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# Ecumenical Borough Deans



Promoting Civic Engagement



A handbook for more effective practice

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One of the biggest single reasons why some EBD groups cease to function efficiently is the failure to observe a handover procedure when a Convenor moves on.

All EBD groups are urged to prevent this from happening by taking the following measures:

- 1 Each group, from the beginning, should choose both a Convenor and a Deputy Convenor.
- 2 When the Convenor is about to step down or move on, the Deputy should take over and assume responsibility for ensuring that the Group chooses a new Convenor.
- 3 The retiring Convenor should ensure that all correspondence as well as contact details for all members of the group are passed on to the Deputy Convenor.
- 4 The new Convenor or Deputy Convenor should notify the London Churches Group for Social Action of the change using the following contact details:

London Churches Group for Social Action  
Westminster Central Hall  
Storey's Gate  
London SW1H 9NH

020 7222 0281  
[esimon@londonchurchesgroup.org.uk](mailto:esimon@londonchurchesgroup.org.uk)  
[www.londonchurchesgroup.org.uk](http://www.londonchurchesgroup.org.uk)

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# Preface

Don't be put off by the size of this Handbook. It is not meant to burden Ecumenical Borough Deans (EBDs) with even more responsibilities. On the contrary, its aim is

- to provide a simple job description and terms of reference, and
- to stimulate thinking about the possibilities offered by the role of EBD by offering a number of suggestions.

The biggest difficulty facing anyone who is given the role of EBD, on top of all their other responsibilities, is the lack of time. Yet pressures on time cannot be the central issue. Otherwise no EBD group would be performing well, yet clearly some are.

The real issue is what level of priority EBDs are prepared to give to this role. That in turn depends on three factors:

- 1 Commitment - of each EBD to take the role seriously. That commitment should be shared by all. Where a group has depended for its success on the commitment of one member, the group has withered as soon as that person departed. More successful groups are characterised by a shared commitment of all members.
- 2 Willingness - on the part of the Council Leader and/or Chief Executive and Council Officers to engage with EBDs. They may need to be persuaded that the churches really can deliver.
- 3 Realistic expectations - on the part of all concerned. This means focussing on what is manageable rather than feeling guilty about what is not.

EBDs can play a useful role as part of the church's mission of civic engagement and the role can be satisfying. We hope that this Handbook will help towards that end.

We are grateful to Pat Logan and Paul Regan for producing this Handbook, with the help of a grant from the Faith Communities Capacity Building Fund.

*Elizabeth Simon,  
Executive Officer, London Churches Group for Social Action  
March 2007*

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*Pat Logan and Paul Regan were commissioned by the London Churches Group for Social Action in 2006 to review and strengthen the Ecumenical Borough Deans network in a project funded by the Faith Communities Capacity Building Fund.*

*Pat previously worked for several years with two Ecumenical Borough Deans groups in South London and on the wider EBD front for the London Churches Group for Social Action. Paul served for several years as Convenor of an Ecumenical Borough Deans group in East London.*

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# Introduction

## A Tradition of Civic Engagement

### *Civic Engagement and Christian Tradition*

The churches have a long history of civic engagement. It has taken many forms - from admonishing rulers, to promoting citizenship, to proclaiming the Civic and Social Gospel. Much of what has made our society civil - its Welfare State, its respect for rights and liberties, its particular form of democracy and its insistence on the limits of state power - is owed in no small measure to the witness of the church.

Different Faith communities have different traditions of civic engagement shaped both by their basic beliefs and by the approaches which they may have adopted in the countries in which they took root. This goes for Christian denominations as well as for other Faith groups. In the UK there is a close and indeed constitutional link between Church and State, even though this takes very different forms in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. What faith groups have in common is a commitment to the common good. The form of that commitment changes as historical contexts change. Although we live in an increasingly secular yet multi-faith context, nonetheless nearly 60% of London's population still profess at least nominal allegiance to Christianity, and this makes up 77% of those who say they have a religious faith. The practice of Christian civic engagement is not obsolete, but it must adapt.

