

Opening the conference, Mayor Nisar Malik described how through this conference he was delivering on his promise made at the start of his mayoralty to bring together religious and ethnic groups. Hounslow is blessed with a wide range of faiths, ethnicities and community groups who, in these fiscally constrained times, continue to work even harder over and above their normal offer. This was why he wished to host this occasion personally to say thank you. He was aware of the positive difference which faiths can make through social action, dialogue or shared learning. 'Whatever our differences, our neighbourhood is what we have in common' he said.

Charanjit Ajit Singh, as Chair of the conference picked up on the theme of the Mayor's speech and commented how through closeness as neighbours people may become friends.

Before moving to the first speaker she referred to the recent report 'Living with difference: community, diversity and the common good,' the report of the Commission on Religion and Belief in British Public Life chaired by Baroness Butler-Sloss and published by the Woolf Institute in December 2015. The recommendations include among others

- the need for greater religious literacy (knowledge and understanding about all faiths) for public officials, faith leaders of all faiths and journalists
- the current pluralism in British society should be reflected in public life
- a nationally agreed curriculum in schools about religion, philosophy and ethics that is relevant to today's society
- public bodies should promote inter-religious encounters

- where a religious organisation is best placed to deliver a social good, it should not be disadvantaged when applying for funding to do so

The full report can be found at <https://corablivingwithdifference.files.wordpress.com/2015/12/living-with-difference-community-diversity-and-the-common-good.pdf>

Examples of current service delivery in Hounslow

Rev Stu Wright of Holy Trinity Church, Hounslow described the Olive Branch Project, collaboration between Hounslow Evangelical, St Johns Mar Thoma and his own church. Each Saturday between 4 and 6pm 30 – 45 homeless guests are offered a hot meal, showers, access to a clothes bank, assessment for TB and signposting to other services. During the winter months the guests can be referred to the Shelter Project run by borough churches.

The service is run by volunteers and more would be welcome as would donations of men's clothing.

The second speaker Rev Libby Etherington spoke of her three and a half years at St Paul's Hounslow West. She saw her mission of the church to be a blessing to the whole community. A need had been highlighted by teachers in primary schools for food for children, especially during the school holidays. This had led to the establishment of a food bank open at the same time as a community café on a Wednesday morning. People are referred through vouchers issued by, for example, doctors or social services. There is a turnover of users, but also some regulars.

Donations for the food bank come from churches and schools and more recently there have been less need for food drives at supermarkets.

However food shortage is often only one of the problems. Debt advice is offered by a group called Crosslight after an initial pilot showed a demand. (For details see www.crosslightadvice.org)

St Paul's have also started a football academy for young people which provides mentoring. It hopes to gain access to a local Hounslow park soon. There is also a language café helping people with limited English to feel at home and manage their daily lives. Finally free family celebrations are held periodically where food is always available.

The third speaker Gurpreet Singh described the Well-being Centre which he had helped set up four years ago at the Gurdwara Sri Guru Singh Sabha, Alice Way in Hounslow. It offers an advice service on health care and such issues as alcohol abuse and domestic violence. People were offered referrals to social services, but often preferred advice from the Centre. Hounslow Council had provided training for volunteers to offer weekly health promotion e.g. on diabetes and diet with the help of a volunteer professional dietician. Sometimes enquiries on one issue uncovered other more serious needs so volunteers must be prepared.

There is a turnover of volunteers and a need to draw in younger people to train as project leaders. Around 2500 enquires are dealt with in a year.

The final presentation was from Najeeb Ahmed and Br. Sahel Ali of the Darussalam Masjid and Islamic Centre in Heston. The Centre was founded in 2009 and provides services to the Somali community such as supplementary education, funeral and more recently marriage services.

Br Sahel thanked Hounslow Council staff and the police for support particularly for the Masjid's open door policy for Somali young people. The organisation has engaged with the Rugby Football Union's project to engage with 'hard to reach' youngsters as a way of linking the young people with the outside world. It is hoped some will take part in the Mo Farah friendship cup in August 2016. Working together can help to keep young people safe from outside extremist forces. Unfortunately, however, Somali young people form a high proportion of the prison population and hence the need to engage particularly with them.

Najeeb explained how the work of the mosque is not done for recognition, but to please our Lord. Most mosques are active in social welfare in some way. For people who have migrated to this country they feel that the Islamic Centre has provided security, a sound footing and safety and as a result he felt assured the

young people questioned why they would want to do any harm in this country, which is now their home. We don't want all to be the same and need to learn from each other, he said.



Overview of what faith groups are currently offering – results from a survey of faiths.

