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A Caribbean Critique?

Exploring black Caribbean experiences of and attitudes to Lambeth Council

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1.0Introduction: The Caribbean conundrum

This report outlines the findings of a qualitative study of black Caribbean residents' perceptions of Lambeth council.

Electric Avenue, 2010

Defining the problem: In 2010, the "Lambeth Ethnicity Report", based on a residents' survey of over 2,500 respondents, came to the following conclusion:

Since Lambeth council started conducting face-to-face residents surveys in 2003 we have found that our black Caribbean residents are less positive on nearly all measures. Black Caribbean residents are more concerned that not enough is being done for young people and the elderly. They are also more concerned about lack of jobs and recreational facilities. Similar with previous years black Caribbean residents are less likely to use local arts and cultural facilities and parks. This is different from the experience of black African residents who do not tend to record such negative perceptions.[1]

[1] Data from the user satisfaction surveys nationally shows that, overall, ethnic minority users tend to express

ESRO was commissioned to conduct ethnographic research with black Caribbean residents of Lambeth in order to explore the possible reasons behind their consistent (dis)satisfaction scores in these residents surveys.

Method: This is not a simple research question to answer. Focus group research could easily descend into a tirade of individual stories and an atmosphere of dissent. Similarly, more survey work would likely yield 'more of the same' rather than providing any real depth of insight.

Ethnography, on the other hand, can reveal the detail in people's lives and ethnographers have more time with respondents to get behind initial opinions and explore people's histories and stories. They have time to build trust and talk about issues like ethnicity and identity. They can even observe (first hand) peoples' interactions with council services. See p10 for a more detailed explanation of the methodology used to conduct this research.

That said, the question remains a complex one, even given the advantages of using ethnographic techniques. Difficult questions remain. Who is to say that interactions with services, and personal experiences, are the sole drivers of general attitudes towards the council? They may well play a part, but so too, do stories, myths and discourses that spread throughout a community. I may not have ever used Lambeth's housing services myself, for example, but I could surely express an opinion on them if asked, based on the multitude of stories I have heard from other people.

Researchers then, were tasked not only with learning the depth and detail of individual stories of customer and service experience, *dissatisfaction* and *satisfaction*, but also with exploring those factors that might evidence *particular* dissatisfaction within this *particular* community.

Any research like this must come with a warning. Lambeth's Residents' Survey Ethnicity Report itself cautions against a cultural (or ethnicity-based) reading of the survey data in the first place: "*It is important to note that the different ethnic groups in Lambeth have very different socio-economic profiles and so some apparent differences by ethnicity may actually reflect the work profile, tenure or deprivation of a particular group, rather than their ethnicity.*" We would echo this caution, and have tried to address the issue in the way we have analysed our findings.

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more dissatisfaction than white British service users. See Equality and Diversity in Local Government in England: Literature Review - Summary Report

Analysis: Whilst we believe that the research *did* throw up *some* evidence of issues that relate specifically to the black Caribbean population (as opposed to any other), such findings will require further research and verification, to be sure that they are unique to, and prevalent within, the black Caribbean population of Lambeth. Furthermore, our findings do also indicate that dissatisfaction with council services *might* be better understood and further explored through the lens of socio-economic factors (and the connected reliance on public services) rather than through ethnicity as such.

Brixton town centre, 2011

The most obvious example of this latter point is the fact that our respondents' experiences of Lambeth housing services, in particular, tended to throw up negative stories and attitudes. Research elsewhere tells us that this would probably be the case regardless of respondents' ethnicities.

In 2009, for example, Lambeth produced a research report called "What drives perceptions of value for money in Lambeth?" The report looks at the factors behind negative perceptions of the 'value for money' that Lambeth council provides in return for council tax. The findings seem fairly conclusive, dissatisfaction with housing services is very highly correlated with negative perceptions of the council's 'value for money'. Table 1, drawn from that report, outlines the difference in the way people rated the council in terms of value for money, efficiency etc. depending on whether they had been positive or negative about housing services.

Table 1: Council tenants who are positive about council housing vs. council tenants who are negative about council housing against corporate performance measures

	Positive about council housing	Negative about council housing	Impact of council housing
Value for money	49	8	+41
Think the council does a good job	77	28	+49
Think the council is efficient and well run	65	21	+44
Keeps residents informed	78	40	+38

Source: Residents' survey 2009, base: council tenants (391)

So for example, of those who had been negative about their council housing experience, only **8%** thought the council offered 'value for money'. Whereas, of those who felt positive about their experience with council housing, fully **49%** thought the council offered 'value for money'.

With this in mind, it might be better to first understand whether black Caribbean residents of Lambeth are over-represented in the population that makes use of social housing. If so, it would suggest that it might not be *black Caribbean* residents that are particularly dissatisfied, but rather, users of Lambeth housing services more generally.

As part of the research for this project, we looked into these very questions and, at first glance, it looks as if our hypothesis is correct, black Caribbean residents are indeed greater users of Lambeth's housing services than other ethnic groups (see table 2). 66% of black Caribbean residents make use of social housing in Lambeth, as opposed to only 39% of the population overall.

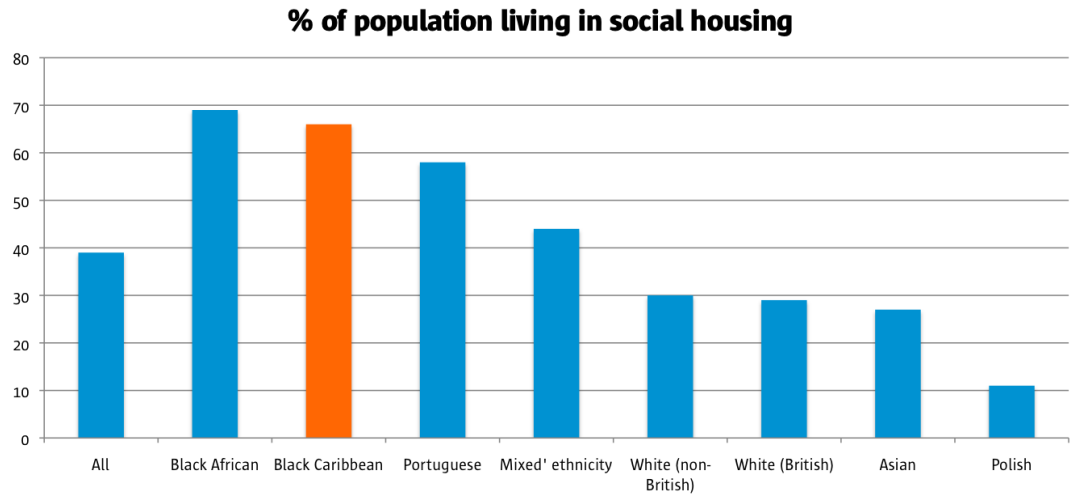


Table 2: Proportion of Lambeth residents living in Social housing, broken down by ethnicity. Data source: Residents survey 2011

With negative experiences of council housing having such a large effect on overall dissatisfaction with the council, it would seem that black Caribbean dissatisfaction with Lambeth may stem simply from experiences with council housing. However, this would not explain why black African residents, who are even greater users of social housing than black Caribbean residents are not similarly dissatisfied. This again suggests that there is something unique about black Caribbean dissatisfaction.

During our research, current and potential users of adult social care services also tended to give negative accounts of their experiences. So again the question arises; if black Caribbean residents are greater users of adult social care services, then maybe the real cause behind dissatisfaction is not ethnicity, but simply the use of certain council services like housing OR social care?

Table 3 (below) shows that black Caribbean residents **are** more likely to use adult social care services and care services for those with disabilities than other ethnicity-based populations. And again, residents survey data suggests that users of social care services are more likely to be dissatisfied with the council overall (34% dissatisfaction compared with 22% dissatisfaction overall). And this time, black African residents were far less likely to have been using social care services.

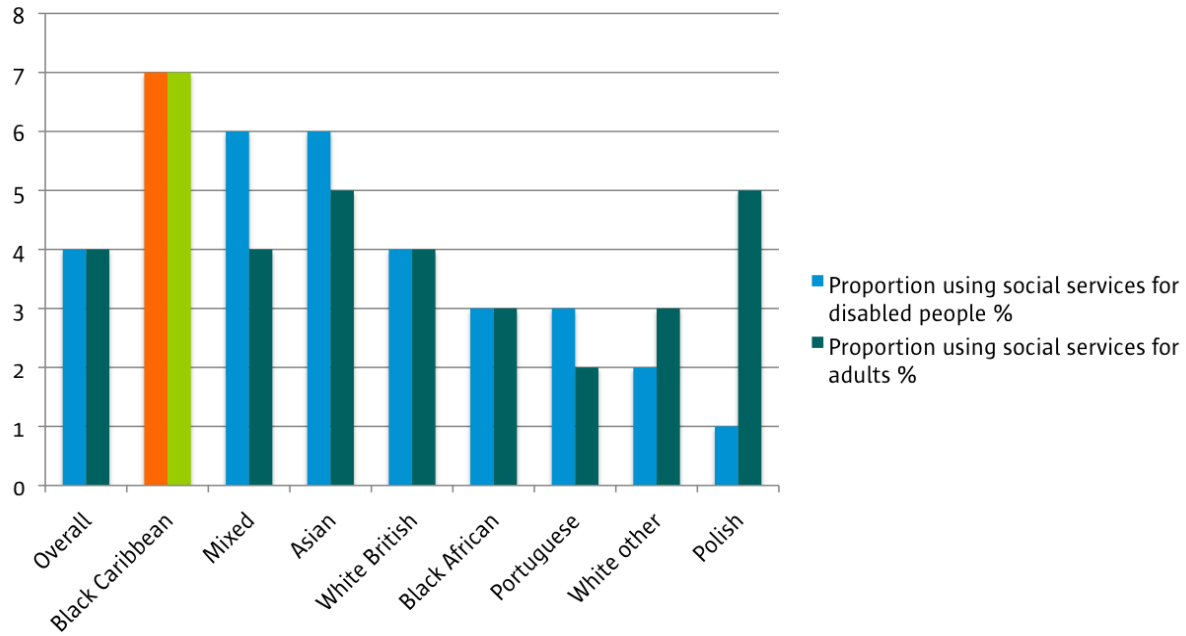


Table 3: Proportion of population using social services for disabled people and social services for adults, broken down by ethnicity. Data source: Residents survey 2011

So, can we conclude that the reason black Caribbean residents return lower satisfaction scores is that they are

greater users of Lambeth's social housing and/or social services?

