Evidence to Sheffield Race Equality Commission – submitted 17th September 2020

Tackling White privilege:
understanding it, working together to dismantle it,
the importance of BAME [1] leadership

Summary

1. Cohesion is not threatened by diversity, it is threatened by deprivation and inequality
2. Racism and in particular covert or implicit racism is a substantial threat to cohesion
3. Racism is a direct product of Empire, and a tool that was designed and used in its creation and maintenance
4. Its consequences continue to have racially discriminatory impact
5. Although progress has been made on tackling overt racism, there have also been backward steps from the 1980s when a colour-blind mainstream politics developed
6. This led to a detrimental impact on BAME groups, including Race Equality Councils, when funding was withdrawn from single identity groups as a consequence of the Cantle Report (2001) and led to a largely colour-blind Community Cohesion Policy.
7. The development of the Black Lives Matter movement, combined with the disproportionate impact of COVID-19 on BAME communities, has brought racial injustice towards the top of the political agenda.
8. The key to dismantling racism is *accountability* – White people recognising and accepting responsibility to change a racist culture – not easy because perceptions are shaped by that culture.
9. Cohesion Sheffield proposes a dual approach
   o Support BAME groups and BAME leadership across all sectors in the city
   o Work directly with substantially White groups and organisations to educate about and transform the dynamics of White privilege which are underpinned by culture and practices referred to as *White supremacy*
10. We identify examples of good practice enabling this – much can be done locally without government permission or changes in government policy.
11. One thing that will make a significant difference is if funders are committed. Funders themselves need diversity in leadership and an understanding of the dynamics of White privilege to ensure they apply criteria that challenge and not maintain the status quo.

About Cohesion Sheffield

Cohesion Sheffield was established in April 2017, with funding from the Paul Hamlyn Foundation, to implement the Sheffield Cohesion Strategic Framework for Action.

http://www.cohesionsheffield.co.uk.

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The framework had been developed as a coproduction between Sheffield City Council and Sheffield Cohesion Advisory Group over the previous three years, involving two major conferences and numerous seminars and workshops.

[1] We are aware that no single term can reflect the diversity of peoples who are discriminated against by White overt and covert racism. For our submission we use the term adopted by the Commission in its terms of reference.

Cohesion Sheffield is an infrastructure hub (part of VAS) that works across all sectors in Sheffield. It has developed a network of 50 partner organisations and groups.

It has 3 key principles:

1. The 'cohesion lens'; everything we do is a cohesion building opportunity if we look at it that way, otherwise we risk unintentionally undermining cohesion. How we do things is as important as what we do.

2. Cohesion is not threatened by diversity, it is threatened by deprivation; deprivation undermines cohesion, tackling inequality is essential.

3. Collaboration is at the heart of our work – multi-partner, cross sector

It is not a top down strategy for partners to implement according to agreed priorities, but an invitation to partners to find their own ways to apply the framework to their existing work.

In January 2020, Cohesion Sheffield made a decision to prioritise racial equality whilst recognising the intersections between all forms of discrimination and marginalisation.

Evidence of racial inequality in Sheffield

The 2020 State of Sheffield Report "The Impacts of COVID-19 on the People of Sheffield"

https://niftyfoxcreative.wixsite.com/stateofsheffield reports long established inequalities in the city, and in particular racial inequalities, made more manifest by the COVID-19 pandemic. Others can and will document existing inequalities that are acknowledged, but persist, for example in health, education, employment, criminal justice, and representation.

Internationally, there is growth in right wing extremism, leading to increases in hate crime. In the UK and in Sheffield this has been stimulated by the Brexit campaigns and an absence of political leadership speaking out clearly against it. Digital media activities have intensified hatred. The Centre for Countering Digital Extremism has a useful Situational Analysis that identifies strategic priorities - https://www.counterhate.co.uk/situation-analysis. Although there is evidence of overt racism in Sheffield, probably less than in many towns and cities.

The focus of our submission is not overt racism, but covert racism, harder to tackle because it is harder to see and often denied. It is not about bad people being nasty, but about good White people lacking sufficient awareness or motivation to understand its dynamics and to tackle and dismantle something they/we benefit from. Key to this is *accountability* – White people recognising and accepting responsibility to change a racist culture – not easy because perceptions are shaped by that culture. We don't notice how our behaviours and the behaviours of other White people around us hurt, discriminate, threaten and humiliate people of colour.

