



Understanding the Impact of the economic down turn on BME communities:

**A case study of the Loughborough estate in
the London Borough of Lambeth**

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Trust for London
Tackling poverty and inequality

The ***Black Training and Enterprise Group (BTEG)*** is a national charity providing a voice to government for black and minority ethnic service providers. BTEG has a successful track record of advising government departments and non-departmental bodies and participates in a range of governmental advisory groups at the national and regional levels and has influenced policy and practice in central government, Jobcentre Plus and Learning and Skills Councils as well as provide technical assistance support to voluntary and community organisations and public bodies.

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In the final analysis, the interpretations made of the voices remain those of the author and BTEG

CONTENT

Acknowledgement	3
Section 1: Introduction and context	6
Section 2: Lambeth – an overview	7
Section 3: The Loughborough estate – a case study	8
Section 4: Issues for consideration	15

Introduction

The continuing economic uncertainty and job losses have resulted in dramatic rises in unemployment and claimant rates and, with respect to Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) people, they are rising faster. The most recent annual figures show a rise in the number of BME claiming Job Seekers Allowance (JSA) in London, which now represent close to 50 per cent of all claimants.

Against this backdrop, the Black Training and Enterprise Group (BTEG) was successful in obtaining a two year grant from the Trust for London to undertake work around the impact and implications of the economic downturn on BME employment prospects in London. Specifically, to explore the impact and implications for local and/or national policy development in improving employment opportunities for disadvantaged people. A key aspect of the work is to raise awareness of practices that could inform policy developments with respect to unemployment and economic exclusions in areas of high BME population in London.

Within this context we were able to identify 15 London Boroughs who met our criteria of key boroughs to focus on in order to explore some key variables impacting on local communities¹. The 15 identified

boroughs are: *Barking and Dagenham, Brent, Enfield, Greenwich, Hackney, Hammersmith and Fulham Haringey, Islington, Lambeth, Lewisham, Newham, Redbridge, Southwark, Tower Hamlets and Waltham Forest.*

Drawn from the fifteen (15) boroughs we sought to undertake focused work on two targeted estates as 'case studies'. This paper is based on the work within the London Borough of Lambeth with a focus on the Loughborough estate in the Coldharbour Ward².

In the London Borough of Lambeth, we were particularly interested in the Council's Economic Development Strategy (EDS) and the role of stakeholders within the Loughborough Junction area. In particular, to consider the role of the Loughborough Estate Management Board (LEMB) as a prime vehicle in the regeneration of the Loughborough estate and other statutory and non-statutory providers of support to the unemployed and/or BME directed resources.

The approach

In trying to better understand the concerns two principle approaches were adopted: qualitative and quantitative information data gathering. Here we explored the concerns being faced by BME unemployed through face to face structured interviews with a random selection of those who were unemployed and accessing the Green Man Employment Skills Zone (N = 7) and a survey using Survey Monkey (N

¹ Key to our approach is a focus on neighbourhoods/estates within a local area. The four criteria were: BME profile, IMD ranking, employment and unemployment rates, compared to the London position. For further details please see Race Equality in Employment – Briefing, Issue 4, Dec'2011 (www.bteg.co.uk)

² The first estate focused case study was the Aylesbury estate, Southwark, which can be downloaded at www.bteg.co.uk

The Loughborough estate – London Borough of Lambeth

= 6) and face to face survey via MI Solutions and the Green Man Employment Skills Zone (N = 21).

Overall a total of twenty-seven (27) respondents completed our questionnaire (see Table 1).

Table 1: Questionnaire respondents by age and ethnicity

Age range	Ethnicity of all survey respondents			
	White	Black	Mixed	Total
16 - 24yrs	4	6	1	11
25 - 49yrs	0	12	0	12
50 - 65yrs	0	3	1	4
Total	4	21	2	27

Use was also made of secondary qualitative and quantitative data to better understand some of the needs within the area and on the estate more specifically. This included reports and data from the Council departments such as the *Economic Development Strategy* and the *London Community Foundation report: Loughborough Speaks*.

In summary, one-in-three of respondents (33%) were unemployed for 12 months at the time of the survey and two-out-of-five (40%) were unemployed for between 6months to 12months with one-in-three (33%) unemployed for more than 12mths³.

