

# Racism probe 'was a cover-up'

ONE of Britain's best known equality campaigners has made a withering attack on a London council mired in claims of institutional racism.

Lord Ouseley, former chairman of the Commission for Racial Equality, accused Southwark of driving out black and ethnic minority traders in its attempt to "regenerate" one of Britain's most deprived boroughs.

He was hired by the council to investigate its policies after an ombudsman found it guilty of maladministration over a black nightclub and youth centre. Planning officers failed to tell the

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Imperial Gardens club of house-building proposals for adjacent land or give it the right to object. The club was later forced to close.

The local government ombudsman found no evidence of racial discrimination but ordered the council to pay £1,000 compensation and reform its procedures. A separate district auditor's report also ruled against the council.

But Lord Ouseley said his own inquiry had been used as a "front" to allow the Liberal

Democrat administration to cover up wider allegations, and accused its "dominant white hierarchy" of failing to implement his 35 recommended changes.

Lord Ouseley says: "I now feel that ... I may have been used not so much to uncover any wrongs but to help cover them up." His inquiry heard many aggrieved black and ethnic businesses telling "agonising stories of their appalling treatment".

Southwark said today it had made progress in acting on the recommendations, all of which it accepted. Council leader Nick Stanton said: "There is no bias."

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