



## **Advice for English Local Authorities**

Local councils have an important role to play in developing cohesive communities and leading local understanding and co-operation between different groups and communities.

The issues raised by Holocaust Memorial Day affect people who live across the United Kingdom, including people who have come to Britain seeking refuge from Nazi persecution or to rebuild their lives as survivors; refugees from later conflicts and genocides across the world; or people who face exclusion because of their race, religion, sexuality, disability, gender, age or any other reason.

While individuals face discrimination and exclusion for any reason we cannot claim that our communities are truly cohesive. HMD is an opportunity for local authorities to lead remembrance of a past which has relevance to all members of the community and to examine issues of equality and diversity within the local area.

HMDT strongly encourages all local authorities to include the Day in their civic calendars and work with local groups to create a commemorative event which remembers victims of the Holocaust, genocide and exclusion and also makes a positive contribution towards sustainable cohesive communities.

### **About Holocaust Memorial Day**

Holocaust Memorial Day was established in the UK in 2000 with the first HMD held on 27th January 2001. 27th January was chosen as the date for Holocaust remembrance as it marks the anniversary of the liberation of the Auschwitz- Birkenau concentration camp by Soviet troops in 1945.

In October 2005 the United Nations designated 27th January as an International day of remembrance for victims of the Holocaust and several countries across the world mark the Day.

HMD remembers the Holocaust and all of the victims of Nazi persecution including the Jewish population of Europe, Roma and Sinti

(Gypsies), Black Germans, gay men and lesbians, disabled people, Jehovah's Witnesses and political opponents of the Nazis. The Day reflects on more recent genocides such as those in Cambodia, Bosnia and Rwanda and the on-going situation in Darfur. HMD also warns against all forms of discrimination and exclusion.

The Day's ultimate aim is to ensure that the Holocaust is never forgotten and that we work together to ensure that such acts of exclusion, victimisation and murder are not repeated here in the UK or across the world.

In 2005 the Holocaust Memorial Day Trust was established as an independent body responsible for the commemoration and delivery of HMD. HMDT is responsible for the national commemorative event and provides information, support and free resources to local authorities, schools and community groups.

Her Majesty The Queen is Patron of HMDT which was registered as a charity on 8 May 2005. The work of HMDT is funded by Communities and Local Government.

While the Holocaust did not occur in the United Kingdom it remains an important period in our shared history. There were a number of British citizens imprisoned and killed in concentration camps; many refugees came to Britain both before and after World War II including 10,000 unaccompanied children on the Kindertransport operation. A large number of these refugees and survivors stayed in Britain and are now very much part of the country's political, social and cultural life and have contributed greatly to our rich heritage.

HMD also remembers the victims of more recent genocides and people who have been victims of hate crime and extreme exclusion in the United Kingdom. Every local authority in the UK is likely to have residents who have experienced such traumatic events. The purpose of remembering these horrific events is not simply as a history lesson or to make us feel uncomfortable about the past but to challenge all of us to consider how we can work in our families and neighbourhoods to create safe and united communities. HMD also focuses on those who are facing exclusion in Britain today because of their race, religion, disability, sexuality or any other reason.

The Nazi state was founded on anti-semitism, racism, discrimination and hatred. These evils, and others, still exist today. Remembering the

consequences of such extremism helps us to recognise Hate Crimes and exclusion when it occurs around us and encourages us to protect the rights and safety of all members of the national and international community.

By commemorating HMD and ensuring that we involve diverse members of our communities we come together in our efforts to tackle prejudice and hatred and create a living memorial to all those who were killed or had their lives changed forever by the Holocaust, genocide and exclusion.

### **How Your Council Can Participate**

Local Authority leaders should consider how commemorations of HMD can help to achieve Local Area Agreement targets, support the principles of the Government's "Improving Opportunity, Strengthening Society" strategy and add a new dimension to the Authority's diversity and equality plans.

The "Improving Opportunity, Strengthening Society" strategy aims to build community cohesion and recognises that this cohesion can be damaged by suspicion and distrust among communities. HMD considers the consequences of exclusion and encourages learning about the experiences of different community groups to protect against the exclusionary policies and practices which lead to genocide. HMD invites learning about different cultures and cultural histories which can help to break down distrust. Shared remembrance of the past also enables open discussions about present problems and future solutions.

The Government's Local Area Agreement programme has reached its third round and all top tier local authorities now have Agreements in place. From 2008 all authorities will have new-style LAAs, as announced in the Local Government White Paper, "Strong and Prosperous Communities", published in October 2006. Creative and inclusive commemorations of HMD which involve a range of stakeholder groups will fit into three of the four themes for Local Area Agreements – Children and Young People (Make a Positive Contribution), Safer and Stronger Communities (Build Respect in Communities and Reduce Anti-Social Behaviour) and Healthier Communities and Older People (Making a Positive Contribution and Freedom from Discrimination). Improving results across these three

themes will have a knock-on effect on the fourth– Economic Development and the Environment. By developing a wide-ranging and inclusive education and commemorative programme Local Authorities may also contribute towards outcomes around Respect and Anti-Social Behaviour.

