



## **INTO THE FUTURE; SIGNPOSTING TO INFORMATION AND ADVICE FOR LOCAL INTER FAITH ORGANISATIONS IN THE EAST OF ENGLAND**

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### Introduction

Since it was established in 2002, the East of England Faiths Council (EEFC) has aimed to help inter faith activity flourish across the region.

We have worked with local inter faith groups to facilitate them networking together and with public sector partners; to offer training; to undertake relevant research, and to give information and advice whenever requested. Similarly, EEFC has learnt a great deal from the inter faith groups, and been able to pass it on to others.

The Council is closing in March 2013, due to loss of most of its public funding, and plans to put in place access to information it has produced, and leave a useful legacy.

This leaflet is designed to answer some of the questions that we have found are often raised by local inter faith groups, and to act as a handy guide to what information can be found in the EEFC publications and from other organisations.

There is a wealth of EEFC publications, which after the Council has closed, can currently be accessed by the links below. Once the publications have been transferred to a permanent site, this document will be re-issued.

### Setting up an inter faith group

There is very good information on all aspects of running a local inter faith group in the Inter Faith Network (IFN) publication *The Local Inter Faith Guide*, which can be downloaded from their web site [www.interfaith.org.uk](http://www.interfaith.org.uk). IFN is an invaluable source of information, and although you need to have been established for two years before applying for membership, they will help and encourage the formation of new groups.

### **We are often asked:**

*Where can I find information on constitutions and governance?*

EEFC has produced two documents which groups considering a new or revised constitution may find helpful.

Guidance on governance can be found in our 2010 publication  
[http://www.faithneteast.org.uk/pdf/LIFO\\_governance\\_guidance\\_2010.pdf](http://www.faithneteast.org.uk/pdf/LIFO_governance_guidance_2010.pdf)

Points to consider about structure and membership can be found in our 2011 publication

[http://www.faithneteast.org.uk/pdf/LIFO Structure and membership June 2011.pdf](http://www.faithneteast.org.uk/pdf/LIFO%20Structure%20and%20membership%20June%202011.pdf)

*Do we need to have people from as many faiths as possible?*

Basically, you need to try to reflect the faith composition of your area, which you can find by looking at the latest census figures on [www.ons.gov.uk/census](http://www.ons.gov.uk/census). However, it is better to get going and draw in new people, than to wait until you have the 'perfect' membership profile.

*How can we work with our Local Authority? And can they help us get set up?*

Most Local Authorities are keen to have an inter faith group with which they can work, when they need to consult or find or share information. In some cases, they will actively try to help a group get set up, and these relationships can become very productive. The local inter faith group does however need to maintain its independence if it is going to be effective.

*Does the group have to register as a charity?*

This is not essential, and there are pros and cons. The publication *The Local Inter Faith Guide* gives some guidance on this matter, but turnover thresholds for registration change, so also check with the Charity Commission [www.charity-commission.gov.uk](http://www.charity-commission.gov.uk)

*Where might we find funding?*

In the past, Local Authorities have been able to help with small sums of money for start-up and public events, but this has become less likely. However, they may well be able to offer you a free room, and perhaps help with publicity. Talk to the Communities Officer or equivalent, but also to your local Councillors. Generally, not very much money is required to run a successful local inter faith group, but if you would like to hold a big, public event (for example, a debate) then aim to find a free venue from a public body or one of the larger faith groups in your membership, and seek sponsorship for refreshments from a friendly business.

Working with the public sector

*Is our Local Authority likely to be interested in what we do?*

Most will definitely be interested, and some will be helpful, for example, by offering venues for meetings, or working in partnership with you on public events and consultations.

*What about other public bodies?*

Remember that other statutory bodies such as the Police, Fire Service and NHS value building good relationships with faith groups, which can be very important to their service delivery. Keep them informed on how to contact you, and any of your activities. Faiths have been represented by the EEFC at regional level for emergency planning matters, and this representation will be continued by the same individuals, who will be co-opted. Contact Priscilla Barlow to find out more ([priscilla.barlow@keme.co.uk](mailto:priscilla.barlow@keme.co.uk)).

