

# THE INTER FAITH NETWORK FOR THE UK

## Note of Link Meeting for Local Inter Faith Organisations in Greater London

from 2pm to 4pm on Tuesday 19 January 2021

by Zoom

**Present:** Mr Balbir Singh Bakhshi (South London Inter Faith Group); Dr Joy Barrow (Hillingdon Inter Faith Network); Ms Merium Bhuiyan (Islington Faiths Forum); Cllr Ruth Bush (Westminster Faith Exchange); Mr Musharraf Chaudhury (Southwark Multi Faith Forum); Ms Frances Connelly (Camden Faith Leaders' Forum); Mr Mustafa Field OBE (Faiths Forum for London); the Revd Alan Gadd (Faiths Together in Lambeth); the Revd Alan Green (Tower Hamlets Inter Faith Forum); Ms Jenny Hadgraft (Tower Hamlets Inter Faith Forum); Mr John Lester (Havering Inter Faith Forum); Ms Katherine Lyon (Southwark Multi Faith Forum); Ms Sonoo Malkani (Harrow Interfaith); Rabbi David Mason (Haringey Multi Faith Network); the Revd Barbara McIntivey (Hounslow Friends of Faith); the Revd Mark Meatcher (Enfield Faith Forum); Mr Steve Miller (London Boroughs Faiths Network); Mr Jeremy Rodell (Richmond Inter Faith Forum); Mr Es Rosen (Barnet Multi-Faith Forum); Ms Penny Smith-Orr (Faiths Together in Croydon); Mr Kirit Wadia (Brent Multi-Faith Forum); Mr John Woodhouse (South London Inter Faith Group and Faiths Together in Croydon); and Ms Saira Yakub (Redbridge Faith Forum).

**In attendance:** Dr Harriet Crabtree (Chair); Dr David Hampshire; and Mr Ashley Beck (Inter Faith Network for the UK).

### Agenda Item 1: Welcome and introduction

1. Dr Harriet Crabtree welcomed participants to this meeting for local inter faith organisations in the Greater London area. This was an IFN regional link meeting of the kind held for local groups in different regions (London was, of course distinctive in a number of ways). It was the sixth such meeting since last April. These meetings offered participants opportunities to share reflections and information.
2. The meeting would be minuted and participants would receive a draft for clearance. If a participant wanted a particular point not to be minuted, for whatever reason, they should indicate that clearly. Screengrabs of the meeting would be taken for social media purposes and if people did not want a photograph of them on social media to let Dr Hampshire know so that they could be edited out before any picture was used.
3. A number of additional groups had signed up at the last minute. This was very positive. It might have a bearing on timings for the meeting.
4. Participants introduced themselves.

5. Dr Crabtree spoke briefly about the work of Inter Faith Network (IFN) during the pandemic. It had carried on its usual work but given major focus to the inter faith response to Covid-19. Linking and bringing together faith and inter faith bodies and supporting exchange between these had been very important. IFN had continued to provide advice and information and to foster wide links, helping people develop inter faith understanding and cooperation. The Inter Faith Week (IFW) programme had been a key part of that; Ashley Beck would be saying something about that in the course of the afternoon.

## **Agenda Item 2: London resources for local inter faith bodies**

6. Dr Crabtree introduced the next agenda item. There would be two presentations from bodies whose work extended across London: London Borough Faiths Network (LBFN) and Faiths Forum for London (FFL). These each had a distinctive remit and carried out work relevant and useful to all local inter faith bodies. She invited Steve Miller, Convener of LBFN and Mustafa Field, Director FFL to speak about their organisations' work.

### *London Borough Faiths Network*

7. Mr Steve Miller said that he did not plan speak in detail about LBFN's current work as many participants would know about that as a result of its pan-London briefings, specialist round tables, and now also the weekly check-in meetings for borough faith forums. However, he would be happy to answer any questions about those later.
8. LBFN grew out of the London Civic Forum in about 2002. Its purpose then, as now, was to link grassroots faith groups and local networks which wanted to work with the local boroughs and other public agencies with the staff from those public agencies who wanted to work with faith groups. LBFN's structure was informal; it had a wide membership, reaching across London.
9. Mr Miller began with some reflections about what lay behind what LBFN's pattern of work. He identified three factors:
  - i. The motivations of the faith communities involved are the normative values, which can be found at the heart of their traditions, for example peace and harmony; transformation; hope; neighbourliness; equality; service; wellbeing; charity; and reconciliation.

LBFN was committed to these in all circumstances.

- ii. A belief that faith communities constitute an invaluable resource to our communities.

This was very much in the area in which LBFN was working. LBFN provided building spaces, volunteers, activities, sometimes actual money, which were available both to its own members and to the wider community.

- iii. LBFN's leadership role in London's neighbourhoods and boroughs.

LBFN has always participated in discussions with the stakeholders and been a voice for communities.

