



Dear Deborah

We are writing to you as the Chief Executive of the West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA). We are also writing to you as an ally; a powerful voice in the region who champions our own.

This letter follows the Black Lives Matter statement which we (the Young Combined Authority, YCA) made on 4 June 2020. It acts on our commitment that 'it is not enough to say #BlackLivesMatter because this is not a moment, this is a movement.'

One month on, we are very aware that the focus on Black Lives Matter is beginning to fade. Mainstream and social media are already moving on. Our hope is that you will be able to keep the need to address structural racism and disadvantage high on the region's agenda and work with other decision makers to translate increased awareness into meaningful action.

Like us, those who stand in solidarity with the Black Lives Matter movement believe that the anger today is justified. Black communities have waited for centuries for their voices to be heard and, though significant changes are being made, the same patterns of inequality are still being repeated.

We have seen the health inequalities exposing the vulnerability of Black, Asian and other mixed communities to the coronavirus pandemic and how our country's slow response to the Windrush scandals have left many families with a tainted view of a United Kingdom.

We do not want people's view of the West Midlands to be tainted in the same way.

The West Midlands is one of the most diverse regions in the country. However structural inequalities create conflict and division in our society. We need to better understand the root causes of racial disadvantage and the adverse impact it has on our young people and underrepresented communities. We need to recognise the impact on a person's confidence, self-worth, ability to grow. The impact on their faith and belief in the region they live, if decision makers fail to resolve the issues that significantly shape their lives.

We need to reassure our citizens that ethnic inequalities are not just.

Civic leaders need to proactively address structural inequalities to ensure and echo the WMCA vision of building a healthier, happier, more prosperous and better connected West Midlands.

To get there, decision makers in the West Midlands need to know what institutional racism means. How it looks, tastes and feels for young people in our region. Do they?

For us, institutional racism is when Black parents have to move their children to a different nursery, so they do not have to carry the burden of an unfair report all the way through education into adulthood. It is being instantly put into the bottom set at Secondary School and having to work your way up. It is starting your first Saturday job with older colleagues making comments about your appearance. It is failing interviews for jobs which you are qualified to do. It is having Black friends in the legal sector that get stopped and searched on their way to work.

It is experiencing these injustices before you turn 18. Before you turn 16.

Structural inequality and institutional racism mean that no matter how well you do in life, you do not have the agency to define your own identity or success.

Once this is accepted and understood, focus can turn to what needs to change...

Representation is important. Young Black people need powerful Black role models to look up to. We strongly believe that diverse representation cannot be reduced to a tick box exercise. People need to be given a seat at the table for a reason - for their talent, their experience, their insight.

But, in the same way, political and other civic leaders are also there for a reason. Their purpose is to champion their communities and, in a region as diverse as ours, it is genuinely concerning that the makeup of our council chambers could still be described as 'male, pale and stale'. So we think that...

- 1. Public bodies should take positive action to build a more representative leadership for the West Midlands.** We understand that it will not be easy or enough to change the makeup of boardrooms and cabinet tables and as such:
- 2. Current political and civic leaders should undertake bias training,** which includes lessons or hearing from people with lived experience of structural racism. If possible, this should be extended to educators as well.
- 3. Decision makers should speak to local Black people to better understand the impacts and root causes of racial disadvantage.** The way decisions are made is as important as who makes them. We think that decision makers need to listen to their communities to understand how best to serve them. The Young Combined Authority was set up on this principle, and we can work closely with leaders to promote more inclusive leadership. And, finally:

- 4. Civic leaders need to build trust through accountability** – this means being honest about the issues and blind spots within your teams and organisations.

We also want to see effort and time put in to helping young Black people across the West Midlands succeed. Decision makers can help to make this happen by:

- 5. Reviewing and, where necessary, refocusing all policy, funding and delivery to ensure that regional inequalities are being tackled, and;**
- 6. Making sure that all new policies explicitly reference inequality and all new activity designed to be accessible and address disadvantage.**

While addressing inequality needs to be embedded across all work in the West Midlands, there are two policy areas or challenges which we think are particularly important to address:

- 7. Education and school exclusions** – learning is a basic right and yet too many young Black people are let down or fall out of the education system. If structural inequalities are to be addressed, education must be part of the solution not part of the problem. Creating a space to talk about Black Lives Matter in schools, colleges and universities could be a good place to start.
- 8. And the disproportionate impact of the coronavirus pandemic** – we all know that Black and other minority ethnic communities have been hit the hardest by the pandemic. How will this be addressed?

By sharing these ideas, we hope to spark action that will bring change for Black communities in the West Midlands. At the very least, we hope that you will be able to use this letter to start a conversation with other decision makers in the region.

We have written this letter because we care, because we have to, because we have little sisters that we want to protect. Because we believe the time for change is now and that our anger only represents a small fraction of the pain that Black lives here have had to endure for so long. Anger that should be used as a catalyst to create the necessary change for the West Midlands.

Yours sincerely,



Eman Mowatt, Olivia Agbe, Aisha Masood and Kashmire Hawker
On behalf of the West Midlands Young Combined Authority.