The appropriate shape of the churches' civic engagement today is a matter of lively debate within the churches as much as within society at large. Has the age of an established Church passed? Is the Church now just one more interest group? Does the erosion of contemporary civic life and responsibility by consumerism, cynicism and careerism mean that the church ought to focus on civil renewal? Should Christians form their own political parties? Should churches be part of the new and blurred structures of governance, or should they take their stand with local communities or should they be more radical still and be part of the struggle of marginalised groups - migrants, homeless people, the

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unemployed and the isolated? Should they play the political game at all or simply try to bear witness to an alternative way of ordering common life and exercising power? These are questions which have long been debated at national level and in academic circles. It is important that they are addressed at local level as well.

### ***Local Civic Engagement***

Local civic engagement has several dimensions. Here, as at national level, democracy is not in the healthiest of states. Here, as at national level, the churches may still be called to act as the conscience of the state. Here, as at national level, the churches may still help ensure that the voice of the people is heard. And here, as at national level, there are ways in which collaboration with the state is required, whether through involvement in activities such as the delivery of social services or the regeneration of local neighbourhoods, or in governance by being represented on policy-making bodies, such as Local Strategic Partnerships.

Local churches are involved in local action in many ways - providing services for young and old, reaching out to those who are isolated, welcoming those who are new, and playing a role in regeneration schemes and town centre developments.

### ***Ecumenical Witness***

EBDs are called to bear witness to the churches' continued commitment to civic engagement, but in a distinctive way. At its simplest, their role is to witness that the churches are united in a concern for the common good of the borough in which they live, that they are supportive of the efforts being made by elected members to serve their local community, and that they are willing to play their part. EBDs provide a clear, collective and authorised focus for that commitment.

There are some basic questions about the EBD system - can it be made more effective, does it need more support, should it be replaced by some more suitable structure or should the effort to have a centrally co-ordinated ecumenical structure of engagement be abandoned? The system of EBDs has not been effective in some boroughs but it has been very effective in others. It can work.

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London, a world city, is continuing to change dramatically - in terms of its population, its economy, its structures, etc. And the churches are changing as well - their people, their economy, and their structures. In such a context, groupings like the EBDs need to be flexible, creative, and responsive if they are to have a useful role to play as part of the church's local mission. This Handbook is an attempt to highlight some of the things which may make a difference.

*Pat Logan and Paul Regan*

*March 2007*



# Part One

## The Job

### *1 Ecumenical Borough Deans Terms of Reference*

#### **Background**

Ecumenical Borough Deans (EBDs) have been in existence for over three decades. The role develops in the light of experience and changes in response to changes in context.

A network of EBDs was first established by the Greater London Churches Council (GLCC) in 1976. Anglican and Roman Catholic area deans already existed in each of the London Boroughs and Free Churches were asked to appoint someone in each borough to serve in this capacity as well. The GLCC co-ordinated this network and the deans held an annual meeting. The network always varied in its effectiveness – some boroughs had strong groups and some had no groups at all. In 1986 the London Churches Group (LCG), the successor body to GLCC, undertook to revive the network. A general consultation was held and guidelines were agreed regarding membership, role and meetings.

#### **The London Churches Group for Social Action (LCGSA)**

The London Churches Group for Social Action was established in 1983 to work on behalf of the Church leadership in London on civic and social policy issues. LCGSA is the social policy arm of London's Church Leaders working ecumenically. Membership comprises representatives of the church leadership and senior social responsibility officers from the Baptist Union, Black-majority, Church of England, Evangelical Alliance, Methodist, Catholic, Salvation Army, Society of Friends and United Reformed Churches. The London Churches Group reports to the London Church Leaders meeting.

