

THIFF Minutes 12th July 2016

Account 3, Bethnal Green

Present: Alan Green (Church of England Borough Chaplain); Jan McHarry (London Buddhist Centre); Michael Dunne (TH Catholic Church); Gulam Hussain (LBTH); Sotez Chowdhury (Near Neighbours); Nathaniel Roos (Fieldgate Street Synagogue); Ashak Chowdhury (Faith Regen Foundation); Ian Watkins (Salvation Army); Andrew Pantland (Methodist Church); Rowena Loverance (St George in the East CoE); Ingrid Cruickshank (Metropolitan Police); Patrick Allsop (Catholic Church); Martin Ling (LBTH); Juber Hussain (East London Mosque); Ram Chandra Saha (Vivekananda Human Centre); Sonya Sier (LSA Bahais of Tower Hamlets); Kirsty Cornell (THCVS); Dani Anderson (THCVS).

Apologies: Peter McGahey; Felix Dawe; Bernadette Hegarty, Sigrid Werner, Leon Silver, Christine Hall, Cameron Kirkwood, Iqbal Raakin.

1. Minutes of last meeting: Apologies should include Nathaniel Roos.

Any other amendments to be sent to Kirsty Cornell.

2. Presentation from Martin Ling, Borough Housing Strategy Manager on the Council's consultation on the borough housing strategy

Martin Ling gave out a paper with a summary of the four themes of the strategy for consultation. ML explained that the borough is developing a new housing strategy, the last one dating back to 2012. The council intends to approve the new strategy on November 2016.

ML set out the background to the review – the housing pressures are growing and becoming more severe; the population of TH is growing, housing prices are rising sharply. The new Housing and Planning Act is intended to meet aspirations around home ownership. There are currently 20,000 on the housing waiting list; 10,000 people are in severe housing need. There are 2,000 homeless households in the borough; half of those are being housed out of borough. The private rented sector is growing and rent levels are above the housing benefit cap level.

The council is consulting at the moment on their new strategy – there is an online survey and some public meetings (ML circulated a list of events people can attend). The housing strategy will link to the local plan and will need to meet the Mayor of London's target for home ownership.

Comments from the forum included:

- Need to ensure that any new developments include green space;
- Request that the percentage of new space in new developments that is affordable is set at a high level and is written into the strategy;
- The changes in the new Housing Act will impact on the poor and vulnerable the most;

ML explained that the “pay to stay” policy in the new Housing Act has been amended and will now be tapered up at 15p in the pound. The House of Lords also brought in new protections for tenancies from the original proposed short term tenancies. The policy however remains that social housing is transitional and not for life.

ML explained there will be a second stage consultation once there is a draft of the strategy in September 2016. The council will also be undertaking an equality appraisal of the strategy.

ML asked that THIFF members let people know about the consultation and encourage people to go online to complete the survey.

http://www.towerhamlets.gov.uk/lgnl/council_and_democracy/consultations/Towards_a_new_Tower_Hamlets_Housing_Strategy.aspx

The forum asked how people who do not speak English can input – ML said that council staff and members are supporting with this.

Remaining public consultation meetings will be:

Monday 25th July 1.30 – 3.00pm; Bethnal Green library

Sunday 31st July all day – Mela at Weavers Field

2. Faith Hate Crime and Incidents, DCI Ingrid Cruickshank

IC introduced the report on hate crime and explained that Brexit has had an impact across the Met and there is an increase in hate crime, which the police are dealing with robustly. IC said there has been a positive push back from the community to people expressing hatred. IC presented figures showing hate crime figures for this time last year to demonstrate the increase. IC was hopeful that the figures will reduce again once the impact of Brexit lessens.

Hate crime data is being collated across the Met and the TH hate crime officer is keeping a close eye on the figures.

TH has the second highest level of hate crime in the met area. IC noted that Newham have lower figures than TH and is looking at what can be learnt from other boroughs such as Newham that are similar to TH.

IC said she is happy to talk to anyone about the issues and would like to hear any insight or suggestions that people may have.