10. LBFN has worked in partnership and collaboration with local authorities, with health agencies, and others. It has participated in these kinds of collaborations and often led in the creation of them, running networking meetings, sharing information, and representing faith communities on a variety of bodies. It has covered issues such as health and wellbeing, peace and conflict, multi faith spaces and chaplaincy, European links, crime, safety and security. Priorities have sometimes changed and from time to time it comes back to earlier issues.
11. Through connections with the Metropolitan Police and the British Transport Police LBFN was introduced, about five years ago, to the work of the London Resilience Forum. That is a strategic network designed to help responses to single traumatic events like the Grenfell Tower fire; terrorist atrocities; or long term events, such as the current pandemic, seasonal health issues and EU exit impacts.
12. Following the events in 2017 LBFN was asked to create a community resilience training course. This was successfully piloted at New Scotland Yard and was due to have been rolled out across London from Spring 2020. Due to circumstances at the time it was postponed. However, everything that LBFN had learnt during 2020 had confirmed the value of the training course. The course content covered important topics such as hate crime, safety and security, first aid. The fundamental work of building relationships was at the heart of the programme. LBFN was now talking again to the Metropolitan Police's education department about how LBFN could deliver a relationship building course in a virtual setting. The police were assisting with that process. Mr Miller hoped, however, that LBFN would be able to get deliver the training course to face to face operation at some point in the future.
13. LBFN was working on building better frameworks across London and on issues such as mental wellbeing, bereavement support and volunteering. It had also been working on key areas of London's recovery, such as climate and environment issues, poverty and work, children and young people, health and wellbeing, and building strong communities. He had been speaking the previous day with a faith leader who had asked him where, with all these potential opportunities but with limited resources, LBFN would put its energies. Mr Miller's response had been that - no matter what the pressing and sometimes overwhelming short term issues were - there was a need to think to the future, engaging in longer term rebuilding. Because of the incredible and inspirational work of the faith communities in London, which had now been recognised by all public agencies, the faith communities and LBFN were in a better position than ever to be taken seriously as partners in this longer term building work.
14. Dr Crabtree thanked Mr Miller for his input and invited any questions.
15. Mr Jeremy Rodell (Richmond Inter Faith Forum) thanked Mr Miller for his presentation, in particular the work on building relationships. He asked how

LBFN included non-religious people in building relationships. This might be a difficult thing to do but it was important.

16. Mr Miller said that LBFN did not involve only traditional faith communities. It was a network for anybody who wants to come together with goodwill and engage with that relationship building. He thought that there were two levels. Firstly, at the personal level, if people wanted to work together without any hidden or negative agendas then absolutely they were part of this. The second level was an institutional one. He thought that faith communities institutionally had not always been included well in local structures, such as council and voluntary service or structures local authorities have created. One of the reasons he had said that there was a unique opportunity was because faith communities and local authorities appeared to have, 'kind of discovered each other'.

#### *Faiths Forum for London*

17. Dr Crabtree invited Mustafa Field, Director of FFL, to speak.
18. Mr Mustafa Field said it was good to be at the meeting, part of the Inter Faith Network, and to be able to renew acquaintances.
19. Mr Field said that FFL worked with a pan-London leadership from faith communities. It worked to represent them, to work on common issues, and to unite the voices of different faith communities. Faith was very important for London. Over 70 per cent of people in London subscribed to a faith in some way according to census data. There was something interesting about London's uniqueness, and how faith was represented within that.
20. A marginalisation of faith had meant that the engagement of faith communities by public agencies and others in London had not been consistent over the last two decades. London was a place of change; often the diversity of London and newer faith communities and diversity of faith communities was not on the map. It was sad that recognition had come about only as a result of the pandemic, or of serious incidents such as the Grenfell fire; hate crime at places of worship; or the rise of extremism. At such times, public authorities looked to faith communities to provide insight into what was happening at a community level and possible solutions.
21. Mr Field spoke about some of the activities FFL had organised over the last few years. He mentioned:
  - Environmental projects - which faith leaders and faith institutions and places of worship had been keen to be involved in.
  - Activities including inter-generational activities such as tree planting campaigns— designed to involve children and young people.
  - Tackling hatred, for example running a campaign called *Turn to Love* (which had been particularly prominent in 2017).
  - Responding to the recent acts of terror since 2019 which had had a profound impact on London - and working to provide a common voice for faith communities.
  - Some work in particular areas of London at the local level.

22. Mr Field said that many issues could be considered as 'hyper local', but at the same time have a resonance for Greater London as a whole. A lot of the work in which the local borough faith forums had been involved was remarkable. They were the ones that build the relationships at a local level to allow London to become a cohesive city.
23. FFL's work also included a number of activities to support faith institutions, such as places of worship, and faith-based organisations that needed assistance with safeguarding, governance training, and health and safety. In 2020 FFL staff had visited 151 institutions around London and supported them with Covid compliance training. They had helped them to undertake a risk assessment; look at Covid compliance best practice; use some of the available tools; and implement necessary steps. This had been particularly helpful in enabling some places of worship to reopen and some of their activities to continue. This assistance was available online but some organisations had required a Covid risk assessment in place in order to open up. FFL had supported them in that process. FFL was not there to make decisions about what these faith institutions did but had supported them in that process. FFL had also hosted a number of training sessions focusing on mental health and domestic abuse and involving representatives of faith communities. These involved a wide range of people, including local authority staff, along with staff from secular organisations and local NGOs.
24. FFL had also run sessions where there was active support to help organisations look at their fundraising strategy and sustainability, this had been welcomed. He estimated that FFL had helped organisations unlock in the region of £100,000 by working with them in 2020. This had been quite remarkable. Sometimes it had been achieved through developing partnerships, such as bringing domestic abuse charities together with faith based charities to work collaboratively to access those funds.
25. FFL was really keen to see where it could provide greater support in the digital sphere. It had needed to enhance how its own organisation communicated online and to consider such questions as how to ensure its social media presence was effective. Perhaps it could develop a communication strategy for organisations to help them play an instrumental role in supporting London's communities
26. Mr Field said he hoped this gave those present a good idea of some of FFL's activities and a picture of areas on which all present might collaborate in the future. He added that
27. Dr Crabtree thanked Mr Field for his presentation and invited questions.
28. Mr Es Rosen (Barnet Multi-Faith Forum) thanked Mr Miller and Mr Field for their presentations. He asked them what they believed was the significant unique selling point or difference between their two organisations?
29. Mr Field said Faiths Forum for London was developed as a pan-London organisation and he understood that the London Boroughs Faiths Network was

developed more to focus on borough support and making sure boroughs and authorities were engaging and developing faith based networks. Faiths Forum for London has primarily worked at a pan London level trying to work with London's institutions. This was never simple. It can get complicated because you can walk into a conversation where you're talking about a pan London issue and then a hyper local issue comes up and everyone's talking about a specific incident in a specific place. What was important was that the two bodies worked together and collaborated; there was more than enough work to be done in London.