We cite one significant instance of inequality in Sheffield. Looking across all sectors, those in leadership roles (senior managers, directors, trustees etc) do not match the diversity demographics of the city that exists now. To increase diversity in leadership has been a priority of Cohesion Sheffield since our inception – there is little tangible change, though probably more recognition and acknowledgment of the need for change. Reasons given are

mostly of the form "it's too difficult", for example because few new jobs are created and few senior posts become available. We don't find that convincing, it seems to indicate lack of will. Our BAME colleagues push back, that its White self-interest, and we think they are right.

Cohesion Sheffield's analysis of the causes of racism and racial inequality in Sheffield

Race was a creation of Europeans over a period of three to four hundred years to justify exploitation of people of colour, the expropriation of lands, of resources, and the extremely profitable operation of the slave trade. Scientific racism was developed as the intellectual justification for that exploitation by dehumanising people.

After the Second World War and the defeat of Nazi Germany overt racism became less acceptable because racial purity was associated with Nazi ideology. Leaders and intellectuals in the UK began to talk more openly about the 'myth of race'.

> "However, the intellectual demolition of race could not undo centuries of racial thinking. Millions of people had become habituated to the idea of race, and instinctively viewed the world in racial terms. This, after all, was how they had been taught to make sense of the world, explain the rise of the European empires and rationalize their injustices. The idea of race, and the practice of racism, had emerged over centuries. It was deeply rooted and to some extent and in some quarters impervious to factual rebuttal."

> D. Olusoga, *Black and British: A Forgotten History,* Pan Books, 2017 p. 490.

Post war government attitudes did not change. Extensive efforts were made covertly to prevent immigration from the West Indies. These were largely unsuccessful due to extensive efforts by employers in the context of an acute labour shortage to recruit from the West Indies and the right of entry available to British subjects from the colonies. The result was the Windrush generation, arriving increasingly from 1948, peaking in 1956.

The effect was to accelerate UK citizens direct experience of Black people, more slowly to enable integration, but also to increase overt racism (for example, trade unions supporting British jobs for British (= White) workers.

The Race Relations Act 1976 established the Commission for Racial Equality and made overt racism illegal in key public spheres. Although providing important protections, it led to 'colour-blindness'. Successive governments from the 1980s claimed and acted as if racial prejudice was substantially a thing of the past. The significance of class dynamics was treated similarly. The intersections between race, class and gender interact in complex but important ways, creating unearned privileges for some, which can be obscured if the focus is put on individual achievement.

This had, and still has, a detrimental effect on education for all. It led to the introduction of the market based approach, built on the assumption that systemic bias against Black children does not exist. So educational attainment is seen as determined by personal factors such as ability, motivation, parental support etc. This has had a detrimental impact on the education of Black boys in particular – and on White working class boys also – because it fails to take account of the structural barriers to their progress.

The Macpherson Report (1999), the Inquiry into the murder of Stephen Lawrence and the failures of its investigation, came to the landmark conclusion that the Metropolitan Police Service had acted in an institutionally racist way.

It introduced the idea of 'unwitting prejudice' that led to racially discriminatory practice. The findings led to interest and research into Implicit Racial Bias as a core element of

institutional and structural racism. Racist behaviour did not mean that someone was intentionally racist but that they lived and worked in a context that was culturally racist and that this had a compelling impact on behaviour.

In 2001, the Cantle Report - an investigation into 'riots' in three northern towns - concluded that ethnic groups were living *parallel lives* which was detrimental to community cohesion. *Multiculturalism* as a policy was identified as the problem, leading to the withdrawal of national and local government funding from organisations that supported minority groups, including funding of Race Equality Councils. The Sheffield REC, established in 2005, ceased as a charity in 2011. Sheffield City Council's *Strategy for Community Cohesion* (2008) had in initial drafts identified racial inequality as a key issue for Sheffield influencing social cohesion, but the final version barely mentioned race or racial inequality.

The Race Relations Act was superseded by the Equalities Act, 2010, which brought together into one framework previous discrimination law. Arguably, it had the effect of diluting action to challenge racism, in particular systemic racism.

In recent years, understanding of systemic and institutional racism has increased and has led to important initiatives such as Decolonising the Curriculum, training for White people and substantially White organisations in Unconscious/Implicit (Racial) Bias, the dynamics of White privilege and the underlying systemic processes and behaviours called White supremacy - a framework helping us understand how the embedded system of White privilege structurally maintains racism to the benefit of White people and that the only way to counter it is to be actively anti-racist.

