

Appendix D



The London Borough of Lewisham is a Borough where residents' equalities needs are generally understood and respected. There is plenty to celebrate in Lewisham with respect to equalities but there are still too often areas of discrimination, hate crime, abuse relating to Faith, Disability, Race, Gender and Sexuality.

Undoubtedly, more needs to be done in practical ways to educate Communities and Organisations. An example of such practice is the *LIF* (*Lewisham Interfaith Forum*) which proactively and passionately engages Communities through Events, Discussions, and sports, including as The Annual Peace Walk, Annual Mosque Open Day, Annual Holocaust Memorial Day, interfaith sports events, and other initiatives. The experience of *LIF* is that we can focus on what we share and what we hold in common across the religious spectrum so that *LIF* can be truly inclusive and respectful to all without anyone feeling they are censured, drowned out or unheard, or others feeling that they are made unsafe by uncharitable views. Everyone needs to be safe. Everyone matters. We have our differences but we try to bring those differences to the table and work together with respect and tolerance.

Although the Local Council actively takes into account Equalities in its Policy and Decision Making, at the same time it is important that there is more Engagement with Faith Groups/Leaders in the Borough to further understand and appreciate those long held values and sensibilities cherished by Faith Communities in a world of changing and melding opinions.

One example from among some members of *LIF* are that concerns and barriers to engagement have emerged not only from a faith perspective but also from a cultural perspective from communities across the faith traditions spectrum most currently concerning pressures to conform with LGBT opinions over the promotion of conservative religious traditions, where critical or dissenting opinions about LGBT may be tacitly or deliberately ignored, dismissed, drowned out, censured, and censored. For the continued wellbeing of any open democratic society, Lewisham Borough in this case, where opinions are aired and respected, it is

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critical that orthodox religious voices are not excluded from the dialogue. Faith communities will sometimes choose to differ vocally on opinions vis-a-vis LGBT, but they are not and should not be dismissed as backward, antiquated or repressive.

Another example, expressed by some of our members is the ongoing discrimination, hate crime and barriers to participation that are experienced by disabled members of our community. Disability equality should be a standard that all adhere to, but sadly this is not always the case in Lewisham.

Evidence of good practice is demonstrated by the work and willingness over the years of the *L/F*, the various ethnic communities in Lewisham, the network of the Police and the Council to cement a close-knit Lewisham community where residents have united to repel the far right marching on Lewisham Islamic Centre, the various peace vigils for continued peace and unity in Lewisham. These events and more, including countless personal testimonies, prove just how indispensable intercommunity dialogue and the work of the *L/F* has been in shaping current attitudes in Lewisham.

Lewisham Interfaith Forum Steering Group. Dec 2019