



Momentum Submission to Reform BAME Labour: Complete Version

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Introduction

In response to the internal democracy review launched by Jeremy Corbyn at Labour Party Conference in September 2017, Momentum sent a survey to our Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic members and supporters asking about their experiences and expectations relating to BAME Labour, eliciting over 1000 responses.*

After the deeply concerning revelations from this summer's BAME Labour elections, where it was exposed that the organisation only had 731 active members, there has been widespread outcry about the total atrophy of BAME structures within the Labour Party and a renewed focus by BAME members on their opportunities to progress within its structures and shape its direction.

BAME Labour in its current form grew out of the 1980s radical grassroots movement Black Sections, which consisted of a self-organised group of Trades Union and Labour Party activists. It fought for increased representation of Black people across the entire Labour movement, including the pioneering election of the first four Black MPs to an otherwise all-White Parliament in 1987.

Over the past few decades the organisation has transformed, and now formally constitutes a Socialist Society affiliated to the Labour Party but theoretically independent from it. However, during this time BAME Labour has stagnated, characterised by poor administration, a severe lack of engagement with its members, and only a tokenistic autonomy from Party structures, that in reality maintain significant control over its membership database and finances.

In 2010, BAME Labour had **3,363** members,** at a time when the entire Labour Party membership stood at less than 200,000. Today, Party membership has exploded to well over half a million, yet active members who are eligible to participate in BAME Labour's structures and processes has fallen to an appalling **731*****.

As the Party has not systematically gathered data on which of its members identify as Black, Asian or Minority Ethnic, it has proven extremely difficult to seek a comprehensive response from the membership as to the true barriers they face or the future opportunities they would like to see created as a result of this review, especially considering the extremely tight timescale.

However, evidence gathered from members and supporters through this survey, as well as anecdotal evidence collected from a number of consultative meetings of BAME members of the Labour Party held up and down the country, paints a clear and damning picture of the current state of spaces for BAME self-organisation and opportunities within the Labour Party. Significant barriers exist for mass engagement with BAME Labour, rendering the structure largely unknown and mostly irrelevant for most BAME members of the Labour Party.

Our research demonstrates that most members believe the Labour Party has a long way to go in terms of its treatment of BAME members and supporters, in creating opportunities to garner

* This is about a half more than the entire active membership of BAME Labour.

** The number of ballots released for the 2010 BAME Labour elections.

*** The number of ballots released for the 2017 BAME Labour elections.

more diverse representation at all levels throughout the Party, and in strengthening the power of its BAME members to shape the Party through collectivisation from a local to a national level. Their responses clearly demonstrate the demand for decisive action by the Party to fundamentally overhaul the structures claiming to represent BAME members, and replace them with the means to truly strengthen and amplify Labour's BAME membership.

The following paper lays out the results of our survey, along with key recommendations for the new form that structures for BAME self-organisation within the Labour Party should take. This is based on the responses of 1008 BAME members and supporters of the Labour Party,**** as well as six large consultative meetings of over 150 BAME members in locations around the country.

Summary of Recommendations

Purpose

- To empower BAME members to overcome institutional barriers and strengthen their voice within the Party, including by supporting them to stand for elected positions and influence policy.
- To lead on the Party's engagement with Ethnic Minority voters, and to move beyond the tokenistic culture of clientelism that characterises the Party's interaction with BAME communities.
- To challenge and eradicate institutional racism, including by ensuring the full implementation of the Chakrabarti report.

Membership

- The Labour Party should audit and maintain data on which of its members self-identify as BAME.
- The Party must extend membership of BAME Labour to automatically include all BAME members of the Labour Party, and abolish the extra membership fee.

Structures

- Every CLP must have an Ethnic Minority Officer and an Ethnic Minority Forum (EMF) provided there are BAME Party members who request it. Where all-White local Parties exist, support must be given to develop greater diversity in their membership.
- EMFs shall feed directly up into the national structures of BAME Labour through clear, transparent and democratic processes.
- For the development of regional structures to be considered.

**** Of these, an estimated 891 are Labour Party members. It is worth noting that non Labour Party members are currently allowed to be members of BAME Labour, provided they are not members of an opposing political party.

