



# Ethnic Minority Housing Strategy for Merton Executive Summary

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2004-2006



# FOREWORD

**By Councillor Steve Austin, Cabinet Member for Housing and Councillor Edith Macauley, Chair of Joint Consultative Council for Ethnic Minority Organisations**

It is with great pleasure that we introduce Merton's first ever Ethnic Minority Housing Strategy. We want to celebrate the fact that this strategy has come to fruition following many months of work by the **Ethnic Minority Housing Strategy Team**, represented by an increasingly large number of community organisations, registered social landlords and other stakeholders. Having set out to involve the community and other stakeholders in developing a strategy for Merton, this document is testimony to successful community engagement and partnership working.

As Cabinet Member of the Council for the Housing Service and as Chair of the Joint Consultative Council for Ethnic Minority Organisations, we are committed to making Merton a great place to live, work and learn for all sections of our community. We strive towards equalities in Merton through promoting full and equal access to learning, employment, services and cultural life and the celebration of diversity. One of the key targets contained in Merton's Community Plan is to **"create greater harmony between people of different races, ages and backgrounds"**. The implementation of this strategy will help us achieve that goal.

The production of this strategy represents a big step forward for Merton's Housing Service. We have devoted significant resources in developing actions to improve housing services for ethnic minorities. Merton's Housing Strategy 2004-2007, was recently awarded 'fit-for-purpose' status, and is underpinned by the objectives and actions identified in this strategy. The strategy also supports other key documents and plans for

Merton, including our first Homelessness Strategy (launched in September 2003), the Housing Revenue Account Business Plan for Council Housing, the Housing Service Plan, Merton's Neighbourhood Renewal Strategy and the Supporting People Strategy which is being developed at present.

Our **Ethnic Minority Housing Strategy** will also feed into the South-West London Sub-Regional Black & Minority Ethnic (BME) Housing Strategy, currently being developed to meet housing needs across borough boundaries. Merton is leading on the development of the sub-regional strategy. We are extremely pleased that the work with our 6 neighbouring boroughs (Croydon, Lambeth, Wandsworth, Sutton, Kingston, Richmond) is now well under way.

The **Ethnic Minority Housing Strategy** sets out our main aims and key objectives over the coming years. The main priorities will be to:

- further strengthen partnership working;
- to enhance our understanding of needs;
- to further engage tenants and residents in order to improve provisions and services;
- to promote racial harmony and build sustainable communities; and
- to invest in a workforce that reflects our diverse community.

This strategy contains a three-year action plan, which sets out tasks to be carried out by the Housing Service as well as our partners to improve services. There is also a detailed analysis of Census 2001 information looking at housing and social exclusion issues and how they affect the main ethnic groups in Merton.

We have already made significant progress as a Council in driving forward our race equality work through Merton's Race Equality Scheme. This strategy builds on that work by further developing housing commitments into actions and measurable targets. As well as fulfilling the statutory duty in promoting race equality through our Race Equality Scheme, we also respond to the Government's challenging agenda for housing and sustainable development policies, which highlighted a number of issues relating to ethnic minorities and housing. We have addressed this in this strategy.

For example, the links between high proportions of ethnic minorities and deprived areas in many parts of the UK have been highlighted by the Government's Neighbourhood Renewal Strategy (2001) and the Communities Plan (2003), which show that ethnic minorities are more likely to be affected by poor housing, unemployment, low educational attainment, ill health and crime. The Communities Plan also emphasised the positive contributions that lettings policies could make to help create mixed and sustainable communities. The Community Cohesion agenda highlighted the need for housing authorities to assess whether housing preferences and lettings policy have any impact upon community well being. We will ensure that these issues are addressed locally through this strategy and action plan.

Having access to suitable and good quality housing as well as adequate support are key to people's well being. We have already set out in Merton's Housing Strategy our priorities, which are to provide more homes, increase housing choice, improve housing conditions in all types of housing, develop communities, and work in harmony with our partner organisations to achieve success. Through the **Ethnic Minority Housing Strategy**, we will ensure that all sections of our diverse community will benefit equally from the improvement in housing services.