There is an EEFC publication on engaging with government that you may find useful: *Working together: faith groups and government, a brief guide to essential information and resources*, which gives key points about the nature of local and national systems to make communications and relationship easier

[http://www.faithneteast.org.uk/pdf/EEFCGuidance for Faith Groups and Government engagement.pdf](http://www.faithneteast.org.uk/pdf/EEFCGuidance%20for%20Faith%20Groups%20and%20Government%20engagement.pdf)

*Should we try making contact with local Councillors? What might they be interested in?*

Research undertaken by EEFC on empowerment of faith groups indicated that they find it productive to work with and through their local elected members, and an EEFC *Survey of Councillors and Faith Groups in the East of England 2012* showed that Councillors (whether or not they have a faith themselves) generally value the contribution of their local faith communities, and want to be able to locate them and understand more about their presence. A local inter faith group has a key role to play in this. Your Councillor may be interested in the EEFC publication *Councillors and Faith Groups*, written for those who may want to engage with faith issues and meet groups in their locality [http://www.faithneteast.org.uk/pdf/Councillors and faith groups.pdf](http://www.faithneteast.org.uk/pdf/Councillors%20and%20faith%20groups.pdf)

*What about the SACRE?*

Every County and Unitary Authority has a SACRE (Standing Advisory Council on Religious Education) to advise it on RE, collective worship and spiritual development in schools. The SACRE comprises people of different faiths, and there are good opportunities for discussion and partnership between your group and the SACRE. The EEFC publication *Working with SACREs* explores the possibilities and makes practical suggestions [http://www.faithneteast.org.uk/pdf/SACRE information for LIFOs.pdf](http://www.faithneteast.org.uk/pdf/SACRE%20information%20for%20LIFOs.pdf)

*How can we be better understood as faith groups?*

As a local inter faith group, you can create many opportunities for improved understanding and relationships. Personal meetings, debates, exhibitions, visits to schools and public bodies, joint seminars on issues of mutual interest, participation in Inter Faith Week can all be explored for their relevance to your locality. The IFN web site [www.interfaith.org.uk](http://www.interfaith.org.uk) has records of past Inter Faith Week events around the country, and may inspire your thinking.

Planning and running events

EEFC has been asked for practical help and advice from time to time, and in 2012 we held a seminar on this subject for local inter faith groups. The notes we wrote for this have been found useful by a number of groups, and deal with all the practical aspects and planning details you need to consider:

[http://www.faithneteast.org.uk/pdf/Putting on an event.pdf](http://www.faithneteast.org.uk/pdf/Putting%20on%20an%20event.pdf)

Media relations

It is well worth cultivating a good relationship with broadcast and press in your area, and some groups also use social media very successfully. EEFC has been providing media training to local inter faith groups across the region, and based on what they have asked, we have produced a short guide to help you get your message across; it covers the basics of press releases, interviews, and dealing with issues and crises:

*Media relations, a basic guide for faith and inter faith groups in the East of England*  
[http://www.faithneteast.org.uk/pdf/EEFC Media Relations Guide.pdf](http://www.faithneteast.org.uk/pdf/EEFC%20Media%20Relations%20Guide.pdf)

### Planning issues

Many local inter faith groups get involved in one way or another with planning matters: their members may be seeking new premises or wishing to extend their current ones, or there may be a new settlement planned, and a faith input needed to its design and delivery.

### **Questions which commonly crop up include:**

*One of our member groups needs to extend their place of worship and may add a community hall – how do they make a start to the process? Another is thinking about starting from scratch – buying land and building on it.*

The EEFC publication *Building for Faith* will give you all the basics about dealing with the planning process, while involving your worship community and neighbours. It also gives details of sources of advice and handy contact addresses in the region [http://www.faithneteast.org.uk/pdf/Building\\_for\\_faith.pdf](http://www.faithneteast.org.uk/pdf/Building_for_faith.pdf)

*We have just heard that a developer is looking to build thousands of new homes near us. As a local inter faith group, should we be getting involved?*

The answer is probably yes! The plans might be in their infancy, but one day this will be a community of neighbours. Faith input should be welcomed by the planning officers and developers, as bringing value and expertise to their proposals. The EEFC publication *Faith in New Developments: Partnerships, People and Places* is an introduction intended for faith groups, planners and developers, suggesting how they can best work together, and giving practical information and examples [http://www.faithneteast.org.uk/pdf/Partnerships, People and Places Faith in New Developments.pdf](http://www.faithneteast.org.uk/pdf/Partnerships,_People_and_Places_Faith_in_New_Developments.pdf)

*Does a new development have to cater for the faith needs of people who might live there in the future?*

There are national guidelines for best practice that were developed in this region by Cambridgeshire Horizons: Faith Facilities in New Developments. However, these are not legally enforceable, and you will need to work closely with the planners and developers to persuade them that it is in the interests of the new community as a whole to have an adequate community centre with accommodations for faiths; housing allocated to faith ministers in the early stages of build; and land set aside for future faith use. There are good examples to be found in *Faith in New Developments: Partnerships, People and Places* [http://www.faithneteast.org.uk/pdf/Partnerships, People and Places Faith in New Developments.pdf](http://www.faithneteast.org.uk/pdf/Partnerships,_People_and_Places_Faith_in_New_Developments.pdf)

### Getting fresh ideas, advice and information

*Where can we find help and advice from real people, rather than just this leaflet?*

Your first port of call should normally be the national body, the Inter Faith Network for the UK [www.interfaith.org.uk](http://www.interfaith.org.uk).