These figures may suggest that ethnicity is a red herring, and that Lambeth should not be focussing on the dissatisfaction of *black Caribbean* residents at all, but rather, users of housing and social services, regardless of ethnicity.

There certainly does seem to be some evidence of a correlation between dissatisfaction with housing services and social services and dissatisfaction with the council in general. But, there is also some evidence that black Caribbean residents are, in fact, particular in their dissatisfaction. Looking back at table 2, we can see that a large proportion of black African residents and Portuguese residents *also* use social housing services. And in fact, though it is not shown clearly in the table, Portuguese residents are greater users of social services than black Caribbean residents when use of services for children and young people is included. And yet, neither black African residents, nor Portuguese residents, register as much dissatisfaction as do black Caribbean residents. In other words, the figures still leave us with a question around why it is that black Caribbean residents in particular, are so dissatisfied.

Thanks to the depth of the data we collected, we were able to go some way towards addressing this question, though the answer includes explanations that are both particular to the community – and particular to service users.

Among those facets of dissatisfaction with Lambeth that may be particular to the black Caribbean community was an emergent narrative of the changing landscape of traditionally Caribbean neighbourhoods like Brixton. Respondents suggested that lack of support for the 'Caribbean community' had led to an erosion of the number of identifiably Caribbean spaces. This, in turn, meant that it was increasingly difficult for people of Caribbean descent to draw on community (or 'ethnicity specific') resource networks.

This decline in the visibility of the black Caribbean community spaces might well also be contributing to more negative attitudes towards Lambeth council. And this could still be true even though a number of our respondents saw the fact that black Caribbean residents were able to mix with all communities (rather than remaining insular within their own) as a *positive* thing.

Personal stories and personal feelings are more complicated. Specific examples of bad service (or indeed good service) can often colour a resident's perception of council services more widely. But how do individual stories relate to a more

general trend of perceptions amongst a larger population? One way perhaps is that individual stories can generate a long-term negative impression for that resident. And if the story of poor treatment is shared with peers, it can play a role in defining the way council services are understood for a whole community, like the black Caribbean community. However, whilst identifying negative discourses is relatively easy, showing that they have particular salience within one particular, ethnically defined community, in a research study of this size, is impossible.

In fact, this last point raises another difficult question. To what extent is there such a thing as 'the black Caribbean community' in Lambeth at all? And who are its members? Whilst some of our respondents were clearly plugged into specifically Caribbean social networks, others were not. For some, daily life involved interactions within a distinctly multi-ethnic community and with multi-ethnic businesses, shops and services. And in two cases, respondents specifically pointed out that their social worlds (their 'community') was, if anything, white.

To some extent Lambeth is defined by its multi-ethnic neighbourhoods and inter-ethnic living. There are indeed pockets were communities and social networks will have an identifiably black Caribbean identity, but this does not mean that every person who describes themselves as black Caribbean will necessarily belong to one or other of them. Often the very idea of a 'community' which supposedly includes everyone of one particular ethnicity is an idea constructed from outside, and not from within a population itself.

Conclusion: All of these factors and discussions played a part in the analysis of the research data, leading to much discussion before coming to the conclusions that we present in this report.

In the final section of the report, we argue for a reframing of the problem. Lambeth must, of course, continue to pay attention to low levels of satisfaction amongst a particular ethnic group (in this case black Caribbean), but we suggest that this objective can best be met by first considering other socio-economic factors alongside ethnicity, especially where they correlate with the use of certain services like housing and social care.

Furthermore, we would suggest that understanding individual stories is as important for understanding population-wide results, as the more overarching survey and feedback data, because individual stories can be shared within networks and subsequently to a wider community.

By reframing the question of black Caribbean dissatisfaction in this way, Lambeth's teams can separate those issues that may belong to a more generic (non-ethnically based) experience of Lambeth services like housing, from those that are more specific to the black Caribbean community. And this clarity will allow Lambeth to concentrate (in more effective, targeted ways) on improving the experiences of its black Caribbean residents, as well the experiences of its service users more generally.

Conclusions and practical recommendations can be found at the end of the report in section eight on P44.

2.0Research method

This research project formed part of a series of research projects ESRO has conducted in partnership with Lambeth Council. The series was designed to fill gaps in existing knowledge, address difficult issues and train council officers and researchers in using ethnographic research methods. As such, a larger number of researchers from ESRO and the council were involved in the research fieldwork than might normally be the case.

Having such a large research team (some 8 researchers in all) has both strengths and weaknesses. Analysis can benefit from having a wide range of input from different researchers, but can also be hampered by the fact that no one researcher was party to all of the different kinds of data that were collected.

In order to mitigate the potential difficulties, a great deal of time was spent in analysis on sharing stories and findings among all researchers.

Constructing a sample: A sample of black Caribbean Lambeth residents was drawn up to encompass a range of different kinds of people who would access different kinds of services and have a range of different needs. In order to achieve this, the sample was stratified according to a number of different criteria. These criteria related to the kinds of household residents were living in, and of the different kinds of services people used (rather than being built on any kind of hypothesis around what different kinds of people might think about Lambeth council).

The sample included 18 households. Respondents were, variously: unemployed, living solely on benefits, entrepreneurial, and employed in the city; living in private rented accommodation, home owners and council tenants; those with and without home access to the internet; families, working-age single people and elderly people; those who frequently used council services and those who rarely accessed council services. Having said this, the majority of our respondents could be described as coming from lower-income brackets and where relevant, we highlight how this may have affected results within the report. There was also a strong bias towards people who identified as having roots specifically in Jamaica, rather than the Caribbean as a whole. We use the term 'black Caribbean' throughout this report however, recognising that our respondents cannot be seen as representing the whole region. Rather they represent the

kinds of people who may identify as black Caribbean on formal surveys.

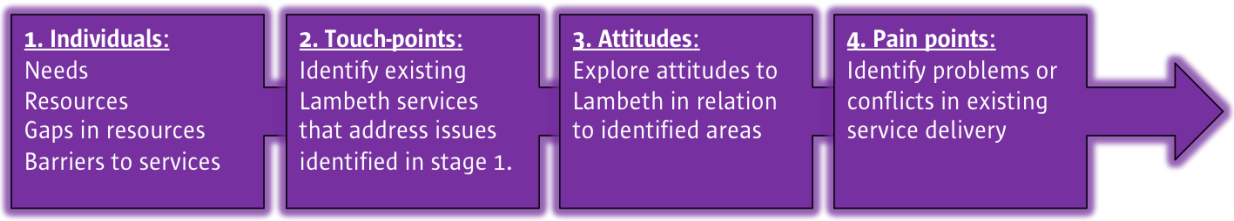
Appendix A shows a list of the respondents who took part in the study.

Fieldwork: Researchers spent a full day with respondents and in respondents' homes, workplaces or out and about.

Each researcher used a topic guide to ensure that core research questions were covered (mainly focussing on the use of, interactions with, and attitudes towards, Lambeth services). Beyond this, researchers allowed the respondents themselves to structure conversations and to describe and demonstrate their daily routines and needs in their own way. In many cases, researchers were able to observe respondents first-hand, visiting or receiving certain public services in Lambeth (for example, a transitional housing project, a job centre, and a health visitor).

Analysis: Post-fieldwork, all of the researchers convened in two analysis workshops to share data and explore the themes that emerged from the research.

Themes were structured according to an analysis framework designed specifically to explore the relationships between respondents' use of services and their subsequent attitudes towards them. The framework pushed researchers to structure data into the following process of analysis:



The findings from these stages were then discussed and analysed through the lens of different factors (including, but not limited to, ethnicity) to try and understand why black Caribbean respondents might have a more negative view of Lambeth's services.

3.0 Housing dissatisfaction: A common cause?

As we have already discussed, housing services emerge in both quantitative survey data and here, in our qualitative study, as being a primary source of dissatisfaction among Lambeth's black Caribbean residents. In this section we outline the detail behind headline figures, revealing why it is that people may be feeling the way they do.

3.1 Running repairs

Nina lives in a three bedroom council house in Streatham with 4 of her children. The eldest girl has a bedroom in a converted reception room downstairs. Her middle and youngest daughters share a room upstairs – and the middle sister's twin brother has a small room to himself. In order to provide a personal sense of space for the two girls sharing a room, Nina has painted the walls in two different colours, one for each side of the room.

Downstairs, Nina employed a neighbour to install a stone floor at a cut-down price. And the garden has been turned into a productive allotment. She is nothing if not innovative with the space she has.

But she is not happy.

Nina's property has a problem with damp. She says that the stone floors she put in were expensive but had become necessary to stop the damage that the damp was causing. Black mould covers window frames in the front of the house and Nina worries about the effect on her children's health.

