



BAME Business Engagement

Skills, Economy and Growth
Scrutiny Commission

July 2018

SUMMARY

There is a need for existing businesses to feel part of the journey this borough is taking. The Mayor of Hackney is committed to supporting local businesses and the Commission was keen to explore the work the council was doing to advance this agenda.

This event saw a focused set of discussions with business owners from the BAME community. The discussions revealed a number of key areas where the council could do more to address the BAME business community's concerns and support needs.

The concerns expressed by local BAME business owners can be summarised under 4 key headings:

1

Engaging with the council

2

Access to business opportunities within the council

3

The business support offer

4

Gentrification

It became apparent that these business owners were not feeling the full benefits of the borough's economic growth and the council needs to do more to communicate and engage with them.

Building relationships with local businesses and developing a better offer to businesses are key pieces of work currently being undertaken by the council.

This event showed us there are many business owners not aware of the council's work to improve its business support offer and feel marginalised when it comes to accessing opportunities to work with the council – procurement.

Their business needs and the needs of the communities they provide a service to are different to the growth sectors. Their views have highlighted there is more for the council explore.

This event is the start of a journey with the council and the points raised need further investigation to assess how BAME businesses can be better supported to thrive in the local economy.

23 individuals attended, and were invited to discuss the following two questions in groups of five to six people:

1. What are the barriers to engagement with the Council?
2. What are the business support needs of BAME Business owners?

ENGAGING WITH THE COUNCIL



1

A clear message from participants was that the Council isn't engaging enough with the BAME business community, and that the Council doesn't fully understand their specific needs.

2

It was also communicated that some participants weren't aware of the existing support offer from the Council, including the business forums, and that the Council needs to better promote the current support, advice and Services we have in place.

3

Attendees went on to suggest a range of ways to better engage with them and to support them through our engagement with other sections of the community.

Some examples included a local charter, an improved website for communication with SMEs and small business loans to help with advertisement.

4

The majority of participants suggested that this engagement needs to take into account the needs of the BAME business community and provide specific spaces for them to engage with us and offer support to each other.

DOING BUSINESS WITH THE COUNCIL



1

Whilst one participant told us that they have found engaging with us on day-to-day business to be a positive experience, others told us that they find it difficult to interact with us and that we could provide more support to help businesses navigate the Council and provide continuity across staff changes.

2

Participants raised specific areas where support would be particularly useful, and the most commonly cited one was commercial property.

In particular, they told us of the difficulties of increasing rent and the need for more affordable workspace.

3

Procurement was another widely discussed area of Council activity where we could doing more to support BAME businesses.

Participants told us that we need to better promote opportunities available for SMEs and local BAME businesses to sell to the Council but that we need to do more to support these businesses to be ready to supply.

4

That we are already doing work to address some these concerns only emphasises the need for better communication and promotion of our activity.

Parking was also mentioned as an area where the Council can help traders.

5

Other suggestions included access to Council databases, building a stadium, providing more funding for community projects and improving the public realm.

BUSINESS SUPPORT



1 A number of participants suggested that more support and guidance around setting up, growing and managing a business would be useful, and made suggestions for how the Council could provide more business events.

Some of these included SME advice surgeries, Start-ups provision and a Hackney-wide business organisation that businesses can go to.

2 Several participants said that more networking opportunities and mentoring programmes were needed in Hackney.

3 A couple of participants identified young people as a key group needing specific support for starting up their own businesses.

LINKED TO GENTRIFICATION



- 1 Quite a few participants talked about the level of resource and support going to new, large businesses in the Borough, or to encouraging and supporting a particular type of 'start-up' business to set up in the Borough - and there was a feeling that the Council is prioritising the needs of these start-ups or larger businesses over local SMEs and isn't doing enough to support the existing community with these changes.
- 2 Another participant told a bigger story about the impact the rapid socio-economic change is having on the BAME community, causing some existing BAME businesses to feel marginalised amidst a new "culture of exclusion".
- 3 They suggested that the Council should use it's levers more to help local BME businesses.

NEXT STEPS

The Commission will have an opportunity to reflect on these findings at our next meeting on the 3rd September 2018.

In the meantime, the Chair of the Commission Cllr Mete Coban will be sharing these findings with the relevant officers and responsible Cabinet member and will seek a response in time for the Commission meeting.

All of the participants have received a follow-up email from the Commission advising them on the next steps and have been put in touch with the Council's responsible officer for organising the business forums, in order for them to access some of the support that the Council offers.