These initiatives, most recently amplified by the Black Lives Matter movement, have firmly placed race and racial justice back on the political agenda.

Cohesion Sheffield's views on the best way to tackle racism and racial inequality in Sheffield – incorporating examples of good practice

It is important that the recent high profile activism, locally, nationally, and internationally, is brought into the mainstream agenda around inclusion. Real conversations are the only answer, to move us <u>all</u> forward, not just some.

The BLM movement has had a major impact. And so has COVID 19, which has both revealed more starkly the greater impact on systemically marginalised groups and has destabilised 'business as usual' in a way that creates new possibilities.

Cohesion Sheffield proposes to prioritise more explicitly racial justice work, and to do so by directly addressing the culture, systems and practices of White supremacy, and in particular White privilege that follows from this. The culture and practices that constitute White supremacy should not be confused with an accusation of being a White supremacist ie a member of an extremist group. We will adopt an inclusive, engaging approach which balances the welcoming of all lived experience with challenge.

In this work we recommend drawing on seminal work by leading practitioners internationally - this is acknowledged and referenced below.

We propose a number of linked priorities. What can be tackled in practice depends on resources available.

1. Work with, and guided by, colleagues/activists in BAME led organisations to ensure the work is anti-racist in approach and practice.

2. Work with substantially White organisations (as assessed by membership of their senior management and/or trustees) - this work to include awareness raising to understand the dynamics of privilege, to acknowledge and challenge individual and systemic racism in its various manifestations; to develop and support White allies enabling sustainable organisational change.

John Amaechi, psychologist and former NBA basketball player, gives a very clear explanation of White privilege in under 3 minutes - https://www.bbc.co.uk/bitesize/articles/zrvkbqt

It can be helpful to think of White privilege as an addiction requiring in depth personal and collective work that is prone to relapse, so maintenance activities are important - see seminal paper by Gail Golden, White Privilege as an Addiction - http://www.antiracistalliance.com/WhitePrivilegeAsAddiction.pdf

The work, in collaboration with anti-racist allies and trainers, has a number of resources it can draw on

- The workbook by Layla Saad "Me and White Supremacy: How to Recognise Your Privilege, Combat Racism and change the World"
- The work of Dr. Muna Abdi - 'White Allies MUST be Antiracist too' - https://the-nomadic-way.com/2020/06/23/white-allies-must-be-antiracist-too/
- The Racial Justice Network in Yorkshire offers Unlearning Racism courses – https://racialjusticenetwork.co.uk/unlearning-racism/
- The brap Anti-racist education programme - https://www.brap.org.uk/post/anti-racist-learning-thinking-and-practice

3. Recognise that a priority for action must be in the VCS in Sheffield, including in Cohesion Sheffield itself. In this work it is helpful to recognise the contradictions that arise - https://reneeroederer.com/2020/06/18/contradictions-for-white-people-in-racial-justice-work/

4. From this base, work with the business and public sectors challenging marginalisation, promoting and supporting anti-racist work and development.

5. This work naturally links to Cohesion Sheffield's priority to promote more diverse leadership. With others, Cohesion Sheffield is sponsoring a conference organised by Dr Muna Abdi entitled 'Tackling Racism across the Leadership Pipeline in Sheffield' on 8th October.

6. The work will not be easy. It requires the building of robust and trustworthy relationships in the context of power imbalances and shifting power dynamics - with a balance between challenge and support. This approach is what Cohesion Sheffield is founded on. It is important for the continuation and the renewal of our work that we explicitly address systemic racism and its intersection with all forms of marginalisation.

7. Some 15 years ago funding was withdrawn from what were regarded as single identity groups, including Race Equality Councils. The rationale was to promote 'community

cohesion' – we are all in this together. But that is glaringly not so, while inequalities exist and increase – in any manifestation. The slogan *no peace without justice* can be also expressed as *no cohesion without equality*.

If we are serious about tackling inequality and injustice, including racial inequality, funders need to explicitly recognise the necessity of developing more diverse leadership. And to do this by funding BAME groups, not to increase segregation but to recognise that the defeat of racial inequality requires commitment both to (a) leadership of BAME organisations who at this stage (having been substantially starved of funding) need funding streams to support their own development and (b) to learning and development by substantially White organisations.

Funders themselves need diversity in leadership and an understanding of the dynamics of White privilege to ensure they are applying criteria that challenge and not maintain the status quo.

Cohesion Sheffield. The Circle, 33 Rockingham Lane, Sheffield S1 4FW
Telephone: 0114 253 6636

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