She insists that despite constant communication with the council ('Lambeth Living' here being seen as the council by proxy) and even visits by council appointed builders, the problem remains. She has little confidence that it will be solved soon.

Nina's complaint was far from unique. A number of our respondents had been similarly let down by the length of time it took to receive help with home repairs. For Mervyn, a 55-year-old man living in Brixton, it had taken more than a year to arrange for the back of his council property to be repaired and renovated. For Martha, a part-time employed, single mother and full-time carer for her own elderly mother who suffers from diabetes, the wait for home improvements

and adaptations had been so long and the need so great, that she had paid for own materials and set about some DIY. She was still fighting with the council to get some of the money back and to have debris cleared from her back garden.

In Martha's case the issue was compounded by the fact that her neighbours had recently had repairs and maintenance carried out on their council property. She immediately compared her situation to theirs', saying that while she didn't suspect that there was anything personal in the fact that she had not had her property seen to, she did think it was unfair and arbitrary. She had even tried to talk to the workmen who were working on her neighbours house, she says, to try and persuade them to come to her property next, but they had told her that they just went where they were told and had no say in where to go next.

It is important to note that Martha did not know the reality of her neighbour's situation and was not in a position to be able to judge the length of time they had had to wait, or the severity of the need for repairs. The more relevant issue is perhaps the way this example demonstrates how a single instance of perceived poor service can escalate to a more general perception that housing services overall are delivered in an arbitrary and unfair way.

During research, these kinds of stories were numerous, and bred contempt. The obvious issues to do with housing resources, timeliness of repairs and renovations aside, it is worth remembering the effect that such stories can have on more general impressions of council services.

When residents share negative stories of experiences of Lambeth's services, they reinforce negative views more widely in a community.

When our respondents share stories of Lambeth Council with friends and in social settings, it may well be these stories that come up. They become mutually reinforcing of negative views.

3.2 Responsiveness and communication

Along with the problems with repairs, a number of respondents described having problems communicating with housing services. Much of the time, these experiences were no more than a simple matter of timeliness. They would report a need for repairs, for example, and would not hear back again for some time.

On other occasions the complaints were more about the specific ways in which they had been spoken to or about the lack of clarity in the way that information was provided.

Martha's case was a particularly striking example of this. She had spent most of her life as a council tenant in Brixton and for more than a decade had been living on the same

road. *"I know all of the people in the housing office,"* she explained, *"but I still feel like every time I go in there I have to explain everything about myself from scratch. I don't think it's their fault necessarily. It seems to be about the fact that the rules are always changing and they always have to go through some new process. But what it means is that my situation, which is complicated, never seems to go in."*

In fact, Martha's housing situation was unusually complicated. Her property had been registered in the name of her father who had long since passed away. Martha had been involved for some time in a dispute over her right to remain in the property due to complications over whose name her tenancy should now be in (her elderly mother's or her own). She felt that though she understood exactly why the bureaucracy was proving difficult, but that she was not able to make the facts compatible with the *system.*

Ola, a 46 year old woman, who has lived in the same council property for over 20 years, told a similar story. A few years previously she had a debilitating illness. During the illness her mobility was severely affected and she still suffers some ongoing problems with her movement as a result. She had tried to apply to move to a ground floor flat, because the flat that she lived in had flights of stairs that were difficult for her to negotiate. She says that she never got a response to her application, and that with the pressures of taking care of a schizophrenic son, and the illness itself, she did not have the energy to follow up. She is still living in the same property now.

Similarly, Natasha, a 21 year old who lives alone in a small council property, feels hard done by in terms of repairs and service, although she knows she is lucky to have received access to a property as she sees her friends struggle to access similar housing support. Her property is in a poor

state of repair and she says bluntly that it does not offer value for money in terms of the rent she pays. She says that her specific requests for repair and maintenance go unanswered and that the onus is on her to chase everything up.

Several of our other respondents also complained about having to make follow-up calls to try and ensure the council keeps to promises and appointments. All felt that communications could be improved with simple instructions, agreements and then proper follow up.

Natasha's response perhaps perfectly sums up the effect that problems with the delivery of housing services can have on overall perceptions of, or attitudes to, the council: "*The council doesn't do anything for me*".

To a great extent, the problems with maintenance and communication described above are individual stories that would not necessarily stand out in the wider context of Lambeth Living's resource management and planning. But other issues did seem to have broader implications.

In the following sections we will look at the perceptions our respondents had of housing in Lambeth that suggest the existence of a discourse being used *across* a *community* or certain section of the community.

3.4 Perceptions on Transparency

Steven is a recovering drug addict living in a transitional housing scheme in Stockwell. His recovery programme involves taking a number of steps to build a positive future. One of these steps has involved making an application for housing to Lambeth Council. He was helped by key workers at the project to navigate the online applications process.

Residents worried about the housing allocation system. It seemed arbitrary and unfair.

He perceived the process as lacking transparency. For example, he has concerns that the application was made online rather than face-to-face. And, although he was grateful for the opportunity of being able to apply for housing at all, he was sceptical of the points system, well aware that his initial points allocation offered him little hope of receiving housing in the near future. His suspicions were compounded by the fact that communications took such a long time. He interpreted this as the council being in no particular rush to find him housing. In fact, of course, he may well have been experiencing nothing more than 'normal service'.

Despite the council's points system the issue of allocation, in particular, seemed to be the one that raised the greatest concerns about a lack of transparency. This research would

by no means be the first to reveal that those seeking council housing draw comparisons between their own unmet needs and the seemingly arbitrary prioritisation of others, but it bears repeating here, as it was reiterated by our respondents.

Simon, a 53 year old council tenant, stated that he agrees with 'the National Front' [sic] about housing. He felt that 'indigenous people' wait on the waiting list for years and then foreigners (specifically 'Africans') come in as asylum seekers and 'get a brand new property within 3 months'. "Well," he said, "*you don't get asylum seekers coming from the Caribbean, whereas most African countries fit into that category. That's one of the worst things the council does. People should protest. They should put people in hostels. Asylum seekers get preferential treatment. People come in and within weeks know the ins and outs of the system as people are here to set them up and to help them… Other people are born here and don't know these things.*" In contrast, he argued, the Caribbean community is not organised. He doesn't know of any Caribbean associations and thinks he would have to go to the CAB for advice.

Letty who is 25 and works full time as a care manager, described in detail her experience with a shared ownership scheme and was extremely angry having gone through a process she felt was not only lengthy but had been miss-sold to her. Letty said the scheme was advertised for people earning under £60,000 but it required a minimum salary of £30,000. In her view most young people couldn't meet the £30,000 threshold. She felt that working young people, like her, were a forgotten group. She contrasted this with those who may not be working or who are young and pregnant. She recounts the story of a friend who was in a hostel for two years with a child and now has a two-bedroom flat. She said that for her, the Citizens Advice Bureau was a waste of time, telling her she had to continue staying with her parents. She questioned why she had to share when she had done all the right things, like going on to university and finding a full-time job.

Respondents variously argued that neighbours, immigrants and asylum seekers, single and young mothers and criminals were all given housing and housing services whilst they remained in need, and without. Comments like these are not unique to the black Caribbean community, or to Lambeth, and are not only reflected more widely in the country (as ESRO's own research has made clear elsewhere[2]) but also in the media and even in the rhetoric of elected politicians. Whatever the truth of the matter, the belief that housing services are distributed arbitrarily can lead to an attitude, among those who are in receipt of, or in need of, Lambeth's housing services that is less positive than those who are not.

In fact, some of our respondents had already taken steps to try and 'use' the system (as they understood it) to their advantage; for example, by using transitional housing as a way of securing a long term housing solution. At least three of our respondents had found housing in Lambeth for older children by allowing them to move out of home and into hostels (especially where there were disputes and breakdowns in relationships at home). From there, the children were able to apply for permanent housing with a greater number of housing points than if they had stayed at home. This is not to say that anyone believed they were doing anything underhand, rather that they understood this to be the system itself.

3.5 Shortage and affordability

The twin issues of there being a shortage of council housing supply and the difficulty of finding affordable housing in the private rental or buying market are, as we all know, widespread. Nonetheless they are of particular importance in inner London, and to that section of society that has grown

[2] "Just Coping" (ESRO & SILK, 2008)

up in, or is reliant on, council housing. For our black Caribbean respondents, the issues were acute and play a large part in their understanding of the council's housing provision and services.

For some, it had led to quite positive reflections on their luck at being able to live in council owned housing at all. Nina, for example, despite the problems she had experienced in receiving repairs and maintenance, still felt proud of her home, and deeply connected into the community around her. She certainly did not aspire to moving into the private sector.

Terrence, a 75 year old, has lived in the private sector in South London for most of his life. During that time he was employed and was able to afford the rent and did not consider council accommodation, although technically it had been an option for him. However, health problems mean that he has been living in a one bedroom, council flat for the last 15/16 years. He is very happy with the flat and said he would not move even if he "won the lottery". In contrast to others, he has not felt the need to contact the housing services apart from the odd repair and spoke highly of the service he has received.

Likewise Mervyn, a 55 year old, long term council resident, spoke positively about the council's ability to house those in need and cited a story about a friend who had come from America and found himself homeless who had been given sheltered accommodation.

These respondents were fortunate to be in a position in which their use of council housing was fairly secure. For others though, the shortage of available housing was a structural problem that was beginning to affect life choices. Steven, for example, was planning his future employment possibilities in the light of his immediate housing needs (and the difficulty of his obtaining council housing), rather than being able to think of the long-term options that may have given greater long term financial gain and security. Martha too spoke of how she had grown up in a very Caribbean neighbourhood that was rapidly changing as friends and neighbours found themselves having to move away from Lambeth to find housing.