- Ethnic Minority Officers shall be elected by BAME members of the CLP only, and must sit on the Executive Committee of their CLP. They must be given direct access to a database of all BAME members in their constituency and must be able to contact BAME members independently.
- BAME Labour shall hold a delegate based conference every year, with democratic procedures in place to empower members to shape the direction of the organisation. Policy passed should be fed into the national Labour Party at Annual Conference.

Activities and Communication

- The Labour Party must provide a minimum of one staff member dedicated uniquely to supporting BAME Labour, who shall be accountable to BAME Labour's democratic structures, mirroring the provision of a staff member to Young Labour.
- The Party must allocate funding for activities, events and schemes (more detail on p.9).
- The BAME Labour Secretary on the Executive Committee must be given direct access to the membership database, and existing rules that give Ethnic Minority Officers at a CLP level the right to a database of all BAME members of the CLP must be enforced.
- The BAME Labour Treasurer on the Executive Committee must be given direct access to the organisations finances.
- The Labour Party must make a serious commitment to tackling racism within the Party, including through the implementation of the recommendations in the Chakrabarti Report.

Representation

- The BAME Labour Executive Committee and Labour Party Representatives (NPF and NEC) should be elected directly through a One Member One Vote (OMOV) ballot of all BAME members of the Party. These elections should occur every two years, as with Young Labour.
- Additional BAME representation on the NEC and throughout all levels of the Party should be seriously considered during the second and third phases of this Democracy Review.

Funding

- The Party should consider a level of funding for BAME Labour which is appropriate to the organisation's remit and responsibilities to ensure the organisation can function to its full potential.
- Funding should be granted in the form of a salary for a dedicated staff member, and a minimum block grant that is enough to cover an annual conference as well as an activity fund.
- A proportion of BAME members fees should also be directly allocated to BAME Labour, to guarantee secure funding and ensure buy-in and accountability between BAME Party members and BAME Labour.

Autonomy

- BAME Labour shall have meaningful autonomy, with its own constitution, which shall be decided by BAME members and amendable at the annual BAME Labour conference.
- BAME Labour shall have organisational autonomy, with the committee having direct access to its own membership list and finances, and the ability to organise its own campaigns and events independently.

- BAME Labour shall have political autonomy, allowing it to take political positions that are independent to that of the Party.
- BAME Labour shall have financial autonomy, in the form of a minimum block grant to cover the basic functions of the organisation and an additional stipend taken as a proportion of BAME member's fees.

Membership

Out of the 1008 BAME members and supporters who responded to our survey, 40% had never even heard of BAME Labour.

Only 14% of respondents declared that they were a member of the organisation, with nearly a fifth stating that they weren't sure whether or not they belonged to BAME Labour. Furthermore, only a shocking 5% of respondents declared that they had been eligible to vote in the last BAME Labour elections, held in summer 2017.

This clear disparity between survey respondents who consider themselves members of BAME Labour, and members who are actually able to actively participate in BAME Labour's structures and processes, demonstrates a dismal situation that left many disenfranchised and disillusioned at election time.

Many members stated they had assumed that they automatically became members of BAME Labour upon joining the Labour Party. Others observed that they had tried unsuccessfully to join the organisation, but had had problems with the website, or had signed up at Labour Party Conference but heard nothing further.

This clear confusion and alienation caused by the complex joining system, extra membership fee and extensive bureaucracy currently in place has undeniably contributed to the stagnation in membership numbers. Key issues with membership of BAME Labour include:

- A £5 charge for membership.
- Membership runs out after two years without any prompt to renew (likely a major cause of the large number of unwitting inactive members, whose details remain on the membership database but who are ineligible to participate in BAME Labour's structures and procedures).
- Multiple members have raised concerns about unsuccessfully trying to sign up, with no reliable way to confirm whether or not they have been successful or to challenge unsuccessful applications.
- Members of BAME Labour do not have to be members of the Labour Party, despite having a (disproportionately high) say in representatives at the top levels of the Party.

