

# LEAVING NOBODY BEHIND IN ERITH AND THAMESMEAD

ASSESSING THE IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON PEOPLE  
WHO FALL UNDER ONE OR MORE PROTECTED  
CHARACTERISTIC IN ERITH AND THAMESMEAD

Abena Oppong-Asare MP

August 2020

Abena Oppong-Asare MP  
Erith and Thamesmead  
 Labour

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All constituents in Erith and Thamesmead who have contacted me throughout the COVID-19 pandemic and have therefore contributed in providing the basis for this report.\*

\*All names and ages of constituents that have been quoted in this report have been changed to ensure their anonymity.

# FOREWORD

from Abena Oppong-Asare MP



Throughout the COVID-19 crisis thousands of constituents have contacted me with issues relating specifically to the pandemic. Those most affected by this crisis appear to be people who meet one or more protected characteristic.

The lack of research available at the beginning of the crisis has meant that the response has not been sufficient and the most vulnerable people in society have been left to face the consequences of this crisis alone.

On May 5 2020, I asked Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, Matt Hancock, if he would “publish a report on the effects of COVID-19 on people who fall under one or more protected characteristics?”

The Minister replied: “Yes, we have today launched a piece of work by Public Health England to look into the disparities in the impact of COVID-19.”

To date, a report into the effects of the virus and the measures taken by the Government to prevent the spread of the virus on people who meet the criteria of a protected characteristic, has not been published.

Over the course of this pandemic I have met with local organisations, constituents, and

UK wide researchers to better understand and analyse the effects of this crisis. Through talking to the people directly affected by the pandemic and interpreting independent research and analysis, I have established a report about how different protected groups are most likely to be impacted.

The report is divided into different chapters that cover various identified protected characteristics in the Erith and Thamesmead constituency. Whilst this is not an exhaustive list, it gives an idea of the type of challenges faced by these groups during this pandemic.

I have included recommendations in each chapter of the report. I will continue to raise each of these with the relevant Government departments to address the issues facing people in Erith and Thamesmead.

This pandemic is far from over and the economic and social effects will continue to be felt for the months and years to come. This report is aimed at constituents and organisations who are working to tackle the effects of the crisis. The report can be used as a means of information about the extent and ways in which constituents in Erith and Thamesmead are likely to be impacted or have been.

I hope the government read this report and take forward the recommendations. The COVID-19 crisis has impacted many people who meet one or two more protected characteristics and I urge the government to put in place effective policies that will be able to redress the significant inequalities across the UK.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Abena', with a horizontal line underneath.

**Abena Oppong-Asare**  
**Member of Parliament for Erith and**  
**Thamesmead**

## **AN INTRODUCTION TO ERITH AND THAMESMEAD**

Erith and Thamesmead partially covers two London Boroughs; the Royal Borough of Greenwich and the London Borough of Bexley. The constituency has an estimated population of 121,867 with a school age population of around 20,000.

The demographics of the constituency include a wide range of communities that have links to countries from across the world, to Ghana, India, Nigeria, and many others. Statistically speaking, the percentage of the Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic population of Erith and Thamesmead is far higher than the rest of the UK at around 37%, making it one of the most diverse places in the country.

Given the demographics of the constituency, it is not difficult to imagine then that the impacts of COVID-19 may be far greater on the community.

Office for National Statistics (ONS) data covering deaths registered by 25th June 2020 show that there have been 223 COVID-19 deaths in Greenwich borough and 225 in Bexley. Approximately 98 of these deaths occurred in Erith and Thamesmead, according to the small area population data from Middle Layer Super Output Areas (MSOAs).

The most accurate and up-to-date statistical data shows us that the level of impact the COVID-19 pandemic is having on Erith and Thamesmead, falls mostly within one or more protected characteristics.

The definition of 'Protected Characteristic' means a characteristic that is protected

under the Equalities Act 2010. The Act defines nine characteristics, this report looks into the impacts of COVID-19 on five of those including: Disability, Race, Sex, Age (children and young people). This report also includes socio-economic status as a protected characteristic.

These communities are already some of the most disadvantaged and the implications of COVID-19 impact thousands of constituents, as outlined by the following data:

**16% of people in Bexley and  
26% of people in Greenwich  
are living in poverty**

**There are over 4,000  
registered disabled people  
in the constituency**

**Women's median earnings  
are 40% lower than men's in  
Erith and Thamesmead**

**6,405 children are living in  
poverty, 22% of children  
aged 0-15 in the  
constituency**

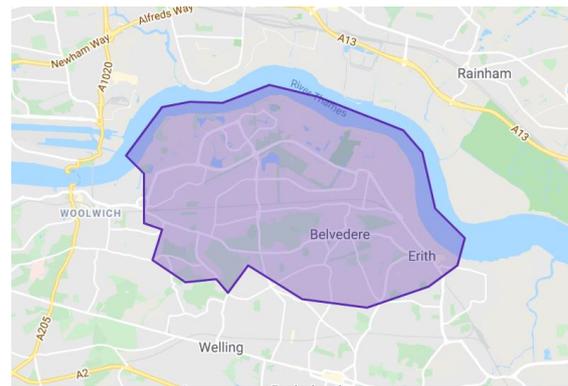
This report finds that those who meet the criteria of one protected characteristic, are more likely to be impacted by the COVID-19 and or the surrounding measures to tackle the virus, than those who do not have defining protected characteristics.

There are many areas in which people are more likely to be affected, the main ones being, financial difficulties, educational attainment, and health issues.

The report is divided into different chapters that cover various identified protected characteristics in the Erith and Thamesmead constituency. Whilst this is not an exhaustive list, nor a detailed look at the impact on those who cross over between different protected characteristics, it gives an idea of the type of challenges faced by people who fall within a protected characteristic group within Erith and Thamesmead. However, it should be noted that the data is consistently changing and will continue to give us more information as the pandemic continues.

The report includes recommendations in each chapter of the report, summarising the main recommendations in the concluding chapter. Abena Oppong-Asare MP, the Member of Parliament for Erith and Thamesmead will continue to raise each of these with the relevant Government departments to address the issues facing people throughout the constituency.

This pandemic is far from over and the economic and social effects will continue to be felt for the months and years to come. It is with hope that this report used as a means of information about the extent and ways in which constituents in Erith and Thamesmead are likely to be impacted or have been.



*Figure 1 Constituency map of Erith and Thamesmead*

You can find out if you are a constituent of Erith and Thamesmead by typing in your postcode at <https://www.theyworkforyou.com/mp>.

## DISABLED PEOPLE

Disabled people have suffered disproportionately from changes made to the Care Act and the Mental Health Act under the Coronavirus Act 2020. These changes have meant that some people are being denied their human rights to personal mobility, health, education, work, and employment, as defined in the International Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. There are concerns that these rights intrusions have continued following the COVID-19 outbreak due to added pressure on local authorities and the third sector.

General measures to prevent the spread of COVID-19 are also unfairly impacting the way of life of disabled people. Accessibility of travel, essential items, education and healthcare support have been undermined during COVID-19; contributing to long term health and wellbeing impacts. This pandemic has exacerbated exclusion, inequality, and poverty for Disabled people with the Disabled People's Organisation, Inclusion London reporting that disabled people "feel like second class citizens".

There are 4,340 people claiming Personal Independence Allowance (PIP) in Erith and Thamesmead. 'Psychiatric disorders', which includes learning disabilities, autism, depression and anxiety, account for 36% of claimants. The second most common disability according to data on PIP claims is Musculoskeletal disease (general), this includes osteoarthritis, inflammatory arthritis, and chronic pain syndromes.<sup>1</sup>

COVID-19 has impacted disabled people in Erith and Thamesmead and across the UK in

varying ways. Those with 'psychiatric disorders' will be impacted differently to disabled people with musculoskeletal diseases, neurological diseases or respiratory diseases.

Disability organisations have been vocal about the impact of COVID-19, the Coronavirus Act 2020 and further measures introduced in regarding to establishing and easing lockdown across the UK. In the absence of an equalities impact assessment into the effects of these issues on disabled people, organisations have been conducting their own research.

In April 2020 members and representatives from Inclusion London and Greenwich Association of Disabled People (METRO GAD) met with the MP for Erith and Thamesmead, Abena Opong-Asare, to discuss the local and regional impacts of COVID-19 on disabled people.



Figure 2: Abena Opong-Asare MP meeting with Inclusion London and METRO GAD

Under the Care Act, local authorities have new functions. This is to make sure that people who live in their areas:

- Receive services that prevent their care needs from becoming more serious or delay the impact of their needs.

<sup>1</sup> House of Commons Library (2020) 'Personal Independence Payment (PIP) statistics for Erith and Thamesmead'

- ✚ Can get the information and advice they need to make good decisions about care and support.
- ✚ Have a range of provision of high quality, appropriate services to choose from.<sup>2</sup>

The Care Act 2014 was suspended under the Coronavirus Act 2020, Inclusion London reported that some local authorities across London were using this suspension as a way to 'manage legal liabilities' regarding the lack of care being provided.

Attendees from METRO GAD reported that they were yet to receive any PPE for themselves or their personal carers whilst other attendees reported that some local authorities were proactively handing out PPE. This is one example of how disabled people are facing disparities in the service they have received from councils since the suspension of the Care Act.