Whilst it was not clear how exactly current council housing shortages might be directly related to views of the council, it is clear that they played a role in the changing nature of the black Caribbean community in Lambeth (discussed in more detail below). In turn, these changes may well play a part in the specifically Caribbean experience of life in Lambeth, and of the services Lambeth council provides.

3.6 Conclusions

One of the prevailing attitudes coming from our respondents that council officers need to be mindful of, is that which seems to say: "*There are services out there that I can't seem to get at – but other people can.*" Coupled with this, researchers noted, and in contrast to other essential resources such as employment, many of our respondents brought with them a sense of *entitlement* to housing. They felt that, for whatever reason, they had a *right* to receive housing services and housing itself from the council. Where these expectations had not been met, respondents were more likely to be negative about the council in general.

"There are services out there that I can't seem to get at – but other people can."

Respondents highlighted specific problems with communication, with the perceived lack of transparency and arbitrariness of housing allocation systems, the shortage of available housing options and with the timeliness and effectiveness of housing maintenance services.

Many of the issues raised however, need not be seen as applying specifically to the black Caribbean community. They might well equally apply to other ethnic groups, or indeed council tenants as a whole, regardless of ethnicity.

We know the black Caribbean community in Lambeth are over-represented in council owned properties, but as mentioned previously, black African and Portuguese residents have similarly high levels of council tenure, but are not associated with such high levels of dissatisfaction. The insight gathered suggests that black Caribbean residents, as more settled communities, may feel a greater sense of entitlement to these services than other groups. This sense of unmet expectations, along with other issues (discussed later in the report), together may be key in driving dissatisfaction. Indeed we explore this issue in more detail on p42 where we cover intergenerational issues.

4.0 Care services: A significant interface

Like housing, care services present another critical interface between residents (citizens) and state services. Some of these services, such as health visitors, are not necessarily delivered by the council. Nevertheless, the ways in which they are provided are often local, and receipt of them is often understood in the general context of the delivery of public services, in which Lambeth council plays a part.

One of the striking findings during research was the relatively high level of care service use amongst our respondents (although it is worth reiterating that the respondents were not selected to be representative). The needs of people who used social and care services undoubtedly and unsurprisingly influenced the choices and opportunities that those people enjoyed. Employment options and housing options, for example, were significantly altered by the need for care to delivered at home.

Again, although seemingly not specifically related to the attitudes people held towards Lambeth Council, people's care needs nonetheless played a part in the general perception of council support. For policy makers and officers at a local level, the important lesson is that people's care needs, even those not within the remit of Lambeth Council, can (and do) affect the ways in which people judge other services that *are* delivered by the council.

Residents are living with unseen and complex needs. They spoke of care services being too bureaucratic, unable to adapt to the specific details of their individual cases.

The point is perhaps best illustrated by an example. At the time of writing, one of Ola's sons is currently being looked after in a full-care institution in South London for his schizophrenia. He is due to be transitioned out of this institution and back into Ola's house, or into suitable transitional housing, very soon. Ola is worried about the transition process, and the implications for her son. She feels that she has been given few options and little information around how her son will receive support and care once out of the institution. Perhaps due to her bad experiences in trying to secure suitable housing for her own mobility issues, she feels that the council: "*don't know how to deal with the disabled.*" These feelings were compounded by her sense of stigma at having had to apply for disability living allowance benefits, and the embarrassment at not being able to work. For Ola then, although the primary sources of care and support were the DWP and the institution that housed her son, issues came back to housing and employment at a local level.

As we have already seen, Martha's mother also had increasing care needs. Her mobility was being restricted by complications arising from her diabetes, and she was becoming housebound. Martha had already taken part-time (rather than full-time) work and much of her time off was spent taking care of her mother, managing visits by the health visitor, shopping, cleaning and cooking. Between these duties, and the need to look after her bright and ambitious daughter, Martha had had little choice but to accept the lower wages of part-time work. But it was also precisely these seemingly external, non-council related factors that had also led her to believe that she should have been prioritised by Lambeth's housing services.

4.1 Unseen and complex needs

Ola's struggles with mobility had entitled her to meals-on-wheels services. She said that the first time the meal came to her door she was surprised to find only *one* hot plate of food. Her own mobility issues, after all, meant that she is as unable to cook for her children as for herself. She says that when she pointed this out to Lambeth, she was referred to children's services. However, since the decision to provide her with meals-on-wheels was made by an assessment from *adult* services, they were not able to help. To Ola, the problem, the need and the solution were all perfectly obvious, but bureaucracy was getting in the way. The 'system' was simply unable to take account of the relatively simple subtleties of Ola's individual case.

Respondents spoke of childcare services in similar ways. Whilst *any* childcare service was appreciated, it was felt that there is a lack of affordable and flexible options. In specific, very few childcare services gave mothers the opportunity to find work. Childcare hours very rarely reflected working hours – and services were not flexible enough to be able to do so. Again, this is a problem that is not unique to Lambeth[3], but nevertheless is interpreted as a failure of Lambeth service delivery on the ground.

During research we met one elderly respondent, Terrence, who had been able to bypass these kinds of problems of receiving services through impersonal bureaucracy. He was using a *personal budget* to access the cleaning services he needed. However, the personal budget system had raised a new set of problems. Terrence had to cancel the cleaning contract he had set up, after feeling that he was being overcharged for the service. He complained that he lacked the necessary negotiating skills to be able to set up the right arrangements.

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[3] *"The London Childcare Market"* London Development Agency, February 2011

Another elderly resident trying to cope on his own had a similar story. Kingsly had finished off paying the mortgage for his house bought under the right-to-buy scheme. Kingsly and his wife are both in poor health and live on a state pension and small private pensions. As he sat next to the neatly organised tablets he takes four times a day, he explained how rising prices are a worry for him. He is worried about his next gas bill that he doesn't know how he will pay. His last bill was bigger than expected and he had to make arrangements to pay in instalments. Despite this, he says, he won't claim Council Tax Benefit because of a bad experience when he tried to previously.

He had been advised to claim but found the form difficult to complete and had to get help. But what really hurt him was that when he went to Olive Morris House six weeks after handing in the form, he was told they couldn't find it. He feels that the person who he gave it to just forgot about it and that he was viewed as a 'load of trouble'. He was so upset that he hasn't dared to fill in another and he says he will not go back to Olive Morris House.

In Terrence's and Kingsly's cases it is not clear whether the problems would ever have come to light, were it not for the research itself. Sometimes needs and issues, like this, especially those relating to care needs, do remain hidden. For example, during research Mervyn revealed that he felt depressed. He had not been diagnosed with depression, but was struggling to find employment, suffering the humiliation of a failed business and was separated from family. It was clear that he was being sincere about his feelings. Researchers also felt that Natasha, young and isolated, may have benefitted from some kind of mental health services intervention, but her troubles with coping on her own may be going largely unnoticed. The only way in which Natasha might have presented herself as in need of more support would be through her complaints about the standard of her housing.

4.2 Young people in care

Several of our respondents had experience of young people's care and accommodation services, either because they themselves had lived in care when they were younger or because they had children who had moved into temporary accommodation or hostels. Steven had spent some time living with foster parents when he was younger, for example. Whilst he describes minor disagreements with his foster parents at first, he has no serious complaints. Nor does he attribute his time in care to his later problems with drugs and crime, although he does describe having a difficult relationship with his mother (with whom he has had very little communication for most of his life).

For other families in our study, domestic and family problems had meant that children had moved out of the family home and into temporary accommodation. Mervyn describes this move for his eldest daughter as being part of her education about how tough it is to live on your own. He says that she moved back into the family home fairly quickly. For Nina's eldest daughter too, the move into temporary hostel accommodation had been seen as a stepping stone to finding more permanent housing, and an immediate solution to the need for personal space as she became older.

In these latter cases then, young people's care and accommodation services were seen as inherently undesirable and sub-standard. They were specifically being used as such, to encourage or gain further (more permanent) accommodation solutions.

4.3 Stigma, judgement and care services

For others, the issue of receiving care services, revolved around the management of the social stigma that arises from doing so. This finding reinforces those of previous ESRO research for Kent county council called "Just Coping"[4] in which we found that families living on low incomes often tried to keep state social services at arm's length, for fear of the judgement of others. Here too, a distinction was drawn by our respondents between those services which sought to 'intervene' in their lives, potentially bringing social stigma and shame; and those which sought to 'support', answering requests for help and minimising the potentially stigmatising effect of unwanted assessment and intrusion.

[4] http://www.esro.co.uk/html/esro/kentpub.html

Unsurprisingly, those services that were seen as 'interventions' were described negatively, whilst those that offered support garnered more positive reactions. Steven, for example, was very impressed with the support services offered at the drug rehabilitation housing project he lived in (a service delivered in partnership between Lambeth, Blenheim Community Drug Project. (CDP) and National Association for the Care and Resettlement of Offenders (NACRO). But this was a service that he himself had actively asked for.

The distinction was most clearly drawn by Simon's wife, who had sought help from care services when suffering from post-natal depression: "*I needed them very badly that one time, but they paid me no mind…I was depressed and I needed their help. I wouldn't contact them in the future.*"

She also described an incident where she took their daughter to the hospital for a minor accident that resulted in social workers visiting her very shortly afterwards. She sent them away as they were not needed then. She noted the irony that they were there when they were not welcome but not available when she needed them for post natal depression.

4.4 Conclusions

For some of Lambeth's black Caribbean residents the role and delivery of care services are significant in their perceptions of the council overall. As with housing services, this may reflect that black Caribbean residents are greater users than those from other ethnic minority groups and it may be more useful to look at potential negative attitudes through a different lens than ethnicity.