30. Ms Sonoo Malkani (Harrow Interfaith) thanked the presenters for what she had found two excellent presentations. She was grateful to Mr Field for pointing out what the difference was between the organisations. She commented that she had been invited to be part of a think tank established by a doctor and some others from the NHS in Harrow. There was no faith or inter faith presence on this group other than herself. The group was looking at the local vaccination programme and how to disseminate information about it, encouraging people from BAME backgrounds to take up the vaccine. She was able to talk about the work that Harrow Interfaith had already undertaken in this area. She believed that there was a role for local inter faith groups to support the work of statutory agencies.
31. Dr Crabtree invited both Mr Miller and Mr Field to consider if there was one message to London's local inter faith organisations about how they might make a difference.
32. Mr Miller said that making the effort to be around the table at times where there was not so much pressure meant that when stress really hit communities they would be in a better place to work more effectively. Building relationships, doing the routine day to day stuff when there was no crisis enabled a better response when there was a crisis
33. Dr Crabtree noted that it was through the quiet and ongoing work of turning up, listening, day by day or week by week, that the vital soft networks are built.
34. Mr Field added that building relationships was important, particularly with faith institutions and faith groups and communities, given their social capital. He noted the way that faith communities and inter faith groups had responded to social need, for example through foodbanks and the support for families that had been disadvantaged. Many of those activities had come through relationships built over time. FFL had seen how people had slipped up during the pandemic where they had not built good relationships with others. For him the key message was about building relationships, bringing groups to the table. He believed that the faith sector needed to think about how it was perceived and how it projected itself beyond the communities directly involved. The faith sector needed to be seen as part of the solution.
35. Dr Crabtree thanked Mr Miller and Field, noting that later in the agenda there would be an input from South London Inter Faith Group, which, whilst not pan-London in scope, had a significant linking role within South London.

### **Agenda Item 3: Roundtable sharing of news, information and ideas**

36. Dr Crabtree invited groups to speak about their work, noting that there would be opportunities for questions time permitting.
37. In each instance the speaker was introduced at the beginning and thanked at the end of their contribution. The death in the last year of Mrs Jackie Grieve of Redbridge Forum and Ms Pat Stevens of Harrow Interfaith was noted with sadness. They had made an enormous contribution to the work of their respective local inter faith bodies.

#### *Barnet Multi-Faith Forum (BMFF)*

38. Mr Esmond Rosen said that:
- The Forum had started in around 2004 and had been reconstituted in 2012.
  - As part of its relaunch the Forum entered a Faith Covenant with Barnet Council, enabling it to be at the table strategically.
  - One of the important things to have developed initially was a celebration of Barnet which brought together both faiths and cultural groups and celebrated Barnet's unity in diversity.
  - As a result of its relationship with the Council, BMFF had been involved from the beginning of the pandemic in strategic decisions and discussions about Covid-19.
  - Another important aspect of BMFF's work had been the partnerships developed with the voluntary sector, the business sector and others, bringing them together and enabling mutual learning about each other's work. As a result of this when BMFF was at the table it was known and respected and might be called upon to assist.
  - BMFF was hoping to develop greater levels of involvement in organising events and activities. A number of sub groups had been developed to that end, with a focus on such issues as the environment, mental health, domestic abuse, poverty, and loneliness.
39. Dr Crabtree invited questions.
40. Rabbi David Mason (Haringey Multi Faith Network) asked Mr Rosen about the balance between the independence of a multi faith group and the local council. How did BMFF manage that? What benefit was there from working with a local authority? Could he say more about the Faith Covenant?
41. Mr Rosen said BMFF was a critical partner and supporter. It was important that BMFF and the local authority were independent partners and continued to be so. That way BMFF could offer criticism, where needed, of the Council's actions as well as publically supporting it. He noted that on some issues the Council had taken the Forum's lead, on issues such as responding to terrorist attacks. On the Faith Covenant, the best person to speak with would be Ms Jenny Hadgraft in her FaithAction capacity.

42. Dr Crabtree said that she would circulate a link so that participants could learn more about the Faith Covenant.

*Brent Multi-Faith Forum (BM-FF)*

43. Mr Kirit Wadia said that he had recently joined the Forum as its deputy chair. He said that:
- BM-FF had been engaging with the Covid-19 agenda and had been working in tandem with Brent Council to reach out to faith communities.
  - The Forum had held various discussions. For example when Diwali was coming up it had facilitated a conversation between the Council and various mandirs about whether it was right to open places of faith during that time.
  - More recently BM-FF had been working with the Council to send letters to the various faith groups in Barnet highlighting the facts and figures and asking them to rethink plans for opening their places of worship even though they were currently permitted to do so within certain parameters.
  - It had also been looking at a number of issues such as policing in the borough. There were certain sections of the community who felt disaffected and it had hosted discussions between the Council, Police and the groups in question. The Forum had worked to build bridges and to bring forward what it was finding the community had been feeling.

*Camden Faith Leaders Forum (CFLF)*

44. Ms Frances Connelly explained that she worked for Camden Council. She said that:
- She thought that CFLF had started sometime around 2010.
  - CFLF currently had two co-chairs. This was useful because, on a simple level, if one person was unable to make a meeting there was always a chair.
  - Under its constitution one of the chairs is a Cabinet member from Camden Council. This was helpful because it gave the Faith Leaders Forum a strong link with the Council and ensured that it had standing with the local authority. CFLF had also found it helpful in terms of inviting speakers to meetings and being included in things with which the Council was engaged.
  - A diverse group of people attended CFLF. Usually meetings of CFLF consisted of 15 or 16 faith leaders, sometimes rising to 20. However, there were over 150 faith organisations in the borough and CFLF were currently only reaching a relatively small number of communities. It needed to broaden its reach even further. It would be useful to hear any advice on how to encourage wider participation and greater attendance at meetings.