London Borough of Lambeth

The London Borough of Lambeth shares common borders with Lewisham, Wandsworth and Southwark. Sixty-two per cent (62%) of Lambeth's population are white with the broad classification of the

³ Please see the full report for breakdown of the analysis of responses.

Black or Black British population accounting for 26%, this being the largest minority ethnic group within the borough. The remaining minority ethnic groups account for 12% of the population.

The concern over the persistent high level of worklessness in Lambeth has spurred on the need to rethink the Council's 'Economic Development Strategy' (EDS)⁴, with the Council wanting to link more directly to the major employers in the City as part of a much wider strategic employment approach.⁵ This approach, it is hoped, will benefit Lambeth through greater partnership synergy and bring them much closer to the economic centre of London.

Based on the evidence of the Council's own Local Economic Assessment Report (2011), over 40 projects were identified in Lambeth that targeted disadvantaged communities to improve access to employment. Coupled with these initiatives, there are numerous Jobcentre Plus (JCP) funded providers that deliver training to support individuals to achieve job outcomes and aims to capture annually around 2,000 individuals in to these programmes. However, from interviews with key officers and other

⁴ Worklessness is defined as the combination of those who are unemployed (not working but available for and seeking work) and those who are economically inactive (not working and not available for or seeking work). Of those who are economically inactive, some may have left the labour market due to care responsibilities, early retirement or full-time education. Others in this group may be people who want to work but require support to enter the labour market: people with disabilities, for example, or lone parents.

⁵ Economic Development Strategy: 2007 – 2010, Lambeth First, 2007. The strategy is currently being revised and until then, this remains the main strategic plan of the authority.

The Loughborough estate – London Borough of Lambeth

stake holders working across the borough, there appears to be a lack of strategic leadership and ownership of the agenda for change. The following summarised the general view of some of the officers: *“there has been very little progress since the publication and launch of the Strategy [the Economic Development Strategy]. In part because of the constant changes that we have been going through as a council and in part to the fact that the economic crisis threw everything up in the air and we have been playing catch-up ever since. Implementing the Strategy really didn’t get off ground. The revisions that are being made may still not get the go ahead until next year, because things are ever changing nationally and here locally.”*

The Loughborough estate: a case study

The Loughborough estate is situated in the Coldharbour ward; a ward with a high unemployment claimant rate (8.7% compared to the borough’s average of 5.6%). The headline profile indicates that Coldharbour has:

- The largest ward population in the borough, rising from 13,272 in 1991 to 14,376 in 2001 (an increase of 8.3%);
- A demographic profile which shows that the BME population make up 56% of the ward population compared to 38% of the borough population (see Table 5), with the African and Caribbean population being the single largest non-white ethnic group at 44%;
- An employment rate of 59.6% which compares less favourably to the borough average of 72.3%. As Table 3 shows, the employment

rate amongst African and Caribbean people is below the ward average at 57.8%

- A JSA claimant rate for 18 – 24yrs that is more than double the borough average (19.7% compared 8.6%: see Fig 6) with 50% of all claimants within the ward coming from one single ethnic group – Black/Black British (Table 5);
- A high proportion of children in lone parent families with a corresponding low proportion of children in married families.

To what extent are BME groups on the estate being supported to develop and/or secure employment or employment skills?

The Marcus Lipton Youth Centre (MLYC)

The Marcus Lipton Youth Centre (MLYC) is located on the Loughborough estate. The centre is one of many local authority maintained Youth Hubs which serves young people in and around the Brixton and Loughborough area of Lambeth. With respect to employment possibilities amongst young people, our interview indicates that finding work/employment for young people is difficult. The Centre Manager explains:

“Young people want to find work. However, often they have to fight against the negative image that they encounter on a regular basis; the media, on the estate and having to live down the history of the estate. At the MLYC we try to support them by sign-posting them and help to undertake job search, training such as mock interviews and guiding them on how to ‘tidy up’. Many of the young people we

The Loughborough estate – London Borough of Lambeth

come across are not confident nor have the social competence so we give them as real an opportunity to the real situation as we can. We try to make them work ready as many come out of school with limited skills and very poor social skills...Based on those who present themselves to us, they turn up unable to answer basic information. What are their career advisers doing?"