LCGSA is now the coordinating body for the EBD network. It has a facilitating role but does not hold any authority over the EBD network. It is able to provide a modest degree of support. The Executive Officer maintains an up-to-date list of names and addresses of EBDs and

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sends out occasional mailings and briefings to members of the EBD network. In order to do this, it depends on receiving details of changes of membership from Church leaders and local EBD groups. The LCGSA convenes an annual meeting for the entire EBD network. It includes reports from the Borough Dean Network in its Reports of its work. It can be approached for help and advice.

### **Appointment and Status**

Ecumenical Borough Deans (EBDs) are appointed in each Local Authority area in London to represent the churches at local level. EBDs are formally appointed by the authorities in their own denominations. Where there are denominational structures, as in the case of the Church of England and Roman Catholic Church, the role of EBD may also be part of the Area Dean's role. Where the deanery is not coterminous with the Borough, decisions are made by each denomination as to which dean represents the Borough for this purpose. Deans may also represent individual independent churches.

For the sake of consistency, the job description is provided by the London Churches Group for Social Action (LCGSA).

### **Membership of the EBD Group**

Borough Dean groups should consist of representatives of the following church denominations or groups, where present in the borough:

- Baptist
- Black majority churches
- Church of England
- Independent and Pentecostal Churches
- Methodist
- Orthodox (Greek, Russian etc.)
- Roman Catholic
- Salvation Army
- Society of Friends
- United Reformed Church

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It may be helpful to co-opt other local Christian leaders with particular knowledge, skills and representation.

The borough dean need not be an ordained minister or leader, but that is usual. They need to be of sufficient authority in their church to be able to speak for their denomination and, with the other deans, for the Church overall in the Borough.

### **Accountability**

EBDs are formally accountable to their denominational leadership. Church leadership may require their Dean as part of their appointment to report regularly to the area synod, circuit meeting etc on the Borough Deans' activities. Even where this is not required, Borough Deans should create mechanisms for accounting to the local churches for the work they are doing, so as to ensure that they are representing the churches' views and concerns to the local authority. (See also section on Communicating with Local Churches.)

### **Relationships**

EBDs need not attempt to be expert in all local policy issues or to participate in all local authority initiatives. Their role, rather, is to help develop and co-ordinate relationships between local churches and civic authorities, above all local borough councils.

This means:

- helping to ensure that the local authority has an accurate picture of how the churches are already contributing to the well-being of the local community and how local authorities could enhance that contribution.
- helping to ensure that the local churches are aware of the emerging opportunities to work with their local authority and know how to get involved.
- Helping to influence local authority policy.

### **Frequency of Meetings**

It is recommended that EBD groups meet together approximately quarterly. It is also recommended that EBD groups meet with the Leader of their Local Authority at least twice a year.

## 2 Job Description

For the sake of consistency, this job description is provided by the London Churches Group for Social Action (LCGSA). The job description seeks to give some coherence to the job, whilst leaving plenty of scope for creativity.

### Job Description for Ecumenical Borough Dean

**Responsible:** to your own denominational leadership.

**Mission:** The EBDs' Core Mission is to be the main point of contact between Statutory Authorities and the local churches in each London Borough.

**Purpose:** To work with the other EBDs as a group to devise an ecumenical work programme which ensures that Christian values are promoted at Local Authority and community levels.

#### Main tasks and duties

- To liaise with the Local Authority over issues of common concern and meet with the Chief Executive or Council Leader at least twice a year
- To liaise with local churches so that good information flows exist
- To liaise with other ecumenical groups in the area, such as Churches Together groups and black majority church groups and initiatives
- To engage with multi-faith initiatives in the Borough.

#### Responsibilities

- To keep the local authority up-to-date on what the local churches are doing and expecting from the Council
- To initiate (where appropriate), encourage and support local ecumenical Christian action
- To elicit from the local authority news of initiatives and partnerships in which local churches might be invited to participate
- To assist with planning Civic Worship Services
- To ensure official church representation at forthcoming council events where appropriate

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- To establish reporting links to deaneries, synods, circuits and their equivalents
  - To let local churches know that the EBD group exists, how it sees its role, who its members are and what it is doing
  - To be aware of Church and multi-faith partnerships and initiatives
  - To consider producing a short Annual Report for all the churches in the borough and holding an Annual Public Meeting at which some issue of common concern can be explored.