We want to thank the **Ethnic Minority Housing Strategy Team** and all those who have contributed to the development of this strategy, and

express our appreciation for the support given by members of the Joint Consultative Council for Ethnic Minority Organisations. We have made good progress in addressing the housing needs of ethnic minorities in Merton, but we recognise that this is only the start and we have a lot more work to do.

We will continue to place this work high on our agenda. With the shared commitment of our partners to combine effort and pool resources to make things happen, we are confident that we will achieve our goal.

Finally, we welcome feedback and comments on the strategy and how we can take things forward. Details of contact officers are listed at the end of the documents. The strategy will also be available on the council's website at: [www.merton.gov.uk/housingpolicy](http://www.merton.gov.uk/housingpolicy)



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**Chair of the Joint Consultative Council for Ethnic Minority Organisations**

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## Introduction

Merton is a multi-faith community with people from many different racial backgrounds. It has an increasing ethnic-minority population made up of well-established communities as well as communities that have more recently settled here. We, Merton Council, aim to make Merton a great place to live, work and learn for all sections of our community, and are committed to promoting equality by promoting full and equal access to learning, employment, services and cultural life, and celebrating diversity, one of our five main aims.

We need to meet the housing needs of Merton's ethnic-minority communities if we are to achieve these goals. As each ethnic-minority community has its own characteristics, culture, faith and different needs, it is important that we understand these needs so that we can make appropriate arrangements. To achieve this, we set up the Ethnic Minority Housing Strategy Team in 2002, involving a large number of independent stakeholders e.g. RSLs and community groups, to develop a strategy to improve housing services for ethnic minorities in Merton.

The main purpose of this strategy is to improve how responsive and sensitive housing is for ethnic-minority communities in Merton.

Through this strategy, we aim to:

- identify the housing needs and aspirations of ethnic-minority communities in Merton through research and improving our information base;
- develop an ethnic-minority housing policy which recognises and responds to the varied needs of different ethnic-minority groups; and
- develop and put into practice an action plan to improve services for ethnic-minority groups.

## Issues affecting ethnic-minority communities

Overall, people from ethnic minorities who live in Merton are more likely to need housing and suffer from social exclusion (not being able to take part in society). They also suffer from racial discrimination and racial harassment, and have difficulties accessing information and services because of language and cultural barriers. An analysis of Census 2001 data and our records show the following.

- Ethnic-minority households, in particular Black African households, are more likely to be living in unsuitable housing than white households (Merton Housing Needs Survey 1999 and Housing Service records).
- Ethnic minorities form a large proportion of Housing Register and homeless applicants, as well as getting general housing advice from our Housing Advice Service.
- Asian residents are more likely to experience overcrowding (data from Census 2001) and other housing problems such as poor heating and repairs and maintenance (Housing Needs Survey 1999).
- Asian and other households are more likely to need larger homes, which are in short supply.
- Ethnic-minority communities are more likely to be living in deprived areas, and more likely to be unemployed and on a low income, no matter what their age, sex and qualifications. Unemployment rates among Bangladeshi and Pakistani men are more than twice that of white men.
- Pakistani, Bangladeshi and African-Caribbean people are more likely to report ill health than white people.

### Main aims

Through developing our ethnic-minority housing strategy, we have identified six main aims and a number of priorities that will help us achieve our aims. The six main aims are to:

- promote race equality through working together;
- identify and respond to housing needs;
- make sure there is community wellbeing and fair access to social housing;
- provide quality housing services for everyone;
- tackle exclusion; and
- invest in a varied workforce.

### Promote race equality through working together

We have involved the community and other stakeholders in developing this strategy for Merton, through the work of the Ethnic Minority Housing Strategy Team. We will build on the strength of this team and will widen involvement, particularly by involving under-represented groups such as the African community and other hard-to-reach groups. We will work with our partners and stakeholders, and combine our resources, to promote race equality in housing.

This strategy sets out how we will:

- work with other agencies to promote race equality;
- put into practice the housing commitments set out in the Race Equality Scheme; and
- work towards achieving level 3 of the Equalities Standard by 2005.

We will monitor who uses our services and assess the effect housing policies have on ethnic-minority communities.

