

The Devon Windrush Flag was raised at County Hall last week to mark 75 years since the Empire Windrush arrived in Tilbury Dock and its 492 passengers disembarked to begin a new life in Britain.

Members of the Devon Windrush Group joined the Leader; our new Chairman, Percy Prowse; Chief Executive Donna Manson; the Deputy Lord Lieutenant of Devon; and the Lord Mayor of Exeter, for the flag-raising.

The event was a chance to pay tribute to the UK's Caribbean community for their immense contribution, and to acknowledge that many of the Windrush generation suffered hardship, prejudice and abuse – experiences that unfortunately many of their descendants still experience today, including those living in Devon.

And finally, the flag raising was an opportunity to recognise that our county has become increasingly diverse over the last 10 years – and as a society we are all the better for it. The number of Devonians who identify as either being Asian, Black and other ethnically diverse people, as a proportion of the population, has increased by 71 per cent between the 2011 Census and the 2021 Census.

In 2011 243,500 people, approximately 4.6 per cent of the population, identified as ethnically diverse people; ten years later this has increased to 392,000 and 6.9 per cent of the population.

It seems apt, therefore, that Windrush Day should also present a chance for us to check the progress of our own commitment to inclusivity – our Race Equality Action Plan.

As Chair of the Corporate Infrastructure and Regulatory Services Scrutiny committee I ensured that councillors heard that our own commitment – to stamp out intolerance and develop a more inclusive culture within the Authority through its Race Equality Action Plan – is making progress. The plan was put into place following an internal audit last year to help us tackle 'structural racism' within the council.

At the Committee, the progress report included:

- Improved support to staff who raise concerns and a new policy to resolve issues
- New wellbeing, recovery and resilience service for staff who have experienced racism from next month
- 'Zero tolerance' approach when staff are racially abused
- New Prayer and Contemplation facilities with improved disability access
- New Race Equality Staff Group and a Race Equality Delivery Group
- Increase in the size of the equality, diversity and inclusion team and its budget
- New anti-racism webpage with staff resources and information
- Improved risk assessment to safeguard staff who work in the community from racism
- Staff encouraged to report racism and other forms of discrimination
- A new living in the UK course for international recruits through Learn Devon

The Cabinet Member for waste says it's unfair to ask all council tax payers to pay for the DIY waste of those who can afford to make their own home improvements.

Councillor Croad commented following a Government announcement last week stating their intention to stop councils charging for DIY waste at Household Waste Recycling Centres.

Charges were introduced for some DIY waste in 2011, in response to swingeing cuts to local council's funding.

It was said then that by introducing charges for items such as kitchen and bathroom refurbishments, those costs would be met by households who can afford to make such home improvements, rather than the general public.

The Government's decision will mean that Devon will lose around £1 million income – money used to maintain the comprehensive service across all of the 19 Household Waste Recycling Centres in the county.

Plans therefore to stop councils charging for DIY waste will make it harder to maintain the Household Waste Recycling Centres service as it is. Cllr Croad said previously that such changes could mean us having to consider reducing opening hours.

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