It is also very useful to talk to other local inter faith groups, especially those who are nearby, or might have encountered similar issues. You can find where all the other local inter faith groups in the region are based, and who to contact at each, on the Inter Faith Network UK web site, or by using the listing below.



## Resources: web sites for organisations

### Councils of faith and interfaith bodies

Inter Faith Network UK [www.interfaith.org.uk](http://www.interfaith.org.uk)  
Bedford Council of Faiths [www.bcof.org.uk](http://www.bcof.org.uk) -  
Cambridge Inter-Faith Group [www.cam.net.uk/home/interfaith](http://www.cam.net.uk/home/interfaith)  
Dacorum Interfaith Network [www.dacorum.gov.uk/default.aspx?page=7476](http://www.dacorum.gov.uk/default.aspx?page=7476)  
Epping Forest Multi Faith Forum [www.oneeppingforest.org.uk/multi\\_faith\\_forum.html](http://www.oneeppingforest.org.uk/multi_faith_forum.html)  
East of England Faiths Agency [www.eefa.net](http://www.eefa.net) (Faith tutors, information and training, the Diversity Game)  
European Council for Religious Leaders [www.rfp-europe.eu/](http://www.rfp-europe.eu/)  
Luton Council of Faiths [www.lutonfaiths.org](http://www.lutonfaiths.org)  
Norwich Interfaith Link [www.norwichinterfaith.co.uk/index.htm](http://www.norwichinterfaith.co.uk/index.htm)  
Suffolk Inter-Faith Resource [www.sifre.org.uk](http://www.sifre.org.uk)  
Stort Interfaith Group [www.catholicstortford.org/interfaith.html](http://www.catholicstortford.org/interfaith.html)  
Three Faiths Forum [www.3ff.org.uk](http://www.3ff.org.uk)  
Watford Inter Faith Association [wifa.petespcs.co.uk](http://wifa.petespcs.co.uk)  
Welwyn Hatfield Inter Faith Group [www.welhat.gov.uk/index.aspx?articleid=728](http://www.welhat.gov.uk/index.aspx?articleid=728)

### Faith Links

Baha'i Community of the United Kingdom [www.bahai.org](http://www.bahai.org)  
Network of Buddhist Organisations (UK) [www.nbo.org.uk](http://www.nbo.org.uk)  
Ipswich Buddhist Centre [www.ipswichbuddhistcentre.org.uk](http://www.ipswichbuddhistcentre.org.uk)  
London Buddhist Centre [www.lbc.org.uk](http://www.lbc.org.uk)  
Norwich Buddhist Centre [www.norwichbuddhistcentre.com](http://www.norwichbuddhistcentre.com)  
Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales [www.catholic-ew.org.uk](http://www.catholic-ew.org.uk)  
Baptist Union [www.baptist.org.uk](http://www.baptist.org.uk)  
Methodist Church [www.methodist.org.uk](http://www.methodist.org.uk)  
United Reformed Church [www.urc.org.uk](http://www.urc.org.uk)  
Salvation Army [www.salvationarmy.org.uk](http://www.salvationarmy.org.uk)  
Hindu Forum of Britain [www.hfb.org.uk](http://www.hfb.org.uk)  
Board of Deputies of British Jews [www.bod.org.uk](http://www.bod.org.uk)  
Muslim Council of Britain [www.mcb.org.uk](http://www.mcb.org.uk)  
Sikhs in England [www.sikhs.org.uk](http://www.sikhs.org.uk)

### Networking and government bodies

Churches Together in England (contact to find your local CT group) [www.cte.org.uk](http://www.cte.org.uk)  
Community and Voluntary Forum: Eastern Region (COVER) [www.cover-east.org/](http://www.cover-east.org/)  
MENTER is the East of England Black and Minority Ethnic Network [www.menter.org.uk](http://www.menter.org.uk)  
Department for Communities and Local Government [www.communities.gov.uk](http://www.communities.gov.uk)  
East of England Local Government Association (EELGA) [www.eelga.gov.uk](http://www.eelga.gov.uk)

### Academic

The Cambridge Inter-faith Programme is a research and teaching centre, and has pioneered Scriptural Reasoning [www.interfaith.cam.ac.uk](http://www.interfaith.cam.ac.uk)  
The Faith and Civil Society Unit is a centre of excellence linking research, policy and practice in the field of faith-based social action [www.gold.ac.uk/faithsunit](http://www.gold.ac.uk/faithsunit)  
The Woolf Institute of Abrahamic Faiths for teaching, research and dialogue  
[www.woolf.cam.ac.uk](http://www.woolf.cam.ac.uk)