*Faiths Together in Croydon (FTiC)*

45. Mr Woodhouse said that whilst being a resident of Croydon he had only recently become involved with Faiths Together in Croydon. He said that:
- FTiC was quite representative - there were lots of different faiths represented.
  - The local authority had had financial issues, which had led to it ceasing to provide financial report from Faiths Together. However, it still wanted the group to support its events. This put the group into a difficult position.



- During the lockdown FTiC had held two events relating to Black Lives Matter via Zoom. The second one had involved schools. It had been an excellent event. It had been held during the school day and worked well. FTiC had also held a successful session on the topic of hate crime.
- Prior to lockdown Faiths Together in Croydon had active hosting events such as inter faith walks and picnics and bicycle rides, amongst other events.

46. Dr Crabtree said she thought that Friends Together in Croydon had initiated the first inter faith bicycle ride. She noted that Ms Penny Smith-Orr, the Chair of FTiC had given a presentation to IFN's last national meeting where she had talked about some of FTiC's social action work, including on knife crime.

*Faiths Together in Lambeth (FTiL)*

47. The Revd Alan Gadd said that:

- Faiths Together in Lambeth had come into being formally in 2008. There had been groups before that but Lambeth Council funded a consultancy which resulted in the independent organisation coming into being in 2008. The consultancy had drawn on the experience people had had with South London Interfaith Group prior to that time, which had been very helpful.
- FTiL was an organisation with both organisational and individual members. There were around 66 of the former and 140 of the latter at the present time.
- FTiL had developed a pattern of events taking place through the year. These helped build friendships and relationships among people from faith groups in the borough.
- It also played civic role, engaging with the work of parts of the Council, the Police, and the NHS. This role was valued by those bodies and within the borough, alongside the friendship and building of relationships in the traditional inter faith kind of way.
- From time to time FTiL had run projects. For the past three years the focus had been on 'mental health first aid'. Members of faith communities and partner organisations were offered free training. The training took place over two days and enabled participants to qualify with Mental Health First Aid England as mental health first aiders. This was something that had been appreciated and it had also helped them to reach some new people, who had subsequently become members. That usually happened when there had been worthwhile project.

48. The Revd Barbara McIntivey (Hounslow Friends of Faith) asked Mr Gadd if members of FTiL pay a subscription. Mr Gadd replied that they did not. FTiL was a registered charity and as such it had a constitution. Membership was covered in the constitution and people signed up as members. In recent years FTiL had had its basic funding provided by Lambeth Council (£2,500 last year). The Council did not question the detail of how this funding was used and did not require a process of project documentation for this funding. He said the Council had taken the view that was it good that FTiL existed and were willing to provide for committee expenses, a website, and other core costs.

*Enfield Faith Forum (EFF)*

49. The Revd Mark Meatcher said that he had been in Enfield for two and a half years and that over the last 12 months he had become involved with Enfield Faith Forum (EFF). He said that:
- EFF have a relationship with the local Council, which helps support their work. A Council officer has supported them by sending weekly updates on all inter faith from Enfield as well as some wider relevant news.
  - EFF was next due to meet in the following week.
  - Over the last few months EFF had been very engaged with trying to help sort out food hubs and other forms of social support.
  - The Forum had regular interaction with the local police. This very helpful because it enabled it be up to date with the latest relevant developments and to cascade this information to its members.
  - Representation from different faith groups was not yet as wide as it might be. The group was at the moment strongest on Christian involvement. However, it was reaching out to the different faith groups. There had been some success with Jewish communities and a couple of the local rabbis were joining the Forum. The group was 'a work in progress'.

*Haringey Multi Faith Network (HMFN)*

50. Rabbi David Mason said that he was the Rabbi at Muswell Hill Synagogue, having been there for 12 years. When he was previously the Rabbi at Kingston and Surbiton Synagogue had been involved in the Kingston Inter Faith Forum, where he learnt there about the importance of structure to inter faith work. He said that:
- When he arrived in Haringey he had found that there had been a group but that it had been relatively unstructured and unorganised and eventually it petered out.
  - HMFN was built with the support of the council and had started its work about three years ago. He had become its Chair.
  - One thing he had brought from his Kingston experience was that every faith community had a clergy leader and a lay person representing the community group. He believed that this expanded what a local group can do and that had been helpful.
  - HMFN had started with quarterly meetings and focused on working together with the Council to bring practitioners, professionals, to speak to the group of faith leaders about the key issues that affected local society.
  - There had sometimes been sharing of faith perspectives to help build better understanding. The main issues addressed by the Forum were pressing ones such as mental health, youth crime, knife crime, suicide, homelessness, and child poverty.
  - There was quite a difference between East and West of the borough. The West was very diverse. It had a high number of people from ethnic minority backgrounds and working together had been very important. He believed that HMFN had been successful. It had provided a lot of networking help to faith communities such as the Jewish community, the Turkish Kurdish Alevi community, a large number of mosques, and Christian communities across the denominations.