He goes on to provide some examples of the challenges being faced by young people:

"Getting young people into an apprenticeship programme has been fraught with problems and this despite the much publicised opportunities around apprenticeships. We had to support a young person who had been waiting for close on three months to hear if he had got onto a programme. No one responded to his application! We chased it up on weekly and then daily basis and by the time we finally got a response the young person had decided he had had enough and was totally put off by the experience. We managed to persuade him to change his mind and to consider the offer; which he did and is doing very well as it turned out."

This experience was also indicated with some of the unemployed interviewed at the Green Man Employment Skills Zone, who told of similar experience of having to wait months before they received any response from their application. As one respondent puts it: *"...they take the p***. Thinking that we don't have mouths to feed or life's to live*

Against this back drop the MLYC is piloting work with a small group of

young people interested in setting up their own business. They are looking to establish their business as a company limited by guarantee; a social enterprise model. The group is meeting on a weekly basis and working through some key issues such as exploration of support structures such as New Enterprise Allowance (NEA) and such other assistance in getting a business up and running.

Loughborough Estate Management Board (LEMB)

The Loughborough EMB was set up in 1995 as a partnership between residents living on the Loughborough Estate and the London Borough of Lambeth. Though the LEMB exist as the formal management arrangement on the estate, based on impressionistic views gained through direct observations, formal and informal contacts, there are concerns from residents and agencies about the effectiveness of the LEMB. A key concern has been in relation to supporting the unemployed and greater use of the Community Centre as a 'community hub'. The concern is that more should be done through greater use of this provision in order to support employability training priorities.

We were unable to interview members of the LEMB as they were not prepared to participate in the research. Were they to have participated we would have been able to better understand some of the pressures and challenges they were facing and importantly, a sense of the future direction of the Community Centre and its role in

The Loughborough estate – London Borough of Lambeth

supporting unemployment on the estate, especially given the history on the estate and the high level of unemployment within the area, many of whom are residents on the estate and are BME.

London Community Foundation⁶

The London Community Foundation (LCF) has been grant making in London for 17 years and in Lambeth for over 15 years and in recent years established the Lambeth Community Fund, an endowed Fund for the borough. In late 2010 they decided to focus on Coldharbour, with a particular focus on Loughborough Junction and the surrounding area.

The aim underpinning the “Building Communities in Coldharbour” was to work with local residents and stakeholders to better understand what matters to them, and how they can support residents to build on the skills and resources that already exist in the community. The LCF approach is to bring co-ordinated and targeted investment to the area, in order to improve residents’ quality of life and support community-led solutions to local issues.

The Loughborough Speak report⁷ (2011) attempted to highlight some of

the most pressing concerns being expressed by residents and stakeholders.

The report author concluded:

“...the area is lacking a focal point for the community, and this was brought up repeatedly throughout the consultation.

Ensuring resident ownership of the centre is critical in making sure the venue is utilized as a key community resource in the years to come... Conversations with the estate management board are needed...to open up access, conduct outreach to residents and organisations in the area and support co-ordinated delivery of services across the area.”⁸

As indicated above, this conclusion is striking in its forthright and clear exposition of what needs to happen to bring a well-placed resource into use, which could provide a well needed fillip in up-skilling and supporting the unemployed – young and old. Implicit within the conclusion one cannot overlook the reference to “conversations with the estate management board are needed” as this would seem to suggest that this is not so easily undertaken. If our experience exemplifies some of the difficulties associated with engaging with the LEMB, then this comment brings to the fore deep seated frustration that currently exists.

⁶ The London Community Foundation (LCF) has undergone many name changes over the 17years: originally known as the South East London Community Foundation (1995), then the Capital Community Foundation (2006), and following on from successive mergers, became the London Community Foundation (2011) (www.londoncf.org.uk).

⁷ Loughborough Speaks: Community Consultation Report 2011, London Community Foundation arose out of a series of consultation events funded by J.P. Morgan, Guys and St Thomas’ Charitable Trust. The events took place during January and February

2011, attracting more than 100 attendees and facilitated by London Creative Labs. The report was published in the summer 2011 and is available online at: www.londoncf.org.uk.