### Accessing the 'Clinically Extremely Vulnerable' list

The main issues raised regarding accessing the 'Clinically Extremely Vulnerable list were:

- ✚ Lack of trust in the Government, some reported being concerned they would be added to a 'Do Not Resuscitate' list if they applied.
- ✚ Lack of communication, some who were not automatically added to the list struggled to apply and were told to contact a range of different people such as their GP, local hospital, local council, and constituency MP.

Many constituents in Erith and Thamesmead felt that they were being passed from one

office to another, with no end in sight to a solution.

### Accessing Supermarket food deliveries

Disabled people across Erith and Thamesmead have been in contact with Abena Oppong-Asare MP seeking help with securing food deliveries from supermarkets. Inclusion London surveyed 285 people from across the UK who identified as an older person, disabled or having a long-term health condition. Of those surveyed 55% said they had issues accessing food deliveries to their homes.

The main issues raised regarding access to supermarket deliveries and food were:

- ✚ Disabled people who usually rely on supermarket deliveries but were not considered clinically extremely vulnerable, could no longer access delivery slots.
- ✚ Food parcels provided by the Government did not take into consideration accessibility needs such as mobility and available cooking appliances.
- ✚ Supermarket deliveries and government food packages included fresh food and food with a short shelf life despite needing to last for up to two weeks.
- ✚ Limited supermarket delivery slots meant that choice of supermarket was not an option therefore grocery outgoings increased for some people.

The food deliveries that were also organised by Local Authorities for those on the shielding list also saw disorganisation nearer

<sup>2</sup> Gov.uk (2016) 'Care Act 2014 Part 1: factsheets'

to the lifting of lockdown restrictions, as many constituents started to report to Abena Oppong-Asare MP, that their food deliveries had been stopped – specifically by Bexley Council. Reasons for this are not yet clear.

### Accessibility around the constituency and wider London

Accessibility has been reported as an issue during COVID-19. A constituent of Erith and Thamesmead reported an incident involving Southern and Southeastern Railway where they were refused support.

**“I am a wheelchair user. At [a London] train station the staff did not want to get the ramp to put me on the train. Later the staff told my mum that London Bridge said they should not put me on the train as they will not bring the ramp to get me off the train at London Bridge. My mum and another passenger had to help me on the train.”**

**- Anika, 25, Bexley**

Inclusion London have also reported issues with train travel including lift access being unavailable during this time

The main issues raised regarding accessibility were:

- ✚ Unable to access support on local transport due to social distancing rules.

- ✚ Unable to access supermarkets physically due to one-person household shopping and social distancing rules.
- ✚ Disabled people who usually employ Personal Assistants to assist with daily tasks are struggling to employ new Personal Assistants who have taken sick leave or left the profession.

Lockdown has begun to ease for many across the UK however, at least, 4,330 disabled people in Erith and Thamesmead are likely to face the negative impacts of COVID-19 for a much longer period of time.

### Employment access

Disabled people are much more likely to have to work from home for a prolonged period of time however, it has been difficult for disabled people to access the ‘Access to Work’ scheme, which provides grants to cover the costs of practical support in the workplace. Anecdotal evidence has found that disabled people are not being provided with support through this scheme, or any other routes, if they need additional support in working from home.

Disabled people already face disproportionate barriers to work. Almost of quarter of UK employers said they would be less likely to hire someone with a disability. Barriers at work has also meant that over 70% of disabled people decided to stop working due to their disability.<sup>3</sup> Disabled people face the threat of unemployment due to a lack of support with working from home or returning to a safe working environment.

<sup>3</sup> People Management (2019) ‘One in four UK employers would not hire someone with a disability’

## Healthcare access

Accessibility of healthcare remains a significant issue for disabled people during COVID-19. Due to the prioritising of COVID-19 related issues, disabled people have reported to Inclusion London that their ongoing hospital appointments have been cancelled. This will have significant and long-term effects on some people's overall health and is creating difficulty in the day to day lives of disabled people affected.

One service user at Greenwich Association of Disabled People reported that they had 17 hospital appointments postponed until 2021.

## Personal Assistants

Personal Assistants are necessary to support some disabled people in their accessibility needs. COVID-19 has created a staff shortage of Personal Assistants due to fear, isolation and sickness which means disabled people are unable to access the support they need. Personal Assistants must be trained to meet the specific needs of their employer, it has not been possible to recruit and train new Personal Assistants during the crisis.

Personal Assistants have also been unable to attend hospital appointments with their disabled employer due to new hospital guidelines which state that people must not have visitors. People with specific learning difficulties, health issues and communication needs have reported that they are unable to receive the care they need due to lack of assistance from Personal Assistants.

## Mental Health implications

Mental health is a significant concern that has been raised throughout the pandemic.

Over 35% of respondents to a survey by Inclusion London have talked about worsening mental health and psychological distress. NHS providers have faced issues with Mental health service provision during COVID-19 alongside other health and care services.

NHS Providers reported that:

"The mental health estate was not fit-for-purpose prior to the pandemic as a result of significant underinvestment historically... Reconfiguring physical space, while ensuring people are kept safe, has also been a challenge for mental health and learning disability services because of the lack of appropriate places" and "early intervention services in many areas [have been] even less available".

In reporting about that adaptation of services, NHS Providers reported that

"Mental health services have been among the most enthusiastic adopters of new digital technology tools".<sup>4</sup>

Inclusion London have raised concerns that disabled people are more likely to have accessibility issues regarding the internet and so have faced disproportionate struggles in accessing mental health support during the crisis. ONS statistics show that 22% of disabled people are not deemed to be 'internet users'<sup>5</sup> and service users have reported a lack of access to information in Easy Read or BSL formats.

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<sup>4</sup> NHS Providers (2020) 'Spotlight on: The Impact of COVID-19 on Mental Health Trusts in the NHS'

<sup>5</sup> ONS (2019) 'Internet users, UK'

## **Recommendations on supporting Disabled People during COVID-19**

1) Measures to ease lockdown must have an accessibility focus such as investing in green transport infrastructure accessible to disabled people.

2) User-led organisations should be funded as essential infrastructure, as disabled people are best placed to understand and respond to their needs.

3) Local authorities should be funded to support the increased need for health and care services following a reduced service during COVID-19.

4) Legacy benefits should be uplifted in line with Universal Credit, and disability benefits increased, to alleviate increased costs faced due to Covid-19.

## BLACK, ASIAN AND MINORITY ETHNIC PEOPLE

People from Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) backgrounds are being disproportionately affected by the COVID-19 virus as well as the measures put in place to prevent the spread of COVID-19.

In June 2020, government analysis found that “people of Bangladeshi ethnicity had around twice the risk of death than people of White British ethnicity” and “People of Chinese, Indian, Pakistani, Other Asian, Caribbean and Other Black ethnicity had between 10% and 50% higher risk of death when compared to White British”.<sup>6</sup>

There are several complex social and political factors contributing to this:

- ✚ Anecdotal evidence collected throughout COVID-19 highlights the racial bias in the workplace contributing to the number of BAME healthcare worker deaths.
- ✚ Research shows that BAME people are more likely to come from low socio-economic backgrounds which creates a set of circumstances where BAME people are more exposed to, COVID-19.
- ✚ People from a BAME background are more likely to be affected by lockdown measures relating to COVID-19 that encroach on their legal rights.

The failure of the UK Government to take these factors into account when introducing

<sup>6</sup> Public Health England (2020) ‘Disparities in the risk and outcomes of COVID-19’

and monitoring lockdown measures has created a response to the crisis whereby BAME people are disproportionately affected by the virus.

The latest ethnicity data available for Erith and Thamesmead is from the 2011 census which means it may be slightly different today. However, the ethnicity data available shows that there is a larger proportion of BAME individuals in the constituency than the rest of the UK. This should be taken into account when establishing localised policy to account for risks posed to BAME individuals.

Of the population in Erith and Thamesmead, Black people account for 25.7% (the UK average is 3%), Asian people account for 11.1% of the population (the UK average is 6.9%) and ‘Mixed’ and ‘Other’ (than White) account for 5.5% (the UK average is 2.9%).

### COVID-19 Police Powers



Figure 3 Abena Oppong-Asare MP outside Plumstead Police Station

Several independent organisations raised the concern, in March 2020,<sup>7</sup> that police would act beyond their powers of arrest in relation to COVID-19 legislation. This concern was echoed by the Home Affairs Committee and Parliament’s Joint Committee on Human Rights.

Following on from the Black Lives Matter protests and the heightened visibility of

<sup>7</sup> Guardian (2020) ‘Can people of colour trust the UK Covid-19 laws with the police’s track record?’

these issues in the media, Black constituents in Erith and Thamesmead have felt more comfortable to reach out to their new MP and express concerns about incidents in the constituency or their own experiences. Some of these incidents were related to COVID-19 stop and search but others were about police power and behaviour in general.