To ensure every BAME member of the Labour Party can elect their representatives and hold them accountable, as well as access ring fenced structures and opportunities, the following recommendations are proposed:

- The Labour Party must monitor data on which of its members self-identify as BAME.
- The Party must extend membership of BAME Labour to automatically include all BAME members of the Labour Party.
- The extra joining fee must be abolished (recommendations for alternative sources of funding given on p.9).

Activities and Communication

When asked about their knowledge on the organisation, including committee members, activities, election processes, finances and membership application process, over half of respondents stated they had no knowledge. A further 34% declared they had very little knowledge, while only 1% (13 people) claimed to have considerable knowledge of these areas.

This is perhaps not surprising when communication from BAME Labour to its members is notoriously poor. BAME Labour committee members have repeatedly publically asserted the difficulty they face in communicating with the membership, as the database is held by the Women's and Equalities Officer employed by the Party who is too busy to respond effectively to their needs. For example, most members only received details about the BAME Labour biannual meeting, held in October 2017, with only ten days notice.

This has resulted in the severe lack of communication with the membership of BAME Labour, and the use of several unofficial email addresses using a variety of membership lists that has sparked considerable concerns of data protection breaches. Ultimately, it has directly led to a culture of inertia and inactivity due to a tangible lack of power and autonomy. There has been no opportunity for members to challenge this culture, and no incentive for the staff member to respond to the demands of members or the committee.

This has left members feeling unsupported and in the dark, and created a strong perception that the organisation only responds to the needs and demands of a small political elite leaving the wider membership isolated in their struggle with institutional barriers. While occasional events, fundraisers and mentorship schemes have been organised and support for some BAME MPs and Councillors has been provided, there has been limited engagement with and outreach to the grassroots membership or the wider BAME membership of the Labour Party.

Survey respondents repeatedly called for an organisation that provides: opportunities to create policy and feed it into the Party; networking and organising events and activities both for self-organisation of BAME members as well as for wider and more practical engagement with BAME communities and supporters; and support for BAME candidates during selections and elections. There was also significant concern regarding the current treatment of BAME members within

the Party, and a call for a commitment to take racism within the Party seriously and implement the recommendations put forward in the Chakrabarti Report.

There is a clear demand for an inclusive and active organisation, that not only provides BAME members with the necessary training, resources and support to break through institutional barriers facing them within the Party, but which collectivises members from a local up to a national level to ensure BAME members are heard and represented at all levels.

Based on the mass demand for significantly increased communication and activity levels, the following recommendations are proposed:

- The Labour Party must provide a staff member dedicated uniquely to developing and supporting BAME Labour, both at a national committee level and at a grassroots level, mirroring the provision of a staff member to Young Labour.
- The Party must allocate funding for activities, events and schemes (more detail on p.9).
- The BAME Labour Secretary on the Executive Committee must be given direct access to the membership database, and existing rules that give Ethnic Minority Officers at a CLP level the right to a database of all BAME members of the CLP must be enforced.
- The BAME Labour Treasurer on the Executive Committee must be given direct access to the organisations finances.
- The Labour Party must make a serious commitment to tackling racism within the Party, including through the implementation of the recommendations in the Chakrabarti Report.

Structures

Currently, there is little scope for BAME members to organise locally and regionally within the Party, due to overbearing stipulations on formally establishing Ethnic Minority Forums (Chapter 14 of the Labour Party Rule Book), a lack of information on local BAME membership, and limited institutional will at a CLP level to actively seek out the necessary information to engender greater local opportunities for BAME self-organisation. Only 26% of survey respondents confirmed that they have an Ethnic Minority Officer, and a mere 8% have Ethnic Minority Forums.

Where they do exist, these Ethnic Minority Forums are often informal and thus remain organisationally defunct and unable to take advantage of the powers ring fenced for them within local Party structures. Even when formalised, Ethnic Minority Forums do not feed up into the national structures of BAME Labour and are only effective and relevant on a local level. There exist no regional structures, as well as no structural provision for engagement with Black and BAME sections of Trades Unions.

Furthermore, Ethnic Minorities Officers are currently either appointed or elected by the entire CLP (not just its BAME members) and do not receive a vote on the Executive Committee of CLPs, often resulting in severe under-representation of BAME members at an EC level. With no

meaningful BAME representation, the perception of CLP Executive Committees as ‘gatekeepers’ to information, opportunities and structural power has been raised countless times in discussions during this review by members who feel they are shut out from actively participating.