With the introduction of subregional resources for housing development, we now need to work across borough boundaries with our neighbours. We are now leading the development of a subregional BME (Black and Minority Ethnic) Housing Strategy. Identifying the needs of ethnic-minority communities in the south-west London area will be essential to the success of this strategy. This will include looking at the needs of hard-to-reach communities such as Korean and Japanese communities, communities that are small in number but have significant needs such as African communities, and ethnic groups who are scattered across many boroughs, such as the Chinese.

We also work closely with several Black and Minority Ethnic Registered Social Landlords (BME RSLs). BME RSLs have in-depth knowledge of the specific needs of the ethnic-minority communities they target, and are often able to respond to the cultural needs of these communities. At the moment, only a small percentage of registered social landlords' housing in Merton is either owned or managed by BME RSLs. We want to strengthen our support for BME RSLs, and have targeted 20% of our development resources towards BME RSLs this year. We will continue to target 10% each year to BME RSLs over the coming years.

### Identify and respond to housing needs

An analysis of Census 2001 data and our service records have given us a profile of our ethnic-minority communities. However, we will need more information to improve our understanding of the specific needs of ethnic-minority communities so that we can target resources to respond to those needs. We will update our information through statistical analysis and research projects, and use the results to influence policy and service development. The strategy also identified the following client groups as being priorities.

### Homeless households

Ethnic-minority households are over-represented in homeless households needing accommodation or needing help and advice in finding accommodation. We will need to identify the reasons behind the high level of housing need and homelessness among these households so we can develop a prevention strategy. We will work with Merton's Homelessness Forum to improve the quality of advice we give to ethnic-minority communities with the aim of reducing homelessness and to provide advice on housing options.

### Elderly people from ethnic minorities

Merton's Interim Supporting People Strategy (2001) has identified evidence of a demand for sheltered and other special-needs accommodation for certain groups of elderly people. Research on the housing needs of the Tamil community (1998) has found that many elderly Tamil people experience overcrowding and live in unsuitable homes with too many stairs. Other issues that were identified include lack of support provided by extended families, the cultural needs of elderly people living in institutions, the need for specific advice that is culturally sensitive and the need to improve awareness of existing services.

A research project that looks at the housing and support needs of ethnic elders is now underway. We will review our sheltered accommodation to see how appropriate it is and to assess gaps in services. We will improve the way information is shared to improve awareness of housing options and eligibility criteria for ethnic elders, and will work with neighbouring boroughs and RSLs to increase appropriate services for ethnic minority elders in Merton and who live in surrounding areas.

### Asylum seekers

There were 962 asylum seekers living in temporary accommodation in Merton in March 2003 (NASS data). Of these, over two-thirds (658) had

chosen not to be housed by the National Asylum Support Service (NASS) outside London so they could be close to families or friends in Merton. These households receive no housing assistance from NASS and have to stay with relatives or friends, often in insecure and poor accommodation. This adds to the problem of overcrowding among ethnic-minority households.

Asylum seekers who are single have to rely on private-sector accommodation or homes for single homeless people, which are often inappropriate for their cultural needs. Lack of support could also lead to their mental health deteriorating, which is often delicate as a result of the trauma they have experienced. To make sure that asylum seekers receive the support they need, we will work with other agencies to influence government policies on asylum seekers and to make sure that asylum seekers receive appropriate support and help.

### Ethnic-minority young people

We know that, nationally, Muslim children are three times as likely to live in overcrowded accommodation (Census 2001). This has already been highlighted as an issue affecting Muslim children locally, with many Asian teenagers of different sexes being forced to share a room because of overcrowding, which is culturally unacceptable to the Muslim religion. Census 2001 data also shows that children from Pakistani and Bangladeshi families suffer twice as much ill health as white children. We will need to work out the effect poor housing has on health, as households from these communities are more likely to be living in poor private-sector housing. We will work towards increasing awareness and understanding of housing issues affecting young ethnic-minority people in Merton.

### Supporting People

Supported housing and visiting support are now funded by the Supporting People Grant to help people with special needs. Ethnic-minority

communities are vulnerable to racial harassment, and are over-represented in single homeless households and homeless families, as well as in people with HIV and AIDs. Black African communities make up 78% of heterosexuals using HIV-related services in Merton (Survey of Prevalent HIV Infections Diagnosed (SOPHID)1999). 89% of HIV positive children are Black African. At the moment, there is little information available on the ethnic origin of people with physical or learning disabilities, or mental-health needs. We will need to improve information about the supported housing needs of ethnic minorities, and work closely with Merton's Supporting People team to meet those needs.