Joan Conlon, Community Inclusion and Participation Manager gave a brief summary of the results from the survey of faith provision. Although at only 18 responses from 103 surveys sent out, it did not give the full picture of all the work faith groups do. From this survey services included health, debt advice, homelessness and toddler groups. She stressed that it is very helpful for Hounslow Council to know what is being offered.

Joan also highlighted the Directory of Places of Worship available on the website of Hounslow Friends of Faith as a very valuable way of knowing how to contact other places of worship. It is essential for groups to update their contact details as they change. Please send changes to info@hounslowfriendsofffaith.org

Social and economic needs in Hounslow. How faiths could assist. Brief overview of the Life Project

Harpreet Rai from Hounslow Council Joint Commissioning Team described the Life Project. This is the title for a grouping of a wide range of services of public and NHS health, social care and community projects aiming to support people with age or health needs to remain living at home and delay and reduce their use of hospital services. This will include advice, appropriate support housing, falls prevention, support for people with dementia among others.

Harpreet stated that the Life Project was (to use the Local Authority terminology) a 'Key Delivery



Vehicle' for the 'Joint Prevention Strategy for Adults in Hounslow 2015 – 2019'. There are currently 59 separate contracts to provide services in this area of need. Hounslow council want providers of services to evaluate what they provide and see how what is offered could be integrated into fewer contracts. A full list of the services needed was shown.

What is needed for faith run projects – practicalities

Workshops

Workshops on homelessness, health matters, asylum seekers/new arrivals, families and young people and education highlighted needs. The main issues were

1. Information on how and where to refer people on to, including during unsocial hours
2. The legal framework when responding to asylum seekers
3. Training for volunteers on good practice in responding to people with often multiple and challenging needs
4. Support for users with, particularly, mental health needs and also domestic violence
5. a borough wide registry of services

Sources of practical help and advice

Debbie Brenner, Vice Chair of Hounslow Community Network (HCN), the collective voice for voluntary groups in the borough of Hounslow, encouraged faith groups to join HCN. The forum can provide information on e.g. funding, new initiatives, and 'Meet the Developers' sessions when voluntary groups could discuss benefits as the result of a new development in an area. The group can make representation to, for example, the Hounslow Chief Executive when cuts to public services are being made. HCN is represented on groups such as the Safer Neighbourhood Board, and Forums for Adult Care and Mental Health.

HCN meets four times a year with invited speakers e.g. the Borough Police Commander. It provides training such as on first aid, mentoring and community research for statistics grant applications.

Uttam Gujral, Head of Community Investment and Cohesion, Community Partnerships Unit at Hounslow Council described the role of her department. This is to promote partnership with community groups and Hounslow Council, community cohesion and to support forums. The Council has devised a Strategy in 2015 to meet local needs. There are 10 contracts with grants of around £600,000 for 62 projects.

The aim of the Unit is to increase the ability (capacity) of voluntary groups (known as the Third Sector) in the work they do to benefit the community. The Council links with the Police and the NHS (known as a Compact) and other stakeholders to work together. There are shared office spaces and meeting rooms available at low rents at CAN-Mezzanine above the library in the Treaty Centre. There is also a regular bi-monthly email newsletter 'Evolve' with useful information particularly about funding.

Uttam asked for feedback from faith communities to know how this arrangement is working to support the work they do and where there are gaps.



Closing plenary

Summing up Charanjit Ajit Singh applauded the good news of the excellent work being done by faith groups in the local community. There are great benefits to individuals in helping others. Let us move away from working in our own silos, learn from each other's experiences and work together across communities. Faith groups do what is possible, which may not necessarily meet the aspirations of the Local Authority.

Those present agreed repeating this meeting would be welcome.

A message from Councillor Sue Sampson, Cabinet Member for Communities praised faith groups for working together to do great work in such a self-effacing way.

Councillor Malik, Mayor of Hounslow again thanked faith groups for the work they do. He felt the conference had been very useful to learn what is being provided and what needs there are such as a Directory of Information to assist signposting and for training. He felt there was a definite need to meet again. He would urge the next Mayor to make it an annual event.



London Borough
of Hounslow

Neighbours in Faith

The Mayor of Hounslow, Councillor Nisar Malik's - Meeting of Faiths

Council Chamber Hounslow Civic Centre, 11th April 2016

The aims of this conference were

1. to celebrate the social welfare work of faith communities
2. to share information on what work faith communities are currently doing
3. to look at any issues where providers need support e.g. buildings, volunteers, funding, advice re Health and Safety, safeguarding etc.
4. to look at ways these could be addressed either informally between faiths or with the support of Hounslow Council
5. to look at social and economic indicators in the borough and assess if there are areas of need where faith communities could help