This lack of power, representation and relevance has resulted in a significant lack of engagement of BAME members on a CLP level, with many diverse constituencies left with extremely unrepresentative local Party memberships. In other CLPs where significant BAME membership exists, the culture of clientelism that currently pervades much of the interactions of the Labour Party with Ethnic Minority communities often reinforces hierarchies within communities; for example, benefitting community and business leaders who can provide large numbers of loyal voters, with a serious lack of genuine political engagement with the wider mass of Ethnic Minority members.

Many in the Labour Party see this as proof of our Party’s diversity, and the positive role that these community leaders have played in partially engaging their communities and organising for BAME representation at various levels within the Party that otherwise would not exist must be recognised. However, it is incredibly important that we also recognise the tokenistic and damaging nature of this culture, and its role in the decline of our Ethnic Minority vote in the run up to the 2015 election.

Furthermore, most members raised a multitude of concerns about the current lack of opportunity to shape BAME Labour, or for membership to feed into Labour Party policy. It currently holds a biannual meeting, with little to no democratic process by which to hold its officers to account or to shape the organisation or its direction. This has contributed significantly to feelings of alienation and disenfranchisement felt by members, reflected in the calls for greater transparency and accountability.

Based on the tokenistic and largely powerless nature of local structures, and the lack of opportunity for BAME members to hold the national organisation BAME Labour to account, the following recommendations are proposed:

- Every CLP must have an Ethnic Minority Officer and an Ethnic Minority Forum (EMF) where BAME members request it. Where all-White local Parties exist, support must be given to develop greater diversity in their membership.
- Ethnic Minority Officers should be elected by BAME members of the CLP only, and must sit on the Executive Committee of their CLP.
- EMFs should make up the local BAME Labour groups, and must be strengthened and supported. The complex bureaucracy needed to formalise them must be removed.
- EMFs should feed directly up into the regional and national structures of BAME Labour through clear, transparent and democratic processes.
- BAME Labour should hold an annual delegate based conference, with democratic procedures in place to empower members to shape the direction of the organisation. Policy passed should be fed into the national Labour Party, as with Women’s Conference.

Elections

Only 19% of our survey respondents thought that they were members of BAME Labour. This lowered significantly to a mere 6% when we asked if members had received a ballot to vote in the elections this summer. This demonstrates clearly the confusion surrounding the current membership criteria, as well as exposes the severely low eligibility for BAME members of the Party to participate in the structures and processes of BAME Labour.

BAME Labour Committee elections are incredibly difficult for grassroots members to participate in, with no public list of affiliated organisations which provide by far the simplest pathway to get onto the ballot. In the last elections, individual candidates without access to information about affiliates had to go through the arduous process of gathering up to 20 handwritten signatures from BAME Labour members to get on the ballot. Given the clear confusion over who does and does not count as a BAME Labour member, even well-organised grassroots members struggled to make it onto the ballot.

Only the NEC representative and Chair positions were contested in this election, out of a possible fifteen Executive Committee positions and five Labour Party Representative positions. Official results have still not been published anywhere, contributing to a culture of secrecy and mistrust surrounding the application of electoral rules, predicated on a Committee who have largely held their seats for a multitude of years with little opportunity for public challenge or scrutiny.

When asked, 78% of those who responded to our survey opted for a One Member One Vote system for electing the NEC representative. Extensive discussions have reflected this notion held by the vast majority of BAME members that a drastic shift in the electoral culture of BAME Labour needs to take place to overhaul the current problematic culture of secrecy and stagnation that surrounds BAME Labour elections. There is a strong demand for handing direct accountability in the form of an equal voting system back to all BAME members of the Labour Party, which removes all bureaucracy and barriers for participation and reflects the current move towards OMOV in various sections and elections in the Labour Party, including Young Labour, Labour Students and the Leadership election.