- As Chair, had had set up a WhatsApp group which allowed faith leaders and contacts to communicate really quickly across faiths. That had been very helpful, enabling sharing of both worried and information. It also allowed members of the network to schedule together, organise work together, and gave it a sense of independent working and cooperation.
  - The WhatsApp group had been successful because HMFF had established a structured approach to inter faith engagement.
  - When the pandemic and the lockdown had begun in March 2020 HMFF had started weekly meetings online. It had followed the Council's lead and adopted Microsoft Teams. The council had helped enabled this. The weekly meetings had allowed HMFN to react to issues as they arose.
  - Meetings were currently every two weeks or so because of the present situation.
  - There had been some really good and cooperative work. The Council had budget for one or two of its officers to work with HMFN, doing secretarial work and offering some other practical support.
  - HMFN was planning for Inter Faith Week, supported by the Council, to do something really positive in the borough.
51. Dr Crabtree said she believed that it was through the Haringey network that Rabbi Mason had helped bring together some interesting faith leader partnerships during IFW in 2020. She referred to a video which showed Rabbi David and a priest from a nearby church talking about their experiences of ministering during the pandemic. She asked Mr Beck to share the link via the chat function. (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AqssY-NhYI>)
52. Mr Rosen (Barnet Multi-Faith Forum) said that he was interested to hear about the cultural groups that were part of the faith network and the importance, or otherwise, of associating not just with the faith organisations but also cultural organisations. Did local inter faith groups need to have discussions about the links between faith and cultural groups and ways that they could support each other in advancing inter faith work?
53. Rabbi Mason said he thought this depended on how “cultural groups” were defined in this context. There was an overlap between faith and cultural groups in that, for example, there were often overlaps between faith and ethnicity. This was perhaps especially the case in Haringey. This meant engagement with both. The imperative was to understand each other. However, it was also important to maintain that sense of it being about ‘faith’. That point was also relevant to engagement by local authorities. HMFN sometimes had rather a lot of representatives from Council because they loved the idea that this was a consultative body. Local groups needed to make sure that there was a balance of participation and that their group felt like a faith network.

*Harrow Inter Faith (HIF)*

54. Ms Sonoo Malkani said that:
- HIF was much smaller than in previous years and that had been for a number of reasons.
  - Quite a number of HIF's members were senior citizens.

- There was involvement of some young people, such as the person who looked after their website who was still at school, HIF wanted encourage greater participation and had been trying hard to get more young people on board. HIF would like to provide young people with something for their CV, so both parties benefited.
- Members had visited schools.
- Harrow Inter faith had a WhatsApp group for some of the committee members with the aim of getting things working.
- HIF had been concerned for some time about funding. Harrow Council had had to make economies and HIF had lost funding as a result. It did, however, still provide HIF with rooms for meetings and that would resume when the pandemic allowed. It had also provided HIF with the services of an officer who has a focus on community cohesion person; this had been particularly helpful, although the officer was more an observer.
- One of the major changes in the last two years had been the lessened engagement of local councillors, which had a wealth of knowledge that could be shared with the forum.
- The pandemic had quite an impact on HIF's work.
- HIF had had some really good suggestions from people about what it should be doing during the pandemic. Given HIF's resources and capacity it had been decided that they could offer comfort and support to people, and relay valuable messages out to contacts and their communities from the council about what it was doing. Effectively signposting them people to they could find out where they could actually get support from in the borough.
- During COVID HIF had also started a YouTube channel where videos could be distributed. There had been some issues with that process, though, and related them to the meeting.
- HIF had moved to having meetings on Zoom which were open to the public. This had proved to be popular.
- HIF had had to postpone its AGM due to the pandemic and it was hoped that this would take place in the future via Zoom if it proved impossible to meet in person due to Covid-19 restrictions.

55. Ms Malkani said that she was very optimistic about the future.

56. Dr Crabtree noted the work in Harrow of the recently deceased Ms Pat Stevens, who had contributed so much over the years – particularly in relation to HIF's work with schools Harrow Interfaith worked had with the local SACRE and Ms Stevens had been a former RE Advisor.

57. Every so often there was a hugely committed person in a local group who led on some areas of work or was active in everything. This was a great gift. It could sometimes, though, be challenging to build on that unless there was note of what they had done and how they did it, when they did it and what needed to happen. (A number of those present indicated that this situation was very familiar to them).

*Havering Inter Faith Forum (HIFF)*

58. Mr John Lester said that:

- HIFF had been invited to become part of the consortium of Havering Changing. The consortium's work was encouraging four particular areas of Havering that did not have much artistic endeavour to become involved in the arts.
- The process of getting involved in Havering Changing had been interesting. For example, members of the consortium had to have insurance. HIFF had never thought about insurance (most of HIFF's meetings were held at the mosque or the synagogue and their insurance covered the group whilst there). They had no income since council grant funding had been withdrawn. HIFF was having to give some thought to the way forward. He wondered how other groups coped with this issue.
- HIFF had also been invited to join the Safer Neighbourhoods Board and the Health and Wellbeing Board.
- Multiple invitations presented something of an issue in terms of the number of meetings.
- HIFF was having a Zoom meeting on the following day with a discussion groups about the question 'Is there a need for creed today?'
- HIFF had a discussion meeting and a quiz during IFW 2020.
- In 2019 a meeting to celebrate the beginning of Ramadan was held at the local synagogue and the Jewish holy day of Yom Kippur was held in the mosque which participants thought was very good.

#### *Hillingdon Inter Faith Network (HIFN)*

59. Dr Joy Barrow said that:

- Hillingdon Inter Faith Network (HIFN) was formed in 2007.
- It had gone through a sticky period a few years ago because the founder chairman moved away to another part of the country. She had inherited the mantel.
- HIFN was independent of Hillingdon Council but worked in cooperation with them, and in particular with its community cohesion officer.
- Over last year the pandemic had affected significantly HIFN's pattern of work. For example, it normally had a tent at the Hillingdon Festival, which attracted several hundred people. It also normally held a Sixth Form conference at one of the local secondary schools. Neither of these activities had been possible last year.
- For Racial Awareness Week HIFN had convened a meeting between faith leaders, the two local Metropolitan Police community officers, and some officials from the council. This was to look at the reasons why members of ethnic minority communities were not reporting racial abuse to the police. Flowing from this, the Council were developing what they called 'race awareness champions'. They had been trying to identify and train one man and one woman from each place of worship on how to respond to incidents of racial abuse experienced by members of their community.
- For IFW HIFN had done a series of video interviews with leaders of each of the main faith communities in Hillingdon talking about how they worked, and how they had opened their places of worship while conforming to Covid-19 restrictions. [Note: these are viewable on the Hounslow Council website <https://www.youtube.com/user/HillingdonLondon/videos>].

