

# South London opinion

**southlondonpress**  
THE SPIRIT OF SOUTH LONDON

**OUR COMMENT**

## Testing time ahead for all

**H**ave you had yourself tested yet? Wandsworth, Lambeth and Southwark have, since Monday, become part of the biggest Covid-19 surge testing programme ever carried out in this country.

We are all hoping to get back to seeing friends and family and shopping this week. The spike in cases of the South African variant is a horrible reminder of just how high the risks are.

South London is highly populated with a very mobile population – about a quarter of us move every two years. Before lockdown, we were all used to long commutes.

This nasty shock will cause many to think hard every time they step outside their front door.

We don't want to be stuck inside this summer when everyone else in the country is out having fun.

There is one sort of "normal" which we were all hoping to avoid, though – the senseless killings which were all too frequent in pre-lockdown London.

Blood is on the streets again, though. Levi Earnest Morrison was stabbed and died on Saturday evening despite the efforts of paramedics and cops to save him.

Must we brace ourselves for more of this slaughter as the restrictions are eased?

Tensions have built up behind closed doors – domestic violence has surged to levels we can only guess at. It seems the keyboard warriors, petty trolls and drill hoodlums have been busy calling each other out too.

Words are important – no one should be subjected to bigotry and prejudice or denied opportunities because of race or creed.

But the anger built up between people – who could just as easily be friends – is out of control.

We can only hope it fades, if and when we get out and about. Then we can either talk to a professional – or happily hurl abuse at other defenceless creatures.

Pigeons, for example, are unlikely to answer back.

## There should be a new school history curriculum

The exclusions covered by *South London Press* ("Black Kids Excluded at Much Rate, and Through the Looking Glass, April 2) are a loss to all of us.

Excluded schoolchildren, as you report, are more likely to be recruited by criminal gangs or fall behind on their schoolwork. Previous reviews, including The Lammy Review and the The Race Disparity Audit have already found widespread evidence of institutional racism.

Dr Tony Sewell rightly says that class or sociology also holds individuals back from reaching their full potential.

Britain is certainly not the only country that has racial division or a legacy of empire.

The Commonwealth has proved a successful model of international co-operation.

However, Britain cannot yet be held up as a model for other countries on race.

Studying authors such as Zadie Smith and Bernadine Evaristo in English classes would help BAME schoolchildren to feel more included in institutions.

A new school history curriculum should accept the recommendations of David Olusoga and Emma Debiri on British history, **Shouvik Datta, ESOL teacher, medical interpreter and language bookseller**

## Council could do more to repair and mark pitches

A huge thank you to the *SLP* and to your reporter Sam Smith, for highlighting the plight of children's football in the borough of Croydon. (*Football pitch upkeep is set to be extended* - pg 20 - *SLP* April 2, 2021).

Your article is perhaps more sympathetic to Croydon council than they deserve and the fact that they told Sam they have "hopes to stretch mowing and repairs beyond April 11" is only because of pressure from local MPs and council-

lors. Their initial decision was to shut as normal.

Labour MP for Croydon Central Sarah Jones clearly recognises the need for young people in the borough to return to playing organised sport and messaged on Instagram as follows:

*"I have received lots of emails from concerned constituents regarding the continued maintenance of football pitches over summer, after the season has been extended to account for time lost to lockdown."*

*"I will be petitioning Croydon council to take action on this and hope to have news for you soon."*

Croydon council have not yet made a worthwhile concession and have said in any event, they will not consider marking any pitch beyond May – But the Football Association have extended the season to June 30.

And if Sam contacts other South London councils (or the contractors they use) he will find that they are all putting short-term financial considerations above the health and well-being of South London kids.

**Steve Davis, Vice chairman, Tandridge Youth League**

## European nationals need to know new obligations

What is Settled Status?

Post Brexit, European Union nationals resident in the UK have had their legal status changed, which requires residents to obtain the right to stay past the mid 2021 deadline.

If they do not, they will be subject to the full force of the Hostile Environment. Settled Status, or Pre-Settled Status is similar to Indefinite Leave to Remain and supplants prior statuses.

The good news first: Settled Status is easy to apply for, far easier than other immigration statuses and can be done by smartphone.

The bad news is that not everyone has a smartphone and legal advice is often still necessary.

There are many things that can go wrong even in a simplified process and seeking advice

some parts of the UK and more than four times more likely to die in childbirth.

In 1999, following the killing of Stephen Lawrence, the Macpherson Report established a definition of institutional racism which said that an institution such as "laws, customs and practices" can be said to be racist if it "systematically reflect[s] and produce[s] racial inequalities in society." Statistics clearly show that racial inequalities are still produced in our hospitals, schools and prisons every single day. Institutional racism is real, and it is the lived experience of many people.