**“Upon dropping a friend home, I and my passenger were accosted by over 5 officers who surrounded us and accused me, specifically, of not being registered and insured on the vehicle. They proceeded to search the car and they also told me they suspected I was in possession of drugs. Even though there were about 9 officers at the scene they put me in handcuffs... During my entire ordeal with the police I was humiliated, stereotyped, dehumanised, threatened and powerless. The police clearly abused their powers and I am still coming to terms to the way they have treated me, and other young black men, like me.”**

**- Adebowale, 23, Greenwich**

The concern is that where police are acting on ministerial dictate rather than in line with emergency legislation, BAME people will be

and are being unfairly targeted by increased police powers.

Nicole Vassell wrote in the Independent on 27 March 2020: “As a Black woman, even going jogging feels off-limits now the police have been granted more power”.<sup>8</sup>

Abena Oppong-Asare MP initially wrote to Kit Malthouse (Minister of State for Crime, Policing and the Fire Service, on April 6 2020, to raise these concerns.

**COVID-19: Abuse of police powers under Coronavirus Act 2020**

I am writing to you in this time of national crisis as we seek to deal with the COVID-19 pandemic. On behalf of my constituents, I extend thanks to the Home Office and Metropolitan Police Officers for their efforts during these extraordinary times.

I have recently been contacted by a number of people concerned by some of the ways in which they have reportedly observed some police officers exercise authority in the days since the Coronavirus Act 2020 granted them more powers to enforce social distancing and the nationwide lockdown. While I understand it necessary for law enforcement to play a key role in helping our country deal with the coronavirus pandemic and limit its spread to protect the NHS and save lives, I share my constituent's concerns regarding the potential for officers to abuse the powers they have recently been granted.

I am sure you will join in my sense of relief that, according to the National Police Chiefs Council, the vast majority of people are fully complying with the guidance and advice, and therefore the need for intervention from police is proving minimal.

While recognising the importance of law enforcement at this time, I join constituents and parliamentary colleagues in reminding the government that civil liberties and the rights of the individual still apply, even at a time of national emergency. Could you please provide me with some concrete reassurances that UK police forces will be discouraged from overreaching when it comes to enforcing social distancing. I am requesting the following:

Tel: 020 7219 4892 Email: [abena.oppongasare.mp@parliament.uk](mailto:abena.oppongasare.mp@parliament.uk)

- An Equality Impact Assessment to be completed on the Coronavirus Act and the powers it gives to police
- A weekly breakdown of arrests, cautions, and fines issued by forces in the UK alongside demographic data during the lockdown period
- Sight of a plan which demonstrates police will discharge evidence-based enforcement of social distancing and not stop-and-search style indiscriminate patrolling of highly urbanized areas.

Once again, I appreciate the efforts displayed by your department and that of your government as we come together to command a national effort to combat COVID-19, and thank you for all that you are doing. I look forward to your early reply and thank you in advance for your efforts.

Yours sincerely



Abena Oppong-Asare MP

Evidence demonstrates that BAME people, predominantly Black males, are disproportionately affected by existing police powers.

<sup>8</sup> Independent (2020) ‘As a Black woman, even going jogging feels off-limits now the police have been granted more power’.

**Between April 18 – March 19, there were 4 stop and searches for every 1,000 White people, compared with 38 for every 1,000 Black people.**

Figure 4 See footnote <sup>9</sup>

**Black people experienced 16% of use-of-force incidents in 2017-18 despite accounting for just 3.3% of the population.**

Figure 5 See footnote<sup>10</sup>

People from BAME backgrounds were right to be concerned that these statistics would be reflected in the additional powers afforded to police as a result of the Coronavirus Act 2020. Case study evidence supported this concern early on and early observations by research bodies pointed to this as an issue.

Abena Oppong-Asare MP wrote to the Secretary of State for the Home Department, Priti Patel, regarding police powers on June 1 2020.

**ABENA OPPONG-ASARE MP**  
 MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT FOR ERITH AND THAMESMEAD  
 PARLIAMENTARY PRIVATE SECRETARY TO THE SHADOW CHANCELLOR OF THE EXCHEQUER

  
 HOUSE OF COMMONS  
 LONDON SW1A 0AA

1 June 2020

Dear Rt Hon Priti Patel MP

As I am sure you are aware, thousands of people have taken to the streets across the UK and US this weekend to demand justice for Black people facing discrimination by the policing and justice system.

This system of racism is evident in the UK and must be addressed as a matter of urgency by the Home Office. Despite Black people being 40 times more likely to be stopped and searched in England and Wales, vague guidelines were issued to police allowing greater powers during Covid-19.

This inconsistent policing approach created by the Government's vague guidelines has had a disproportionate affect on BAME communities. It was revealed last week that police in England issued at least 22% of fines for contravening lockdown to BAME people, who account for just 15.5% of the population.

With BAME people more likely to be affected by Covid-19, it is vital that policing is monitored and set guidelines are issued to police forces and residents regarding legal requirement during Covid-19.

I wrote to the Minister for Crime and Policing, Kit Malthouse MP, on April 6<sup>th</sup> 2020, raising the issue of the abuse of police powers under Coronavirus Act 2020. In this letter I requested the following:

- An Equality Impact Assessment to be completed on the Coronavirus Act and the powers it gives to police
- A weekly breakdown of arrests, cautions, and fines issued by forces in the UK alongside demographic data during the lockdown period
- Sight of a plan which demonstrates police will discharge evidence-based enforcement of social distancing and not stop-and-search style indiscriminate patrolling of highly urbanized areas

I am yet to receive a response to this letter. Over the past week video footage has surfaced on social media highlighting the disproportionate use of force against BAME people by police

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across England. I am highly concerned a large amount of police officers shown in this video footage are not wearing PPE yet are using stop and search powers to engage in physical contact with people. This is deeply worrying given the evidence that BAME communities are more likely to be stopped and searched by police, more likely to receive fines under Covid-19 powers and are more likely to be directly impacted by the Covid-19 virus.

The issues relating to the disproportionate impact of Covid-19 on people from a BAME background are complex and I am aware that enquiries are still ongoing. However, as a matter of public urgency the Government should ensure that the abuse of police powers under the Coronavirus Act 2020 is not one of these reasons.

Will you now assure myself and BAME people across the UK that:

- PPE will be issued to police forces with a legal requirement to wear a mask and gloves when entering in physical contact with a person
- Set guidance will be published to police forces and the public on their legal rights and duties during Covid-19
- An Equality Impact Assessment will be completed and published regarding the Coronavirus Act and the powers it gives to police

I do hope that given the increasing evidence of police discrimination across the UK towards BAME communities during Covid-19, the Home Office will act urgently in the interest of public health.

Yours sincerely

  
 Abena Oppong-Asare MP

Downing Street has defended some police conduct, saying it was up to forces to “exercise their own discretion”<sup>11</sup>. This shows a failing by the Government to take into account the conscious and unconscious biases that already exist in policing and the demonstrable impact of these on BAME communities. To ensure that all citizens are

<sup>9</sup> Home Office (2019) ‘Police use of force statistics, England and Wales’

<sup>10</sup> Gov.uk (2019) ‘UK population by ethnicity’

<sup>11</sup> INews (2020) ‘Coronavirus: ‘Overzealous’ police officers tell shops to stop selling Easter eggs’

aware of, and able to exercise their legal rights police must have a defined set of rules.

SOAS University of London have found that throughout the COVID-19 lockdown measures:

“The observed misapplication of the regulations and illegal actions by the police appear to be being used disproportionately against BAME communities.”<sup>12</sup>

Researchers pointed out that observations could not be translated into statistics at the time, as there was no access to ongoing recording of police encounters relating to COVID-19 legislation.

Commenting on The Health Protection (Coronavirus) Regulations 2020, Shadae Cazeau, Head of Policy at EQUAL said,

“Without knowing how officers will record these encounters with members of the public it will be difficult to assess how this may impact upon disproportionality. There is already a lack of data more generally in policing and we are concerned that this may further affect trust between BAME communities and the police.”<sup>13</sup>

It was revealed on May 26<sup>th</sup> 2020 that BAME people have been disproportionately fined under the Coronavirus Act 2020. Police in England issued at least 22% of fines for contravening lockdown to BAME people who account for just 15.5% of population.<sup>14</sup>

An example of where BAME communities were put at risk of being disproportionately subject to the impacts of emergency police powers was the infringement on their ability to access open spaces and parks.

The measures introduced in the Coronavirus Act 2020 allowed local authorities and police forces to make their own decisions regarding access to open spaces. Lambeth Council and Tower Hamlets both took early decisions to close access to some parks and green spaces. Communities Secretary Robert Jenrick confirmed that these were decisions for the councils to make, noting only that: “I have asked them to be very judicious in taking that step and only to do that where they feel it is impossible to maintain social distancing rules within their parks or open spaces”.

Many individuals were vocal about the closure of green spaces including Professor Antonia Layard, Professor of Law (University of Bristol Law School), in a blog post where they discussed the “implications of greenspace for mental and physical health and its unequal distribution”.<sup>15</sup>

According to data from 2014-2017 Bangladeshi households had the highest rate of overcrowding, at 30%, 15% of Black African people also live in overcrowded conditions, whilst 2% of White British households were considered overcrowded. This demonstrates that the closure of green spaces was likely to have impacted BAME individuals much more than white individuals.