NR raised a concern that if the economy worsens then hate crime is likely to increase. IC said that the police will enforce and deal with any hate crime and that she has a sense that communities want to come together.

SC gave some examples of hate crime incidents that he was aware of in Whitechapel. IC asked that everyone encourage the reporting of hate crime, and that the message is that the police care and will take any reports of hate crime seriously.

DCI IC can be contacted at: Ingrid.Cruickshank@met.pnn.police.uk

Hate crime can be reported by calling 999 (emergency), 101 (non-emergency). Details of other ways of reporting hate crime can be found on the LBTH website:

http://www.towerhamlets.gov.uk/lgnl/community_and_living/community_safety_crime_preve/hate_crime/hate_crime.aspx

3. THIFF constitution

The constitution and the accompanying code of conduct were handed out and will also be circulated via email.

AG explained that the THIFF constitution will be reviewed. The constitution aims to be light touch without too many rules. Changes that will be proposed to the constitution include removing the 3 year time limit on membership of the steering group.

The next meeting (September 2016) will be an extraordinary general meeting to agree the changes to the constitution, and the following meeting will be an AGM to elect the steering group. Proposed changes to the constitution will be sent out with the notice of the EGM.

The steering group is currently made up of Alan Green, Jan McHarry, Leon Silver and Aslam Uddin; Aslam unfortunately has not had the time to be able to attend recently. People can be co-opted to the steering group outside of the elections.

AG confirmed that THIFF is a member of The Inter Faith Network for the United Kingdom and subscribes to its code of conduct 'Building Good Relations with People of Different Faiths and Beliefs'.

4. Information share:

Sotez Chowdhury – Near Neighbours are running a small grants programme from DCLG through the Church Urban Fund. Grants of up to £5k are available for organisations who want to undertake social interaction or social action projects that bring people of different faiths and beliefs together (stand-alone events will not be funded). Projects are likely to have a very local impact and new projects are preferred (although an application could be made to re-run a project but in a new area). The application form is very straight forward and there is a quick (2 week) turnaround. Salaries will not be funded but sessional workers can be. The Church of England parish you are applying in must be able to see the application form. The programme started on the 23rd May and will continue until the funding runs out. Near Neighbours and THCVS can provide support following the project to help people get more long term funding for projects.

Sotez can be contacted on: near.neighbours@cuf.org.uk / 0207 898 1647

Sonya Sier – attended an event during Ramadan at the East London Mosque and would encourage others to attend similar events in the future.

Kirsty Cornell – question from a forum member who is unable to attend about forums to discuss aspects of different faiths and beliefs. THIFF can be a way to meet people to then meet outside of THIFF to discuss religious beliefs; can also contact some of the member organisations of The Inter Faith Network.

Michael Dunne – will be leaving TH and moving to West London in September 2016, so this will be his last THIFF meeting. The forum expressed their thanks to Michael.

Andrew Pantland – will also be moving away from TH and this will be his last meeting. Andrew said it had been a privilege to have been involved in the forum. The forum also passed on their thanks to Andrew.

AG said that both Michael and Andrew had both consistently shown support for the forum and had always been willing to turn out to show solidarity with faith groups at times of difficulty or conflict.

Juber Hussain – there will be an event at the mosque on the 27th September for the 3rd sector and religious leaders (invite only). The mosque is also setting up a student interfaith forum with the Ambassadors of Faith and Belief. It will be a London-wide forum and 6 schools are signed up currently.

Faith Regen are running an event for women on the 16th July – details were sent with the invite to the forum meeting. Faith Regen have developed a feedback form with the tension monitoring group that people can complete and send to Faith Regen.

Jan McHarry – to make people aware of the awards for all funding available from the lottery – she was successful in getting funding to write a guide about how spaces around religious buildings can be pollinating friendly.

Alan Green – asked if anyone was able to attend their Council of Mosques Eid dinner on Thursday. AG also said that it is the 21st anniversary of the Srebrenica massacre and there is an exhibition at the East London Mosque about Islamic heritage in Europe. AG recommends that people go if they can; it runs until Saturday 16th.

Dates of future THIFF meetings: 20 September; 8 November and 17 January 2017.