### 3 Civic Engagement

There is a range of Civic Affairs where it may be useful for the churches to be seen to have a common voice or to be acting collectively or simply to be seen. It is up to the EBDs to identify such occasions, to assess their importance and to decide on an appropriate form of representation. Some of these are regular, annual events, others occasional.

#### Events and Celebrations

- An Annual Civic Service - pray - for local officials
- Remembrance Sunday
- Holocaust Memorial Day
- Peace Week
- Major religious feasts

#### EXAMPLE – Annual Civic Services

Annual Civic Services are a way of stressing both that civic authority is subject to a higher authority and that it has the support through prayer of local churches. The nature of the service and its planning has become more problematic in a multi-faith context, partly because this can obscure the distinctive role of the Church in UK constitutional life and partly because some faith representatives, including those from Christian denominations, find it objectionable to worship in a multi-faith manner even though they are happy to work in a multi-faith way on social issues.

*Advice may be sought from the Inter Faith Network for the UK*

#### Occasional events

- Local Council and General Elections
- Special Campaigns (e.g. Jubilee Debt Campaign, Make Poverty History, Set All Free)
- Dedications and Memorials
- Anniversaries and Jubilees

### EXAMPLE – Local Elections – Before and After

EBDs can play an important role in organising hustings when candidates can be invited to hear what the Churches' agenda is and given scope to explain their platform. There is material available on how to organise such an event, and guidance can be sought from LCGSA.

In some areas there may be elements seeking to exploit tensions between different groups. EBDs can express support to ethnic, religious and minority groups which may be the target of such attacks, and can offer encouragement to local churches which may have to combat such attacks in their community.

After an election there are always some changes in Council membership and often changes in overall control. EBDs should be quick off the mark to write to all newly elected councillors, expressing support, mentioning any particular issues of concern, and explaining the role of EBDs.

## Partnerships

Partnerships and collaboration between statutory, private and voluntary sector groups can be valuable. However, they need to be entered into with proper care and planning to be effective. The following examples may be of help in thinking about what is involved.

### Local Strategic Partnerships

- Borough-wide
- Theme Groups (such as crime reduction, health improvement)
- Area Group

### EXAMPLE

In one borough the Council has invited EBDs to choose a person - not necessarily an EBD - to represent the churches (and Faith communities more generally) on the Core LSP body. That person, in turn, is invited to attend EBD meetings.

### EXAMPLE

Tower Hamlets EBDs have actively been encouraging the churches to play an active role in the borough's 8 Local Area Partnerships (LAPs) and several of the EBDs have themselves taken part in the LAPs that cover the areas in which their own churches are based.

### EXAMPLE

Croydon Council has developed active local forums in both the more deprived and less deprived areas. A very active local neighbourhood forum in Purley was chaired for three years by a local vicar. Its meetings involved discussions and reports from key council officers and have been attended by 50-100 local residents.

## Social Issues

The Council will have its agenda (Community Cohesion, Public Service Delivery, etc). It is important that the churches have theirs. Among major social and civic issues of concern to the Churches in London today are:

- Social and Economic Justice, including poverty and inequality
- Crime, particularly gun and knife crime
- Family break-down
- The environment
- Asylum-seekers, Refugees and Migrants
- Health including HIV and AIDS
- Housing and Homelessness
- Serving the community through welfare and community projects
- Serving the 2012 Olympics
- Faith response to major emergencies
- Community Care.

It is not possible for us to cover all aspects of the work of Ecumenical Borough Deans in this Guide. However, there are additional resources on our website at [www.londonchurchesgroup.org.uk](http://www.londonchurchesgroup.org.uk) The website covers the key areas of work undertaken by the London Churches Group for Social Action. There are also a number of publications such as reports, newsletters and briefings which can be downloaded, and links to other important sites.