- HIFN had been looking to do a series of interviews with the religious leaders of the different faith communities looking at how the religious teachings of the faith encouraged faith members to have a vaccine. It was hoping to do these as soon as possible, ideally in the next month.
- HIFN was also anticipating working with the council on mental health training and awareness.
- On the eve of Holocaust Memorial Day a Zoom meeting was planned with Michael Bibeck, a second generation holocaust survivor. This was open to anyone interested. Details were available from [HillingdonInterFaith@googlegmail.com](mailto:HillingdonInterFaith@googlegmail.com)

60. Mr John Woodhouse (South London Inter Faith Group) noted that he had been in a Zoom with NHS South East London where somebody had said that 34 per cent of BAME people do not want to have the vaccine and said that what Dr Barrow had spoken about needed to be done urgently. Dr Barrow said that Hillingdon was divided into two territories, one north of the A40 and the other south of the A40. These areas were very different demographically and one was very diverse. HIFN wanted the interviews to highlight how the teachings of the faith almost provided an imperative for people to have the vaccine, especially given the statistics around the impact of Covid-19 on BAME communities.

61. Dr Crabtree noted that on the IFN website the office was beginning to put up resources relating to faith and vaccination.  
<https://www.interfaith.org.uk/news/covid-19-and-vaccination>

*Hounslow Friends of Faith (HFF)*

62. The Revd Barbara McIntivey said that:

- Hounslow Friends of Faith had recently celebrated its 20 years of existence in 2020. Because of the pandemic planned celebrations could not go ahead as planned. However, HFF had produced a booklet setting out the history of the group so people could learn how it had come about and developed over two decades.
- Hounslow borough was very blessed with diversity; all the major faiths were represented within the borough.
- Although HFF was quite a small voluntary organisation with no funding from the council it did have good representation from all the faiths. This was made up mainly of lay people rather faith leaders, although there were some involved. Most of the trustees were lay people.
- HFF did the usual things local inter faith groups did.
- HFF held an annual walk, which this year was likely to be in June and to be virtual.
- With the Council, they supported the annual HMD – that had been difficult last year because of the pandemic, although there had been a Zoom event with a speaker.
- HFF had good links with the council and there was a programme of inviting members of the council to meet communities in the borough, including the community inclusion officer who was also the prevent lead.

- There were also strong links with the police liaison officers based in the borough. The new Metropolitan Police Borough Command Unit (BCU) Commander for the West Area, which covered Ealing, Hounslow and Hillingdon, had asked for a two monthly conversation with Hounslow Friends of Faith. That was a good sign of engagement.
- HFF had been used as a trusted messenger by the Council during the Covid-19 pandemic. HFF was looking to do some short video clips encouraging all communities to have the vaccine.
- Succession issues were also relevant to HFF. She had been around when Hounslow Friends of Faith had started in 2000. She had moved away for work. When she returned, after eight years, she noticed that it was mainly the same people on the committee as when she had left. That was not necessarily an issue in itself but there was a need to ensure younger people were engaged so the group had a long term future. There was now a young Buddhist monk who was now going to take over being assistant secretary. That was an excellent first step.
- From her involvement with London Borough Faiths Network she was aware of a poetry and art competitions for schools. This was something HFF might consider as a way of expanding their contact with schools.

63. Ms McIntivey closed with the observation that it was really helpful to hear what other people were doing because it gives organisers ideas. I knew. She concluded by saying

64. Dr Crabtree noted that she had been present at HFF's anniversary event in Inter Faith Week. An additional dimension to that had it had been that its knitting group had produced a wonderful banner for the anniversary. If participants would like to see that it could be found on the Inter Faith Week IFN's Facebook page in a post done during the Week, and also on its Twitter feed. Crafts, knitting, sewing, embroidery, were a significant part of some local inter faith bodies' activity.

*Islington Faith Forum (IFF)*

65. Ms Merium Bhuiyan explained that she was the Vice-Chair of Islington Faiths Forum. She said that:

- IFF had been existence for more than 20 years. She said herself had been involved for the past 5 years.
- IFF had become a CIO (Charitable Incorporated Organisation).
- IFF had been awarded the Queen's Award for Voluntary Service – that one was one of its biggest highlights.
- Central to IFF's work were the values of respect, peace, and courage.
- IFF worked to create extensive and inclusive faith networks in the borough and to promote religious harmony for the benefit of the public in Islington and for the wider community.
- It was a vibrant group with 131 members and 644 community partners and groups. It involved a very wide range of people around the borough.
- Islington had churches and mosques but although there were Hindus and Sikhs in the borough there were not gurdwaras or mandirs.

- IFF did quite a lot of schools work. Speaking about schools work. The year before Covid-19 had been very successful, supporting peace assemblies specifically.
- IFF went out to different schools and people referral units in the borough and created an inter faith calendar.
- The Forum had recently further developed its website.
- There had been network events during the year. Highlights had included the Football Peace Cup. This had involved 100 young people, young men that were at risk of offending. The Peace Cup helped to build positive relationships between young people that could be sustained beyond the event.
- IFF had also held an inter faith youth event. This had been organised in partnership with Platform Islington, a youth hub in North London. The debate had been about the way the pandemic had affected their relationships with God. The event had attracted young people of a wide number of backgrounds and had been live streamed on YouTube.
- The Forum had also been involved with the council around emergency planning.