### **Make sure there is community cohesion and fair access to social housing**

The Government has asked housing authorities to assess whether housing preferences and their lettings policy have any effect on community relations and racial tension in local communities. The Communities Plan also emphasised the positive contributions lettings policies could make to help create mixed communities. We will contribute towards community relations by improving understanding of the housing preferences of different ethnic groups, looking at whether there are any problems in Merton and looking at any possible effect on race relations. We will also develop a more sensitive lettings policy that will help promote racial harmony.

We will make sure that the share of social housing offered to ethnic-minority households reflects their representation on our housing register, by monitoring lettings by ethnic origin, and looking at lettings by bed size, location and area preferences. To help build cohesive communities, all local authorities must develop 'choice-based' lettings schemes by 2010, which will introduce more choices and flexibility to our existing points-based schemes. We will make sure that our Housing Service takes account of the needs of ethnic-minority households when developing our 'choice-based' lettings policy.

### **Provide quality housing services**

We recognise that ethnic-minority tenants may have different needs from other tenants. We will make sure that our ethnic-minority tenants receive responsive and sensitive housing-management services, and can enjoy living in an environment that is free from racial harassment. Although housing providers only have limited power as landlords to tackle racial harassment, they can take action which many tenants are not aware of, resulting in incidents not being reported. For example, the Housing Service can help victims by improving security, or transferring them to another home or area. Our MASCOT Community Alarm Service provides an alarm service to households who have experienced racial harassment, and runs a 24-hour phone hotline for hate crime.

The Housing Service will continue to work with other agencies to deal with the under-reporting of racial incidents, improve responses to incidents reported and increase support for victims. Agencies we work with include the Merton Partnership Against Crime (MPAC), the Racial Incidents Panel, Merton Housing Association Group (MERHAG) and Merton Racial Equality Partnership (MREP). There are joint guidelines for the police and Housing to share information. We will do more to improve social landlords' responses to cross-tenure incidents (where council tenants and private owners clash) and work with MREP to improve reporting procedures so more people report incidents.

We will increase the involvement of ethnic-minority tenants and residents so that they can influence the way we deliver services. There have been initiatives to increase ethnic-minority involvement in tenants' and residents' associations, including the first ethnic-minority open day. Ethnic-minority residents are now represented on a number of new associations. By increasing the level of involvement of ethnic-minority residents and their influence on the services delivered, we aim to increase their satisfaction with housing services and their satisfaction with opportunities for getting involved.



### Tackle exclusion

Reflecting the position nationally, ethnic minorities in Merton, particularly Black residents, are more likely to be unemployed and to be on a low income. The Bangladeshi and Pakistani communities also have an unemployment level that is higher than the national average. In many parts of the UK, we have found a high percentage of ethnic minorities living in the most deprived areas in Merton. These communities are at a higher risk of being excluded from society and are more likely to be affected by poor housing, unemployment, low educational achievement, ill health and crime.

Ethnic-minority communities in Merton are particularly affected by poor housing. The Housing Domain scores of the Indices of Deprivation 2000 showed seven wards out of twenty in Merton are among the top 10% most deprived in England in terms of housing. The Graveney ward, which is the most deprived ward in Merton, also has the highest percentage of ethnic minorities of all Merton wards at nearly 45%. With the exception of Longthornton, all eight wards with an above-average percentage of ethnic minorities are among the top 10% most deprived.

Housing providers can play an important part in tackling exclusion issues at a neighbourhood level by involving local communities in innovative projects. Merton Housing Service and our partner RSLs can contribute towards increasing the economic wealth of deprived communities by involving ethnic-minority residents in community-development projects and by encouraging local Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) contractors to bid for contracts on housing work. We will also analyse the most up-to-date information on ethnic origin and deprivation at a neighbourhood level so that social landlords can develop appropriate responses and use resources to tackle exclusion.

### Invest in a varied workforce

We recognise that a varied workforce that reflects the make-up of Merton's population will provide better responses to the needs of our communities. At

the moment, the overall ethnic make-up of staff within the Housing and Social Services Department reflects that of Merton's population, although Asian staff are very much under-represented (4% of the workforce compared with 12.4% in the population). On the other hand, the representation of Black staff at 20%, is much higher than their representation in Merton's population (7.8%), although they are mostly in lower-graded posts.