### **Failings in understanding COVID-19 impact on BAME individuals**

Early research showed that 35% of almost 2,000 patients in intensive care units were from a BAME background, despite BAME

<sup>12</sup> SOAS (2020) ‘Policing in a Time of Coronavirus’

<sup>13</sup> BTEG (2020) ‘COVID 19 and Police powers’

<sup>14</sup> Guardian (2020) ‘BAME people fined more than white population under coronavirus laws’

<sup>15</sup> University of Bristol (2020) ‘Parks in the time of Covid-19’

people making up only 14% of the population.

Whilst case study analysis clearly showed that BAME people were being disproportionately affected by the virus there were concerns that statistics would not be able to offer insight to this due to not being properly recorded. The NHS Coronavirus symptom tracker did not initially give the option for people to identify their ethnicity and gender. It wasn't until 18<sup>th</sup> April 2020 that the NHS began tracking coronavirus cases by ethnicity.<sup>16</sup>

Furthermore, a medical certificate of cause of death (MCCD) does not include the ethnicity of a person, only their age and gender. According to the Office of National Statistics (ONS):

"Information from death certificates is used to measure the relative contributions of different diseases to mortality. Statistical information on deaths by underlying cause is important for monitoring the health of the population, designing, and evaluating public health interventions, recognising priorities for medical research and health services, planning health services, and assessing the effectiveness of those services. Death certificate data are extensively used in research into the health effects of exposure to a wide range of risk factors through the environment, work, medical and surgical care, and other sources."

Therefore, it is essential for future research that the number of patients, by ethnicity, that have died from coronavirus can be collected and analysed. Death certification legislation was last updated in 2009 to include the Coroners and Justice Act which enables a

new independent role, for the medical examiner, to scrutinise and confirm the cause of death proposed by a doctor.

Prior to this, legislation was last updated in 1935 and it has become clear throughout the COVID-19 pandemic that legislation does not cover the necessary grounds needed for thorough and proper research into the "exposure to a wide range of risk factors" contributing to deaths in the UK.

One example of this was seen in the Erith and Thamesmead Constituency, where a constituent of Black descent sadly died due COVID-19 symptoms, but this was not reflected in his death certificate.

The 'Disparities in the risk and outcomes of COVID-19' government inquiry found that "people of Bangladeshi ethnicity had around twice the risk of death than people of White British ethnicity" and "People of Chinese, Indian, Pakistani, Other Asian, Caribbean and Other Black ethnicity had between 10% and 50% higher risk of death when compared to White British".<sup>17</sup>

This report was not published until June 2020, over two months after initial findings pointed to a disproportionate impact on BAME individuals. A second report, containing safeguarding proposals, was failed to be published alongside this first report detailing the findings.<sup>18</sup>

This demonstrates an overall failing by the Government to act to protect BAME communities throughout the COVID-19 pandemic.

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<sup>16</sup> BBC (2020) 'Coronavirus cases to be tracked by ethnicity'

<sup>17</sup> Public Health England (2020) 'Disparities in the risk and outcomes of COVID-19'

<sup>18</sup> BBC (2020) 'Coronavirus: BAME safety plan not published'

## Exposure to COVID-19



Figure 6 Abena Oppong-Asare MP meeting Doctors and Nurses at local A&E

The 'Beyond the Date: Understanding the Impact of COVID-19 on BAME Communities' report, states: "It is clear from discussions with stakeholders that COVID-19 in their view did not create health inequalities, but rather the pandemic exposed and exacerbated longstanding inequalities affecting BAME groups in the UK."<sup>19</sup>

There are some evident factors that provide a direct link between BAME citizens and increased risk of contracting the virus, including the fact that BAME individuals are more likely to be employed as key workers:

- ✚ In London more than a quarter of transport workers operating tubes and buses, which have remained open during the lockdown, are from Black and Minority Ethnic Backgrounds.
- ✚ In the NHS, around 40% of Doctors and 20% of Nurses are from BAME backgrounds.
- ✚ In London, 67% of the adult social care workforce are from BAME backgrounds.

BAME people are not only disproportionately represented in at risk

<sup>19</sup> Public Health England (2020) 'Beyond the data: Understanding the impact of COVID-19 on BAME groups'

occupations such as the healthcare sector, they are also more likely to face discrimination at work leading to the increased risk of exposure to COVID-19.

Staff from a BAME background account for 21% of the overall NHS workforce however, analysis shows that BAME individuals account for 63% of all NHS staff deaths from COVID-19.<sup>20</sup>

Evidence collected by EveryDoctor throughout the pandemic indicates that racial discrimination within the NHS is a contributing factor towards the disproportionate level of deaths compared to workforce representation.

Abena Oppong-Asare MP has met with EveryDoctor multiple times throughout the pandemic and has taken their concerns forward in Parliament.

**"I spoke to NHS doctors from EveryDoctor, and they told me that 63% of BAME doctors felt pressured to work in wards treating COVID patients, compared with 33% of their white counterparts. Does my hon. Friend agree that the Government must do more to address workplace discrimination that affects ethnic minorities?"**

**- Abena Oppong-Asare MP,  
COVID-19 BAME  
Communities debate,  
Intervention, June 18 2020**

<sup>20</sup> HSJ (2020) 'Exclusive: deaths of NHS staff from covid-19 analysed'

**“The organisation EveryDoctor, which has been representing doctors throughout the crisis, has reported that between mid-April and the end of May, 42% of the UK doctors it surveyed did not have access to adequate PPE.”**

- **Abena Oppong-Asare MP, Testing of NHS and Social Care Staff debate, Spoken contribution, June 24 2020**

According to EveryDoctor BAME NHS staff are more likely to be working without adequate PPE and an analysis in April 2020 showed that 64% of BAME healthcare workers said they felt pressured to work in hot wards (wards where COVID-19 patients are treated) compared with 33% of doctors who identify as white.

In April 2020, 47% of doctors did not have access to World Health Organisation (WHO) approved PPE, according to EveryDoctor but due to existing institutional racism BAME doctors were less likely to advocate for themselves for more protections.

Employers and healthcare providers refer BAME doctors to the GMC at more than double the rate of their white counterparts.<sup>21</sup> This has created an environment whereby Doctors from a BAME background are less likely to engage in confrontation or complaints procedures with senior staff for fear of referral.

This is especially concerning as anecdotal evidence provided by EveryDoctor stated

that: “staff are being stopped by chief executives in hospitals and told to not wear their own protective equipment”.

An analysis of the 2016-2017 Trade Union Congress Racism at Work Survey found that:

“Over 70% of Asian and Black workers... reported that they had experienced racial harassment at work in the last five years” and “around 60% of Asian and Black workers, and almost 40% of participants from a Mixed heritage background reported that they had been subjected to unfair treatment by their employer because of their race.”<sup>22</sup>

Respondents to this survey also said that they were less likely to raise issues at work due to the discrimination they had faced. This echoes anecdotal evidence provided by EveryDoctor and is a cause for concern when considering the heightened exposure of BAME workers to COVID-19.

Abena Oppong-Asare MP asked the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what plans his Department has to investigate reports of historical workplace racism in the NHS, on 16 July 2020.

Helen Whately MP, Minister of State for the Department of Health and Social Care, replied that:

“The NHS has put in place an action plan to support black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) staff through the pandemic. This includes risks assessment processes to protect staff, bespoke health and wellbeing resources and strengthened engagement with BAME staff networks to ensure their views are represented in decision making.”

This has been disputed by Doctors, including the Doctors’ Association UK, which in a

<sup>21</sup> General Medical Council (2019) ‘Fair to Refer’

<sup>22</sup> University of Manchester (2019) ‘Racism Ruins Lives’

briefing with Abena Oppong-Asare MP, said:

“Crucially, healthcare institutions are yet to risk assess all of their BAME staff. Where risk assessments have taken place, DAUK has been told by frontline doctors again and again that nothing has been put in place to modify the personal risk to them as BAME frontline healthcare workers.”

It was also highlighted previously in this report that Bangladeshi households had the highest rate of overcrowding, at 30%, 15% of Black African people also live in overcrowded conditions, whilst 2% of White British households were considered overcrowded. We now know that people of Bangladeshi background face the greatest danger of dying from COVID-19 and that BAME individuals are much more likely to work in key worker roles.

The failure to protect key workers is likely to have also had a disproportionate impact on key worker households. The official Government advice states that if you have symptoms of coronavirus, then in your household: “you should stay as far away from other members of your household as possible. It is especially important to stay away from anyone who is clinically vulnerable or clinically extremely vulnerable with whom you continue to share a household.”<sup>23</sup>

No robust guidance has been provided on what to do if you are clinically vulnerable and live in the same household as someone with symptoms. It was also advised that if an individual lives with someone who is shielding, that individual is not advised to do the same. Therefore, individuals have had to make the choice between shielding

alongside a family member and the economic impact of leaving work to do so. The lack of guidance offered to people living in overcrowded households undermines the risks posed to those mainly from a BAME background.