# Part Two

## Practicalities

### 4 *Appointing Officers*

Choosing officers is the responsibility of each EBD group. Officers are not designated by the various denominational bodies that appoint individual EBDs.

#### **Convenor**

Each EBD Group must choose a Convenor. The convenor is the main point of contact with the LCGSA.

#### **Deputy Convenor**

It is also recommended to choose a Deputy Convenor. Precisely because EBD groups tend to be small and fragile, it is unwise to place all the weight upon the Convenor. If she or he is unavailable for any reason, the group can wallow - unless there is someone whose role it is to take over. It is highly advisable, therefore, for EBD groups to choose a Deputy Convenor. One of that person's first tasks is to notify the London Churches Group for Social Action if the post of Convenor has changed.

#### **Convenor ensures**

- That the group meets regularly (3-6 times per year is advisable and it is helpful to set provisional dates for the entire year)
- That all members - especially new members - have contact details of the other members and a copy of this EBD Handbook, available from the London Churches Group for Social Action.
- That the group has an overall work-plan
- That someone has accepted responsibility for taking notes of meetings and circulating
- That notices of meetings are sent out two weeks before meetings and the group has a draft agenda and notes of previous meetings
- That changes of members and contact details are sent to the London Churches Group for Social Action (LCGSA)
- That an annual report is submitted to LCGSA

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## Secretary

It is also recommended to choose a secretary. Unless notes are taken and circulated, indicating what is to be done and by whom, it is all too likely that when the group next meets they will discover that nothing has been done and time is wasted. It is quite possible for this task to be done in a variety of ways - either by rotation amongst the members, or by the Convenor, or by some designated person, whether that person is an EBD or simply attends meetings.

### EXAMPLE

In Southwark the EBDs have appointed a Secretary to help the group run efficiently - not just to take minutes but also to deal with correspondence.

## When the Convenor steps down

When the Convenor steps down, it is essential to choose a new convenor at once so that the group does not wither away, and for the Deputy or Secretary to notify the London Churches Group for Social Action of the new Convenor, so that key contact is maintained.

## Is there a Problem?

If your group has not met for six months or more and your convenor is absent or inactive, any borough dean is urged to take the initiative to call a meeting. Ask the London Churches Group for contact details of other deans in the Borough if you are not sure who they are. Contact the London Churches Group for Social Action (tel: 020 7222 0281 [esimon@londonchurchesgroup.org.uk](mailto:esimon@londonchurchesgroup.org.uk)).

### EXAMPLE

One EBD convenor sets aside 2 hours per week to do Council related work. He finds this works well, keeps the issues fresh in his mind, enables him to feel reasonably on top of things and lets him sleep at night!

## 5 Setting Priorities

EBDs have other full-time responsibilities and are not in a position to take on a huge social agenda. It is better to focus on one or two specific areas or themes (for example, affordable housing, environmental action, community safety and crime reduction, care for older people, etc), whilst leaving some scope to respond to unforeseen, emerging issues. That is why having a work plan is important, so that energies can be focussed around limited but achievable targets, not jumping from issue to issue at each meeting.

How to choose which issues to focus on? This can be done both informally and formally.

Informally EBDs are in touch with the life and needs of their local community, the concerns of their congregations and the policies of the Council. They can simply decide amongst themselves which areas seem to be of greatest concern to the churches locally.

EBDs may need to respond to an agenda set by the Local Council, for example a consultation strategy.

Formally an agenda may also be set by the EBDs through a process of consultation of their own

- By setting aside one meeting per year to develop a work-plan for the year and inviting to that meeting a few individuals with local expertise such as from the local Council for Voluntary Service, or faith representatives on the Local Strategic Partnership
- By holding an annual public meeting for all church members in the borough and, as part of that meeting, asking people to indicate which issues they would like EBDs to take forward. (But it is not wise to give the impression that suggestions made at a public meeting constitute a mandate as other issues may need to be taken into account.)



