

Bedford Council of Faiths (BCoF) Annual Report

BCoF continues into 2021 with some new trustees and is represented on a variety of local bodies. Chris Horler stood down from the trustees in 2019. We are grateful for his service as secretary. BCoF is affiliated to the national Inter Faith Network.

The speaker at the BCoF AGM in 2018 was David Jonathan from Grassroots and Luton Council of Faiths. He spoke on:

- why different faiths should work together
- interfaith dialogue and why it is effective
- how faith groups can maintain resilience and sustainability
- his motivation for being involved in interfaith work.

Peter Gerrish and Cass Howes attended a meeting of the Inter Faith Network in July 2019. It was agreed, in 2019, that Wendi Momen would represent BCoF on the university chaplaincy partnership group (UBECT).

Ideas for future meetings, suggested in 2019, have not been followed through. These include talks by:

- the Archdeacon of Bedford
- Mags Brady
- Peter Adams on peace and reconciliation
- Bedford Town Centre Chaplains

We also considered a joint meeting between Queens Park Community Orchard and BCoF. These ideas could be considered for future BCOF meetings

Ongoing participation by BCOF

Holocaust Memorial Day (HMD) 27th January

HMD was commemorated in 2019 and 2020 as a Civic event at the Anne Frank tree in Russell Park and in the Harpur Suite. There was participation from the Borough Council, the Anne Frank Trust and local schoolchildren. The Higgins Bedford also participated. Due to the lockdown in 2021, the commemoration involved a single member of the Bedford Progressive Synagogue reciting the Kaddish prayers at the Anne Frank tree.

Bedford and Luton Emergency Response Committee (BLEVEC)

Cass Howes represents BCoF on Blevec and is the faiths lead. The deputy faiths lead is Laurence Benjamin representing Luton Council of Faiths. Faiths leads:

- give advice on religious issues arising during emergencies,
- recruit volunteers from faith communities
- can call in faith representatives to set up a faith station at Assistance Centres set up by the local Borough councils to take evacuees.

Assistance Centres were set up over Christmas 2020 to take evacuees due to river flooding in Bedford.

Currently volunteers, including those from faith communities, are staffing the three mass vaccination centres in Bedford.

Yarl's Wood

A proposal had been made by the Home Office, in 2021, to settle 200 male asylum seekers close to the present Yarl's Wood Immigration Centre near Bedford. BCoF supported a local campaign against the proposal, headed up by Revd Luke Lerner. There were concerns about the quality of provision. It was announced, on Tuesday 9th February, that the Home Office has withdrawn the proposal. The local campaign was referred to in the withdrawal announcement. More information about this has been circulated.

Standing Advisory Council on Religious Education (SACRE)

Every local council is required by law to have a SACRE. The council monitors the effective provision of religious education and collective worship. Cass Howes and Virendra Soni have places on the Council and Virendra has been elected Vice Chair of SACRE.

Refugee Week

The BCoF representative on Bedford Refugee and Asylum Seeker Support (BRASS) is currently Cass Howes.