Alongside a lack of guidance, access to government guidance and official Public Health England (PHE) advice is a problem for BAME individuals who have English as a second language. In the 2011 census only 85% of people in Erith and Thamesmead said they spoke English as their ‘main language’. Of those who didn’t consider English as their main language, 2.8% of people in Erith and Thamesmead say they did not speak English well or at all. This equates to approximately 1,950 adults in Erith and Thamesmead who will have been unable to understand PHE and government guidance without assistance.

On July 31 2020, Criag Whittaker, Conservative MP for Calder Valley, claimed that “it is the BAME communities that are not taking this seriously enough”<sup>24</sup>. There is no evidence to indicate the Black, Asian and minority ethnic people have not been adhering to COVID-19 health advice compared with other ethnicities. This report, therefore does not agree that this should be considered as a contributing factor to be addressed.

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<sup>23</sup> Gov.uk (2020) ‘COVID-19: guidance for households with possible coronavirus infection’

<sup>24</sup> Lbc.co.uk (2020) ‘Muslim and BAME communities not taking coronavirus pandemic seriously, Tory MP says’

## **Recommendations on supporting Black, Asian and minority ethnic people during COVID-19**

1) All public health advice should be available in multiple languages.

2) An independent report into structural racism in the NHS should be conducted by the Equality and Human Rights Commission.

3) Risk assessments of NHS staff should be mandatory for employers with mandatory publication of % compliance.

4) The Home Office should introduce a system to be used by all police forces across England and Wales to record use of police stops, fines and arrests in relation to COVID-19.

5) Death certification legislation should be updated to include ethnicity.

6) Support the Mayor of London, Sadiq Khan's call to routinely collect and publish the demographic of everyone impacted by coronavirus.

7) The Home Office should publish a report detailing the impact of increased police measures on BAME citizens to be reviewed before seeking an extension to the Coronavirus Act 2020.

## WOMEN



Figure 7 Female nurse. Photo credit: DFID. Available at: [www.flickr.com/photos/dfid/28246596039](http://www.flickr.com/photos/dfid/28246596039)

Whilst women are less likely to die from COVID-19, they are much more likely to feel the economic impacts of COVID-19 than men. The policy implications are more likely to have a lasting impact on the financial stability and employment status of women. Despite this, women are less likely to be represented in policy making decisions. Women are also more at risk of being negatively impacted by COVID-19 financial implications in all, of the other protected characteristics. Therefore, if a woman is also BAME, disabled or from a low socio-economic background, the negative impact on them increases.

### Financial implications

There is a significant gap in the financial situation of women in Erith and Thamesmead compared with men which will result in more women facing financial difficulties as a result of the COVID-19 crisis.

Women's median earnings are 40% lower in Erith and Thamesmead than men. The average yearly salary for a woman is £17,708 compared with £29,690 for men. The gap in median earnings for the whole of England is 36% and for the rest of London it is 30%. This means that whilst women across England will feel the financial impacts of COVID-19

disproportionately, women in Erith and Thamesmead are even more at risk of facing financial difficulties than the rest of the country.

Data provided by the Women's Budget Group for this report shows housing affordability for women in Erith and Thamesmead, this demonstrates the impact of the earnings gap in real terms. There is a gender gap of 7.2% when comparing the ratio of house prices to earnings in Erith and Thamesmead. Women need nearly 18 times their annual salary to be able to afford the average house in Erith and Thamesmead. This is more than the ratio in London and significantly more than in England. The single annual income required for a typical mortgage in Erith and Thamesmead is £63,100. Women's earnings fall 72% short of the income required, whereas men's fall 53% short.

### Median house prices in 2019

REGION	£
England	235,000
London	470,000
<b>Erith and Thamesmead</b>	<b>315,500</b>

RATIO OF HOUSE PRICE TO EARNINGS			
ALL	WOMEN	MEN	GENDER GAP
9.4	12.0	7.6	4.4
13.9	16.9	11.9	5.0
<b>12.9</b>	<b>17.8</b>	<b>10.6</b>	<b>7.2</b>

Figure 8 Research provided by Women's Budget Group

The research into housing affordability in Erith and Thamesmead indicates that women are far more likely to be priced out of the housing market and therefore more likely to be renting. Renters face a higher risk of financial instability during the COVID-19 crisis. According to research carried out for the Guardian by Opinium, six in 10 renters said they had suffered financially as a result

of the UK-wide shutdown.<sup>25</sup> Of those, one in five had been forced to choose between food and bills or paying rent. Just a month into the crisis the poll also found 25% of respondents had, had to leave their home because of the crisis.<sup>26</sup>

Private rents in Erith and Thamesmead absorb three-quarters of women's median pay, whereas it absorbs less than half of men's pay.

Due to the disparities in earnings it is more likely that single women will face financial difficulties during COVID-19. They are also more likely to have entered the crisis with existing financial difficulties which will be exacerbated by the current circumstances. Across the UK, single women are at the highest risk of poverty according to the DWP; women make up 60% of employees on low pay; and, women represented roughly two thirds of those with severe debt problems (2013).

## Employment



Figure 9 Female care workers. Credit: DFID. Available at: [www.flickr.com/photos/14214150@N02/16340594191](http://www.flickr.com/photos/14214150@N02/16340594191)

Women are slightly more representative of the people claiming Universal Credit in Erith and Thamesmead. There are 6,036 female Universal Credit claimants which equates to

51% of the total number of claimants in the constituency.

The conditionality of claimant's highlights that there is a much larger disparity between men and women in future work prospects.

Of the claimants with 'no work requirements', meaning they are either found to have Limited Capability for Work; over state pension age; the lead or responsible carer of a child aged under 1; or, are the carer (of 35 hours per week or more) of a severely disabled person, women account for 70%.

Of the claimants 'preparing for work', meaning they are either found to have Limited Capability for Work or are nominated as the lead or responsible carer of a child aged 3 or 4 years old, women account for 71%.

These statistics are similar to those across the rest of London and the UK and highlight the higher level of caring responsibilities undertaken by women which inhibit their work prospects. Overall, women are more likely to take on caring roles than men. Of the 6.5 million unpaid carers in the UK 58% or 3.34 million, are women.<sup>27</sup> The level of unpaid care by women has increased during the pandemic, one study showed the proportion of mothers responsible for 90% to 100% of childcare increased from 27% to 45% during lockdown.<sup>28</sup>

This is important during the lockdown and in the economic recovery, as women are prevented from re-entering the workplace due to increased caring responsibilities. It also highlights the financially precarious position of women across Erith and

<sup>25</sup> Guardian (2020) 'Millions in UK having to choose between paying rent and eating, poll suggests'

<sup>26</sup> Guardian (2020) 'Activists urge tenants hit by coronavirus crisis to stop paying rent'

<sup>27</sup> Carers UK (2014) '10 facts about women and caring in the UK on International Women's Day'

<sup>28</sup> Guardian (2020) 'UK society regressing back to 1950s for many women, warn experts'

Thamesmead at a time of financial instability across the country. We could see an increase to the 1.2 million carers already living in poverty in the UK<sup>29</sup> if more women are pushed out of work and into unpaid caring positions due to COVID-19.

The effects of the crisis on women's employment opportunities is already evident. Research from the Institute for Fiscal Studies found that "of those who were in paid work prior to the lockdown, mothers are 47% more likely than fathers to have permanently lost their job or quit, and they are 14% more likely to have been furloughed."<sup>30</sup> Up to 31st May 2020, 12,700 jobs had been furloughed through the Government's Job Retention Scheme in Erith and Thamesmead constituency, equivalent to around 16% of the population aged 16-64. It has been widely reported that millions of jobs remain at risk when the changes to the furlough scheme come into effect. The data regarding job losses and furloughing across the UK and within Erith and Thamesmead to date highlights an increased risk to women's work prospects.

Women in work have represented the majority of key workers during the pandemic, making up 58% in total.

**Women accounted for 58% of key workers during the pandemic**

Of key workers, women are most represented in the areas of education and childcare (81%) and health and social care

<sup>29</sup> Independent (2016) 'More than a million carers are living in poverty, research warns'

<sup>30</sup> Institute for Fiscal Studies (2020) 'Parents, especially mothers, paying heavy price for lockdown'

<sup>31</sup> Office for National Statistics (2020) 'Coronavirus and key workers in the UK'

(79%).<sup>31</sup> TUC has estimated that 38% of key workers are paid less than £10 per hour.<sup>32</sup> The Guardian reported in April 2020 that "half of frontline care workers paid less than living wage".<sup>33</sup> This demonstrates the precarious financial situation of women working in key roles during the pandemic but women also represent the majority of workers in low paid, insecure work environments overall.

Before the COVID-19 pandemic the percentage of women in part time employment was 74%; women made up 54% of those on zero hours contracts and 69% of overall low earners.<sup>34</sup> This again highlights the precarious financial position of women going into the pandemic. The disproportionate number of women in insecure employment highlights the risks posed to women during the economic recovery from COVID-19 and the disproportionate impact job losses will have on women.