#### *Redbridge Faith Forum (RFF)*

66. Ms Saira Yakub said that her colleague, Ms Karen Kent, had hoped to attend, but had not been able to do so. She sent her apologies.
- RFF had been formed in 2003.
  - Sadly Mrs Jackie Greive, former Chair and co-founder of the Forum, had died in February before the pandemic. Mrs Greive was greatly missed by staff and trustees alike.
  - Mrs Greive had done much more than anyone else and her loss had had a deep impact. To keep the work going all of the trustees had to become more involved. It had been challenging.
  - RFF had funding from the local authority, which covered part of their costs. There were two members of staff who worked part time on a 14 hours per week basis.
  - It was a registered charity which although part funded by the local authority was independent. There were close working relationships.
  - One feature of RFF was doing its work in actual spaces, such as community venues and libraries. This had been very successful.
  - As RFF's meetings focused on local issues they generally had a high take up.
  - The pandemic had brought faith leaders and communities together for the common good.
  - The biggest challenge of lockdown had been making a transition to using technology for meetings. Many of their members were over 60; it had been difficult to get them all engaged. However, many had continued to support the Forum. They had developed digital skills such as holding one to one Zoom sessions on tablets and Kindles. Even so, the move to technology had meant not everybody who used to attend could attend and this was concerning.
  - For Inter Faith Week RFF had held a virtual walk of peace. Each of the trustees filmed a tour of their place of worship and gave a talk on 'loving thy neighbour'. This had been really well received. It could be viewed on RFF's website. It



also had meant that all of the trustees could be actively involved in the work of the forum.

- RFF had regular network meetings. These followed the pattern of the quarterly meetings in the library but had now moved to Zoom.
- RFF had also held a women's inter faith workshop on Zoom.
- The staff and trustees were now looking to the future and thinking about how to re-establish the work they were doing before the pandemic.
- It was giving thought to recruiting new trustees. There had been a recent appointment of a younger trustee from the Jewish community this had brought new energy, which had been welcomed.
- Linked to the new appointment, an inter faith education series had developed, focusing on marriage. Each trustee had given a presentation on their faith perspective. It had been running every Thursday.
- RFF was planning for the coming months. There would be a meeting on 26 January focusing on crime.

#### *Richmond Inter Faith Forum (RIFF)*

67. Mr Jeremy Rodell said that:

- RIFF had been established in 2009. He personally had been involved with the Forum for almost 10 years.
- This year there had been a change of chair and the Forum had slightly restructured what it was doing.
- Richmond was one of the least diverse of the London boroughs but that that did not mean that diversity was lacking. RIFF people from outside of the borough to join; this increased diversity. For example, Ms Charanjit Singh was longstanding member of the core group but was from Hounslow. Two RIFF members were also a part of Kingston Inter Faith Forum (he was one of those).
- There was no mosque or gurdwara in Richmond; Muslims and Sikhs went out of the borough for the purpose of worship.
- RIFF met quarterly.
- It had no funding but Richmond Council provided it with a secretariat, through a council officer also served as the Forum's community officer. The work of the officer was highly esteemed by members.
- When the Forum was able to meet physically the council also provided a room for that purpose. They had originally also provided refreshments but budget cuts had meant they no longer did.
- Lack of funding could sometimes be an issue.
- Meetings had come to be rather heavily occupied by council officers doing presentations. While these were of good quality, there was a concern that these were being used to tick boxes in terms of the council's agenda.
- The new chair had pointed out that there were many places of worship in the borough which were not a part of the forum. The Forum was looking at how to extend and improve its communication.
- Mr Rodell said that the Forum had started to plan one event every quarter. These were not necessarily organised by the group. For example, the Holocaust Memorial Day in Richmond was organised by the synagogue but as a civic event. This year they had decided to have a speaker from the Uighur

community. The event would be held on Zoom because the person speaking was outside the UK.

- RIFF had, for the first time done an event for Inter Faith Week. It had gone very well. It had been tri-borough covering Richmond, Kingston, and Hounslow. Using Zoom it had been possible to combine a speaker and some small group dialogue. The Forum was planning to use that model again and it had been an important learning experience.

*South London Inter Faith Group (SLIFG)*

68. Mr John Woodhouse said that:

- SLIFG covered many of the South London boroughs but not all.
- This year SLIFG Group was celebrating 40 years since its foundation.
- For the forty year celebrations Mr Woodhouse had done a series of interviews with founding members, which had been put on the Group's website and Facebook page. They were also on YouTube.
- Across the years the group's approach had varied. It had been most interesting to look backwards to what people did in the past. Mr Brian Pearce had been very important in the development of SLIFG and had some very interesting things to say about the group – including how its work related to that of the Inter Faith Network.
- The Group was considering digitising its archives. He would be glad to have contact details for anyone who might have the skills to do that (on a remunerated basis).
- Since pandemic and lockdown SLIFG had moved completely to Zoom meetings. These had replaced the normal in person lunch meetings they had previously held.
- SLIFG had recently held very successful events on Black Lives Matter, especially with relation to mental health.
- For Inter Faith Week, it had had a very good presentation about remembering BAME soldiers and civilians. IFN's Assistant Director, Dr David Hampshire, had taken part in that.
- In December the Group had held nine faiths' celebrations. For the first time this had included Pagans.
- SLIFG had been developing plans for 2021, including for a tree planting event involving a broad representation of people. This might be in the context of inter faith walks in the different boroughs.
- Another plan in 2021 was to do some sessions on bereavement, which had been a major issue for most faiths during the pandemic. It also wanted to build on the work it had done on mental health.
- Mrs Sarah Thorley had done an excellent survey of South London inter faith activity some years ago and it would be wonderful to have the funding to update that and to have more up to date information.

69. Mr Balbir Singh Bakhshi added that he believed that SLIFG set a very good example of diversity and cohesion. Its work was multi faith both in terms of the groups and the partners they worked with, such as universities and schools, where they had been particularly involved.