The recent Commission on Integration and Cohesion makes a number of recommendations for Local Authorities and Government on how to improve community relations. An inclusive and creative HMD commemoration will fit in well with an overall cohesion strategy and can help to meet some recommendations such as:

- Encouraging adult participation with young people
- Supporting young people to volunteer in local citizenship activities
- Local Authorities develop myth busting strategies aimed specifically at established communities
- Local Authorities and LSPs conduct a brief “audit” of opportunities for cross-cultural and inter faith engagement in their areas

There is no set form for inclusion of HMD into the civic calendar and inclusion will not automatically help to achieve Local Area Agreement target outcomes. Commemorations of HMD must look beyond the memorial aspects of the Day and consider how to incorporate HMD into overall equalities strategies. The HMDT team can advise on how HMD can fit into the outcomes of Local Area Agreements. HMD’s place in the civic calendar and relationship with overall strategies will vary depending on the needs of the local authority and local community.

Despite the fact that there is no uniformity in how different Local Authorities could or should commemorate HMD there are some basic principles which all councils are advised to follow:

- Involve communities facing exclusion within the local area – this could be (for example) religious or racial discrimination, homophobia or exclusion due to disability
- Involve members of Local Strategic Partnerships in the planning and organisation of commemorations. LSP involvement should help to ensure that stakeholders are consulted and have plenty of opportunity to become involved. If there is a steering committee for HMD consider whether this should be a subcommittee of the LSP.

- Ensure that any steering group includes representatives of different community and faith groups. Try to include people who have not previously been involved in civic events.
- Ensure that HMD is a meaningful addition to the civic calendar and relate it to other equality work throughout the year – for example awareness raising of homophobic hate crime could be held at HMD events (on or around 27th January) and to mark LGBT History Month (February).
- Think about a whole area approach. If the council is taking a lead in the organisation of HMD commemorations it should look at how to incorporate HMD into different areas of responsibility such as libraries, schools, youth groups, social care and equalities. Where these responsibilities are held by different councils this offers an opportunity for cross authority cooperation
- Start early – consider having a motion at a full council meeting noting that HMD is approaching, offering the council's full support and encouraging community groups to participate. HMDT can help with the wording of such a motion.

Just as there is no set way to organise HMD commemorations there are no set events. Each event should be relevant and responsive to the needs of the local community. Some suggested events are:

- A specially commissioned performance piece exploring contemporary issues of exclusion.
- A conversation exploring discrimination between a Holocaust survivor who rebuilt their life in the UK and a present day asylum seeker.
- A photography or art exhibition – think about holding a series of exhibitions in the civic centre in the weeks leading up to HMD. Show these exhibitions in areas which the public visits.
- An open forum for discussion between different communities on how to encourage understanding between communities.

***Lewisham Council describe how HMD has been commemorated in their Borough since its inception in 2001:***

“Lewisham is a diverse borough and consulted with a number of community and faith groups about the Council's plans to respond to the concept of a Holocaust Memorial Day each January. A committee of various representative groups and faiths was formed headed by a leading Lewisham Councillor.

Lewisham hosts two events, a multi faith service at the local synagogue and a Young Peoples Theatre production at the Broadway Theatre. A decision was made in 2002 that the theatre event would be led by young people. One of the aims of Holocaust Memorial Day in Lewisham is education and learning. We felt that young people learn very well by working together. This enables them to explore their own ideas and attitudes rather than being influenced by the agenda of adults. As adults we also have a lot to learn from young people.

Each year during the summer term schools and other young people's groups are contacted inviting their pupils / young people to participate. We encourage collaboration between schools which leads to greater inclusion, e.g. a special school may work with mainstream schools.

At the start of the autumn term each group is assigned an artist to work with, this could be a dance tutor, performance poet or visual artist. The tutor works closely with the class teacher. Using the national Holocaust Memorial Day theme as stimulus, a piece of drama, artwork or dance is created. In addition to the theatre event on Jan 27th the participating schools share their work by visiting each others schools and performing in assembly. An exhibition created by a designer working with the young people is also displayed at these events. This sharing gives schools new opportunities to foster links.

These events to mark Holocaust Memorial Day have developed over the years. Schools have demonstrated their commitment to the day and it now forms part of their curriculum. Two hundred young people will be involved in next year's performances with an expected audience of seven hundred.

The day helps the participating young people to try to understand the significance and impact of the Holocaust, contemporary genocides and conflicts and appreciate other cultures and faiths whilst celebrating the diversity of their own borough."

Local Authorities which already host commemorative events should consider how to expand their programme. Events which are successful should not be replaced in order to fulfill targets – instead complementary events should be considered eg youth groups could explore the issues raised by HMD and create a dramatic performance examining these issues. This could form an element of a civic service, helping both to educate young people and to engage them in civic life and duties.

The theme for HMD08 is "Imagine... remember, reflect, react" which calls upon us all to remember the past, focusing particularly on individual experiences; reflect on the present and examine discrimination in our own communities and react together to create a better future. This theme also looks at creative responses to the Holocaust and encourages creative forms of remembrance.

### **How We Can Help**

HMDT offers a range of free resources suitable for local authorities, community groups, schools and faith organisations. These resources include guidelines with further details on the history of Holocaust Memorial Day, posters exploring different experiences, classroom activities, liturgical resources, presentations and a short film on DVD.

Each year HMDT also produces a free commemorative book listing over 400 events which have taken place across the United Kingdom which can provide ideas and inspiration.

Members of the HMDT team are available to discuss HMD events, attend steering group meetings and provide advice and support. HMDT can also work with local authorities to incorporate HMD into civic calendars.

For more details contact Louise Hector.

Louise Hector  
Community Liaison Manager  
Holocaust Memorial Day Trust  
PO Box 49743  
London  
WC1H 9WU

0845 838 1883

[louise.hector@hmd.org.uk](mailto:louise.hector@hmd.org.uk)