

Witness Name: Emmanuel Ogbonna

Statement No. 1

Exhibits: 3

Dated: 8 October, 2023

UK COVID-19 INQUIRY

WITNESS STATEMENT OF EMMANUEL OGBONNA

This witness statement describes my work as part of the First Minister's Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic COVID-19 Advisory Group.

The formation and structure of the Advisory Group

1. Sometime in March/April 2020, I became disturbed by the reports which were highlighting the disproportionate impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on people from black and minority ethnic backgrounds. I and other members of Race Council Cymru (which is one of the major race charities in Wales), wrote a letter to the First Minister to request that urgent action be taken to protect the lives and well-being of members of the ethnic minority communities in Wales. This letter was sent through the office of the charity, Race Council Cymru. I have requested a copy of this letter to attach to this statement but Race Council Cymru are having difficulty finding this letter.
2. The First Minister acted promptly and established the Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic COVID-19 Advisory Group to look into the issues that were implicated in the disproportionate outcomes that ethnic minorities were experiencing from COVID-19, and to recommend the necessary courses of action to alleviate these problems. The Group was led by Judge Singh. Please see attached Exhibit 1 which is the Terms of Reference of the First Minister's Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic COVID-19 Advisory Group (**EO/1 - INQ: INQ000267870**).
3. Following the first few meetings, the Advisory Group decided that two sub-groups were required to explore a) the socio economic issues that were implicated and b) the health and social care issues that were involved. I was subsequently invited to chair the socio-economic sub-group and Dr Keshav Singhal was invited to chair the health and social care sub-group.

4. The sub-group I chaired carried out its work until a report was produced in June 2020. The Terms of Reference remained unchanged during this period.

Liaison with the Welsh Government

5. The socio-economic sub-group held several meetings and consulted widely with stakeholders from the ethnic minority groups in Wales. We invited the Deputy Minister of the Welsh Government at the time to attend some of our meetings and she was able to get a good sense of the concerns of the members of grass-root ethnic minorities in Wales. However, the main output of the work of the socio-economic sub-group was the final report which was published in June 2020. The report is attached as Exhibit 2 (EO/2 - INQ: INQ000267869).
6. Information on the meetings held with the Welsh Government and its representatives can be obtained directly from the Welsh Government as I did not keep record of this.
7. Information and recommendations made to the Welsh Government can be found on the final report of the socio-economic sub-group.
8. The Welsh Government accepted the key recommendations of the socio-economic sub-group that urgent action be taken to deal with the disproportionate impacts of COVID-19 on members of the racial and ethnic minority communities and to take concerted action to end racism in Wales. The response of the First Minister of Wales to the report of the socio-economic sub-group is presented as Exhibit 3 (EO/3 - INQ: INQ000285930).
9. The Welsh Government retained the socio-economic sub-group in an advisory capacity for a few weeks after the final report was published. The Government also began work on developing an anti-racist Action Plan for Wales in mid-2020 and I was invited to co-chair the steering group that was established to lead this work.
10. I am also aware that the Deputy Minister announced a number of 'quick wins' that arose from either the formal request of one or more of the advisory groups or that arose from discussions that she listened to as part of the numerous engagement sessions we held with local communities. However, I did not keep record of these and it may well be that the Welsh Government kept formal records which may form part of their submission to you.

Information gathering and data collection

11. Data were gathered from multiple sources. First, we ensured that the membership of the sub-group comprised individuals with recognised expertise in different areas and that had lived experiences of racism. Second, we involved academics, researchers, trade unionists and government policy specialists who had specialist interests in race

equality and the intersectional nature of discrimination, and we asked them to help in the data gathering process, included gathering published information on the pandemic and ethnic minorities and reviewing recent publications in academic and occupational journals. However, by far the most important source of data was the information from the diverse groups that comprise Welsh ethnic minorities. We recruited community mentors to help in gathering data on the experiences of groups and individuals which we analysed to generate key emergent findings from the study.

12. Although data collection was as robust as possible under the circumstance, this effort was hampered by the limited time we had to collect and analyse data. The report was commissioned in April 2020 and we were asked to produce this in June 2020.
13. The minutes of the meetings were kept by Welsh Government officials, and they should be able to provide these to you on request.

Public health communication and public confidence

14. The healthcare sub-group dealt with this aspect of the work.

The public health and coronavirus legislation and regulations

15. This aspect of the work was handled by the healthcare sub-group that was chaired by Dr Singhal.

Statement of Truth

16. I believe that the facts stated in this witness statement are true. I understand that proceedings may be brought against anyone who makes, or causes to be made, a false statement in a document verified by a statement of truth without an honest belief of its truth.

Signed:

Personal Data

Dated: 8 October, 2023