## Domestic violence

The rise in domestic violence across the entire UK is a major concern for Erith and Thamesmead. Each year more than 100,000 people in the UK are at imminent risk of being murdered or seriously injured as a result of domestic abuse, 90% of these victims are female.<sup>35</sup> In the year 2018/19 the London Borough of Greenwich had the highest volume of domestic abuse offences

<sup>32</sup> TUC (2020) 'A £10 minimum wage would benefit millions of key workers'

<sup>33</sup> Guardian (2020) 'Half of frontline care workers paid less than living wage'

<sup>34</sup> Women's Budget Group (2020) 'Crises Collide: Women and Covid-19'

<sup>35</sup> SafeLives (N.D) 'About domestic abuse'

per 1000.<sup>36</sup> Bexley had the 19<sup>th</sup> highest level of offences but in 2019 reported an increase in offences by 8.5% to 2,026 offences.<sup>37</sup>

By April 2020, the Met Police reported a 24% rise in domestic violence across London and warned the “true extent of offending is likely to be more”.<sup>38</sup> Domestic violence support organisations have reported huge increases in reports of domestic abuse. The Bexley branch of Solace Women’s Aid reported:

“In the first week of lockdown the calls and requests for support seemed to decline within Bexley,” she said.

“For myself and my team this was a worrying period, you could sense the feeling that those needing support may be having difficulty accessing it. This has now changed and we are seeing an increase in calls to our service, along with those requiring support finding other ways to make contact with us.”<sup>39</sup>

Gender is the main characteristic heightening the risk of domestic violence but low income, which is disproportionately applicable to women is another. Women in households with an income of less than £10,000 were 3.5 times more at risk than those in households with an income of over £20,000.<sup>40</sup> In May 2020 there 5,486 households claiming Universal Credit across the Erith and Thamesmead constituency.<sup>41</sup> The number of people claiming Universal Credit in May was 1,990 higher than April 2020 and 3,590 higher than March 2020, before the UK lockdown began.

<sup>36</sup> Mayor of London (2019) ‘Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG)’

<sup>37</sup> London Borough of Bexley (2019) ‘Joint Strategic Assessment 2019’

<sup>38</sup> Guardian (2020) ‘Charges and cautions for domestic violence rise by 24% in London’

The combination of reducing incomes, stress due to the pandemic and already rising rates of domestic violence across Erith and Thamesmead poses a significant risk to women in the constituency.

A survey of domestic violence charities during COVID-19 found that:

- ✚ 84% of domestic abuse service providers said they had to reduce or cancel one or more services.
- ✚ Over a third of refuge providers had to reduce or cancel the refuge services they usually provide.
- ✚ Just under 70% of responding services were concerned about future loss of income from fundraising.
- ✚ 67% stated they were concerned about future increases in demand.<sup>42</sup>

There is a concern that women in Erith and Thamesmead will continue to face a higher risk of domestic violence in the foreseeable future as the financial and wellbeing impacts of COVID-19 continue to grow.

## Representation

**“The role of parliaments in legislating and scrutinizing governments’ policies and budgets during the crisis is key to curtailing deepening gender inequality.”**

**– UN Women**

The Government’s response to COVID-19 has failed to represent the differing needs

<sup>39</sup> 853 (2020) ‘Domestic violence reports rise amid coronavirus lockdown’

<sup>40</sup> SafeLives (N.D) ‘About domestic abuse’

<sup>41</sup> HOC Library (2020) Constituency data: Universal Credit rollout

<sup>42</sup> Women’s Aid (2020) ‘Women’s Aid calls for emergency cash injection during Covid-19 crisis’

and views of women across the UK. Just six of the current members of the Cabinet are women, that is 27% of all Cabinet members.<sup>43</sup> Despite the clear impacts COVID-19 has already had and will continue to have on women, the Government has failed to produce a gender impact assessment into the economic impact of the COVID-19 outbreak. There is no explicit gender advisor on the SAGE group; the C-19 group is comprised of five male Ministers<sup>44</sup>; and, only 22% of appearances at daily coronavirus briefings were by women.

Local representation is also an important factor in responding to the ongoing pandemic as local authorities are required to make more localised decisions regarding public health and finances. Erith and Thamesmead is represented by two local authorities; Greenwich and Bexley.

The Greenwich Council Cabinet is made up of 10 local councillors; six males and four females. The Bexley Council Cabinet is made up of eight local councillors; seven males and one female.

Whilst all Councillors and MPs are active in the decision-making process, representatives with cabinet roles locally or nationally have a more influential involvement in the decision making process relating to COVID-19 policy changes.

Past outbreaks across the globe such as Ebola and SARS have resulted in a disproportionately negative impact on women's financial situations compared to males; it is therefore important that women are involved in the decision-making process as we move forward.

## Recommendations on supporting women during COVID-19

- 1) The Government should conduct a gender impact assessment into the economic impact of COVID-19.
- 2) The economic response to COVID-19 should focus on creating secure employment opportunities for those in the most affected industries.
- 3) Domestic violence charities should be consulted about their increased need following COVID-19 and funding should be provided to local organisations.
- 4) The Government should work with Unions and employers to tackle gendered workplace discrimination.

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<sup>43</sup> HOC Library (2020) 'Women in Parliament and Government'

<sup>44</sup> Newton Dunn, T (2020) 'Twitter'

## LOW SOCIO-ECONOMIC STATUS

Before the UK lockdown over 2 million people were living in poverty in London and those from a low socio-economic background have felt the effects of COVID-19 disproportionately. Office for National Statistics (ONS) figures found that those living in the most deprived areas of England and Wales are twice as likely to die from COVID-19.<sup>45</sup> Deprivation is associated with both greater exposure to virus and increased risk of poor health. COVID-19 has exposed the health impacts of deprivation as well as increased the risk of more people falling into poverty. Those from a low socio-economic background are more likely to be burdened with the lasting impacts of the pandemic.

### Health impacts

In the year 2013/2014 16% of people in Bexley and 26% of people in Greenwich lived in poverty.<sup>46</sup> The health life expectancy gap between the most and least deprived areas of the UK is 19 years.<sup>47</sup> Whilst Bexley has one of the lowest levels of poverty across London and Greenwich falls approximately in the middle of the London deprivation index, this discrepancy in life expectancy demonstrates the health impacts of people living in poverty and the risk posed to those in poverty in Erith and Thamesmead.

In 2019 Joseph Rowntree Foundation reported that over half of the households living in poverty in the UK were working households.<sup>48</sup> The combination of low paid, insecure work and existing health inequalities forces working people in poverty into a vulnerable position during the COVID-19 crisis. An analysis of the job quality of key workers found that the average wage and job quality of a key worker was less than the average non- key worker. The study reports that: "the median key worker earns £12.26 per hour, 8 per cent less than the £13.26 per hour earned by the median earner in non-key occupations".<sup>49</sup> There are also many key workers who are paid far below this as highlighted earlier in the report.

The TUC has estimated that 38% of key workers are paid less than £10 per hour. The report found that key workers were also more likely to work in low quality jobs including zero hours contract roles, high stress environments, long hours or jobs that pose a risk to health.

The majority of key workers have been continuing to go into work throughout the lockdown unless they have been advised to shield by the Government. As we have seen throughout the crisis there have been vulnerable key workers who have not been advised to shield and therefore unable to access the furlough scheme who have continued to go to work and been put at risk. This has been evident in Erith and Thamesmead with constituents contacting

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<sup>45</sup> Office for National Statistics (2020) 'Deaths involving COVID-19 by local area and socioeconomic deprivation'

<sup>46</sup> Trust for London (2020) 'Poverty rates by London borough'

<sup>47</sup> Office for National Statistics (2016) 'Healthy life expectancy at birth and age 65 by upper tier local authority and area deprivation'

<sup>48</sup> Joseph Rowntree Foundation (2020) 'UK Poverty 2019/20'

<sup>49</sup> City University of London (2020) 'The job quality of key worker employees: Analysis of the Labour Force Survey'

the office of Abena Oppong-Asare MP to raise concerns about safety at work.

Key workers in pharmacies in Erith and Thamesmead were put at risk due to a lack of PPE, reported to Abena Oppong-Asare MP in an email.

**“We need adequate supplies of quality personal protective equipment (PPE) in all pharmacies. Although additional funding has been granted to help pharmacies install protective barriers, some pharmacies are still reporting difficulties in sourcing masks and aprons. We are working to source PPE for our colleagues but we haven’t managed to secure PPE stocks for community pharmacy.”**

**- Aran, 43, Bexley**

As late as June, Care Homes within Erith and Thamesmead had to rely on donations of staff to be able to access PPE. Social care and home care workers have accounted for the highest number of deaths from COVID-19 from any profession.<sup>50</sup> Social care staff are among the lowest paid workers in the UK with an average earning of £7.89.<sup>51</sup>

These examples demonstrate how those who are already at the highest risk of health inequalities due to their social-economic status have also been put at the highest risk during the pandemic.

<sup>50</sup> Home Care Insight (2020) ‘Social care workers twice as likely to die from COVID-19 as health workers, ONS data shows’

As well as vulnerable key workers, low paid workers from non-key worker sectors have been put at risk throughout the pandemic. Over a quarter of UK households have less than £1,000 in savings, this has led to many vulnerable people who cannot access furlough for shielding reasons to choose between their health or their job.

An email from a constituent demonstrates the challenges many across the constituency have faced.