It must also be noted that throughout our survey, and in every meeting we organised and attended concerning the review, the perception of significant disadvantage for BAME members in internal selections was persistently raised. This is in part caused by a lack of active engagement by BAME members in Trades Union structures, and more must be done by the Party to ensure its BAME members are supported and encouraged in this regard. However, there is also the widespread troubling perception that the Conservatives are better at standing BAME candidates in majority White constituencies, whereas the Labour Party is often reluctant to. BAME candidates who wish to stand in majority White areas are often questioned and made to feel as if their competency is judged by the Party on their ethnicity rather than their merit. More must be done to challenge this culture, as with the role of All Women's Shortlists in promoting more BAME women.

The following recommendations are therefore proposed:

- The BAME Labour Executive Committee and Labour Party Representatives (NPF and NEC) should be elected directly through a One Member One Vote (OMOV) ballot of all BAME members of the Party. These elections should occur every two years, as with Young Labour.
- Additional BAME representation on the NEC and throughout all levels of the Party should be seriously considered during the second and third phases of this Democracy Review.
- Current rules regarding BAME Labour elections must be amended to engender greater opportunity for grassroots participation, including preventing Members of Parliament and the House of Lords from standing for Executive Committee and Labour Party Representative positions in BAME Labour. These should be included in the new BAME Labour Constitution, amendable by members.

Funding

Currently, BAME Labour is funded by its individual joining and organisation affiliation fees, along with multiple fundraising events. The Party also pays for a member of staff, who is employed to dedicate a small portion of her time to supporting the organisation. Whilst theoretically this ensures BAME Labour remains autonomous from the Party, in reality the extra joining fee and separate membership has provided significant barriers for participation and the vast majority of BAME members of the Labour Party do not engage.

Furthermore, the Labour Party relies heavily on the 'Ethnic Minority' vote, without which it was calculated the Conservatives would have won an extra 28 seats in the last General Election.¹ However, although Labour is widely recognised as the Party that champions values of equality, justice and diversity, it saw its vote share among Ethnic Minorities reduce in the lead up to and during the 2015 election, where an unprecedented 1 million Ethnic Minority voters chose Conservative.

This demonstrates that Labour cannot be complacent in its treatment of Ethnic Minority communities. It must genuinely seek to engage with them on a political level, offering proactive solutions to the challenges they face and not just offer tokenistic gestures or treat them as a homogenous voting bloc to be courted around election time. The Party has come some way in achieving this aim, with greater diversity in the Parliamentary Labour Party than ever before and the launch of its seminal Race and Faith Manifesto.

However, significant issues still exist in the Party's engagement with Ethnic Minority communities, with a strong culture of clientelism and relying on community and business leaders to deliver block votes during selections and elections. This process is racist, sexist, undemocratic, unhealthy and ultimately ineffective, and if Labour is to maintain its current

¹ <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2017/sep/28/ethnic-minority-voting-gap-cost-theresa-may-28-seats-report-says>

polling among Ethnic Minority voters it must genuinely seek to organise along political lines with all members and voters.

This strategy can only be successfully pursued with a genuine commitment from the Party to allocate the necessary resources and powers to its BAME members to enable them to organise within the Party on an equal level and to empower our communities to actively engage with the Party on a genuine political level to the greater benefit of all. Greater representation at all levels at the Party is an important goal to strive towards, however this constitutes mere tokenism if not matched with serious funding and robust structures to empower BAME members to organise politically and challenge the entrenched toxic culture that Labour engagement with Ethnic Minority communities has historically engendered.

When arguing for extra funding for BAME members to organise within the Party, several points must be considered. Firstly, there currently exist only hollow and limited local BAME structures in the Party, as compared to say the Women's and Youth structures. An initial investment will be necessary to set up the new structures and ensure they are supported sufficiently so that the new section is successful. Secondly, it must be recognised that across the liberation strands, White and middle-class Women, LGBT and Disabled members are often more visible and receive greater opportunities than BAME members who fall into these categories. It must therefore be recognised that extra funding for BAME members is intersectional and cross-cutting in nature and benefits BAME members that fall into each liberation category, and therefore boost opportunities for disadvantaged members across the board.

