



Brighton & Hove Interfaith Contact Group (IFCG): what it is and what it does

Purpose of this summary

This summary is provided for anyone seeking clarification about the nature and purpose of Brighton & Hove Interfaith Contact Group (IFCG).

History and nature

The IFCG was formed over 20 years ago (1997) and has been active under the same name ever since. It is a constituted community group and is affiliated to the Interfaith Network UK. It is run entirely by volunteers, mainly drawn from its Executive Committee, on which all faith groups represented locally are entitled to have 2 members. The Chair, Secretary and Treasurer are elected by IFCG members at the AGM. We also have a Membership Secretary, approved at the AGM. The IFCG has a clear Code of Conduct (see www.interfaithcontactgroup.com) which is applied at all meetings and events taking place under its auspices.

Remit

The IFCG is a community of faiths rather than a faith community. It exists to provide a point of contact for the many faith groups in our city and to promote understanding and good relations between people of all faiths and none. The IFCG also exists to encourage members of the different faith communities to engage with one another in a spirit of openness and mutual respect.

Ethos

The IFCG celebrates religious pluralism and promotes respect for all faiths on the understanding that no single faith or religion has a monopoly on the truth.

Priorities

IFCG volunteers have commitments within their own faith communities as well as other paid work. Therefore their time is at a premium and we are careful in setting priorities for how our limited 'volunteer time' will be used. Generally we prioritise in favour of organising and running events that will benefit the community of Brighton & Hove. The IFCG concentrates particularly on providing spiritual opportunities for local residents, of all faiths and none, to come together around topics or themes that are of general interest and relevance. The IFCG works from the 'grassroots' upwards, learns from its experience and develops accordingly.

The IFCG is not, in itself, a group for social action, as we have no premises of our own and a limited pool of volunteers. However, faith communities that are linked to the IFCG may themselves run

social action projects and enlist help for these through the IFCG. For example, Hove Methodist Church has often received volunteers through the IFCG for the Christmas lunch on Christmas Day that the church provides every year for up to 150 local residents who would otherwise be spending the day alone. The IFCG involves secular community organisations in some of its events so that the work of these organisations is shared with faith communities, and vice versa.

Activities

The IFCG organises two annual events that are now well established in the City's calendar: the Annual Interfaith Service, which takes place in November around the time of National Interfaith Week, and the IFCG AGM, an open public meeting, with speakers from different faiths, which takes place in the spring. In addition the IFCG runs a monthly interfaith prayer hour, and an interfaith choir, both open to people of all faiths and none. The IFCG also organises occasional conferences, dialogue meetings, concerts and social events. The IFCG arranges prayer vigils for the whole community at short notice whenever there is a need, for example when there has been a sudden attack or disaster.

The IFCG does not have a 'brief' from the Council; it sets its own priorities. The IFCG has long appreciated and benefited from the support of the Mayor's Office, other Council officers working in the 'Communities' sector, the Lord Lieutenancy, local MPs, the Police and Fire Services, all of whom regularly attend and contribute at IFCG events. The IFCG has strong links with interfaith groups elsewhere in Sussex.

Funding/spending

IFCG income comes from individual subscriptions (£15 p.a.), donations and occasional small grants (£1,000 – £2,500) from BHCC and various funding bodies. Our income is spent on events that benefit the community of Brighton & Hove. Administration costs are minimal and cover essential expenses. We rarely have any venue costs as local faith communities kindly donate the use of their premises. We have no paid staff and our volunteers do not receive any financial remuneration. Good relationships are our main capital. These relationships have taken many years to build up, are very highly valued, and are the reason why our core team remains stable and committed.

IFCG website

www.interfaithcontactgroup.com

Our website keeps people informed, includes a facility to join or donate online and gives contact details for the current Co-Chairs, Secretary and Membership Secretary. Do join us or contact us if you value the work we do and would like to become involved.

(IFCG Executive Committee, July 2019)