**“My husband is severely and chronically asthmatic and has recently been on steroids struggling to breathe without CV. He is not a key worker but cannot do his job from home. He has been told he just has to go into work in shifts working evenings when no one else is there.”**

**- Lisa, 37, Greenwich**

The increased risk of exposure to COVID-19 is continuing to increase as more industries begin to open and the furloughing scheme ends.

### **Financial impacts**

The implications of measures relating to COVID-19 has resulted in an increased level of financial instability across London and the wider UK. Whilst the full effects of the crisis are still unknown, anecdotal evidence from residents in Erith and Thamesmead has

<sup>51</sup> The Kings Fund (2019) ‘Average pay for care workers: is it a supermarket sweep?’

highlighted an increased level of concern relating to household finances.

The ongoing financial impacts and removal of government support schemes is likely to have a devastating impact on households in Erith and Thamesmead. The eviction ban put in place during the COVID-19 pandemic, to stop landlords from evicting people and therefore make them at risk of homelessness is said to be lifting on the 23rd of August 2020. At the time of writing this report, it is unclear if the Conservative Government will be extending the ban, with the Labour Party putting pressure on the Government for an extension. Abena Oppong-Asare MP's office has identified households who are at a heightened risk of homelessness due to the removal of the ban.

Residents of Erith and Thamesmead that have previously contacted Abena Oppong-Asare MP about eviction notices will be at immediate risk of homelessness if indeed the removal of the ban goes ahead.

**“My Landlord has taken me to court and I am expected to vacate the property in June, 2020. I’m a single mum... It’s been a battle living in my present flat and dealing with mould, rats, having to pay off repairs from my own pocket most times to mention but a few.”**

**- Lisa, Greenwich, 44**

The above constituent has also detailed medical issues which means that they will be at heightened risk due to exposure to COVID-19 if made homeless whilst the pandemic is ongoing.

Shelter have estimated around 230,000 people are at risk of homelessness across the UK when the ban is lifted. The number of private renters in arrears is double what is what at this time last year. As many remain at risk of job losses and household financial difficulties the threat of homelessness poses a national scandal waiting to unfold.

The London Intelligence – Snapshot of Londoners survey has documented the economic effects of the COVID-19 crisis on Londoners. According to the survey nearly half of Londoner's have seen a decrease in their disposable income since the beginning of the crisis.<sup>52</sup> Between March and April 2020, an increase of 1,605 people applied for Universal Credit or Job Seekers Allowance in Erith and Thamesmead, a rise of 2%.

Whilst the Government has established some support systems for those facing financial difficulties, they have not gone far enough to protect the most economically vulnerable people. Ongoing research finds that those most vulnerable are likely to be the most impacted by job losses and economic instability. According to Resolution Foundation, “four in five social housing tenants either work in sectors directly affected by the lockdown (such as hospitality, travel and non-food retail), are unable to work from home, or have caring responsibilities for school-age children”.<sup>53</sup>

The financial impact of COVID-19 so far has been evident in the increase in food bank

<sup>52</sup> Centre for London (2020) ‘The London Intelligence’

<sup>53</sup> Property Reporter (2020) ‘Social housing tenants most likely to be directly affected by the current crisis’

use,<sup>54</sup> the increase in risk of debt for millions of households<sup>55</sup> and, in day to day risks and challenges.

One constituent who usually works for the NHS but has had to shield due to COVID-19 was excluded from the furlough scheme.

**"I applied for ESS for food, gas & electricity due to self-isolating because I am grouped as high risk of coronavirus as I have underlying medical conditions, but I was refused because I am a student."**

**- Malaika, 21, Bexley**

It is clear those who were already facing financial struggles have been disproportionately impacted by COVID-19 and have faced increased levels of poverty due to a lack of work and support available. As the Universal Credit claimant count data highlights, thousands more people are at risk of facing financial difficulties in Erith and Thamesmead in the months to come.

Many families have are already facing financial difficulties due to job losses, decreased wages and rising outgoing costs.

**"I am writing regarding our family finances and circumstances, as I still can't quite believe that we are in this position through no fault of our own and we cannot access any help or financial support even though we have both worked and paid our revenues for over 30 years.**

**We have 1 more month of mortgage holiday and then what? Someone please tell me how we will access finances.**

**My husband has been allocated £57 per week in Universal Credits which is an out and out insult and we are ineligible for the HMRC grant and as self-employed is also not on Furlough.**

**My husband is now desperately applying for work in this current climate which is frankly soul-destroying. I am an NHS keyworker who is still having to come to work every day, full-time.**

**- Amanda, 48, Greenwich**

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<sup>54</sup> Guardian (2020) 'UK food banks face record demand in coronavirus crisis'

<sup>55</sup> Guardian (2020) 'UK households face £6bn debts because of Covid-19, says charity'

## Recommendations on supporting people with a low socio-economic status during COVID-19

1) Record the socio-economic demographics of those admitted to hospital with Coronavirus.

2) Conduct a report into the effects of Coronavirus on people from low-socioeconomic backgrounds to determine if and how they have been more widely impacted.

3) The Government should work with medical experts to understand the long term health impact of having Coronavirus and ensure that deprived areas are given more funding to tackle health inequalities.

4) Workplace risk assessments should account for socio-economic status in health crisis.

5) Financial support should be aimed at the lowest income households and those on Universal Credit.

## CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE



Figure 10 Abena Oppong-Asare MP with school children in Erith and Thamesmead

Children and young people are facing a range of long-lasting impacts as a result of the measures taken during the COVID-19 pandemic. Children and young people are likely to face disproportionate impacts of COVID-19 in relation to their mental health and wellbeing, educational attainment, employment projects, socio-economic status and general welfare. The measures surrounding COVID-19 and policy implications have a much larger impact on children and young people than the direct health impacts of the virus.

### Education

There are between approximately 20,000 young people usually attending school in Erith and Thamesmead. Whilst constituency data is unavailable, data from the Borough of Greenwich highlights the extent of disruption to children's education during COVID-19.

In 2019/20 there were 44,796 aged 4-18 in the local authority of Greenwich overall. On

the first day of lockdown 1,036 pupils attended school in Greenwich.<sup>56</sup>

The impacts of school closures will affect young people's education attainment, mental health and overall welfare. Greenwich council estimate that 75% of our most vulnerable children in Royal Greenwich have not been to school once in this pandemic, despite being able to.

**75% of vulnerable children in Greenwich have not attended school during the pandemic**

Across England "around 25% of children with an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) or a social worker were attending an education setting on 2 July, up from 23% on 25 June."<sup>57</sup> There are currently 2,987 students with an EHC Plan in the boroughs of Greenwich and Bexley. One student in Erith and Thamesmead, when surveyed, said they "have an [EHC] plan and this is not being used" and many more felt unsupported in their education.

The varying support needs of students across Erith and Thamesmead will need to be considered when addressing the impacts of COVID-19 on young people's education. Of 276 students surveyed who are resident, or attending school, in the constituency, 66.3% said they felt their education had suffered due to COVID-19. Not understanding the work set, difficult learning environments, adapting to online learning and, technology and access issues were some of the difficulty's students raised regarding working from home.

<sup>56</sup> Royal Borough of Greenwich (2020) 'Statement on the reopening of schools in the borough'

<sup>57</sup> Gov.uk (2020) 'Attendance in education and early years settings during the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak'

There are around six hours in a school day with around four to five of those involving direct learning. Of the students surveyed in Erith and Thamesmead, 36% reported doing one to two hours home learning per day and 5% reported doing none. Of the students surveyed who had upcoming exams 62% less prepared for them and worried.

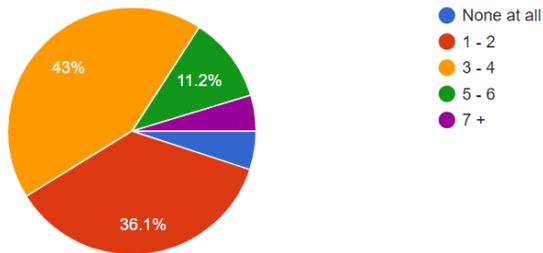


Figure 11 Survey of students in Erith and Thamesmead regarding how many hours of home learning done per day

Young people leaving schools or colleges this year have had their exams cancelled and will instead receive a 'calculated grade'. Concerns that predicted grades are likely to disadvantage BAME, working class and disabled students were raised by the Equality Human Rights Commission who warned that using this method could "could deepen the existing inequality in education".<sup>58</sup> An Office of Qualifications and Examinations Regulation (Ofqual) algorithm was used to produce the results for 87% of A-level students across England and 97% of GCSE results. On Thursday 13 August it was announced that 39.1% of students had their predicted grades downgraded due to the Ofqual algorithm. Data published by Ofqual highlights a pattern where pupils in schools in disadvantaged areas have been disproportionately marked down. Widespread outrage from A level students being handed downgraded results and missing out of university places, resulted in

the Conservative Government u-turning on the algorithm awarded grades. The Government informed students that they could accept their teachers predicted grade if it was higher than the Centre Assessed Grade (CAG) given by the algorithm or alternatively re-sit exams in the autumn. This change would also apply for GCSE students, in order to avoid the same fiasco.

