

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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

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 the 5th of May 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.

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.

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. These conversations have formed the basis of this report.

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 which I will continue to raise each of these with the relevant Government departments. 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.

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 UK.

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

Abena Oppong-Asare MP

DISABLED PEOPLE: OVERVIEW

Disabled people have suffered disproportionately from the measures put in place in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Abena Oppong-Asare MP has received emails from constituents impacted by these measures and met with disabled people's organisations to understand first-hand experiences throughout the pandemic.

The experiences detailed in these emails and meetings with Abena Oppong-Asare MP form the basis of this section of the report, which finds that disabled people have been, and will continue to be, disproportionately impacted.

The main issues discussed in this section of the report are access to healthcare, access to personal care, access to goods, transport and services, financial difficulties, employment issues and mental health impacts.

The report also draws on research undertaken to understand the national landscape of COVID-19 effects on disabled people. The findings in this section of the report are likely to be felt across the UK but some areas focus on specific disparities relevant to Erith and Thamesmead.

Recommendations are made in this report based on the findings and suggestions raised by disabled people in the constituency. These include investing in accessible transport infrastructure, increasing financial support for disabled people and investing in user-led organisations as essential infrastructure.

BLACK, ASIAN AND MINORITY ETHNIC PEOPLE

The disproportionate impacts of COVID-19 on Black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) people have been widely reported. A Public Health England report found that BAME people have between 10% and 50% higher risk of death when compared to White British people.

This report looks beyond these findings at the wider ranging impacts such as: misuse of police powers, exposure to COVID-19, the failings in understanding these impacts and, the future implications.

This section of the report draws from a wide range of local and national sources who have documented the impacts of COVID-19 on BAME communities. It also draws on first hand experiences of constituents who have contacted Abena Oppong-Asare MP and key workers who have regularly met with Abena to update her on the developing situation.

The conclusions drawn from this section of the report highlight workplace discrimination and longstanding structures of racial inequality that have contributed to BAME people facing a disproportionate impact of the pandemic.

The recommendations highlight the need for structural, legislative and social change such as: tackling work place discrimination, including ethnicity on death certificates and producing culturally sensitive public health advice.

WOMEN

This section of the report finds that women are more likely to be impacted by the financial implications of the COVID-19 crisis. It also identifies a heightened risk for women in Erith and Thamesmead who already face greater financial inequalities compared with the wider UK,

Contributing research from the Women's Budget Group and Centre for Cities has helped form the basis of this report, alongside case studies from constituents who have contacted Abena Opong-Asare MP throughout the crisis.

The report highlights three main areas in which women are most likely to be disproportionately impacted by COVID-19. These are: financial difficulties, employment issues and domestic violence. The report also identifies representation as a key factor within these areas.

Women are also more likely to face these issues for a long period of time after the initial health impacts of the crisis have lessened. This is due to women facing the brunt of job losses and the circumstances in which women entered the crisis - in more precarious financial situations.

The recommendations in this section focus on measures that the Government, organisations and employers can take to lessen the impact of the challenges raised in the coming months and years. These include: a targeted economic response, tackling gender discrimination, investing in organisations working with women and victims of domestic violence and, conducting a more thorough gender impact assessment before introducing new economic measures.

LOW SOCIO-ECONOMIC STATUS

Socio-economic status is not currently a protected characteristic under the Equalities Act 2010, however it has been included in this report as it is clear that people with a low socio-economic status are facing disproportionate inequalities during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Public Health England report into the disparities in risks and outcomes of COVID-19 highlighted the challenges specifically facing those with a low socio-economic status. This section of the report identifies these challenges which have been highlighted by Erith and Thamesmead constituents. The report also draws on existing research which highlights long-standing inequalities that contribute to these disparities.

The main challenges facing people with a low socio-economic income are: increased risk of health issues relating to COVID-19, exacerbated financial issues and employment risks.

Those with a low socio-economic status are far more likely to face risks relating to COVID-19 as a result of their economic status. This is highlighted by first-hand accounts detailing employment issues. These issues have been ongoing throughout the pandemic and are likely to remain for a long period of time as decisions are made about the economic recovery from COVID-19.

The recommendations highlight the need to tackle existing inequalities in health and the economy and, the need to begin to address the potential long-term impacts created as a result of the pandemic.

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

The effects of COVID-19 on children and young people are complex and have been widely missed in the response to the pandemic due to their low infection rate.

Several issues relating to education have been raised by parents and teachers in Erith and Thamesmead. An independent survey carried out by Abena Oppong-Asare MP of children and young people in the constituency highlights the educational impacts students are facing. Research from a variety of organisations has also highlighted the negative impacts that are likely as a result of the school closures such as, a widening attainment gap and grade calculation inequalities.

The mental health of children and young people is also a rising concern and will have lasting impacts in years to come unless it is addressed as an immediate priority.

This section of the report also highlights the disproportionate impacts on children and young people who also meet the criteria for a separate protected characteristic. For example, children from low socio-economic backgrounds, disabled children and BAME children are more likely to face the challenges highlighted in the report as well as challenges highlighted in previous sections.

The recommendations focus on the provision of resources for children and young people in response to the pandemic. For example, more funding should be given to youth services, support for mental health, families in poverty and children at risk of educational inequalities.



Figure 1 Abena Oppong-Asare MP with school students in Erith and Thamesmead

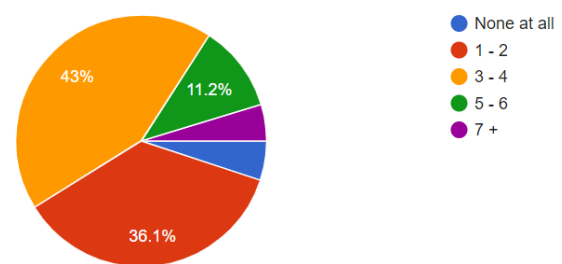


Figure 2 Survey of students in Erith and Thamesmead regarding how many hours of home learning done per day

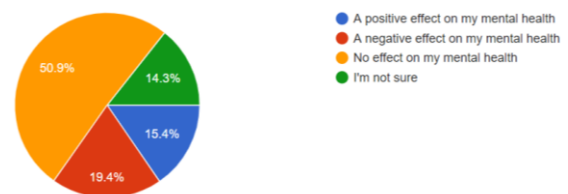


Figure 3 Survey of students in Erith and Thamesmead regarding the effects of lockdown on their mental health

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.

However, we must not fail to understand that 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 have 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 to handling these challenges in Erith and Thamesmead.



Figure 4 Abena Oppong-Asare MP meeting with Greenwich Association of Disabled People and Inclusion London



Figure 5 Abena Oppong-Asare MP meeting Doctors and Nurses in A&E

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.

Women

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

BAME people

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

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.



Figure 6 Abena Opong-Asare MP speaking outside Parliament eve of the Jamaica 50 flight

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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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.