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## 6 Getting the Right Skills

It may be useful to check what skills the EBD group has and identify any skill gaps. Most EBDs will not necessarily have great familiarity with how local authorities are structured, how they work, and what directions they are getting from central government. Nor do they have to pretend to. A much better approach is to try to bring in people who do have that expertise and “insider’s knowledge”. This can be done in two ways:

- Either on a one-off basis, by inviting in someone who has expertise on a particular issue of concern, or someone from the wider voluntary and community sector (for example, the Head of the local Council for Voluntary Service) who has experience of how best to relate to the Council
- Or by co-opting someone with local government expertise (for example someone who is working for or who has recently worked for or been a member of a local authority).

### EXAMPLE

One EBD Convenor used to invite socially involved church people from his area to be part of a ‘Think Tank’ which would meet quarterly and explore, in some depth, the different aspects of particular issues and the most useful ways for EBDs to be involved.

## 7 Adapting the Style of Meeting

It may be comfortable and cosy to meet up over tea or coffee in a vicarage parlour but it not necessarily the most effective way of meeting - especially if the group has to decide to reach out to new members or to invite in or co-opt people with expertise. Also it is important to remember that some of the independent churches do not have full-time paid ministers, which means that meeting during weekday mornings or afternoons automatically rules them out. Be prepared to find new ways of meeting and engaging with each other.

### EXAMPLE

Both Haringey and Lambeth EBDs have found that having Prayer Breakfasts are an effective, enjoyable and spiritually refreshing way of enabling a wide range of church people to look together at how they may contribute to the life of their borough.



# Part Three

## Making Links

### *8 Communicating with Local Churches*

EBDs should ensure that their work is owned by local churches as far as practical. This applies to each EBD in respect to their own denomination and to the EBD group collectively. It is possible to develop systems of communication in ways that are not too time-consuming.

#### **Let churches know that EBDs exist**

People quite often say they have never heard of the EBD network. The best ambassadors are the EBDs themselves.

#### EXAMPLE

In both Richmond and Kingston, EBDs have produced a simple leaflet describing what the Ecumenical Boroughs Deans network is, what it does, who the deans are and how to contact them. This is either sent out to local churches and/or made available at the rear of local churches.

#### **Report to the churches on what EBDs are doing.**

The EBD Secretary could ensure that the e-mail list for sending notices of meetings and notes of action includes secretaries of all local Churches Together groups as well as secretaries of local deaneries and/or synods.

#### **Enable local churches to contribute to the EBD agenda**

- For those denominations which have deanery synods, circuit meetings etc an annual verbal and/or written report should be considered,. This could include an invitation to submit issues for EBDs to place on their agenda.

- Some EBDs have routinely sent emails to their fellow clergy, informing them that they are about to meet and asking for any agenda items. The response has not proved so heavy as to be unmanageable.

#### EXAMPLE

In Wandsworth, EBDs for a few years held an annual public meeting which consisted both of a report on the year's activities and a panel discussion on an issue of local concern, involving representatives from the Council, the voluntary sector, the local Multi-Faith forum and a local church.

### Working with Churches Together Groups

Churches Together groups vary in size, geographical area (there may be several in one borough) and issues of concern. Some have become involved in action on asylum and immigration, homelessness, local regeneration etc. EBDs should make it a priority to keep in regular contact. The advantages of doing so are:

- EBDs could help ensure that the concerns and work of such groups are brought to the attention of Council leaders and officers
- Churches Together mailings and meetings could help convey news about who the EBDs are and what they are doing
- EBDs could use Churches Together as one important forum for accountability and for being able to back up their claim to be representing the concerns of local churches
- Churches Together groups might know people who could assist with some of the EBDs' practical and administrative tasks
- Closer links between EBDs and Churches Together would help ensure that the churches are seen to have their act together.

In order to facilitate joint working, we suggest that:

- A standing item on the EBD agenda should be a report from the local Churches Together Group

- A copy of agendas and minutes of EBD meetings should be emailed to the secretary of the Local Churches Together Group
- Where there is not already overlapping membership between the local CT group(s) and the EBD group, it may be appropriate to invite the secretary or other officer of the CT group to attend EBD meetings.

