

## Race, Ethnic Minorities and the Culture of the Liberal Democrats

### Introduction

In September 2016 I was invited by Baroness Brinton, as President of the Liberal Democrats, and on behalf of the Party Leader, Tim Farron MP, and the Federal Executive (now the Federal Board), to undertake an independent inquiry into process and culture within the Liberal Democrats, focusing specifically on race and ethnicity. I was not asked to address particular individual complaints or cases, nor the problems of race and ethnicity in the country as a whole, but as part of the party's commitment to build and safeguard a fair, free and open society I was commissioned to focus on those barriers or issues faced by Black and Minority Ethnic (BaME)<sup>1</sup> members and supporters and the Liberal Democrat Party itself.

The Federal Executive provided the following questions to be addressed as part of the review process, but also made clear that I was free to explore other relevant questions.

- 1. Are there barriers to participation for BAME members? If so, what and where are they?*
- 2. Do barriers differ in different parts of the party?*
- 3. How effective are existing mechanisms/procedures in addressing the issue?*
- 4. Does the Party do enough to engage with BAME voters and ensure accessibility for potential BAME members?*
- 5. What further steps should, or could, be taken by the Party to address the issues identified in this review?*

I accepted the invitation and stood down as the Party's Spokesman on Northern Ireland. While Party Headquarters undertook to provide responses to any questions I had, and to help with arranging contacts, meetings or information, it seemed to me best, within the limitations of a pro bono inquiry and my other commitments, to undertake meetings away from Party Headquarters and with as little direct involvement as possible by the party staff, in order to give a degree of independence to the work. However at the outset I want to express my sincere appreciation for the assistance given to me not only by party staff and members who responded very helpfully to my requests but especially to Mrs Kate Jegede, a volunteer researcher who became a party member during the process of working with me on the review, and provided me with considerable help as well as advice from her own experience.

I was interested to undertake the task not only because I was already working on issues of First Nation people in various parts of the world and on problems between African-Americans and the police in Baltimore, but also because of my experience in Northern Ireland and the similarities, as well as the differences, between racism and sectarianism.

This review can be seen as a follow-on from the 2013 Report by Helena Morrissey QC into party culture and processes following a series of specific allegations of sexual harassment. While these allegations

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<sup>1</sup> The terminologies of Black and Minority Ethnic, BaME and BAME are not very satisfactory but I have used them, partly because this was the terminology used in the mandate given to me, and partly because I have not come across anything that is much of an improvement. I hope that something better may emerge.

were taken up by the police as well as the party and did not lead to convictions, the Morrissey Report can be seen as part of a fairly successful long-term campaign to address some of the disadvantages and barriers to the progress of women in the party. However the Morrissey report recognized that it had not gone far enough in addressing complaints that institutional and systemic barriers were holding back black and minority ethnic (BAME) talent, so this new inquiry is looking specifically at race and ethnic minority disadvantage and what to do about it.

### Is there a problem?

The obvious starting point is to ask whether or not there is a problem. The Liberal Democrats as a party believe firmly that they stand for equality before the law and fair treatment for all members of society. The preamble to the Party Constitution says

*".....we reject all prejudice and discrimination based upon race, colour, religion, age, disability, sex or sexual orientation and oppose all forms of entrenched privilege and inequality"*

With such a commitment, surely there could not be a problem?

From the start almost everyone I listened to and spoke to, from the most senior leadership of the party and throughout the organization and membership, whatever their background, agreed that there is a serious problem. They did not all agree on the causes of the problem, but it was clear to everyone who looked at the racial and ethnic background of elected representatives, spokespersons, activists and members attending meetings and conferences, that the party is not representative of the racial and ethnic diversity of the country as a whole. Even in those parts of the country where a substantial proportion of the population is from racial and ethnic minorities, the membership and representation of the Liberal Democrats does not properly reflect that diversity.

**This is a substantial problem for a party which has committed itself to equality and diversity and the under-representation is so stark that it does not require a statistical study to demonstrate it.**

### Does the party recognize that there is a problem?

For nearly two decades the party has been conducting reviews on race equality and other aspects of diversity within the party and there have been changes in procedure to address the issues raised.

