic minority communities so they can help explaining and relaying the safety messages. Some community leaders have created videos translating the main messages in their own language to ensure people understood.

However, there are some communities for which the understanding of the information is less obvious, as they do not speak good English i.e. a Portuguese lady panicked because she thought the schools were opening again after the Easter break, as she had not understood that “school” work was starting again but didn’t understand this was online only.

Some people follow the guidance from their own country, as they listen to news in their native language, but the guidance might be different as it is for another country. This will pose a problem if some countries relax the lockdown and the UK does not. Some people feel frustrated with the UK government guidance, as in their country things happen differently. This increases the level of tensions and the anxiety that people are experiencing.

Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities may not have easy access to the official guidance and might not trust it. Support organisations have now produced booklet including all the various guidance, which should help. However, the access to it is not guaranteed and the understanding is also not guaranteed. The information is published in PDF format and distributed on-line, so it may not reach some more remote community members, or vulnerable community members who do not have access to IT communications.

Some people raised the issue of having too much information and not knowing what real news is and what fake news is, which makes things really daunting for some people.

### 3) Understanding of self-isolation/social distancing guidance – any cultural barriers against? – 20 responses

Most of the groups confirmed they understood the guidance and there were no cultural barriers against the self-isolating and social distancing guidance. However, some raised the issues of lack of mental health support for those who are self-isolating and for those who are now staying at home all the time i.e. in some communities the man is always out from the family home but now he is there all the time and it can put a strain on some family members. There was some indication that mental health support in appropriate languages and with cultural knowledge would be helpful.

A few communities find the compliance very difficult if not impossible, as in some culture’s families live in multi-generational units where young people live with their elderly grandparents. This may include people who are on the shielded list in a small space where many members of the same extended family have to share rooms. In other cultures, men are used to gathering in large groups and some of them might continue to do so. Large families live together even if they do not live in the same house so they would continue seeing each other and going to each other houses as they are part of the same family.

### 4) Access to food especially culturally and faith appropriate food – 21 responses

None of the ethnic community groups reported issues about access to food. Their usual suppliers have continued to supply them. If people were unable to go shopping, volunteers went to do their shopping instead, so all was dealt with effectively within their own community.

All the community leaders we spoke to said they shopped for others who were socially isolating. Some of them mentioned that they are aware of the needed safeguards and said they use bank transfers. If cash is exchanged, gloves and anti-bacterial wipes are used. But a lot of them mentioned that most of the time, they do the shopping for free.

However, some of the most vulnerable people who have been helped by local authorities have only received one meal a day and that meal has not always been culturally appropriate and respected dietary needs. In some instances, community members have been filling the gap by cooking for the most vulnerable people i.e. homeless people and people in shelters and refuges and have been able to provide halal meat, vegetarian and vegan food. But this will not be sustainable in the long term.

#### 5) Death and religion and/or culture – 13 responses

Concerns were expressed by more than one group about what is happening with their relatives who live abroad if they have the virus. Members were concerned that if relatives are in hospital or if they died, how would they know? How will they even know where they are buried. Sometimes the communications infrastructure in other countries is not as reliable as in the UK, so they may or may not be able to get through on the telephone. In the circumstances of a national disaster there is generally a helpline, but this is international, so in this situation hard for people to know who they should call.

There was concern about funeral arrangements in certain religions including Islam and Judaism. Especially regarding cleansing of the body which is supposed to be carried out before burial and cannot be carried out in the current circumstances.

It was expressed that a lot of emotional support is needed for those who have lost a loved one somewhere else, but some of this support will be provided by members of the community. Bereavement counselling may be available, but will it be available in appropriate languages for people whose first language isn't English, and culturally appropriate?

A community leader was concerned about people, in particular, who might want to be buried at home (by which she meant in their country of origin). The cost of flying the body is prohibitive and even the cost of keeping the body until things go back to normal. One of their community members in London had died and had said in their will that they wanted to be buried at home and they are struggling to fulfil his wishes because of these issues.

#### 6) Awareness of the shielded list and of vulnerable people – 14 responses

Most community leaders said that they were not aware of what the shielded list was. They said that anybody who was vulnerable, ill, or could not go out for their shopping,

prescriptions or anything else would be picked up by other community members and supported. However, some of them were grateful to have the explanation about what it was.