⁸ Victoria Warne (2011), Building Communities in Coldharbour: Now we are talking, The London Community Foundation, p.22

LionHeart in the Community (LITC)

LionHeart In The Community (LITC) is a social enterprise providing community engagement through their One-Stop Shop approach which utilizes work-based learning, skills and training, social inclusion, job brokerage and outreach services to support disadvantaged communities in the South London area, including those who live in the Loughborough Junction area. Their aim is to assist anyone who need advice and support, training, employability, skills development and work-related activities.

Services are designed to engage with local communities especially 'hard to reach' groups such as BME, Young People who are not in education, employment or training, those with Disabilities, Ex-offenders and Over 50s. Thus:

- Welfare and Support
- Employability and Skills
- Work-Based Learning
- Social Brokerage and Advocacy
- Community Projects

A feature of the programme's approach is the presence of a 'youth officer', whose role it is to offer guidance and support to enable the young person to continue on the programme. In short to prevent drop-out. Part of the role is to liaise with the family and to ensure that there is a commitment from all parties to the process; and where necessary to "ensure they get involved" by building effective relationships. As with the interview with the MLYC Centre Manager, there is an emerging view that some young people lack 'stickability'; that is, there is no

commitment and perseverance – short termism appears to be the order of the day.

However, respondents to our survey and interview, when asked of their motivation in finding employment offered some up-beat responses in contrast to the perception of giving up too easily. One female respondent, within the 16 -24yrs age band, commented:

"My motivation to find a job is still sky high...I know where I aspire to be and am making provisions to get there."

Another respondent (male) within the same age bracket described his motivation as "...good. I am self-motivated and good at getting things done myself."

And a more dynamic and clear thinking female respondent offered the following sentiment:

"I would like to run my own business but I understand that I have to prepare myself and be more confident. I am very happy to join this course and I appreciate the opportunity to be here."

"...from the courses I have attended I believe they give me opportunities to find work because of the qualifications I will be getting."

Interestingly, those who had been in work and who now found themselves unemployed reacted differently to their situation. A male respondent interviewed at the Green Man Employment Zone commented sharply that:

The Loughborough estate – London Borough of Lambeth

“...it is stressful being unemployed and trying to find work. As a plasterer it is not a good time. I am looking to change my career; I am looking to see what there is in terms of IT.”

Other respondents, whose frustration was clear to see, offered the following insights:

“I am tired not working. It is frustrating. The impact of new migrants have undermined the wage structure because they are cheaper and contractors are taking them over us who have been doing the work for many years. Employers are reducing the wages they pay whereas migrants are prepared to work harder and for less – they will do almost anything. I left construction and change options where I am now looking to go into security....”(Male 16 – 24yrs)

And still others:

“...can’t put into words my frustration. I have been trying different things and exploring work experiences in the hope of getting employment“(Male, 16 – 24yrs).

*“..Not happy at all. Finances are only short term and I have children and other home needs to meet. I am in my 30s and have to depend on the little I receive from benefits. It’s not right. I have to really consider changing my work field from admin to healthcare.”
[Female, 25 – 49yrs]*

To what extent are policies and strategies making a difference?

Despite the strategies, policies and consultative outcomes, most notably the current Economic Development

Strategy and the Loughborough Speak process, there is much still to do. In understanding the journey from policy to action it is clear that the voices from those impacted upon will be a key determining factor in determining whether change has taken place; and just as important, the extent to which the changes are making a difference for BME people living on the estate specifically and more widely across the borough.

The first thing to note is that the current Economic Development Strategy (EDS) is being revised, with no date identified as to when the revised strategy will be published. From initial discussions with officers in the Council it seems as though a strong feature of the revised strategy will focus on attracting new businesses into the borough, development of new business opportunities and matching skills to the labour market.

Second, key drivers associated with the developments of Local Strategic Partnerships (LSPs) have all but ceased and in its place are “collaborative conversations taking place with relevant stake-holders,” as one senior officer commented. With reference to the establishment of the Employment and Skills Board and the Training Network, perceived as key coordination structure within the current strategy, the Officer goes on to explain that “they were linked into LSP delivery arrangements and never really got off the ground. A new strategic management arrangement is being considered and will be in place soon” as part of the new and emerging new economic strategy.