In 2001 Lord Dholakia set up the Racial Equality Advisory Group which produced the report entitled *"Diversity, Racial Equality and the Party"* published in 2004. This report was launched and accepted by the Federal Executive and led to the establishment of the Ethnic Minority Election Task Force (EMETF). In March 2006 at the Harrogate Spring Conference the Party approved a further motion from Lord Dholakia on the issue and Party President Simon Hughes MP launched the Party's 'Equality and Diversity Review'. At the Autumn Federal Conference that year Sir Menzies Campbell MP announced the launch of the 'Diversity Fund' with £200,000 to fight target seats where women and ethnic minority candidates were chosen.

In October 2007 Issan Ghazni was appointed the National Diversity Adviser to promote equal opportunities and diversity by providing advice, support and leadership throughout the Party at all levels. He undertook a very substantial piece of work, consulting, drawing on best practice and legislation, taking advice from members and building on the earlier Dholakia report. The result was an even more comprehensive document – *“From Barriers to Benefits”* which was taken to the Autumn Conference and approved in 2008.

This report reflected good practice models from the public, voluntary and community sectors and was aligned to the current UK and European equalities legislation. It addressed –

- Leadership and accountability with the setting up of the ‘Diversity Engagement Group’ (DEG) and Diversity Champions, and proposed the merging of Ethnic Minorities Election Task Force (EMETF) and Ethnic Minority Liberal Democrats (EMLD)
- Target setting, monitoring, reporting and reviewing
- Increased funding
- Information gathering and equality monitoring
- Marketing and communication
- Reaching out to Black and Minority Ethnic communities
- Training, development, capacity building and action learning in the party and the creation of a ‘Diversity Network’ to contribute to raising the awareness of members and to help change the culture of the organisation.

There was a very detailed set of recommendations and a priorities plan for the period 2008 – 2010. It was an exhaustive piece of analysis and a practical, managerially informed route to the resolution of the problem, indeed it would be difficult to see how one could produce a more detailed and substantive report based on the received wisdom of how to address race and ethnic minority issues. There have been other initiatives and enquiries into specific problems; the Ethnic Minority Liberal Democrats (EMLD) and other internal party groups such as the Chinese Liberal Democrats have been active; and every Party Leader before and since has made strong statements of support for commitments inside and outside the party on these issues.

So if the party knows there is a problem and has already tried unsuccessfully to resolve it, what could I do that has any hope of making a difference? I would not be able to produce a report that was any better, more detailed or informed than Issan Ghazni’s 2008 document and I could immediately appreciate the sense of frustration amongst party members, especially, but not exclusively those from Black and Minority Ethnic backgrounds, that the issue had been raised so many times before and there had been enquiries and reviews, some of them very exhaustive, but things were no better. Indeed arguably they were worse, because during Charles Kennedy’s leadership and stance over the Iraq War there had been a considerable influx of new members from BaME communities, especially from Muslim communities, but many had subsequently drifted away, and this despite the fact that the party had been in government and so in a position to make changes. It seemed to me entirely reasonable there should be considerable scepticism that my intervention would make any positive difference at all. I regard it a tribute to the courtesy and commitment of many BaME and other party members that

despite this, they were prepared to meet and give me the benefit of their experiences as well as their thoughts about the reasons for the problem in the party and what needed to be done about it.

**As I listened to their accounts and asked questions about barriers to progress within the party for BaME members, and the complexities of the situation emerged, I began to focus increasingly on trying to find a different approach to what could be done in practice to change the situation.**

Is a different approach needed?

The frustration of members of the Ethnic Minority Liberal Democrats (EMLD) and others who made submissions, including the Chinese Liberal Democrats (CLD), was not only exacerbated by their knowledge of previous initiatives that had not made an appreciable difference to them, but also by the sense that there had actually been real progress during the same period in the representation of some other groups, particularly women and LGBT+ members, though perhaps less so for people with disability. Of course the situations are not entirely analogous. In the case of women for example, not only are they not a numerical minority of the population – on the contrary – but they are also equally represented as a proportion of the population in every single constituency across the country. Racial and ethnic minorities tend to be concentrated in particular communities and are also very diverse. The social, economic, political and cultural differences across the huge range of racial and ethnic groups are enormous and even thinking of BaME members as a particular cohort within the party is a serious oversimplification. BaME communities themselves are not only diverse, but like almost every other community in the world, they have their differences and sometimes difficulties with other BaME communities as well as with the majority community.