One community leader representing the Gypsy, Roma and Travellers said that members of the community would probably not have been picked up by the NHS shielded list.

#### 7) Awareness of the Councils' helplines – 20 responses

Most of the community leaders were aware of the helplines and some of them had used them and knew people who had used them and had been satisfied with the support they got.

A few of them did not know about them and were grateful to have the information and the contact details to spread this in their respective communities.

#### 8) Experience of contacting the helplines – 9 responses

Few community leaders had contacted the helplines themselves, as they said that most of the support is providing within their respective communities. However, for those who had contacted the helplines or who knew somebody who had contacted the helplines, said the support was good.

#### 9) Shopping for someone else and safeguards – 11 responses

The respondents said that they did shop for other people but are aware of safeguarding issues and are using bank transfer payments and gloves if paying by cash. A few of them mentioned that they do shop for other people but there is no transfer of money.

#### 10) Childcare and home education – 15 responses

Most community leaders said they were not aware of any issues as in their culture, the mother was always at home so there was no issue regarding childcare according to them. Some community leaders provide educational material and activities to keep the children busy. However, a few community leaders reported the following issues about home education:

- Parents who are unable read or write and therefore cannot home school children
- Parents do not understand and speak English, causing difficulty with home schooling
- Difficulties in home educating when more than one child, as families usually only have one computer. This has created a lot of tensions between family members who need to juggle several curricula needs and also work commitments
- Variable support from schools: there are examples where teachers Facetime students to check their understanding, some schools have given all their IT equipment to their pupils who did not have any (a school in Dorchester) but most of the time, the support from school is very basic. Some parents are really distressed because they are not teachers

- In certain cultures, fathers do not usually spend a lot of time at home and with their children. The fact of having to stay at home altogether puts a huge strain on family relationships (potential increase in depression, domestic abuse ...)
- The conditions of the accommodation is an issue, as people who live in flats, who do not have access to outside space for the children to play are finding it very difficult.

#### 11) Issues with mortgages/rent and knowledge of available support – 15 responses

The response was varied, and some local communities do not currently have financial difficulties. But most of the other communities do and where this is the case, have had to apply to Universal Credit. All the community leaders said they knew where to get help when needed and had already used that help. Some community members work for organisations like DWP so they are aware of the issues and the help available and are able to help people to complete their application.

#### 12) Knowledge of help for self-employed people and small businesses – 17 responses

There were a number of concerns raised about financial issues as there are a number of self-employed people and small businesses within the communities who have had to shut shops or cease trading and have worries about the financial future.

Businesses in this community tend to be small and are very often family based. Community leaders said they were aware of the available help but at the time of most of the interviews that help was still at a planning stage. Some people said that they did not really trust the government promises. However, they said they would apply when the time comes. The Councils have now written to all the registered businesses to inform them about the application procedure. Some community members confirmed they had received the letter from the council. However, there is still concern that some people will find the form daunting to fill in, will not understand what is being asked of them, will not ask for help and therefore will not apply. It was also reported that some people might have been working for themselves but might not be registered, therefore they would fall through the net of support.

#### 13) Potential for increasing community tensions – not a question asked, just picked up in conversations

- a) English people are angry at Bulgarian men in Sturminster Newton, as they gather together in the evening in the park (those men live together)
- b) Thai people are angry at English people for still going to the beach in Southbourne and Bournemouth and for not respecting social distancing in public transport
- c) Tensions on the Ashoak site in Wareham, as half of the residents are Gypsy, Roma, Travellers and the other half are not, so the non GRT are angry with the GRT for gathering in groups on site
- d) Lack of suitable accommodation for Gypsy, Roma and Travellers especially in the Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole area
- e) There are a number of Portuguese from Madeira in Bournemouth, they only speak some English and expect other Portuguese people from the mainland to help them for

free. This situation is historical and had been already been exacerbated by the EUSS scheme and possibly by the Coronavirus situation. It is creating tensions and difficulties and the community leader we spoke to has given up and does not want to help any longer.

#### 14) Any other issues not covered? – 20 responses

Some European members still have not received a response from the Home Office re their status despite having made the application months ago and this is causing a lot of stress. This will also affect access to Universal Credit.