### *Southwark Multi Faith Forum (SMFF)*

70. Mr Musharraf Chaudhury said that:

- The Multi Faith Forum had been in existence for 20 years.
- In the recent past, like many groups, they had gone virtual.
- The Forum worked closely with Southwark Council and had developed an ambitious faith strategy for the borough. Both partners had been working very hard on that.
- The Forum had held a virtual conference focusing on mental health and wellbeing. This had had good attendance from across the borough.
- SMFF had also been helping with vaccination take up, and had written a piece for a magazine that went out to all the homes in Southwark, aiming to reach particular faith based groups.
- SMFF had been increasingly working with the Council during the pandemic. There had been a meeting with the leader of the Council in the previous week who he had been worried by the rate of infection in Southwark and some of the neighbouring boroughs. The leader of the Council had also brought up the issue of faith premises that remained open, whilst many had closed.
- SMFF generally held an annual inter faith form. The pattern had been to open four or five faith premises, with talks about those faith groups and the buildings. It invited people of faiths and none, and there had been speakers from local Humanist group. It was hoped that this would next be held in September 2021.

### *Tower Hamlets Inter Faith Forum (THIFF)*

71. The Revd Alan Green introduced himself as the chair of the Forum. He said that:

- THIFF had been formed in 2003 out of practical need of dealing with faith hate. Its origins lay in conversations between himself, a council officer, a police superintendent. They had been concerned to bring the faith communities together to discuss what was actually happening in terms of faith hate and what might done about it.
- THIFF had tried to keep the Forum working at that practical level, though not necessarily dealing just with negative issues.
- The Forum had developed a light touch structure and had a steering group. It had also developed a constitution so that it could join the IFN. It had one fundamental rule, which was mutual respect.
- Over time the Forum had built up good relations with the different faith communities and secular partners. It had become a trusted body to help secular partners negotiate the world of faith – a world which could sometimes be quite difficult for those outside of that orbit to understand and engage with.
- The Forum acted as a conduit put people in touch with one another either across the faiths or between the faiths and secular bodies. That system, he believed, had worked really well but it had experienced stress over the last year due to the pandemic.
- THIFF did not have an income. However, Tower Hamlets Council had been very kind to THIFF during the last couple of years and had commissioned two bodies to work with it to be its administrators and to help it develop its work. At present that partner was Faith Action. Without that, he thought THIFF would

not have been able to respond so well to the needs of the council and other bodies this year.

- THIFF's light touch structure had worked well but it had been starting to creak over the last year because it had been quite successful in its work and so had been very much welcome at the table as a trusted partner in responding to the pandemic. It had then been required to carry out work that it was not structurally fully able to do. For example, during the first lockdown the council had asked THIFF to say which of the faith communities in Tower Hamlets were open and which were closed, asking for information within 24 hours. THIFF did not have the means to do that. Currently the Forum did not have members, but rather a mailing list of people who had signed up. This illustrated the need to develop further.
- The process had pointed to THIFF needing a firmer structure to do this sort of work. The issue being faced was how to develop the structure but retain the openness of the Forum.

#### *Westminster Faith Exchange (WFE)*

72. Cllr Ruth Bush commented that it had been incredibly useful and interesting to hear how both the variety of structures and also the amazing enterprising things that people do. She said that:

- WFE had yet another different approach. It had been initiated by the then leader of Westminster City Council as the council's network of connection with the faiths in Westminster.
- It had proved very useful in that regard. There were other inter faith organisations within Westminster that operated on a faith initiated basis and WFE sought to keep in touch with those.
- WFE has a database a list of 'sort' of members who had not really signed up to anything in particular, other than to be willing presences. The list of about 180 contacts was mostly faith based but also included the voluntary sector, the police, and the NHS. There were a few faith groups that did not engage - particularly some very small churches.
- She had made the point strongly to the Council that places of worship were not primarily there to be sources of social cohesion for the council – that it was not their main purpose, even though it might be one of their functions. The Council could not rely on place of worship to perform certain social functions - some were very small and did not have the capacity and resources to respond. There had been discussion about this with the Council and she hoped there was a greater realism.
- WFE had some limited support from the Council through an officer whose role included administrative support to it. However, that had been somewhat affected during the pandemic due to the circumstances of the officer during that time.
- In normal times the Exchange met three times a year and there was discussion with cabinet members about particular issues - either where the council wanted to tell the faith communities something about policy or where the faith representatives wanted to discuss something about an issue with the council.
- In the fourth quarter WFE of each year holds a prize giving for a schools art competition that it holds (in 2020 with poetry added on). The message about it went out to all the schools in Westminster and all the faith organisations. The

prizes awarded came as gifts from various individuals and bodies, such as £500 from the Church Commissioners for a couple of years. The 2020 competition ran rather later in the year than normal and was entitled 'Covid-19 Lockdown and My Faith'. The topics were always faith oriented. Previously, there had been in the region of 400 entries. This time, during the pandemic, it was all online and there had been fewer entrants

- In the previous week there had been a meeting of faith leaders and communities with the Leader of the Council about whether places of worship should stay open. The Leader had encouraged them to do so if they were Covid-19 safe, but obviously they had to close if they were not. The places of worship had been offered help from the council to help with their risk assessments.
- The previous day there had been a meeting about vaccinations and out of that had come a commitment to set up an inter faith group to do work on communication to help address concerns that some people of faith had about vaccines and the programme of vaccination.

73. Dr Crabtree thanked the participants for their contributions. It was always a privilege to facilitate these meetings of local groups. The vital work that they did, often quietly and behind the scenes – day on day, week on week, month on month - made a very significant difference to local communities.
74. It was agreed that email address that participants had provided to attend this meeting would be shared unless people did not wish them to be so. If they did not wish them to be so, please would they contact the Inter Faith Network Office and ask for their email not to be shared.
75. The meeting closed with a short silence to remember all responding to the Covid-19 crisis by supporting people at this time.
76. The meeting closed at 4.15pm.

29 April 2021