**In trying to deepen my knowledge and understanding of the problems for BaME members, I was also asking myself why previous efforts had not been successful and why, given its clearly stated views, the Liberal Democrat Party was not being seen as the natural party of race and ethnic diversity by many BaME communities.**

I embarked on the process of evidence and information-gathering by sending out a number of invitations for submissions from those who had relevant experiences and views as members or former members of the party in order to try to inform my understanding of the situation, making it clear that all the submissions, whether written or oral, would be treated in confidence. I also asked for meetings with senior figures and staff in the party and looked into some of the formal policies and procedures of the Party, as well as previous enquiries and reviews of the problem, to try to understand what had been tried in the past, and how far it had been successful. It quickly became apparent that not only could my review not be an exhaustive enquiry, it was also dealing with the sort of issue that would not usefully be addressed by a merely academic or legalistic approach. It was not just that the resources were not available and the issues so complex; this was not just an academic or legal question, it was a deeply emotional one and the party was a largely voluntary network of people across the four countries of the United Kingdom with very different backgrounds, populations and experiences.

It was clear that some people had had unpleasant experiences with particular individuals or local groups. Some of the evidence they presented was strongly suggestive of negative attitudes by

individuals towards people from different racial or ethnic backgrounds. In a number of cases there may have been clashes of personality or experiences of disappointment when they were not welcomed and accorded opportunities as individuals and they felt that this was because of their colour. In some cases it was indeed clearly a race/ethnicity issue and in other situations probably not. Many who have achieved significant office in the party maintained that they had not experienced any negative reactions to their colour or ethnic background. I concluded that some individuals and groups within the party were unwelcoming to people of colour but in other cases colour was not the only or even the main reason for the problems experienced. There was no evidence of widespread racism, however it did seem that for some individuals and organizations in the party addressing the low level of representation of ethnic minorities was not an agenda item, much less a significant priority.

#### A question of priority

When I was working in Northern Ireland as Alliance Leader the major diversity issue was between those people from the Protestant Unionist Loyalist communities and the Catholic Nationalist Republican communities, and Alliance's top priority was to address that issue. This was so clearly the case that nobody joined Alliance unless they were committed to that agenda item. Whatever their approach to other issues of diversity there was no question about the 'Number 1' priority issue – it was for some people in some places at that time a matter of life and death. In the Liberal Democrats the commitment to diversity and the campaigns to make diversity happen have brought significant changes and improvements for women and LGBT+ members and representation, but not for BaME members and representation, and I became convinced that if things were really going to change this now had to be a 'Number 1' priority issue for the party. The party has a tendency to try to be inclusive of all issues at all times and that has an intellectual appeal, but it has not worked for BaME communities, because addressing everything means focussing on nothing.

**I concluded that if there is to be positive change, the approach to race and ethnic minorities has to become a top priority. Liberal Democrats themselves must come to understand that liberalism means diversity and unless that can be seen in identifiable BaME members and representatives, then BaME communities, and indeed the country as a whole, will not be persuaded of the credentials of the Liberal Democrats on this issue.**

To me this meant taking a different approach. I would not try to set this problem in the context of diversity in general, but as a separate priority and instead of taking the traditional party route of waiting until I had produced the report, having the recommendations debated and approved and then hoping to see it implemented, I decided to approach Baroness (Lorely) Burt, who was the relevant spokesperson for the party at the time and suggested that there was an urgent need for a social media campaign on this issue within the party. I introduced her to a Polish friend and colleague of mine, Eva Grosman, who was the driving force behind the 'Unite Against Hate' campaign that had been run quite successfully in Northern Ireland. Although the General Election interrupted the development of this social media campaign, I understand that it is moving ahead with the support of the Party Leader, Sir Vince Cable, without waiting for any further bureaucratic procedures.

**I hope that by the time you read this report there will already be in place a social media campaign within the party to get across to the membership at all levels that there is a problem within the party, and that it is not possible to be a convincing liberal party and address these issues in the country as a whole if the party is not much more visibly diverse in its BaME membership and representation.**

### Leadership

Without any reflection on previous leaders, it is clear to me that this issue is a priority for Sir Vince Cable as has been demonstrated by, amongst other things, his appointment of Issan Ghazni as his Personal Advisor on Race Equality and Community Engagement. Baroness (Meral) Ece, who led the Race Equality Taskforce, has been appointed Equalities Spokesperson, and Merlene Emerson has taken up the Chair of the new Race Policy Group of the Party. None of these people need any introduction to the issues or how the party has tried to address them in the past, and they have important roles to play now.