However, whether there is specificity to the black Caribbean respondent's experiences or not, we can see that care needs play a part in peoples' attitudes to all support services (including those not directly delivering care, such as housing). Furthermore, whilst risk assessment and duties of care must clearly be paramount in the delivery of care services, our evidence suggests that there are consequences in terms of creating social stigma for those who are seeking help and this in turn may create a barrier for those seeking support from the council.

5.0 Caribbean spaces: Safety and support

Despite the findings of the Ethnicity Report, we found little evidence among our respondents that people were not using, or interested in using, outside spaces. Quantitative findings that black Caribbean residents were less likely to be using Lambeth's parks, for example, may be a red-herring, since parks were demonstrably not the only kinds of outdoor spaces in Lambeth that our respondents considered. In fact 'space', both inside and out, emerged as being important to many. For some this was expressed as concern, and the need for more housing space, especially as children got older. But for others, there was a clear desire to make use of the outside spaces around their homes. Some even described this as being part of a doorstep culture that was derived particularly from Caribbean (or Jamaican) culture.

The use of spaces outside of the home immediately raised two issues in particular: 1) community safety and, 2) the changing nature of what were traditionally 'Caribbean' community hubs and spaces, such as Brixton market.

The question of the use of outside space also threw up one of the more interesting and unexpected findings of the research; that quite a number of our respondents had created 'mini-allotments' or vegetable gardens in the outside spaces that attached to their properties.

For some, media reports of gangs and violence can be frightening. One elderly resident said that he was scared to leave his home.

5.1 Community Safety

Whatever the truth of crime statistics, there was a general perception among our respondents (especially those with children) that there had been a decline in community safety both recently and in comparison with a more generalised past.

For some, like Kingsly and Terrence, two elderly residents living in the south of the borough, the perception of a decline in community safety was clearly linked to media reports of gangs and shootings. Kingsly said that he feared leaving his homes as a result, while Terrence feared opening his door in the evening. Similarly the impact of extreme single events (such as the recent shooting of 5 year old Thusha Kamaleswaran on Stockwell road) whilst not directly related to the lives of the residents we studied, nevertheless created the impression of declining community safety and lawlessness.

For others, the perception of community safety was based on more immediate, tangible personal experience. More than one respondent, for example, spoke about the openness of drug dealing in Brixton Town centre and felt that this was something that the council should take responsibility for, especially, one respondent pointed out, as the windows of the town hall directly overlook much of this activity. They described having been offered drugs themselves, but worried more for the safety of their children, especially teenagers. Riding on the bus through Brixton with Nina, for example, provoked a tirade against the sheer audacity of the drug dealers around Brixton station, as she pointed out of the windows of the top deck.

This proximity to crime had an effect both on respondent's perceptions of community safety but also on their individual lives. Nicola, a young woman living in Tulse Hill had had many brushes with the law and knew of people who had been in (or were currently in) prison. Steven too, had spent time in prison after getting in trouble when he was younger. Those respondents with teenage children all felt that negotiating their own children away from criminal activities and troublesome peers, was a very immediate concern (as we shall see below) rather than expressing abstract fears of crimes they had read about on the news.

While it may be legitimate to say that where crime is involved, responsibility lies more with the local police than with the council, there is a greyer area around the notion of 'anti-social behaviour'. The stories we heard from one or two respondents about appeals to the police not being answered certainly seemed to suggest that there is still a public perception that communication between the police and Lambeth Council's own anti-social behavior team could be improved and there is limited awareness of the existing mechanisms in place available to residents to report anti-social and their concerns around community safety.

5.2 Children and young people

In terms of safety, young people and children were seen as especially vulnerable. Martha was unequivocal: "*The schools around here are rough. I wouldn't send my daughter to the local schools. Her father pays for her to go to a Catholic school in Southwark. I have no doubt she is getting a better education there.*" Martha, in particular, felt that the influence of 'rough kids' in a Lambeth school would get in the way of the ambitions she had for her daughter. She placed a primary importance on her daughter's education and was unwilling to take a 'risk' (as she saw it) with the local schools.

Nina was less worried about the school that her children went to, suggesting that it had 'changed beyond all

recognition' in recent years. She also felt that her children could and would support each other if there were any trouble. But she did worry about the fact that her son wanted to play football, because, she said, there are no safe places to play. She lived relatively close to Streatham Common, but felt that it was not a safe place for teenage boys to be playing. Instead she took her son to play in the grounds used by a nearby, Croydon run, school. But even then, she said, the school was designed for "*the misfits… you know the bad kids who have been sent out of other places.*[5]"

On the other side of the proverbial fence, Steven described having run with gangs when he was younger living on the borders of Streatham and Brixton. He didn't blame anyone for his misdeeds but he did describe an atmosphere in which it was all too easy, at school age, to get into trouble, stealing and robbing.

Others talked more generally about the lack of things to do for young people and the fact that this left them on the streets (a common refrain that can be heard in many parts of the country of course). More importantly though, some described having grown up in Lambeth, at a time when much more of life happened outside, and that, as children, they played in the streets safely. Martha was adamant that there was no way that she wanted her daughter to be hanging around outside in the same way that she had done in her youth.

5.3 Outside spaces and vegetable gardens

Despite the sometimes well-worn narratives around crime and decline in community safety however, our researchers nevertheless observed that respondents did in fact move quite freely around Lambeth. Indeed, in some cases, respondents met friends and acquaintances whilst out and about suggesting that far from being a terrifying space defined by crime, Lambeth's streets could also be quite social where people would run into others that they knew. Nina was heavily involved in local community activities, for example, and walking the streets around her house it seemed that she had a passing acquaintance with all who walked by. The same was true of Mervyn. He described his home life as lonely but was able to share words with several people on a short walk into Brixton town centre from his home. Nicola also stopped to greet a lot of people on her daily walk to the Caribbean shop to buy ingredients to make lunch; some who she knew from growing up in the area, others were people that she knew well from working at the local doctor's surgery as a receptionist.

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[5] We assume that Nina is referring to one of Croydon's Pupil Referral Units that is located close to where she lives.

Similarly, a number of respondents expressed the desire to spend more time outside and a (perhaps nostalgic) return to the days in which people used to 'hang out' on their doorsteps and in the streets together. In fact, as Martha said, the fact that people seem to do that less nowadays may be less down to fear of crime than to the fact that neighbourhoods are increasingly heterogeneous in terms of ethnicity and income, and that there just isn't such a strong 'Caribbean' flavour to them anymore.

Perhaps more surprisingly was the fact that 11 of our 18 respondents had made innovative use of the outside spaces attached to their homes. Gardens had become allotments, and vegetables and herbs were being grown to supplement household groceries and to share with friends and neighbours. For Terrence, even a small amount of balcony space afforded the opportunity to grow vegetables.

When Kingsly was in work he travelled the country in a delivery van and used the opportunity when out in the countryside to buy fresh vegetables and eggs for the family. Now he is no longer in work he grows food in his garden, and proudly showed off his runner beans and courgettes. For the past seven years he has also had an allotment in a neighbouring borough where he can grow a few more things: potatoes, peas and corn. But it's also a place to socialise and to get out of the house and into the fresh air. He's worried that with his deteriorating health he will have to give it up soon.

Both Mervyn and Nina had also turned their gardens into quite magnificent vegetable patches and nurseries. They both shared food with friends and neighbours and supplemented their weekly shops. And for both, the economic value was enhanced by the emotional and social good they also derived from the activity. Nina had personal

associations with certain plants and spaces, and Mervyn felt productive while not working for example.

Our study took place with far too small a sample of respondents to draw firm conclusions about whether or not the practice was common in, or indeed specific to, the black Caribbean community. Nonetheless, 11 out of 18 respondents is a surprisingly high proportion, and may point to the potential for developing or supporting community programmes that promote this behaviour as being both healthy and economic.

Furthermore, the fact that people had taken such time and care in their own outside spaces seems to reinforce the idea of the importance of outside space to the community we were studying, and demonstrates the ingenuity inherent in at least part of Lambeth's population.

5.4 Housing space

Whilst the respondents we saw had made good use of outside space and generally saw 'lack of space' as being tied to a lack of 'safe space', inside space was more commonly raised in relation to an issue of scarcity. Ironically, we did meet respondents for whom the legacy of family break-up or change had meant that they now lived in properties that afforded more personal space than was perhaps needed. But for others, especially families with young children, pressures on inside space in terms of being able to provide bedrooms to teenagers or being able to adapt spaces to account for mobility or care needs, had become an issue.

Simon's family, for example, lived in a crowded 3 bedroom property. In the living room there is a 3 piece suite, 4-seater dining table, large TV, drum set and overflowing shelving filled with books and a music system. Upstairs, Simon's 7 year old and 18 year daughters share a small room.

This perceived problem further fed into narratives about immigrants with large families taking all of the available family housing space, and of the general shortage of housing options in Lambeth.

5.5 Caribbean cultural spaces

Brixton town centre has long been associated with Caribbean culture, from the greens and yellows of the market, to the reggae sounds, the names of the streets and squares, and the cafes and restaurants selling curried goat and Jamaican patties. But Brixton is changing. In recent years the famous covered markets have been refurbished and revamped. What was once a distinctly Caribbean market now plays home to Italian Delicatessens, organic restaurants

and boutique fashion shops. Property prices in the area have risen fast as wealthier populations, often not of Caribbean descent, move in. Brixton still has Caribbean flavours but they now vie with many others.

