

Cllr Asher Craig Briefing Note – Event / Meeting

Title of event	United Nations Working Group of Experts on People of African Descent 32nd session on Economic Empowerment of people of African Descent 32nd session of the United Nations Working Group of Experts on People of African Descent OHCHR
-----------------------	--

Economic Empowerment of people of African Descent – The Bristol Story

Bristol has a rich history as a port city, with a long tradition of trade and trafficking routes. But this past is tainted as the city was a major centre for the transatlantic slave trade, with ships departing from the city to traffick enslaved Africans to the Americas. Throughout the 17th and 18th century the city's merchants played a prominent role in the sale and trade of over ½ million enslaved bodies. A significant amount of the institutional and corporate wealth in our city was founded through this atrocious episode in our collective history. By the latter half of 18th Century, Bristol's position had been overtaken by Liverpool, but even as late as 1789, the trade to Africa and the West Indies was estimated to have comprised over 80% of the total value of Bristol's trade abroad.

Today, Bristol is a thriving city with a modern economy based on a variety of industries, including aerospace, electronics, and creative industries. The city is also a major hub for international trade, with the port of Bristol serving as a gateway to the UK for imports and exports. But the dark chapter of slavery still hangs shamefully over the city and African heritage communities in no way share in this economic wealth of the city but the City has finally acknowledged its role in the trade of enslaved Afrkans and has taken steps to address this history.

Bristol is a Tale of Two Cities – the city is often described as progressive, classy and creative, youthful, economically buoyant, indeed in 2017 the city was given the accolade of the best place to live in the UK. Yet this is in total contrast to the experience of Bristol's black communities and most significantly people of African descent, who have been historically marginalized and economically disadvantaged due to persistent, endemic systemic racism and discrimination.

Indeed in the same year we received this accolade, the Race Equality Think Tank the Runnymede Trust found that Bristol's black communities have poorer job prospects, worst health and fewest academic qualifications than those in white communities and named our city the worst for racial equalities in the UK. To address the finding, various organizations and initiatives have doubled down and/or been working towards economic empowerment and inclusion of black communities in Bristol.

In 2019 the city launched the "Bristol and Transatlantic Slavery Legacy" project, which aims to raise awareness of the city's role in the slave trade and to promote a better understanding of its legacy.

The project includes a range of initiatives (delivered individually and collectively) and includes researchm exhibitions, talks, and educational resources. In addition, the city has begun the process of renaming some of its streets and buildings to reflect its commitment to confronting its past. For example, the Colston Hall, named after a notorious slave trader, was renamed the Bristol Beacon in 2020.

Other initiatives include Black South West Networks, Social Enterprise Incubator – part of £2.7m ten year programme to provide development support and investment to enterprises coming from or working with communities experiencing inequality in Bristol. The aim is to contribute towards making Bristol's social economy more diverse and inclusive, able to create a greater social impact

and able to become a more significant part of the city's overall economy and ultimately success story.

Furthermore, Bristol City Council has committed to promoting diversity and inclusion in the city's economy through its Covid Economic Recovery Strategy, which recognizes the need to address existing inequalities and support underrepresented communities. As Deputy Mayor, I secured over £4m of investment into Bristol's VCSE communities as part of their recovery. Nearly a £1m of this fund is directly targeted at Black and minorities groups. As a City we are also keen to see assets of community value, history and respect secured by Bristol's African Heritage communities and this work is in progress.

Overall, there is still much work to be done to ensure equal access to economic opportunities and resources for Bristol's black communities, but these initiatives and commitments are steps in the right direction.

We heard from Simon Woolley about the impact of Covid 19 and the disproportionate number of deaths of people from African heritage communities, but the impact on our businesses, organisations and self employed individuals further exacerbated the pre-existing dynamics of social-economic structural inequality.

So let me tell you a little more about the city of Bristol.

Bristol has a population of 472,400 with non-white minorities representing 19% of the population. Of that figures 3.8% identify as Black/Black British: African as their ethnicity category and 3.2% said they had African country of birth. The 2021 census shows that the largest ethnic minority group in Bristol is the Somali and Somalilander population with an estimated population of 9,200 people (1.9%).

Bristol's Labour Administration, led over the past 7 years by the UK's first Mayor of African Descent, Marvin Rees, continues to campaign against systemic racism in spite of the Government's widely condemned Sewell Report. Under the Mayor's leadership Bristol City Council is regarded as a leading council on tackling racial injustice and delivering social justice. Bristol as a city is only recently and slowly coming to terms with its role in the Trade & Trafficking of Enslaved Africans. Efforts are now being made to expedite the atonement process and work towards achieving holistic reparations.

Since 2016 we have gone further than any previous administrations in developing an understanding of and facing up to and addressing the legacies of the TTEA, Race and Racial hierarchy both within the Council itself and the wider city.

From public recognition of institutional racism to the establishment of the Mayoral Commission on Racial Equality (CoRE) which came out of the need to address the findings of the Runnymede Report; and the Legacy Steering Group, delivery of a multi-awarding winning Stepping UP leadership programme, recruitment of the most diverse cohort of black and Asian magistrates, implementing Ban the Box, which has seen an increase in the number of African heritage people being given a second chance to become economically active, securing £500k of funding for a new HIV and Sexual Health Project for people of African descent and Working closely with local community organisations in Bristol that aim to fight against racial injustice like Black South West Network, SARI, African Connexions Consortium and African Voices Forum all of whom are working towards economic inclusion of African heritage communities.