## EXAMPLES

In Croydon, the Churches Together in the Borough of Croydon group has over the years been a very active and well-supported gathering whose activities extended to national and international as well as borough-wide affairs. Yet there was still scope for an active Ecumenical Borough Deans group.

In Westminster, the Churches Together in Westminster group has a wide-ranging membership and agenda which has led the Ecumenical Borough Deans to conclude that there is little value for them to meet as a separate group.



## 9 Working with the Local Authority

It is the core mission of the EBD group to be the point of contact for the Churches of each borough with the statutory authorities, particularly the local authority. It is essential to develop good working relationships with key members and officers for this to be effective. Some people working in the public sector will be committed Christians doing their work from a vocational point of view. They may particularly appreciate opportunities to work with the EBDs but will not be partial.

### Praying

How should EBDs ensure that the members, officers and work of their local council is included in the churches' prayers?

- First, they can ensure that each of their own meetings begins with such a prayer.
- Secondly, they might mention the need for prayer in the communication they have with their local churches, or even include a draft prayer.
- Thirdly they might hold a public event (not to be confused with the annual civic service).

#### EXAMPLES

'Pray Haringey'. Much of Haringey EBDs' inclusive work with local churches and its effective work with the local council has been given a boost by its 'Pray Haringey' sessions.

Lambeth EBDs have taken part in major prayer events for the Council, which have attracted hundreds of local Christians.

### Meeting

A good starting point for arranging to meet the Council is to contact the Council Leader's or Chief Executive's Office. It is a good idea to have a meeting of the EBDs at least a month in advance of any meeting with the Council to agree items for the agenda and communicate these to the

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council officer concerned with calling the meeting. The Council will need good notice if it is to arrange for senior officers to attend the meeting to deal with items under their control. Many boroughs will expect chief officers such as the Director of Education to attend in person.

Regular contact with the local authority is important. Do not leave it to the Borough Council to call the meetings. Avoid contacting the Council only when you have complaints or to lobby on hot issues, as this does not help build up meaningful relationships which encourage collaboration as well as honest dialogue.

Nevertheless, if there is a contentious issue and the Local Authority is pursuing a policy which is felt to be wrong or unjust, it is important to challenge the decision makers. Remember that being an EBD is part of the mission of the church, and that does not mean being a buffer for, much less an arm of, local government. You may, as an EBD, have a duty to become involved. In such cases the first step is always to try to find out all the facts. If these serve only to deepen rather than alleviate your concern, then part of your role may mean registering your concern with the Council Leader. After all, being an EBD gives you status and access that other members of the Church may not have. And with that comes a responsibility. That responsibility does not mean playing the neutral role of mediator. It means ensuring that the plight of those who are in need is taken into account.

### **Follow up**

Remember to follow up any action points agreed at your meeting with the Council. More generally, EBDs might also wish to give thought as to how best to keep the Leader and Chief Executive informed, from time to time, of what they - and the churches generally - have been focussing on in terms of social and community action.

## 10 *Relating to Multi Faith Forums*

The Faith community landscape varies from borough to borough in terms of the proportion of the local population belonging to faiths other than Christian, the existence and structures of local multi faith forums and the attitudes of Councils to meeting single-faith representatives. It is not therefore feasible to suggest a single model which all EBD groups should seek to follow. But there are a few principles by which EBDs may wish to be guided:

Where a local multi faith forum does exist it is important for EBDs to establish some sort of relationship with that forum. This is essential if the Forum is representing faith groups' views in meetings with the Council.

- Note the difference between forums which have a formal structure and membership and those which are open to any interested individuals.
- Recognise that the agendas may be very varied. Getting a clear common agenda for social action may not be possible.