Martha vividly described these changes, remembering the trips she used to make with her mother to the various Caribbean shops in the market to buy different types of food that reminded her mother of Jamaica. Now she must make the trips on her own. Her mother is housebound, and can do no more than issue a list of instructions about what shops to visit and what foods to buy. But, Martha says, her mother wants her to pass on greetings to shopkeepers that are no longer there. The number of Caribbean shops has declined, and her routine is increasingly confined to one or two shops rather than the whole market.

Martha says that the street where she lives has seen the same shift. Growing up in the neighbourhood, everyone was black Caribbean. But no longer. Families have moved out, looking for more space further away, where house prices are lower. In their place, white families and young professionals now surround her home. "The sense of community is different," she says, with no malice, just as a simple matter of fact.

Growing up in the neighbourhood, everyone was black Caribbean. But no longer. Families have moved out, looking for more space further away, where house prices are lower.

Kingsly, who has lived in Lambeth since the 1960s,tells a slightly different story. Sitting below a picture of Bob Marley, he talks about there being a strong Caribbean community in his younger days, which came together especially around family occasions, such as birthday parties, weddings and christenings. But he feels that it was never just one community, and that Caribbean people have always mixed a lot. He has many English friends. He says there are still Caribbean community events, but he no longer goes, and he seldom mixes with friends, but this is because his family is so large and come together frequently at his home.

One or two of our other respondents were less hopeful about the changes: "*Yeah, there is money coming into Brixton. But it is being spent on the middle classes and the things* ***they*** *like.*" These respondents focussed on the fact that houses were now too expensive, new shops were aimed at wealthier shoppers and in one case, that the refurbished 'Ritzy' cinema was unaffordable.

However, not all of our respondents were equally affected. For Sarah, a 27 year old young professional working in a communications agency in Brixton, the changes were not unnoticed but were less of a cause for concern. She argued that those who know Brixton but don't live there haven't really noticed the changes, presumably because there is still enough Caribbean life going on. But for her, changes meant better food and more options for her 'trendy' lifestyle. Sarah,

unlike others we spoke to, was enjoying and taking part in the new Brixton, able to take part in the nightlife afforded by new bars and restaurants.

Sherry, a young entrepreneur running a music business on Coldharbour Lane, also appreciated the new options for lunch that now surrounded her business. She too felt that Brixton had not changed in any detrimental way. Interestingly, as she said this to our researcher, her assistant chipped in that her Jamaican grandparents had lived in Brixton for years and years and loved going out in the market but had commented recently on the fact that there were fewer and fewer Caribbean places to go to.

One space that has been less affected perhaps, are the spaces within people's homes, especially kitchens. Socialising for Letty, for example, was largely around Caribbean culture in terms of Caribbean cooking and entertaining. The primary social space was the home she shared with her parent's and in particular the kitchen and living room. As we have mentioned elsewhere, others also saw the Caribbean culture they were a part of as being expressed through food. But it is interesting that these kinds of cultural moments are largely private, whilst the number of public spaces declines.

We are left with two pictures then. On the one hand there are black Caribbean residents who feel excluded by the gentrification of what they saw as traditional 'Caribbean spaces', who feel that the process of 'improvement' has also been a process of de-Caribbeanisation and exclusion. And on the other there are those who can afford the new shops and services, who see improvements and new opportunities. The interesting question, is whether it is more likely to be those in the first group that are more likely to be those that have scored lower in terms of satisfaction with Lambeth's services.

5.6 Third sector and Caribbean community sector

During the recruitment stage of research, our researchers noted that there was a surprising lack of specifically Caribbean community services that we could contact to find potential respondents. This was surprising. Lambeth, and especially Brixton, has the reputation as being a Caribbean cultural centre, and yet (especially in comparison with other ethnic strongholds in the capital) there seemed to be a lack of an ethnic third-sector infrastructure.

That said, for most of our respondents, this lack of a third sector was not necessarily top of their list of needs. Respondents did not, for the most part, call for there to be more. However, this did not mean that a more robust Caribbean third sector infrastructure might not be welcomed.

During research we followed one respondent on one of her frequent visits to a local time-banking project, where she was receiving a lot of support in terms of finding work, and learning management and community support skills. At this project, we met Dave, a long time black Caribbean Lambeth resident. In the past, he said, there had been a lot of Caribbean organisations. He, and his father before him, had been quite involved. They included community centres, clubs for the elderly and support groups. But, he said, most of these had now gone. His view was echoed by the woman who ran the time-bank, also a Caribbean Lambeth resident. She argued that there had been a number of accusations of financial mismanagement of these charities, and that when they had closed, there were few who were willing to step in and fill the gap. It is perhaps interesting that this very absence of Caribbean community services had afforded the opportunity for one of our other respondents to describe her own community project as "the only Caribbean run, community project in Lambeth".

There is a lot of evidence (both from Census-style demographic data and more qualitative studies[6]) that second and third generation black Caribbean residents in the UK are becoming more and more likely to identify themselves as black British, rather than as black Caribbean. And data on 'mixed marriages' also suggests that black Caribbean populations are becoming less easy to define and identify. These data may suggest a reason for the decline in the number of people who are likely to see a need for specifically black Caribbean community and third sector services and organisations.

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[6] See for example, research by Warwick University: http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/med/research/csri/ethnicityhealth/aspects_diversity/concepts/ and http://tinyurl.com/5wnuj82

However, whilst we might be able to explain the decline in number, through a general lack of a perception of need, or even a decline in the number of people who self-identify as black Caribbean, there were nonetheless respondents among our sample, who feared that black Caribbean people were subject to discrimination, and could benefit from representation. They felt that young black men in particular were targeted and feared in society, that young black Caribbean people were still discriminated against in the job market and that many in the black Caribbean community struggled with low wages and poor educational opportunities. One respondent also suggested that the black Caribbean community still had needs but had fallen off the political agenda so that resources were more likely to be spent on other ethnic minorities: "*It's de-motivating*," she said, "*trying to start something up is difficult. And let's face it – I am not likely to get the funding in the end anyway.*"

Such views came in varying degrees; some respondents were angry, others mentioned it only casually, in passing, and without reference to any specific need. For others it never arose.

But there is another way of looking at the issue. During analysis researchers collated a list of the resources that our respondents drew upon in their daily lives, from family and friends, to churches and employers: a kind of map of social

capital. What was interesting about this map, was the relative lack of resources that specifically supported some of the more pressing needs identified by the research, such as employment, housing and community space. Furthermore, the list included very few (if any) specifically Caribbean resources[7]. In other words, whilst there was little explicit demand for black Caribbean community service resources, that is not to say that such services might not provide benefits if they did exist. Discrimination might be tackled through active representation for example, and lack of access to employment opportunities among young black Caribbean residents might be addressed by black Caribbean employment services, or organisations that are able to build more and lasting connections with employers on behalf of black Caribbean residents.

As a final point, the lack of a third sector infrastructure feeds into the points made in the previous section about the decline in Caribbean specific spaces and the weakening of an identifiably black Caribbean culture in Lambeth. It may also increase the feeling, stated by some of our respondents, that changes and investments made in Lambeth, are rarely made with the black Caribbean community in mind.

5.7 Conclusion

The idea of Caribbean spaces emerged as a surprisingly dominant theme in our research. From the innovative use of garden spaces, to the desire for identifiably Caribbean cultural spaces in the face of decline, 'private and public spaces' emerged as an interesting set of discourses around which to think about the black Caribbean experience in Lambeth.

Some of our respondents were clearly feeling the decline in identifiably Caribbean cultural spaces, particularly in Brixton. And this, along with the decline in the number of dedicated services that might create and perpetuate such a space, may be contributing to the feeling that Lambeth is not supporting the black Caribbean community. For others, the processes by which these changes were happening (rising house prices, rising rents, gentrification and regeneration) had crept up on them, changing the cultural landscape slowly. As one member of the research team put it: "It is as if some of the respondents had taken a Caribbean community and culture in Lambeth for granted and simply failed to notice it disappearing until many things had already gone." The point is interesting. It raises all kinds of questions around changing identities and the need for successful ethnic businesses and an active third sector in order to maintain a strong ethnically based community culture, especially in the current economic climate.

[7] Black Caribbean dominated churches notwithstanding.

Today, these issues highlight a number of opportunities for Lambeth to think about ways in which it could support the black Caribbean community and also be seen to be investing in the interests of its black Caribbean residents. Investment in, and promotion of a Caribbean third sector is one traditional route that a council might take to better engage with certain populations, but there are also opportunities to think more creatively, and in culturally specific ways. Examples might include looking into opportunities to support black Caribbean community gardens or gardeners, or engagement with Caribbean businesses and/or restoring some of the institutions that have made Brixton an historically iconic Caribbean hub[8].

[8] As an interesting footnote to this point, informal conversations with officers in other London boroughs has revealed that where a borough is home to a significant ethnic group or ethnic community hub, this is being seen as a potential source of tourism, much in the mould of Westminster's Chinatown.

6.0 Employment and worklessness

It has long been recognised that black Caribbean populations are disproportionately affected by worklessness[9]. During our research, respondents expressed concern both for their own employment situations and for the prospects of young black Caribbean people in the future. In fact, the difference in lifestyles between those of our respondents who were employed and those who were not, was striking, although it is likely this is the case for all residents regardless of ethnicity.

The issue of employment of course, is one that is affecting every part of the population given the broader economic context, and is by no means something that should be seen as an issue specific to the black Caribbean population. Nevertheless, some of our findings did suggest that our black Caribbean respondents had particular fears and worries, and that certain factors that affect anyone's chances of finding employment may have a particular resonance within the black Caribbean community.

The job centre was full of customers, many of whom, Mervyn [a resident] noted, were also black Caribbean, and many of whom were regulars.