In March 2021 Bristol City Council passed an Atonement and Reparations Motion regarding the City's role in the Transatlantic Trafficking of Enslaved Africans. The motion reflected on how racial inequalities are embedded in the current economic system, which results in African heritage people and communities systematically having poorer outcomes. Unless these systemic failures and their drivers and sources are identified and addressed we are in danger of replicating them in any attempt to design a fair and resilient economy. We know that Historical attempts to disenfranchise our communities has resulted in the disproportionate impacts experienced today. The racial wealth divide is an economic archaeological marker rooted in the multigenerational history of the TTEA.

In 2020 – the Legacy Steering Group and Bristol City Council, commissioned a report produced by Black SW Network in partnership with African Connexions Consortions called Project T.R.U.T.H – which stands for (Telling Restoring Understanding our Tapestry and History). This report for the first time in this city's history centres the voice of people of African Heritage communities on the matter of Bristol's connection to TTEA and stands as an unprecedented attempt to shape a way forward with AHC at the centre. The recommendations have been formed into an action plan and the LSG project plans to introduce memorialisation and educational spaces that inform the Bristolian communities and indeed the wider international diaspora and allies of the history of racial injustice throughout Bristol by way of commissioned art, a 'story-house' (better known as a museum), and international collaborations with racial justice organisations across the globe.

The Mayor of Bristol is the leading architect of the Bristol One City Approach to implementing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development has entailed review of local structures and processes that can be related to IDPAD's (UN's International Decade for People of African Descent 2015-2024) thematic objectives. The One City Plan engages local place-based leaders including people of African descent, in implementing SDG targets. Notably, the One Bristol Curriculum is being developed by local place-based leaders including people of African descent, to decolonise educational curricula and pedagogy in Bristol's educational institutions. In 2019, the Centre for Black Humanities at University of Bristol employed its first Afrikan Heritage Professor of History, Professor Olivette Otele. This is worthy of note given the disproportionately low levels of Black academics employed in senior roles within British higher educational institutions.

Bristol leads in implementation of SDG Targets amongst UK cities and encourages community participation in through the design and delivery of it's One City Plan. This illustrates implementation of SDG Targets 10.3 and 16.b – implementation of anti-discrimination policies at the local level, to promote human rights, social justice and equality.

In 2016, Bristol's AfriKan ConneXions Consortium held a conference to raise awareness of IDPAD following the election of both Mayor Rees and myself, and the social enterprise organisation African Voices Forum subsequently themed its AGM in 2017 on IDPAD, and launched a book called Inspirational Women in 2018.

In Summer 2019, UWE Bristol's Social Sciences Research Group hosted a Roundtable on Afriphobia in collaboration with IDPAD Coalition UK. This event was organised by Ade Olaiya, co-Chair of the Partnership sub-committee of the ICSWG PFPAD (international civil society working group for the permanent forum of people of Afrikan descent), who is here with us today,

Community leaders voiced discontent on issues pertaining to Afriphobia (the Coalition's preferred term used for Afrophobia), highlighting the importance of implementing SDG 16 Targets for peace, justice and good governance. Later this month SARI (Stand Against Racism and Inequality) are hosting a citywide conference on Afriphobia.

The Queen's Lord Lieutenant of Bristol, Mrs Peaches Golding OBE, herself of African ancestry, in collaboration with the Mayor's Office and existing BAME Magistrates, successfully engaged in an initiative to increase diversity of the city's Magistracy. This exercise resulted in swearing in of one of the UK's most diverse (as regards ethnicity, religion, age and gender) group of Magistrates ever. These actions illustrate SDG Target 16.b being implemented to promote and enforce non-discriminatory policies that achieve universal human rights, race equality, and social justice for Bristol's African diaspora communities.

- African diaspora led nongovernmental organisations are increasingly given agency in developing and implementing new structures and processes. Collaboration between academia, policymakers, and representatives of local African diaspora communities contributes to development and implementation of the One Bristol Curriculum for schools, as well as review of structures and processes in local education institutions.
- Disproportionate gaps in student attainment occur at all stages of education, between African diaspora youth and their white peers. The city has disproportionately low levels of Black teachers in Bristol (less than 2%) despite Black students representing 80% of the student population in some of the city's schools. Moreover, under-representation of people of African descent in the city's public sector workforces and leadership teams, also reflects wider inequality in employment patterns. The Race Equality in Education Group (REEG) and One Bristol Curriculum were established with primary focus in addressing student exclusion and attainment gaps for local African diaspora youth at all levels of education. Both these groups facilitate community participation by local members of the African diaspora and development of African diaspora educators.

Finally, the implementation of community wealth creation strategies that support and encourage community wealth building to produce more sustainable equitable growth whilst alleviating systemic poverty is the key to fair employment and equitable growth. The community wealth building model of economic development is emerging in our city and offers communities real, on the ground solutions battered by successive waves of extraction, disinvestment, displacement and disempowerment.

If the source of racial injustice in the 21st century is economic injustice or domination of the global economy established in the 17th century, than a more just economy is the only way to sustainably achieve racial and economic justice.

Differences in power manifest in asymmetrical access – a privilege which continues to run along racial lines. We have to be mindful of the past and how inequalities continue to manifest. We must reflect on how racial inequalities are embedded in the current economic system resulting in poorer outcomes for African heritage people.

Unless these systemic failures and their drivers and sources are identified and addressed we are in danger of replicating them in any attempt to design a fair and resilient economy not just in Bristol, but across the UK and indeed the world.

Yesterday, 30th April marked the 60th anniversary of what is known as the Bristol Bus Boycott – In 1963 the Bristol Omnibus Company's refused to employ Black and Asian bus crews which led to a city-based strike led by prominent Bristolian Civil Rights activists, the boycott Influenced the UK's Race Relations Act in 1965 and 1968.

Thank you