Relating to Multi-faith forums does not necessarily mean that EBDs should cease trying to meet as a churches group with local Council Leaders and Chief Executives even though in some boroughs Local Authorities are reluctant to meet with just the representatives of the Churches and prefer a multi faith group. Meeting the Council Leader and Chief Executive as part of a wider multi faith group can both enrich your work and also allow the significance of the churches contribution to speak for itself. But it can also mean that the agenda becomes too narrowly focussed on minority community issues or community cohesion with the result that issues like poverty and inequality, homelessness, social care and the environment, are not adequately covered. This is why EBDs should not allow themselves simply to be absorbed into and subsumed under Multi Faith Forums.

It is open to Borough Deans to make a case with the Local Authority for continued separate Christian representation, based on their numbers and role in the wider community. Even if this is not granted, there is no reason why, if you have other concerns, EBDs could not invite Council officers and Heads of Departments to meetings that you yourselves have convened.

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Where meetings with the Council are held on a multi faith basis, the EBD group has a continued role in co-ordinating the Christian voice and representation in the multi faith forum, using the guidance in this Handbook to ensure effective working and accountability.

#### EXAMPLES

In Merton one of the EBDs has, over the years, played a leading role in such a forum.

In Camden, the EBDs have tried meeting immediately prior to the meeting of the Multi-Faith Forum so as to use their time efficiently.

In Kingston, the EBDs are effectively a sub-group of the local Inter-faith forum but still are able to meet separately with Council officers.

In some boroughs EBDs have been playing a key role in helping to sustain and even initiate Multi-Faith forums.

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## 11 *Relating to the Community and Voluntary Sector*

There is a Council of Voluntary Service (CVS) or its equivalent in most boroughs. Since the churches and other faith communities are part of the community and voluntary sector, it is helpful to have good relationships with this body. It can be a useful source of information and sometimes has resources which can be valuable in developing policy and practice. These can include training opportunities, consultancy, funding and briefing on issues affecting the voluntary and community sector.

In some boroughs the CVS has been given resources to work with the faith communities to ensure that these constituencies are adequately represented in consultation and partnership arrangements.

### EXAMPLE

The Newham Voluntary Sector Consortium acquired funding from the Local Authority to appoint a faith liaison officer. This worker was able to establish relationships with a wide range of representatives from different faith communities. As a result of her work, a major conference attended by over 300 people from different faith groups, the Health Authority, Police and Local Authority was able to produce a report of how the communities in Newham could work together.

## Conclusion

It is not possible for us to cover all aspects of the work of Ecumenical Borough Deans in this Handbook. However, there are additional resources on our website at [www.londonchurchesgroup.org.uk](http://www.londonchurchesgroup.org.uk)

The website covers the key areas of work undertaken by the London Churches Group for Social Action and Affiliated Members.

There are also a number of publications such as reports, newsletters and briefings which can be downloaded, including this Handbook.

In addition there are some useful links to other websites under the headings of Churches, Government, Other Faiths and Voluntary Agencies which will put you in touch with valuable information.

If you have questions you can email us at [esimon@londonchurchesgroup.org.uk](mailto:esimon@londonchurchesgroup.org.uk)



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One of the biggest single reasons why some EBD groups cease to function efficiently is the failure to observe a handover procedure when a Convenor moves on.

All EBD groups are urged to prevent this from happening by taking the following measures:

- 1 Each group, from the beginning, should choose both a Convenor and a Deputy Convenor.
- 2 When the Convenor is about to step down or move on, the Deputy should take over and assume responsibility for ensuring that the Group chooses a new Convenor.
- 3 The retiring Convenor should ensure that all correspondence as well as contact details for all members of the group are passed on to the Deputy Convenor.
- 4 The new Convenor or Deputy Convenor should notify the London Churches Group for Social Action of the change using the following contact details:

London Churches Group for Social Action  
Westminster Central Hall  
Storey's Gate  
London SW1H 9NH

020 7222 0281  
esimon@londonchurchesgroup.org.uk  
[www.londonchurchesgroup.org.uk](http://www.londonchurchesgroup.org.uk)

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