The question of leadership however leads me back to the challenge of how to make a difference. When David Cameron was Leader of the Conservative Party he personally led a strategy to seek out winnable seats for women and ethnic minority candidates. The Conservatives (and Labour too) have actively headhunted established Liberal Democrat Black and Minority Ethnic activists. Liberal Democrats have not tended to be so targeted in their approach to membership and representatives, and even where they have been, it has not always been well-informed. The liberal approach tends to expect people to take the initiative themselves to join and put themselves forward and usually to stand in their local constituency. If the party wants to make real change on this issue it will require a much more proactive and focussed approach. The Campaign for Gender Balance (the Gender Balance Task Force in an earlier incarnation) was created to be proactive in seeking out, training, mentoring and providing practical support to potential women candidates and it has seen some real success.

**That is why I strongly support the recommendation of a recent Review of EMLD that the Party should establish a similar structure to the Campaign for Gender Balance to address BaME underrepresentation in the Party. This means a Campaign for BaME Representation with paid staff, accountable directly to the senior party leadership and responsible for identifying, training, mentoring and giving strong support to emerging BaME leaders in the party.**

### Are more procedures needed?

It will not be enough to set up a structure, try to implement previous proposals or add more procedures. The party seems to have a lot of procedures and bureaucracy, indeed it is probably one of its failings that in a voluntary network with limited resources it may have more procedures than it can satisfactorily implement. It is clear, for example, that when there are complaints about racial or ethnic minority questions, many have not been able to be dealt with in a reasonable period of time. Perhaps it has been difficult, because of the low numbers of BaME members in some areas, to get appropriate people who are available to carry out the procedures. One needs to acknowledge that there are times and contexts where democratic and bureaucratic processes can become an obstruction to positive change

rather than a facilitator of it and only democratic fundamentalists refuse to acknowledge that leadership and action may be needed to break through a problem.

**I had many reports that the current complaints system is not working in a timely fashion. This needs to change because undue delay creates suspicion that there is a resistance to addressing the problem. It may even be that a different approach, for example a restorative justice model, would be better than mediation or complaints procedures that are too complicated or take too long. Whatever the solution, complaints need to be addressed in a more timely fashion**

For this reason too, while I understand the seeming value of proposals made to me that there should be Equality Impact Assessments for all Policies, Procedures, and Practices in the Party, I came to the conclusion that the fundamental challenge was not to provide for more procedures or an appeal to rules, but to change the culture of the party, especially at the local level. That is also why in the production of this review I decided that instead of adding to the thoughtful, detailed and lengthy documents that were already in existence but not properly implemented, it was necessary to produce a short document, taking a different approach, available to, and readable by, all party members. It is not a question of abandoning the insights and recommendations in the previous reviews, many of which simply need to be implemented, but I not convinced that piling on more procedures will solve the problem. It seems to me that a different perspective may need to be taken that understands why those previous proposals failed to bring about the successful change their authors intended. The party at various levels can bring people in from BaME communities, get them on to approved lists of candidates and ensure that they make it to selection meetings, but unless they are made welcome by local party members, selected as candidates in winnable seats and given the financial, moral and campaigning support they need from the party locally and centrally, nothing is likely to change for the better in terms of BaME representation.

I have become sceptical that the anti-racism training approach championed by some anti-racist organizations in the USA has really demonstrated much success in creating social change. Despite the legislative revolution, the anti-racism training and campaigning and the Obama family being in the White House, I have seen only modest evidence that attitudes across the country have been sufficiently changed.

**I concluded that in the main what was needed was not additional procedures but changes in the political culture in the party.**

What does culture change involve?

Liberals should be able to appreciate the human dimensions of individual and communal differences and motivations, and how individuals and communities function. Let me give a few examples.

Most people get involved in a political group because they are invited, and they stay involved because they develop empathetic and respectful relationships. It is not solely a matter of intellectual assent to a political programme and personal commitment to a cause. So if the party wants more numerous and effective BaME members they need to be invited in a way that makes them feel respected, welcomed and involved in the work of the party.

I am not sure that there is an understanding in the party in general that if local party meetings are held in a pub then many Afro-Caribbeans from an evangelical or pentecostal Christian culture, and those Muslims for whom alcohol is a forbidden substance, will likely feel uncomfortable. Even the kind of food provided can add to the sense of an alien culture for observant Muslims and Jews. A multi-cultural and multi-ethnic party needs to think about such things and be sensitive to them.