The Loughborough estate – London Borough of Lambeth

Third, there is a tacit acceptance and understanding that this area (and ward) is of concern, with the recognition of the high level of needs. There is also an understanding that some resources in the area, most notably the Community Centre and the Green Man Skills Zone, to name two venues where visible changes are possible, are under-developed and in some cases, as with the Community Centre, under-used.

The Green Man Skills Zone, for example, is leased by the Council from a private landlord on a 10 year lease. Based on two visits to the building (i.e. one and half days), the majority of the clients that entered the centre were BME and on the day in which the survey was conducted, 30 people came into the building, all of whom were from BME background. Of the 30 who came into centre on the day we visited, 11 completed the questionnaire and seven (7) were interviewed.

Respondents were clear what they wanted to see:

“...I feel helpless. We are discriminated for certain jobs and positions. The system is unfair and we are suffering. We have to work twice as hard to get anywhere. Over the last 6months I have been on interviews and taking training courses. I am now doing some volunteering through Time Bank; just to keep myself busy and active. That’s what we need. I come to the Green Man because I have to not because I want to! But they can’t really help.”
[Female, 25 -49yrs]

“...I get frustrated because of my situation. At my age what is out there

fore me? There is a lot out there if you are 16 – 25yrs; they are targeted [he shows a flyer on NEET related programme]...The older unemployed are not getting the support they need. We get help and support at the Zone, but they can’t do a lot really. I am willing to take any job going, admin, reception anything. I recently did some volunteering with the British Heart Foundation but that can’t pay the bills. I get £60 per week is not enough! It makes me depressed but I can’t give up and I have to keep trying.” [Female, 50 - 65yrs]

“...I am resigned to my situation and now concentrating on reducing my debts. I gain my motivation trough improving my skills so that I can get an office job, away from hotel industry where I have been working all this time. I have considered self-employment but have yet to fully explore what this might mean. I am trying my hand at anything going so that I can learn different skills to going it alone if necessary. The Zone has helped me because I can use the computer to check on things and there are people here to help you. But it can get depressing though at times.”
[Male, 50 -65yrs]

And another respondent offered the following:

“First of all there are should be free exercise, theatre and sport classes. Lessons should be divided into morning and afternoon. These lessons psychologically affect people who are unemployed for long time (each lesson should be an hour). Secondly, they should be having training courses that everyone would like to do, and

might include talking about Jobs etc.”
[female, 25 – 49yrs]

And another respondent explained that access to new technology was for him the future and that more opportunity ought to be in place:

“Basic computer training... I know what I'm doing but when I attended a particular ICT training course, run by a well known company, roughly 75% of the people who were there didn't know how to use a computer.” [male, 25 – 49yrs]

WHAT WE FOUND

As a result of the short study we found that:

1. More needs to be done to ensure the presence of the 'employment hub' in the area as currently no other similar provision exist of the same size and a resource such as the Green Man should be given time to develop and establish a presence (established in 2010).
2. Based on locally provided data, the Green Man Centre supported over 600 people over the two years since its establishment, and since then, they appear to find it difficult to attract more people from the immediate area given the level of unemployment in the area/ward. The current discussions taking place regards management of the building would benefit from some form of 'outreach' capacity built into the delivery approach of how the centre goes forward. An aspect of that approach should include how best to work on the estate

with the LEMB.

3. Need to explore new channels of communication and promotion so as to attract those who are disengaged (e.g. consideration of new ideas for partnership working with agencies like LITC and JCP, for example, to target and attract lone and single parents for example).
4. Development of informal and non-formal approaches to supporting jobseekers (i.e. perhaps linking with the London Community Foundation's Coldharbour Challenge Fund programme such as, for example, being one of the 'nurturing organisations', perhaps sitting on the Resident Panel in some form of advisory role or through JCP co-fund key employment and training opportunities through being creative with the Flexible Support Fund).
5. Enabling local people to feel part of the delivery arrangements through their involvement in managing the building (e.g. increase volunteering opportunities as an example).