Lastly, it is important to recognise the spirit and purpose of this democracy review; called in the wake of an explosion of Party membership in the past two years. There has been a huge amount of money raised from fees, and while much of this is best used for campaigning, this is not the only way it must be used to win a Labour government. It is imperative that a significant amount is reinvested in the membership in order to foster a healthy democratic culture, maintain members' engagement (and as a result retain their membership fee), and as a result continue to grow the Party (and its funds), and ensure members can shape its direction to remain receptive and relevant and ultimately win elections.

For this reason, it is recommended that:

- The Party considers significant funding for BAME Labour, directly accessible to the Committee, to ensure the organisation can function to its full potential from a local up to a national level to empower it to engage proactively with Ethnic Minority voters on an ideological level and organise along political lines.
- This should be granted in the form of the salary for a dedicated staff member, and a minimum block grant that is enough to cover a biannual conference and an activity fund.
- A proportion of BAME members fees should also be directly siphoned into BAME Labour, to provide incentive for recruitment of BAME members to the Labour Party and engagement of BAME members with the structures.

Autonomy

The issue of the terminology and the name 'BAME Labour' has been endlessly raised as a point of concern, with members feeling like the label is imposed on them and very few readily identify as BAME. Further confusion arises with the use of 'Ethnic Minority' for the groups and officers at a local level, which many members again find inherently problematic and the inconsistency in vocabulary further contributes to the disjointed and dysfunctional structures. Outside of politics and a small bubble, very few 'BAME' communities would recognise it as a term that applies to themselves, creating a further barrier between the Labour Party and the Ethnic Minority communities it seeks to engage with.

There is a wide debate ranging as to the alternatives, one which must be led by the Party's BAME membership. To this end, the autonomy of BAME Labour to decide its naming and definition must be respected in its entirety.

This must be taken alongside a serious commitment to constitutional, organisational, political and financial autonomy. To ensure its fundamental organisational autonomy, BAME Labour must be accorded its own constitution, decided by BAME members and amendable by annual conference. On top of this, the Secretary must have direct access to the membership list and the Treasurer must have direct access to the finances. To create a new organisation without these powers would be to continue the tokenistic culture of organisation of BAME members that has currently created the near complete disengagement of grassroots BAME members and severely limited opportunities for BAME members to become active at all levels at the Party. Therefore, these demands for autonomy must be met as a bare minimum to rectify the current issues that stymie the development of active BAME structures.

The provision of financial resources has the serious potential to be used as a method of control, to limit political and organisational autonomy, and has certainly played a significant role in the current atrophy of BAME Labour structures. To mitigate this possibility in the future, it is imperative that a minimum commitment of funding for a dedicated staff member and annual conference be provided by the Party. This must be given alongside a proportion of every BAME member's fee to the Labour Party, to be dedicated to BAME Labour for a campaigns and activity fund directly accessible by the Executive Committee. This will ensure the organisation is sufficiently funded to reach its full organisational potential, while also incentivising BAME Labour to launch BAME membership recruitment campaigns, and ensure that BAME members have an incentive to engage with the structure and become active within it. Any changes to this financial set up must be ratified by BAME Labour, to ensure that it is able to maintain significant political and organisational autonomy.

Lastly, BAME Labour must be able to take political stances independent from that of the Party, in parity with Young Labour. Last year's election saw Ethnic Minority voters return to the Party in droves because of our fantastic manifesto that reflected their realities and offered pertinent solutions to the issues BAME communities struggle with. BAME members must continue to take a leading voice in ensuring the Labour Party continues to connect with Ethnic Minority voters by taking strong, independent political stances on the issues that most prominently affect our communities, as well as being able to feed these positions directly back into the Party.

As such, our recommendations to ensure the autonomy of BAME Labour are as follows:

- BAME Labour shall have meaningful autonomy, with its own constitution, which shall be decided by BAME members and amendable by an annual BAME Labour conference, as with Young Labour.
- BAME Labour shall have organisational autonomy, with the committee having direct access to its own membership list and finances, and the ability to organise its own campaigns and events independently.
- BAME Labour shall have political autonomy, allowing it to take political positions that are independent to that of the Party, as with Young Labour.
- BAME Labour shall have financial autonomy, in the form of a minimum block grant to cover the basic functions of the organisation and an additional stipend taken as a proportion of BAME member's fees.