



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.

HMDT hopes that all local authorities will 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.

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 can use commemorations of HMD to help achieve Best Value goals, particularly in terms of equalities and involving residents in civic activities.

Northern Ireland's Local Authorities are expected to be able to demonstrate a culture which encourages both equal opportunities and the observance of the equal opportunities requirements set out in legislation and an inclusive and creative HMD commemoration will fit in with an overall equalities strategy and helping with:

- The encouragement of adult participation with young people
- Supporting young people to volunteer in local citizenship activities
- The development of myth busting strategies aimed specifically at established communities
- The production of an audit of opportunities for cross-cultural and inter faith engagement in their areas. This can be a joint venture between the Local Authority and the Community Planning Subgroup
- Evidence that in seeking Best Value status the Council has been responsive to community and stakeholder needs

There is no set form for inclusion of HMD into the civic calendar and inclusion will not automatically help to achieve Best Value targets.

The HMDT team are happy to advise on how HMD can fit into individual council's Best Value and Equality strategies. 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 we suggest that local authorities consider:

- 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 Community Planning Subgroups in the planning and organisation of commemorations. CPS 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 CPS.
- 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 can look at how to incorporate HMD into different areas of responsibility such as libraries, schools, youth groups, social care and equalities.
- 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 which local authorities have used in the past 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.

Events which are successful should not be replaced in order to fulfil 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.

Lewisham Council describe how HMD has been commemorated in their Borough since its inception in 2001. Lewisham’s experiences are particularly relevant to unitary authorities:

“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."

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.

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