The Loughborough Centre appears under-used and is perceived by some as a white elephant on the estate. It has potential to be a strong community base for a number of activities and projects, especially with respect to unemployment and estate focused initiatives, but the management of it is viewed as *“lacking vision, foresight and drive”* [male resident]. On a walk-about on the estate, this resident pointed out that *“while the outward facing glass*

The Loughborough estate – London Borough of Lambeth

front is used as a public notice board”, publicising events taking place in the area, “there is little to no programme promoted as taking place within the Loughborough Centre”. Arising from discussions with residents on the estate (as well as officers in the council and community based providers in the neighbourhood), URH has been awarded funding from Comic Relief to establish IT training but this has so far not materialised.

In response to this criticism, through the work of the LCF Community Development Manager and partners, work is underway to develop the Loughborough Centre as a ‘community hub’. The first meeting of the ‘development group’ took place in November 2011⁹ and has now met on six occasions since. It is therefore a step in the right direction, with the long term expectation that the hub development group will be the platform by which the model is fine tuned and then rolled out. As explained by the Community Development Manager, this is an approach which seeks “to support similar initiatives in Angell Town and the Minet Hub in Myatts”. She goes on to explain:

“I am working with local stakeholders to establish a generic governance model for the development of community hubs...Membership of the TLC hub development group will be further expanded to include greater representation from key local groups including LETRA. The LEMB attended

the first few meetings...I am hoping that the current financial and management issues facing the LEMB will be resolved soon and that they will re-instate their regular attendance and representation.”

Fourth, the London Community Foundation (LCF) Building Communities in Coldharbour Challenge Fund programme, targeted specifically on the Coldharbour ward and Loughborough Junction in particular, is an innovative and exciting pathfinder initiative. The initiative seeks to work with residents and local stakeholders to deliver programmes that address local issues. A key feature is the role of ‘nurturing organisations’ and ‘resident panels’. If successful, this could prove to be valuable in providing a strong link between strategy and practice. If successful, the Council could do well to learn from the value of this approach in support of its commissioning programmes.

ISSUES FOR CONSIDERATION

Through our process, there is a strong impression of not enough being done to support jobseekers. In relation to employment and skills training, there are a number of opportunities in our opinion that would contribute significantly to raising opportunities and aspiration amongst jobseekers within the area.

They are:

1. Greater use and take-up of local provisions such as the Loughborough Centre, Green Man Skills Zone, and LionHeart in the Community, for example, and for them to focus on the delivery of

⁹ The group grew out of a meeting in November 2011, called by the CEO of United Resident Housing (URH), which manages local housing services through the LEMB, to focus on the usage and development of The Loughborough Centre (TLC).

The Loughborough estate – London Borough of Lambeth

skill based education and training opportunities;

2. Need to increase access to information about training, volunteering, work placements and job availability;
3. Support for local people to volunteer so as to improve and increase personal skills as well as employability opportunities;
4. Better understanding of how to set up and run a business, whether social enterprise or otherwise.

Respondents have told us how they feel in being unemployed and their voices are audible to hear:

“...stressed, feeling helpless, discriminated for certain positions. The system is unfair and we BME are suffering. We have to work hard to get a position.” (female, 25 – 49yrs).

And another:

“..I am not motivated to do anything because you get no response from the applications you make. The number of times I have made an application but get no reply; there is no feedback that could help you to do better next time. You don't know what you did wrong or how you can make it better. No matter what, you have to pick yourself up and keep trying; but it's not easy. I sometimes think about what it is doing to me. I have only just started to claim but I have seen some of my friends and they seem like they have little self worth – don't care how they look or carry themselves. They say 'what's the point and who cares anyway'? I don't want to be like them and feel the longer I stay claiming and out of work

my mind will start zapping.” [female, 25 – 49yrs]

Taken as a whole, one of the key concerns must be how best to get the most out of the physical structure of The Loughborough Centre (TLC) through an effective asset management arrangement. This could facilitate both an inward as well as outward strategic approach to empowering communities. TLC is a relatively small space and, if not marketed and managed effectively, could become over subscribed in a relatively short period of time. Hence it is crucial to have a strategic asset management approach which should include working with partners with whom there maybe some reciprocity and/or associated synergy such as the Marcus Lipton and Green Man Skills Zone, for example.

www.bteg.co.uk