..unemployment had become a millstone…

6.1 Finding work

For Mervyn, unemployment had become a millstone. A few years ago he had attempted to create a property business venture in the Caribbean but it had fallen through, leaving him in financial difficulties. On return to the UK he had been applying for jobs without success. He describes making endless applications but rarely being offered so much as an interview. He is convinced that his age (55) means that he is not being given a chance, and has all but given up hope. During research, the ethnographers followed Mervyn on one of his routine visits to a local job centre that he used to make phone calls, write applications and use the internet. The centre had become a significant resource for Mervyn, though he felt that many of the jobs that appeared in the daily lists were recycled, and new opportunities were rarer than the daily lists made it seem.

The job centre was full of customers, many of whom, Mervyn noted, were also black Caribbean, and many of whom were regulars. The similarity of the faces and of the

[9] See for example, "*Black Caribbean Young Men's Experiences of Education and Employment"* Fitzgerald et al. (Natcen, 2000) https://www.education.gov.uk/publications/eOrderingDownload/RR186.pdf

jobs on offer added to the fruitless drudgery that Mervyn felt about job searching. It was taking its toll. He openly described to the researchers his growing feelings of depression and the role that unemployment was playing in that.

Whilst Mervyn's case was extreme, finding employment was a concern for others too. For Letty, the grind of eternal job-applications was no less depressing. If Mervyn had thought that his difficulties were based solely on age, he may be wrong. Letty was younger, and yet similarly unable to find a job. Kingsly too expressed great worry about his sons. Three of them had employment that was directly related to the council, and he felt that they were all at risk because of the recent government cuts[10].

6.2 Skills and qualifications

During research, several respondents said they wanted to do certificated courses. Retraining and re-skilling was seen as something that would create more employment opportunities in the future. For example, Martha was working in admin at the time of research but had also enrolled in a catering course and was learning to cook Caribbean food. She hoped to be able to work as a freelance caterer in the future and had already made some tentative steps in that direction. That kind of work would allow her to work at home and look after her mother and daughter.

Nina wanted to attend classes at an adult education centre, gain some qualifications and find some work. As her children had got older and reached the age that they could

[10] An opportunity for further research, would be to explore the extent to which black Caribbean employment patterns have been affected by the recent central and local government cuts, and to explore whether the community has been disproportionately affected.

look after themselves, Nina saw a return to work as a way of improving her living standards.

Both Martha and Nina however, expressed concern that qualifications and training may not lead directly to employment and worried that they may be wasting both time and energy on projects that might not lead to any tangible outcomes.

There is of course, some truth to their fears. Not all qualifications have the same value, and it became clear in the research that there were long-term consequences to under-achievement in school for example, regardless of subsequent certificated qualifications. Nicola is very bright but had poor qualifications, and is stuck doing low paid jobs she doesn't enjoy. Natasha also did not do well at school. She is unemployed and has been looking for work for some time. In fact, job-hunting was the main focus of her life from day-to-day. She used the internet primarily to look for jobs such as agency websites. In the long-term she wanted to train to be a social worker. She has found the job-hunting process very demoralising as she has been looking for work for a long time and had not been successful despite numerous applications. While she was able to access support when she was younger, there is no longer the same level of help available. Most of her days she spends at home, alone, either job-hunting, texting friends or watching TV.

For Sherry, who had left school at 16, there was a long road and several returns to education (including a specific music tech. degree) before she found some success in creating her music company. Letty had also gone to university after her mother pushed her to. She studied marketing. She intended to find a job in events or marketing. However, after a terrible experience on her first full time job after graduating, she left the role and became unemployed for a while. When she returned to work she went into a caring company that her father had once worked for. She has now been promoted to a management post, full time. But the route was not easy.

Retraining and adult education options then, carry some risk and opportunity cost. Steven perhaps expressed this most clearly when he described his options for moving on from the transitional housing he lived in. He said he had two options: (1) Going on to a three year training programme that would enable him to earn more money, more securely, as a specialist builder/engineer, or (2) going to work as a labourer *now*, for much lower and less secure pay, in order to gain enough money to find a home and set himself up in the short term. The decision was a tough one. Thinking in the long term, he well understood the advantages of the first option. But good long-term thinking did not take away the pressures of immediate need.

In sharp contrast, Sarah, who had completed both school and a degree at university now shares a house with ex-university friends and has been developing a strong career in the design industry.

These facts in themselves are interesting, but not necessarily related specifically to the black Caribbean community. Far more interesting perhaps was the fact that Sarah described herself as an 'Oreo'. This is not a term we would want to encourage by any means and we use it *precisely* and *only* because it came up during research. It expresses the idea that someone is 'black on the outside and white on the inside'. The worrying thing about Sarah using the term is that she sees her higher education and subsequent success as being different from the 'black' experience of Lambeth, and more akin to the 'white' one, as if there were a difference in opportunity and achievement, that was related to skin colour. In many ways, Sarah's less tactful description of herself echoes the fears and worries that other respondents had when describing ongoing discrimination, a lack of support for the community and the difficulty of finding employment even with qualifications.

6.3 Social capital and employment opportunities

As we have alluded to in previous sections of this report, one of the key problems for some of our respondents was a lack of connections to people or institutions that might be able to offer routes to work or more secure employment. Those that did, like Sarah and Sherry, were far more likely to have found themselves better employment options. For Natasha, on the other hand, a lack of connections and her poor employment options were self-reinforcing. She felt isolated and unsupported, but also met few people in her working life who were likely to be able to help her build a more long term future.

Interestingly, when we spoke to people about using connections to try and get jobs, respondents almost universally responded that to do so would be immoral. For example, one or two of our respondents had friends that worked in the council. They felt that they could not use these connections to lobby for work, because to do so would be to engage in nepotism and favouritism. Of course, in reality, it is not about morality, but rather a question of having resources and connections that allow you to hear about and apply for job opportunities. And in general, it was felt by researchers, that many of our respondents had few meaningful places to turn to for support in these terms.

This point perhaps derives directly from the factors described in the previous sections about lack of community network resources.

There has been a lot written about the need to build social capital in communities affected by unemployment and low-incomes. We will not revisit those arguments here. However, we would add that building social capital in communities is not a 'cheap fix' option, nor is it easy to do. It requires real investment of both time and money, and it requires real opportunities to be made available, rather than just the hope that connecting people without resources will somehow make resources appear. Nonetheless, there is certainly an opportunity for the idea to be explored further in the black Caribbean community in Lambeth, as there is much existing capital in terms of shared identities, desire for spaces, and shared social worlds. In turn, these strong mutual interests would provide firm foundations for building stronger community links with, for example, employers, or to create innovative mentoring programmes for young people etc.

6.4 Conclusion

Much more could be said on these issues and much more research could be done. It is beyond the scope of this report to fully tackle the employment situation of Lambeth's black Caribbean population. We will conclude briefly then.

Problems of unemployment in Lambeth, and problems of unemployment in the black Caribbean population are nothing new. It was also clear that a number of our respondents would benefit from help and support in findings routes back into work, and that existing options were by no means filling all of the need. In challenging economic circumstances, solving long-term unemployment challenges will not be easy. However, opportunities exist in the council's move to become the first cooperative council in the country.

Again however, while it is felt that black Caribbean people are less supported, less likely to succeed, and more likely to feel the effects of declining opportunities, so too dissatisfaction is likely to remain.

7.0 Generational difference

One of the more interesting themes to emerge from the research data was the question of the impact of the fact that the black Caribbean community in Lambeth is a mature one, with many who are second or third generation, British born. The experience of immigration is not one that most of our respondents had experienced themselves, but rather they were the children or grandchildren of immigrants.

In terms of our research question around the dissatisfaction of black Caribbean residents with Lambeth council, the difference between the experience of people in different generations did seem to have some impact. For example, people's expectations around work and housing, matched, to some extent, those of their parents or grandparents, despite the fact that the landscape of both jobs and housing markets had changed.

The fact that our respondents for the most part did not see themselves as 'immigrants' or recent arrivals, in the same way that other ethnic groups might, might also go some way towards explaining differences in attitudes to council services. Our respondents perhaps, had a different set of expectations based on having grown up in Britain and Lambeth, that other, more recently arrived ethnically defined populations, may not.

7.1 Housing

Kingsly talked extensively about having come to the UK from the Caribbean, and being able to find both work and housing. He had worked as a labourer for most of his life, before ill-health took its toll. But he worries about the future for his sons, wondering whether their work opportunities will be as secure as his.

The expectation of the availability of housing and opportunities that comes from Kingsly's generation is perhaps mirrored in the expectations of younger people like Letty. She had expectations that things like finding her way on to the housing ladder should be easier. She didn't want to move into shared accommodation, which was the only way she could afford to get into private housing, away from her parents. And this unwillingness to make compromises left her with few options.

The same contrast in expectations and realities could be drawn within different generations of the same family. Mervyn lived in a relatively well-maintained three bedroom,

terraced house in Brixton; a house he had been allocated many years previously. When one of his daughters had sought to live away from home however, the only option was to move to a far less desirable temporary hostel.

The reality is then, that expectations around the availability of housing set by one generation, may not be realistic for the current generation of younger people. It means perhaps that there is a greater likelihood of expectations not being met among the black Caribbean users of Lambeth's housing services. Mervyn drew the comparison bluntly: *"When Africans come here they can't expect anything. The places they come from are not nice. So they like whatever they are given. We want more."* Mervyn's point is too crude perhaps, but in the idea that people's expectations play a role in how they perceive a service, there is surely truth.