If there are to be more enthusiastic young members from BaME communities, going to older established community leaders may not be the best route to success. Young people will respond to recognizable role models with whom they can identify and who are interested in their issues. This requires party members to engage with those communities and develop more identifiable black and ethnic minority community leaders who are liberal democrat in their sympathies and who can address the relevant issues, which will vary from community to community.

For some communities it will be aspirational issues like education and business, but for others it may be culture or sport. Hindus will not be focussed on the same issues as Muslims or Christians. Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi, Chinese, Middle Eastern, Latino, African and Afro-Caribbean communities<sup>2</sup> all have different dynamics and issues, so they should not be treated as if they were all the same. Everyone cannot do everything, so different party members and groups will need to focus on building relationships with particular communities.

Role models are important and the party already has some, however I was not convinced that even those who are already active members of the party are being used as effectively as they could be, especially in the media – and that includes some Liberal Democrat parliamentarians and councillors. In addition, when BaME members succeed in being elected, they have not necessarily received all the support they needed to be re-elected.

If the party wants to send out a message that this is a real priority issue then a high profile BaME representative should be appointed as a Party Vice-Chairman or a Vice-President for BaME communities – a real active leadership role working with those current and former parliamentarians and other elected representatives from BaME communities along with the Leader's Personal Advisor on Race Equality and Community Engagement, the Equalities Spokesperson, the Chair of the Race Policy Group and others who are already have responsibilities for working on these issues. These BaME representatives, who are already within the party, need to meet regularly to promote the issue, help the party learn how to engage with the various communities and their media, support each other in keeping it a top priority for the party and work with the Campaign for BaME Representation, or whatever it might be called.

#### What about resources?

Clearly financial resources are needed for this work and it should be acknowledged that some members from the BaME communities are already significant financial contributors to the party. Some of their

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<sup>2</sup> Needless to say these are examples and not a substantive list of significant communities.

contributions should be consciously directed to training and building up people from BaME communities as party representatives and giving them the material support they need.

However other kinds of resources and support can be really important too.

- A young family may have a father or mother who is keen to be involved politically but they cannot afford the childcare necessary to enable them to get to evening meetings. Assistance with looking after children could be a very worthwhile contribution.
- One BaME activist told me how incredibly helpful it was to have a very experienced Lib Dem councillor spend time helping him to focus on what he needed to do to make a success of his campaigning. He also made the point that that the mentoring, which went on over a period of time, was sometimes quite tough, but he really appreciated how he had learnt so much from this experienced non-BaME colleague.
- Many young people from BaME communities could be excellent representatives, but they just don't see themselves as fitting in to what seem from outside to be the strange and esoteric cultures of Westminster and the City and Town Halls. If every parliamentarian, Assembly member and councillor made it their business to ensure that each year they took on one young person from a BaME community as an intern for a few weeks, so that they saw what working inside the institutions really looked like, some might be turned off, but others would become excited and realize that they could do just as good a job in the future as those who are there.

Of course if they did get excited and involved it would mean real changes in the culture of the party, but if we are talking seriously about more BaME involvement that means cultural change. What sorts of things might need to change?

- The party often makes a big issue of someone being a local candidate, and attacks other parties for bringing candidates in from outside with no apparent appreciation that this is going with the grain of the natural prejudice of communities against 'the Other' who is different from the majority in that community. The party should think carefully about the various ways in which more candidate mobility and less focus on 'the local candidate' would facilitate addressing these problems. Not only could good BaME candidates be more easily brought into some constituencies, but incumbent non-BaME representatives might be persuaded to move sideways into another constituency to make way for a BaME candidate, if there was more mobility and less focus on localism.
- I have also been struck by what seems a tendency to focus on the principles of campaigning, more than on campaigning on principles. During my time in Northern Ireland public life it was just not possible to be a liberal without addressing and challenging the problems of Protestant/Catholic relations. If one simply followed the principles of clever campaigning Alliance should have stood Protestant candidates in unionist constituencies and Catholic candidates in nationalist constituencies. From the start the party marked itself out as different when in the early 1970s the Protestant Co-Leader, Bob Cooper, stood in mainly Catholic West Belfast and the Catholic Co-Leader, Oliver Napier, stood in mainly Protestant East Belfast, and both were elected to the Northern Ireland Assembly. This made clear in actions, rather than just

words, that the purpose of the party was to challenge the natural local prejudices and change the politics of the place by not going with the grain of perceived campaigning wisdom, but consciously challenging it not only by what they said, but by who they were. If Liberal Democrat selection meetings were to judge the candidates before them, not just on where they lived, how articulate they were in speaking about party policy and how loyally they had delivered Focus leaflets, and on whether they fitted in with the local racial, ethnic or class profile, but also on what message having them as a candidate would convey about the party's attitude to race and ethnicity, maybe there would be less need than there is now to campaign to change the law to facilitate all-BaME short-lists. Are Liberal Democrats campaigning to change the law in order to overcome ethnic prejudice in other parties, or in the Liberal Democrats?

