

Tories accused of racism by black party members

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The Conservatives were today hit by a "racism" row after two black party members claimed they were "stopped and searched" when trying to attend a local association meeting.

The men said they were "traumatised" by their treatment at the hands of [party officials in Brent North](#).

They claim that even though they showed their membership cards and other identification, while others were waved into the association's AGM they were ordered to one side and "forced to empty their pockets" before being allowed to enter.

In a letter to Bob Blackman, the local Tory leader, Arena Sesay, 22, and Lawrence Okuns, 20, said they felt "like animals ready to be sent to the slaughter house".

They added: "We strongly believe that the security personnel/chairman and yourself took a strong distaste to us at first sight because we are young blacks dressed in casual denim and bomber jackets and hair-braids/dreadlocks and did not fit your individual criteria of a young Conservative : l i l y- white, pin-striped articulate middle-class young man.

"We expect such stereotyping from old white men... since we are victims of this in our daily lives and through our lives' journeys, but not from public figures in office of an important political organisation as the Conservative Party, especially in Brent, where we have such a diverse population."

Mr Sesay and Mr Okuns accused Mr Blackman, the local London Assembly member and leader of the Conservative group on Brent council, of treating them in an "insensitive and unsympathetic" way.

Mr Sesay, a student, said their treatment was "appalling". He said he had a membership card and a driving licence but "that was not good enough". He added: "We were forced to empty our pockets and open our wallets to show other ID. We were left in the corner whilst the chairman and other Central Office representatives were debating our fate. To me it was racist."

The two men had been persuaded to join the Tories by Mr Sesay's mother, Sibbo, a health visitor and long-standing party member.

Mr Okuns, also a student, said he did not believe the Conservatives at "the top" were racist. "I joined the party because I wanted to make a difference. People always say it's a racist party, I have been watching what's going on at the House of Commons and I don't think they are racist. It's people at a local level."

Mr Blackman admitted there had been a "degree of altercation" at the meeting but vigorously denied any suggestion of racism by him or his colleagues.

He said it was "rubbish" to claim Mr Sesay and Mr Okuns had been stopped and searched. "I take a very strong objection that any of us are racist in any shape or form. There must have been 140 people present and of them I would have thought 40 per cent were black or Asian," he said.

Mr Blackman said everyone attending who was not known to the stewards was asked for a membership card and ID.

He accused Mr Okuns and Mr Sesay of having a "different agenda" ahead of the mayoral and London Assembly elections next month.

A spokesman for the national Conservatives said: "The party takes matters such as this very seriously and we will be looking into the complaint."