This is not 'doing down' Black, Asian and ethnic minority people or suggesting we cannot achieve.

It is getting clear in our minds that we do not all have the same starting point in life.

For Black, Asian and ethnic minority people we start from a position of systemic disadvantage and it's our job as politicians to abolish inequality and establish a level playing field. Mentions of 'family structures' and 'culture' also appear to blame individuals for their own disadvantage.

The report's suggestion that racism has a lesser role to play in inequality than class is classic 'divide and rule' politics from a Government more interested in sowing division than genuinely improving standards of living. The Conservatives tell us they are interested in 'fairness' and 'levelling up', in inequalities of geography and class. The truth is they aren't interested in addressing inequality at all.

It is not so simple to divide up class and race like this especially given that Black, Asian and ethnic minority people make up such a huge percentage of the working class across the UK.

The real experts know this. Just 48 hours on from its publication it became clear just how

or assistance has not been easy, given that is a newly created status and the usual support mechanisms have been severely curtailed due to pandemic-related closures.

Many people struggle with English, IT, or are young or vulnerable.

Lastly, not everyone knows about the change. It may surprise many to discover that even now plenty of people are not aware of the new rules, or the implications.

A survey of London care workers from EU27 nations recently showed 1/3 did not know about Settled Status, in 2021.

The statistics published by the Home Office do not always tell the full picture either.

While the Government rightly trumpets the fact more than five million people have applied, neither they nor any local authority in the UK really have a clear idea of where people live and what nationality or immigration status they should be.

An example being that the borough of Newham has 120,000 applicants, out of an approximate population of 350,000.

Merton and Wandsworth have far less (around 58,640 for Wandsworth & 41,250 for Merton) applicants to date, but is that simply because fewer EU nationals live in our borough?

No one is sure. The age demographics also vary wildly, between youth, working age and 65+, which may be reflective of the wider population or it might not be.

All these are open questions.

So what can be done?

Unfortunately, at this point, we must be in damage limitation mode. While we can all lobby our MPs to consider tweaking the scheme, or extending it, the real goal now is to make sure European nationals know about their new obligations, their options and where to get help.

We must do all we can to avoid another Windrush hostile environment.

**Ben Austin**

**Campaigns Executive**

**European Movement in Wandsworth & Merton**

<https://www.wandsworth.eu>

little credibility the report had after attributed contributors distanced themselves from the document and the Government's most senior race advisor resigned, citing a politics "steeped in division."

Even those close to the Commission could see it was a politically motivated exercise in dismissing the very real concerns of ethnic minority people.

As for the recommendations, many of them miss the mark. The failure to recommend mandatory ethnicity pay gap reporting stands out while proposals to diversify the curriculum do not go far enough to guarantee education about Britain's role in the transatlantic slave trade or colonialism. We need this to change deep-seated attitudes towards Black people in the UK.

Proposals to fund the Equality and Human Rights Commission and establish a Health Disparities Office are particularly ironic given the Tories have cut EHRC funding by £44 million since 2010 and recently abolished Public Health England. It is good that the Commission recommended we stop using 'BAME.' This language masks differences in experience and culture of different race and ethnicities.

It is an unhelpful and accurate term but it will take more than language tweaks to end institutional racism.

This report was an opportunity to meaningfully grapple with the issues of institutional and structural racism in the United Kingdom. Instead, we got a 250-page divisive polemic which cherry picks statistics to prove a point. After a year in which Black, Asian and ethnic minority people have been unequally impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic, the report came as an insult. We cannot let it divide us in the fight to end inequality and structural racism.



**in my view**

**Marsha de Cordova, MP for Battersea**

**A**fter months of delay, last week finally saw the publication of the report from the Commission on Race and Ethnic Disparities, established by the Prime Minister in July 2020 after the Black Lives Matter movement.

From the minute Boris Johnson hired Tony Sewell to be the Chair of the Commission, I suspected the Government might not be serious about addressing racial inequalities.

He and other Commissioners have previously cast doubt on the concept of institutional racism.

But even I could not have anticipated that the report would be so offensive and incoherent as to suggest a 'new story' be told about slavery and to dismiss the concept of institutional racism out of hand.

Let's get one thing clear – institutional racism does exist in the UK, in our health care system, education system and criminal justice system. This is borne out in data from the Race Disparity Unit, established by Theresa May which finds that Black people are nine times more likely to be stopped and searched, five times more likely to be excluded from school in