- Having said that, there is something amiss if in major cities like London, Birmingham, Leicester and Manchester the membership and public representation of the party is so unrepresentative of the racial and ethnic mix of the cities. In this sense the party starts from an even worse position than it did with gender balance. Not only was there no shortage of women members, but they were often the backbone of the party, making sure that things were organized and actually happened. It was therefore a question of moving to better gender balance at the level of officers, senior elected representatives and leadership. With BaME members there is a major job of work to be done to increase BaME involvement in the party, and every individual member needs to have in mind the question, 'Is being a liberal about what I say and believe, or about what I do and am?' Every local association needs to compare the make-up of the population in their area with the make-up of the local party, the make-up of the officers in the local party, and whether their activities, leaflets and preoccupations are reflective of the local community.
- Do the Party Conferences help to develop a better appreciation of racial and ethnic diversity? This is not just a matter of policy papers and the background of speakers, though they are important, but the cultural and social side of conference give important opportunities. When I have gone to liberal party conferences in other parts of the world the celebration of culture has often played a more important role. There is often an excellent Indian dinner at the Lib Dem Conference, but are these opportunities used to convey more than the excellence of Indian food? What about Afro-Caribbean music and other cultural activities that go beyond the usual English conference functions? How far does multi-culturalism inform the thinking and planning of conferences?
- If a member of a BaME community comes into a party meeting, is your key concern whether they conform to party policy, or would make a good leaflet deliverer, or is it that they should feel welcome as a person, not be left on their own, engaged in the conversation, and followed up afterwards so that a relationship is built and maintained, and they can be helped to become more fully involved if that is what they want to do? Is being a better liberal a matter of concentrating on discussing the latest party policy (or scandal) with old friends and party colleagues, or concentrating on the new BaME arrival who is feeling uncertain that they can really break into this largely white family?

Change means change.....

A word of warning however; if you are really committed and successful, things will change for you and the culture of the party. All my life I have been committed to addressing the problems of Protestant/Catholic relations at home, and have been a committed European, and a liberal internationalist. When our three children grew up, one married a Catholic (my wife and I are Protestants), one married a German, and one married a Brazilian. The message is that if the party really takes this issue seriously it must be prepared for major changes. In my family experience these have been profoundly enriching changes, and the same will be true for the Liberal Democrats, but it will mean challenging many of the ways the party sees and does things. This review has come about because of the failure of the party's usual way of doing things to deliver sufficient change. Concentrating on having the right policies and procedures and allowing the usual liberal democratic approach to take its course has not worked.

Another challenge, to which I referred earlier, is the commitment to addressing diversity across all fields at the same time. When this is applied to the specific realm of race and ethnic minorities it can mean that anyone from a minority background is a suitable BaME representative and that is not a matter of colour. Instinctively I have a good deal of sympathy with this, after all, it is not so many generations ago there were signs outside boarding houses in England saying "No Blacks or Irish". Discrimination is not just a matter of colour. However the world has changed, the context of politics has changed, and if we are to change and be agents of change it may be necessary to be more visual, pointed and simplistic. Increasing the percentage of people from Germany or Poland or France will not convey to BaME communities that there has been any real change if they are all white Caucasians. Unless the party at this point addresses the BaME question as substantially identified by colour, it will not really be seen to be making a difference. In that respect the BaME communities also have their own issues. EMLD has been around for some time and it is my perception that it has been more successful in attracting in members from some Asian backgrounds than from black African or Afro-Caribbean communities. Everyone in the party has work to do but it is important to avoid the common liberal mistake of obscuring the challenge and obstructing change by trying to deal with everything at the same time and making perfection the enemy of the good. The issues are complex, but to make real change in a reasonable timescale it will be necessary to be more single-focus.

#### What about those initial questions?

Finally, let me come back to the questions the party's Federal Executive (now Federal Board) asked me to address and my answers to them.