#### **Conclusions/recommendations**

The conclusions/recommendations below are learning points that should be taken into consideration in case of any crisis but should happen systematically:

| Recommendations  | Reason  | By whom (DREC, DC, BCP, other ...)                             |
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| Provide easy access to guidance and relevant information from all statutory partners in different languages  | Need to ensure that everybody understands the guidance and all the important relevant information to avoid misunderstandings  | Statutory partners, links with Bournemouth Interpreters Group? |
| Gypsy, Roma and Traveller Liaison Officers or their equivalent should communicate directly with members of the GRT community and provide relevant and cultural information appropriately. Potentially provide printed copies of the booklet provided by Travellers Times | Because of their lifestyle and centuries of discrimination, Gypsy, Roma and Travellers are at higher risks of not having access to the right information and of not being taken into consideration and therefore of being affected by the virus. However, a direct, friendly approach can make a lot of difference and avoid the issues | DC, BCP, Kusti Bok, Police, DREC                               |
| Access to culturally aware counselling and bereavement counselling and reassurance to communities about deaths in families   | Different cultures deal with and are affected by deaths differently. An understanding of those differences could make a lot of difference to people as they would feel included and cared for   | DC, BCP  |
| Access to food parcels and meals provision should always take into account   | People will not eat the food provided if it is not  | DC?, BCP?  |



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| cultural, religious and dietary needs  | responding to their cultural, dietary needs   |   |
| Consideration should be given as to what can be done to help people with different religions come to terms with funeral arrangements in the current circumstances                                | Different cultures deal with and are affected by deaths differently. An understanding of those differences could make a lot of difference to people as they would feel included and cared for   | DC, BCP   |
| Consideration of feeding into the right channels to help with accessing information about relatives in other parts of the world. Potentially a telephone helpline through the British Embassies? | People should be able to connect with family members abroad in a case of a global crisis  | Embassies, DREC, DC, BCP  |
| Guidance to schools about supporting children from families whose first language is not English i.e. additional support provided to those children as parents unable to home educate             | Parents for whom English is not the first language might not be able to educate their children at home and therefore those children do not receive any formal education   | Schools, DC, BCP  |
| Outreach to ethnic minority businesses who do not apply for the help available to encourage and support them in applying   | A lot of small business owners are not confident with filling forms online and are scared to access formal financial help so they don't. Helping them to fill in the form would enable them to get the help they need and to feel reassured | DREC, DC, BCP, Citizen Advice, Outset, Chambers of Commerce ...                                   |
| Consider the of relaxing social distancing on public transport in the light of the expectations of different cultural groups   | People should respect the guidance and the guidance should be strictly and firmly adhered to especially on public transport as it affects other people  | DC, BCP, Bus Companies  |
| Discussions at the highest level about how to tackle increasing tensions between communities in the current  | A lot of tensions have happened between different community groups for various reasons  | DC Community safety teams, BCP community safety teams, Dorset police, DREC, Prejudice Free Dorset |

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| <p>circumstances, which may otherwise overflow into violence or social disturbance. More joined up working and communication between Council community safety teams, support organisations like DREC, Intercom Trust ... and the Police</p> | <p>including personal interpretations of the guidance and fear of contamination. Those tensions have a detrimental effect on social cohesion and they could lead to serious incidents in the future.</p> |  |
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As stated in the introduction, this is a work in progress and other issues may emerge as we are living in a constantly changing situation. Whilst some of the recommendations and themes may become obsolete as things change it is anticipated that they can provide some indication of how the response could be improved to a future similar emergency situation. Some of these recommendations should be considered by in emergency planning teams.

A plethora of reports and articles have been published to discuss the impact of the Covid 19 pandemic on people from different ethnic backgrounds and the necessity to take this disproportionate impact into consideration in planning statutory partners responses.

*16<sup>th</sup> April – “Government to launch a review into the devastating effect of Covid 19 on BME Communities” The Independent*

*21<sup>st</sup> April – “Ethnicity and Covid 19: an urgent public health research” The Lancet*

*30<sup>th</sup> April – “Ethnic minority deaths and Covid 19” Kings Fund*

*7<sup>th</sup> May – “BME communities are experiencing a disproportionate impact” Nursing Times*

*7<sup>th</sup> May – “Action needed to mitigate Covid 19 risks to BME” NHS Confederation*

Dorset Race Equality Council, April 2020.