Merton's Housing Service is small compared with many London housing authorities, with 176 staff. At the moment, ethnic-minority staff are under-represented at all levels in Housing, making up only 16% of the workforce. Again, Asian and 'Other' staff are under-represented, with the percentage of Black staff higher than their representation in the population. At the moment there are no ethnic-minority staff represented at senior management level.

The Housing Service has a very low turnover of staff, with many staff having stayed with the organisation for many years, so there has not been much opportunity within Merton's Housing Service to increase the representation of ethnic-minority staff. Asian and 'Other' residents aged 16 to 74 were more likely than other groups (Census 2001 data) to be unemployed, which may explain their under-representation in the workforce. To deal with the under-representation of ethnic-minority staff, we will continue to develop and put into practice a programme of positive action and will make sure that our recruitment process does not contain any discriminatory practices by analysing job applications and outcomes by ethnic origin. We have piloted a training course on equality and diversity for staff to increase awareness of equalities issues in the workplace and to promote cultural sensitivity. We will also work with registered social landlords to promote housing as a career option for people from ethnic-minority communities, particularly young people.



If you would like more information in your own language, please contact us at the address shown in the box below.

**Albanian** Nese deshironi me shume informacion ne gjuhen tuaj, ju lutemi te na kontaktoni ne adresen e dhene ne kutine me poshte.

**Arabic** إذا أردت معلومات إضافية بلغتك الأصلية الرجاء الاتصال بنا في العنوان المدون ضمن الإطار أدناه.

**Bengali** যদি আপনার নিজের ভাষায় লেখা আরও তথ্য চান তাহলে দয়া করে আমাদের সঙ্গে যোগাযোগ করুন, উল্লিখিত বক্সে আমাদের ঠিকানা রয়েছে।

**Chinese** 如果你需要用中文印成的資料，請按低端方格內提供的地址與我們聯繫。

**Farsi** اگر مایل به اطلاعات بیشتر به زبان خود هستید، لطفاً با ما از طریق آدرس زیر تماس بگیرید.

**French** Pour tout renseignement complémentaire dans votre propre langue, veuillez nous contacter à l'adresse figurant dans l'encadré du bas.

**Gujarati** જો તમને તમારી પોતાની ભાષામાં વધારે માહિતી જોઈતી હોય, તો કૃપા કરીને નીચે અંતમાં આપેલા ખાનામાં દર્શાવેલા સરનામે અમારો સંપર્ક કરો.

**Punjabi** ਜੇਕਰ ਤੁਸੀਂ ਪੰਜਾਬੀ ਵਿਚ ਹੋਰ ਜਾਣਕਾਰੀ ਲੈਣੀ ਚਾਹੁੰਦੇ ਹੋ ਤਾਂ ਹਿੱਸਾ ਵਰਕੇ ਹੇਠ ਲਿਖੇ ਖਾਨੇ ਵਿਚ ਦਿੱਤੇ ਪਤੇ 'ਤੇ ਸਾਡੇ ਠਾਲ ਸੰਪਰਕ ਕਰੋ।

**Somali** Hadii aad u baahan tahay faahfaahin intaa kabadan oo ku soobsan afkaaka hooyo ama Af Somali fadlan lana soo xiira cinwaanka hoos ku qoran.

**Spanish** Si usted desea más información en su propia lengua, por favor contáctenos en la dirección al pie del formato.

**Tamil** உங்கள் மொழியில் மேலதிக தகவலைப் பெற விரும்பினால், அடியிலுள்ள பெட்டிக் குள் தரப்பட்டிருள்ள விவரத்தில் எம்முடன் தொடர்பு கொள்ளுங்கள்.

**Urdu** اگر آپ اپنی زبان میں مزید معلومات حاصل کرنا چاہتے ہیں تو براہ کرم ہم سے اس پتہ پر رابطہ قائم کریں جو کہ نیچے کے بکس میں درج ہے۔

You can also get this information in large print, in Braille and on tape.

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## Contacts

If you have any comments or questions about this report, please do not hesitate to contact Angela Chu, Principal Housing Policy Officer, at the following address:

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