

Councillor Bernie Grant is at the centre of a major row in Haringey Council's ruling Labour Group.

After being ousted from the Ethnic Minorities Joint Consultative Committee and the Community Development Committee at the Group's annual meeting a month ago, he accused the Group of "institutional racism".

Now he faces the wrath of the Group at their next meeting and could be expelled from the Group for his outspoken statements to the Party and the Press.

Adrian Roxan went to find out what was behind the row and what kind of man ~~Bernie~~ Cllr Grant was.

Bernie Grant is no stranger to fighting authority.

As a full-time official for the National Union of Public Employees, he does his fair share of tackling officialdom and bureaucracy.

So the present "racism" row would seem to be just another chapter in Cllr Grant's ~~1~~ chequered and controversial career.

But he doesn't see it that way and feels it is time to clear the air and sort things out:

"I am being judged on different values to other people because I'm black. They are looking at me in a different way to white councillors.

"I am under the microscope and certain of my characteristics are highlighted which wouldn't happen with a white councillor.

"I am blunt and outspoken and some people probably think I am rude but I seriously believe it is a cultural difference - it is just the way I am. People tend to read things into everything I say."

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Bernie Grant came to Britain from Guyana in the West Indies in 1963 and settled in Hornsey. Over the next six years he worked for British Rail, took 'A' levels, went to Edinburgh University and finally ended up working for International Telephones.

It was there he first became interested in trade unions when he was involved in a dispute and he gradually worked his way up the scale.

In 1975 he joined the Labour Party and three years later successfully applied to become a full time official with NUPE. He now lives in Tottenham with his wife, Yvonne, and three boys, Steven, Jimmy and "Ali".

"I joined the Council because I saw it as a challenge. I knew it was very bureaucratic and I had been involved in fighting against the Council on various issues like the Walk-In Centre in Turnpike Lane, suspensions of black kids and the lack of provisions in Tottenham.

~~I firmly believe~~

"I am firmly committed to helping ~~people~~ disadvantaged people - be they disabled, black, women or just normal working class people.

"All my decisions are taken in that light and this is a problem for a lot of the leadership because they tend to look at things in a more overall context.

"I was shocked when I joined the Council at how bureaucratic it was and the manoeuvres of the officers astonished me.

"I also ~~believe~~ believe that people should be chairman of committees for at the most three years.

"Some chairmen have lost touch with the grass roots because they have been in the chair for seven years or more."

The "grass roots" are something Bernie Grant is determined not to lose touch with and his ~~x~~ stubborn approach sums up his character:

"I have always backed the community first and foremost - perhaps that is my basic problem."

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