#### ***Are there barriers to participation for BAME members? If so, what and where are they?***

Yes, there are barriers, but in the main they are not procedural, nor about racist attitudes of party members. They are mostly problems of the ways of doing things including the political culture of the party and the priority given to the issue.

#### ***Do barriers differ in different parts of the party?***

Not really. It is a party-wide issue, but it is a more acute problem in some places than others. For example in London, where there is such a substantial BaME representation in the community as a

whole, the low level of BaME representation at all levels from membership through to leadership is a more acute problem than its absence in more remote rural parts of the country where there are very few substantial BaME communities. In those rural areas the party has the opportunity to seize the initiative of being the natural party for incoming individuals from BaME backgrounds, but only if local party members make the changes now.

***How effective are existing mechanisms/procedures in addressing the issue?***

The existing mechanisms, and those that have been proposed in a series of excellent reviews and reports prior to this one, have clearly not been very effective and it seems to me that in the main, more mechanisms/procedures are not the solution. The mechanisms and procedures already agreed from previous reviews should not be abandoned, but implemented, however it will be necessary to make this issue a top priority that is constantly being specifically thought about and spoken about instead of addressing all aspects of diversity with the same commitment at the same time. It will not be enough to depend on traditional liberal democratic approaches. The party will have to engage in direct action - on appointments more than just on elections and on engaging with BaME communities, and identifying people and working with them and promoting them, rather than expecting people to be enthused and join in. A specific party body, analogous to the Campaign for Gender Balance - a Campaign for BaME Representation - is required and the party should be mustering and promoting the resources it already has in its current and former BaME parliamentarians, elected representatives and officials, and appointing a Vice-Chair or Vice-President for BaME Communities.

***Does the Party do enough to engage with BAME voters and ensure accessibility for potential BAME members?***

No, the party does not engage sufficiently with BaME voters and ensure accessibility for potential BaME members and this is more a question of the culture, focus and priorities of the party, which need to change in various ways. There is an excessive dependence on intellectual arguments and insisting on over-inclusive propositions and procedures that cannot be delivered in due time (including complaints procedures), and on traditional campaigning principles (such as 'the local candidate') which actually mitigate against the changes that are needed.

***What further steps should, or could, be taken by the Party to address the issues identified in this review?***

There is an urgency in dealing with this problem. The party is at a low ebb in terms of parliamentary and local government representation. If the party can grow, those who are elected in the near future, will be in place as leaders and role models for the medium to long-term future. If there are very few BaME representatives elected in this regrowth phase it will be even more difficult to make the necessary change in the future than it is now.

Many of those who as retirees are now free to engage in party activism had their early formative political experience shaped by the big issues of thirty or forty years ago, for example, the anti-Thatcherism of the 1980s. The liberal young people we need to bring in from BaME and other communities may have a different set of political preoccupations driven by the problems of today. They need to be engaged

and welcomed, humanly as well as organizationally and politically, so that they can help the party to change.

The change that is needed is mainly in the culture of the party. The party tends not to give sufficient attention to the concerns of BaME communities or to 'recruit' key individuals from them but to wait for them to join. When they do, they are expected to find a way of fitting into the culture of the party as it is, rather than taking steps being taken to engage and involve them and to welcome the change that they can help to bring in the party.

Issan Ghazni, in a thoughtful critique of the 'Prevent' Strategy in the 8 July 2011 issue of Lib Dem News (at the time he was Chair of EMLD) said *'Dialogue and involvement are the key words'*. He was entirely right. Whether we are thinking of individuals, local groups and communities, or at the regional and national levels, in appointments from BaME communities as well as policies about race and ethnic minorities, the human engagement in dialogue and involvement is key. We do not succeed in addressing such problems by doing these things to/for people, but with people.

The Liberal Democrat Party has traditionally been viewed (and has viewed itself) as the party which stands up for human rights, civil liberties, personal freedoms, equal opportunities, fairness and diversity. As such, the party could be the natural home for those individuals and communities who may have suffered discrimination in some form, and who share its commitment to justice, tolerance, diversity and honesty. At a time when politics globally is becoming more nationalistic, xenophobic, and racist and where ethnic cleansing is a current horror in some countries, there can scarcely be a more urgent liberal priority than to challenge that present cultural drift in what is done as much as in what is said, but this will only be effective if there are changes in aspects of the culture of the party itself.

**John, Lord Alderdice**  
**House of Lords, London, January 2018**