7.2 Work

A second theme to emerge around generational difference feeds into the points about social capital that we have already discussed above. Some respondents pointed out that the kinds of work that their parents had done were no longer such good options today. For example, whilst manual labour, or working on public transport had provided secure employment 30 and 40 years ago, there were fewer opportunities today, and those that there were, were often temporary and far from secure. In this sense, the skills that were being passed on from one generation to another were not necessarily as valuable as they once had been.

7.3 Conclusions

These themes require more specifically focused inter-generational research to unpick. Much work has been done elsewhere on the dynamics and changes that have taken place within Britain's Caribbean population and there is no doubt a rich vein of research to be looked at that is far beyond the scope of this report.

What is important is to understand that there may be factors relating to the historical position and integration of the black Caribbean community in Britain (and Lambeth) that affect the ways in which current residents perceive their treatment by government services. Expectations of state support in finding housing may be high, for example. And there may be inherent disadvantages in the job market that are derived from the types of jobs that previous generations took on.

Both of these factors may be reflected in the expectations people have of the services they receive, and therefore the satisfaction scores they give.

8.0 Conclusions and recommendations

Too often the council attempts to understand residents' perceptions by looking at the specific services they deliver and thus from the point of view that the council is made up of separate departments. In reality, perceptions of the council are often formed in a far less differentiated way. Where a resident has a lot of contact with, say, a housing service, housing services become 'the council'. Where someone has dealings with social services, then social workers too are seen as 'the council'. And, at the beginning of this report, we presented quantitative evidence that made it clear that individual services (especially housing services) can and do have a great influence on residents' perceptions of the council as a whole.

The challenge for our research was to explore the reasons behind the fact that black Caribbean residents' perceptions of Lambeth Council seemed to be disproportionately negative.

Dissatisfaction in and of itself was fairly easy to identify. Housing services and social care services, difficult job markets and fears around crime and safety all played a part in forming negative opinions of local services and Council performance. These findings chimed with those of the residents survey data. Bad experiences with single services lead to negative attitudes towards the council as a whole.

But these findings did not answer our question. Bad experiences with housing and social services are not unique to the black Caribbean community in Lambeth. Other populations (black African, Portuguese etc.) also make great use of these services. And yet, black Caribbean residents express greater dissatisfaction with the council as a whole than does any other ethnically defined population.

To get at the answer to our question, we needed to add to the traditional confines of collecting opinions and feedback around different services and explore the contexts of cultural and community change, and the uniquely Caribbean experiences of living in Lambeth that may drive or predispose negative reactions to and evaluations of Lambeth's services.

We identified the declining visibility of identifiably Caribbean cultural spaces, the pressures on housing and employment that are impacting on the infrastructure specifically of this community, the lack of valuable social capital and the effects of black Caribbean history and

immigration in Lambeth, as all having a potential impact on black Caribbean residents' attitudes to the council.

In other words, we have complicated matters. Rather than seeing a simplistic model whereby a bad experience with a single service, leads to a general perception of poor council service which leads in turn to a higher level of dissatisfaction; we see this process as happening within a context of pre-disposition to more negative assessment of council services. Natasha, for example, may have had a bad experience when trying to get repairs done to her council property, but she also may have had expectations, derived from family history, that were going unmet.

Looking ahead, we would argue that it is important to understand dissatisfaction in a more nuanced way. Trying to identify problems in individual services is valuable in that it can reveal systemic problems, of course. But perceptions of the council are also formed in undifferentiated ways that do not relate to single services or single experiences. They are formed over time, and in conversations and shared stories, as much as direct experiences.

Furthermore differences in satisfaction scores such as those coming from one particular ethnically defined group, may be telling us something about that group, but they may also be a red-herring, concealing other underlying factors, such as socio-economics, that determine the use of, and experience of, local services.

With this in mind, generating more positive responses from within a community like the black Caribbean community, may not be as simple as identifying a service that needs fixing, but thinking more widely about how to start creating a positive impression of the council. In the current climate, macro-economics and national government policy can all play a part in creating needs within populations that are hard to meet, for any council. But Lambeth can still build a more positive and constructive narrative around how it is still able to deliver services, and is able to act for the benefit of its various communities. Some of this will come in the form of specific actions, and by addressing specific problems (such as the timeliness of housing repairs), but it might also require being more imaginative in the ways it engages with the black Caribbean community specifically. This might involve building communications and partnerships with other service providers or supporting local business initiatives or being seen as a valuable local employer, for example. The work of the Cooperative Council is a source of rich opportunities as well to co-produce with black Caribbean residents the sort of relationship they want to have with the council and the role they want to play.

8.1 Summary of service experiences that directly caused dissatisfaction

Council Housing:

- Repairs not being done on time
- Poor communication
- Allocation system perceived to be not transparent and feels arbitrary and unfair

Social services

- Not responsive to requests for help
- Invasive at times, and insensitive to potential stigma they bring
- Poor communication and insensitivity to complexities of individual cases
- Not managing transitions in and out of care services
- Lack of flexible childcare options that genuinely allows parents to work

Community safety

- Poor communication between police and anti-social behaviour teams
- Failure of council to tackle open criminality and anti-social behaviour
- Failure to provide safe spaces (including schools) for young people

Planning, regeneration and development

- Gentrification of Caribbean spaces means some long term residents feel excluded from spaces they saw as 'theirs'
- Little support from third sector Caribbean institutions and organisations
- Weak relationships with Caribbean businesses

Employment services

- Repetitive job opportunities breeds hopelessness
- Unimaginative support services
- Skills and training offered but not linked to employment

8.2 Summary of emergent themes that may give rise to negative perceptions of the council within the black Caribbean community specifically

- Greater use of housing and social services among black Caribbean residents, leading to shared community discourses around poor delivery

- Greater expectations among black Caribbean residents of the availability of council housing
- A sense of being 'passed over' by other, more recently arrived, immigrant populations, especially with regard to housing provision
- A sense of a declining community and declining community infrastructure and spaces. Community not supported by the council
- Lack of support services aimed specifically at black Caribbean residents, from either council or within third sector
- Perceived discrimination among potential employers, especially against young Caribbean men
- Difference between the experience and contexts of first generation black Caribbean residents in Lambeth, and second generation residents, that can leave current generations with unrealistic expectations and few useable skills and connections in the job market

8.3 Recommendations

It is difficult to come to a set of concrete conclusions based on this research, since the object of the research was exploratory and sought to reveal the drivers behind negative attitudes and indeed explore the existence of negative attitudes in the first place. The research did not specifically aim to develop new services or interventions and was not specifically focussed on how to address problems within specific services. Specific problems listed above can of course be addressed by individual service providers. A number of possible areas for service improvement or development did emerge during research and they are worth commenting on here.

Support and development of Caribbean third sector: There are a number of areas in which a stronger Caribbean-specific third sector might prove valuable. The cooperative council initiative may provide opportunities for this.

- Young people's employment (training, skills and connections with employers
- Business associations, promoting Caribbean-owned small businesses, for example
- Cultural spaces, for any and all age groups
- Grassroots representation e.g. tenants associations
- 'Growing groups', community gardening projects have already seen some success
- Peer-to-peer mentoring for young people

Communications and engagement: There are two ways in which the council could improve communications.

- Throughout the report we identified a number of occasions when better communications would have led

to more positive attitudes to specific services. This is about timeliness of responses and sensitivity to individual stories

- Telling and communicating true, positive stories around Lambeth services and the ways in which they are delivered, and being improved on.
- Consider opportunities for engagement and dialogue with Caribbean community, such as: councillor led activity, grassroots outreach by members or officers etc.
- Consider how the council can get the message out there that council has less money and resources to deliver services.

Monitoring and feedback: In the future, satisfaction scores should always be considered in the light of socio-economic and demographic factors, as well as ethnicity, to ensure that conclusions are based on a full understanding of the contexts in which certain figures (and differences) are created.

Feedback mechanisms can also be designed to systematically take account of more qualitative findings and more in-depth feedback from, say, a residents' panel. This would ensure that the construction of research takes into account the ways in which residents themselves understand the council and its services and structures (even if these understandings do not match the council's own).

Wider issues: It is worth remembering that many of the issues that we touch on in the report, and which have a particular resonance within the black Caribbean community in Lambeth, are specific manifestations of some of the most difficult problems in Britain today: Lack of affordable housing, lack of flexible and affordable childcare, lack of employment and meaningful training opportunities etc. These problems are very real for the black Caribbean community in Lambeth but are beyond the scope of this report, but should not be forgotten.

Appendix A: Respondents

Name	Approx. age	Household composition	Tenure	Employment status
Martha	45	3 people Grandmother, mother and daughter	Social housing	Works part-time as Admin
Sherry	33	Single	Private renter	Business owner
Kingsly	84	3 people Husband, wife and adult son	Home owner	Retired
Terrence	75	Single	Social housing	Retired
Nina	40	5 people 4 children	Social housing	Not employed but does voluntary work
Simon	53	6 people, husband and wife and 4 children	Social housing	Full-time Student
Devon	75	2 people, husband and wife	Home Owner	Retired
Mervyn	55	3 people (two lodgers a mother and daughter seeking asylum)	Social housing	Unemployed
Letty	25	Lives with her parents social housing	Social housing	Full time as a carer in a management role
Natasha	21	Lives alone in social housing	Social housing	Unemployed
Nicola	26	3 people, Nicola and her parents	Social housing	Unemployed
Ola	42	2 people, mother and daughter	Social housing	Unemployed, part-time student
Steven	35	Many (HMO)	Transitional housing	Unemployed
Yvonne	29	Single	Private renter	Unemployed
Sarah	27	Single	Private renter	Full-time employee