In light of this change, the Government also lifted the cap for university places, so that universities could offer more places to students who might have already missed out on a place due to the fiasco of the A level results. But this has left many universities in difficult positions as offers had been awarded to other students on the day the results had been announced and strict guidelines in place regarding social-distanced learning. Several students from Erith and Thamesmead have been immediately impacted with university offers being withdrawn. A constituent detailed their experience of this in an email to Abena Oppong-Asare MP.

<sup>58</sup> Equality and Human Rights Commission (2020) 'Predicted grading during COVID-19 could limit young people's futures'

Yesterday I received my A-Level grades and was disappointed and upset at the results I received. I was given ADE; two of my subject results were dropped by 2 grades which the government assured wouldn't happen.

They also assured us students that universities would be more flexible but this has not been my experience... I tried to get in touch with them but was unsuccessful. There was no number to contact and my online form was rejected straight away due to my downgraded results and I also emailed them with no response at all.

- Sara, 18, Erith and Thamesmead

Students from low income households are more likely to be unable to sit exams as a way of gaining a different result. This option was offered by the Department of Education for students who were unhappy with their calculated grades but students have reported being charged large amounts of money for this. A constituent contacted Abena Oppong-Asare MP to raise this issue.

I was unable to hand in expected work during lockdown due the fact my family was facing severe financial problems. I come from a very poor family, this is not an excuse but I was forced to put my studies on hold to look for a job or let my family starve hence why I was unable to finish my assignments concluding in me receiving no grades at all.

I have emailed my school explaining everything to them but I have had no luck, they said they can allow me to sit my exams but I would have to pay £120 for each A level.

- Nia, 18, Erith and Thamesmead

### Health and wellbeing

Whilst children and young people are far less likely to contract or die from COVID-19, the implications of measures put in place during the pandemic has had a negative impact on the health and wellbeing of young people in other areas.

The mental health charity YoungMinds found that 83% of young people with a history of mental ill health have found their conditions have worsened since the coronavirus crisis began in the UK. Of those already receiving support for their mental health, 26% said they were now unable to access their

support due to COVID-19<sup>59</sup>. Loss of routine and social isolation were found to have been the main factors in impacting mental health.

The survey of school students in Erith and Thamesmead raised concerns about mental health within the constituency; 19% of those surveyed said the school closures had a negative impact on their mental health. Some students said the effects on their mental health was the most difficult thing about not attending school and others suggested that mental health support should be prioritised upon returning to school.

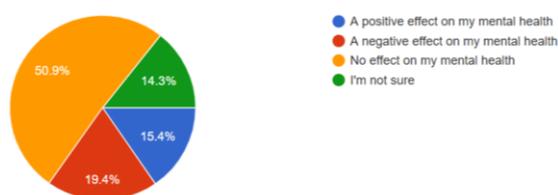


Figure 12 Survey of students in Erith and Thamesmead regarding the effects of lockdown on their mental health

Following COVID-19 services to support young people will be essential in dealing with the impacts of the public health crisis. However, a report by UK Youth found that 17% of organisations in the youth sector said that permanent closure was likely and 64% of respondents said that they were likely to lose sources of funding.

The general welfare of vulnerable children and young people in the home is also a concern across the constituency. As has already been highlighted, 75% of vulnerable children have not been attending school in the Borough of Greenwich. There is little research available regarding the increased risk of child abuse during COVID-19 but charities such as UNICEF have warned of

rises and NSPCC have reported a 20% increase in calls to their helpline in Wales.<sup>60</sup>

## Children in Poverty

There were 4.1 million children and young people living in poverty in 2017/18 and this figure was expected to rise year on year. The latest figures for Erith and Thamesmead show that 6,405 children aged 0-15 are living in poverty, 22% of the children aged 0-15 in the constituency.

Children in poverty are more likely to fall under more than one protected characteristic meaning they are living in families that are affected by COVID-19 in multiple ways. For example, 45% of children living in minority ethnic families are in poverty and 70% of all children in poverty are in working families. The effects on these children due to socio-economic impacts of COVID-19 will be felt disproportionately.

The Children's Society estimate that 1.7 million children are 'living in a household with problem debt' and 2.1 million children are living in a household that has difficulty paying bills. The Food Foundation reported, just three weeks into lockdown, that 1.5 million Britons had not eaten for an entire day because they had no money or access to food.

The Government's national voucher scheme to support children who usually access free school meals has been criticised as many parents and carers have been unable to access it. On 30 April 2020 it was reported that some who are entitled to the scheme still did not have access to it. The scheme is also only available to 1.3 million children who are eligible for free school meals which is far

<sup>59</sup> YoungMinds (2020) 'Coronavirus having major impact on young people with mental health needs – new survey'

<sup>60</sup> BBC (2020) 'Coronavirus: Child abuse calls to NSPCC up 20% since lockdown'

below the level of actual child poverty prevalent in the UK.

These issues are reflected in the constituency of Erith and Thamesmead; 3,759 children and young people are entitled to free school meals out of the 6,405 children living in poverty.

The need for support for families in poverty is continuing to increase due to COVID-19. Trussell Trust reported giving out 89% more food parcels in April 2020, compared with the same month last year. Carers and parents with children with disabilities were twice as likely to use a food bank as the rest of the population.<sup>61</sup> With the financial impacts of COVID-19 expected to be felt by families in the months to come, the impacts on children in poverty are expected to increase.

The recent budget cuts to TfL by central government have also impacted children and young people from low socio-economic backgrounds. Under 18's free travel for Londoners has been suspended which will affect young people in accessing education and employment opportunities.

The following case studies from young people in Greenwich and Bexley, provided by Child Poverty Action Group, highlight the impact these cuts will have.

**“My siblings are in secondary School and 6th form and all of them go to school far from our house. Without free bus fares they'll either need to transfer schools or be unable to afford to eat lunch.”**

**- Liam, 14, Bexley**

**“The removal of free travel for 18s will place an immediate strain on our finances when school starts up again. This pandemic has stretched a lot of people's finances thin, and to be brief, the extra stress of topping two more oyster cards off weekly is not one that my family (or any family in our position) needs.”**

**- Sam, 16, Greenwich**

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<sup>61</sup> Guardian (2020) 'More than 100,000 carers 'forced to use food banks in UK lockdown'

**“My daughter currently takes 2 buses to school and 2 back from school as we live 3 miles from school. By taking this away my daughter would need to walk for at least an hour to and from school. My daughter also attends dancing classes in Greenwich and takes 2 buses 4 times a week to Greenwich, she will no longer be able to do this as I will not be able to afford this.”**

**- Katie, 35, Greenwich**

**“I take it to travel to my school, I have asthma and sometimes I like to go a half an hour to the big park. I need the oyster because my family can't afford buses. I've used my Oyster card every day and without it, it would mean a horrid price or to get to my place of education tired and unmotivated.”**

**- Alex, 10, Bexley**

### **Recommendations on supporting children and young people during COVID-19**

**1)** The Government should assess the increased impact on children and young people's mental health due to COVID-19 and allocate more funding to the provision of mental health services following the pandemic.

**2)** Funding should be allocated to youth services to provide assistance in tackling the impacts of COVID-19 on young people.

**3)** The Government should collect data from all organisations dealing with reports of child abuse and publish the findings in relation to COVID-19.

**4)** Unconscious bias training should be provided to teachers and boards in relation to awarding 'calculated grades' or this type of awarding of grades to be scrapped and another solution found.

**5)** Universities and Sixth Forms should be encouraged to lower their entry level requirements for BAME, working class and disabled students to account for unconscious bias in calculated grades.

**6)** Support for families in poverty should be provided during the summer holidays, including extending meal vouchers to all children in poverty.

## Conclusion

The impacts of the COVID-19 crisis and measures taken in response to the virus are wide ranging with some impacts having a more lasting effect than others.

These issues can be worked on together within communities and through government, during the COVID-19 pandemic, in order to reduce the impact on children, young people, Black, Asian and Minority ethnic communities, women, disabled people and those from low socio-economic backgrounds.

Many of these inequalities that have been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, existed due to the austerity agenda and the cuts implemented in the public sector by the Conservative Government for the last 10 years.

Public Sector cuts in the last 10 years to Education, the NHS and Police has made it even more difficult for these institutions to provide a world class services to people, in normal times, let alone during a global health crisis that is the COVID-19 pandemic.

This report has highlighted the many difficulties and challenges that have faced people in protected characteristics, but it has also highlighted the immeasurable pressure and tension that Key Workers are under across the United Kingdom and in Erith and Thamesmead during this pandemic. Their efforts must not go unrecognised.

The recommendations of this report will be followed up with the relevant Government departments, with the hope that it contributes to solutions in handling these challenges in Erith and Thamesmead.

## Recommendations

### Disabled people

User-led disabled organisations should be funded as essential infrastructure and consulted in the ongoing response to the crisis as disabled people are best placed to understand and respond to their needs.

### BAME people

Public health advice should be made available in multiple languages with culturally sensitive messaging.

### Women

The Government should conduct a gender impact assessment into the economic impact of COVID-19.

### Low socio-economic status

Workplace risk assessments should account for socio-economic status in health crisis'.

### Children and young people

Universities and Sixth Forms should be encouraged to lower their entry level requirements for BAME, working class and disabled students to account for unconscious bias in calculated grades.

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