

# Waltham Forest LGBT Matters

## Executive summary

Waltham Forest LGBT Matters was commissioned by Waltham Forest Council to gain a greater understanding of local lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) people's experiences and perceptions on community safety, community cohesion and customer service issues.

A total of 270 lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgendered people who lived, worked or socialised in Waltham Forest completed a survey that explored perceptions and experiences of community safety and crime, perceptions of social cohesion and social involvement, and experiences of using the services provided by Waltham Forest Council and its partners.

Thirty-nine of the survey respondents took part in six focus groups that explored in more depth the issues facing LGBT people living in Waltham Forest. Interviews were held with four key stakeholders to help with interpretation of the findings.

You can download copies of this summary and the full research report from:  
[www.sigmaresearch.org.uk/go.php/reports/report2010a](http://www.sigmaresearch.org.uk/go.php/reports/report2010a)

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### COMMUNITY SAFETY AND CRIME

Personal safety and fear of crime were major concerns for many survey respondents, though no more so than they are likely to be in many other London boroughs. To maintain their personal safety many LGBT people "passed as straight" in their everyday lives.

- The majority of LGBT respondents (83%) felt safe outside in Waltham Forest during the daytime, but only 36% felt safe after dark.
- More than half (57%) of all respondents felt that homophobic and transphobic harassment was a problem in Waltham Forest, including one-in-eight (13%) who felt it was a very big problem.
- Fear of homophobic or transphobic attack had lead 30% to avoid certain areas, streets or parks in the borough. This fear was often exacerbated by the presence of homophobic graffiti that many perceived was not removed quickly enough.
- Fear of harassment, abuse or assault had lead many to modify their behaviour when in public so as not to appear obviously lesbian, gay or bisexual.
- 10% of survey respondents had been physically attacked, and 36% had been verbally abused because of their LGBT identity in Waltham Forest. Abuse and attacks most commonly occurred in the street.
- Less than half (44%) of those physically attacked, and only 7% of those verbally abused, reported the incident to the police. While half of those who experienced physical attack and reported it to the police were satisfied with their response, of those verbally abused only 40% were satisfied with the police response.
- Many of those who took part in focus groups, and the survey, believed that the police would act professionally, and in a non-prejudiced manner, but that they were unlikely to take homophobic abuse seriously, or be able to do much about it.
- Only 30% of respondents were aware that Waltham Forest police had an LGBT liaison officer, although knowing this did make the majority more confident that the police would treat them fairly.
- Awareness of all the alternative hate crime reporting services was uniformly low.

## COMMUNITY COHESION, INVOLVEMENT AND SOCIAL CAPITAL

Many participants reported little or no sense of LGBT community within the borough, which was exacerbated by the absence of LGBT community infrastructure. Notions of community cohesion were not very meaningful to most LGBT people in the borough.

- Just under two-thirds (61%) of all respondents were satisfied with Waltham Forest as a place to live, although a small proportion (9%) reported being very satisfied.
- Almost half of respondents believed that their local area had not changed much (47%) in recent years, while 39% believed it had got worse.
- Around a third (36%) of respondents were proud of their local area.
- Half of respondents felt that Waltham Forest was an area where differences between people (such as age, gender, race or sexual orientation) were respected.
- Many respondents felt that some faith groups were hostile to LGBT people and that their homophobia was rarely challenged.
- Almost two thirds (62%) of survey respondents had recent experience of engagement with a range of political, social or sporting infrastructure in the borough.
- A third (33%) of survey respondents felt that they could influence decisions affecting their local area.

## USING THE SERVICES PROVIDED BY WALTHAM FOREST COUNCIL AND ITS PARTNERS

While most participants felt that the Council effectively engaged in LGBT issues when prompted to do so (such as the IDAHO event), the Council and its partners were widely perceived to do too little to promote the well-being of LGBT people in the borough.

- 30% of survey respondents felt that the Council was doing a good job, but only 12% felt that it was making the local area a better place for LGBT people to live.
- The majority of respondents had not experienced verbal abuse or physical assault when using sports or recreational facilities, or NHS services in Waltham Forest.
- Significant minorities had experienced discrimination using bars or restaurants, out shopping, or while using public transport or taxis.
- While focus group participants perceived some excellent work being done to address LGBT issues in schools, they felt that this best practice needed to be shared widely.

### GENERAL CONCLUSIONS

Many LGBT people believed themselves to be an invisible minority in Waltham Forest, a perception exacerbated by an absence of LGBT people within promotional materials, publications, or websites produced by Waltham Forest Council and its partners.

The lack of a commercial LGBT infrastructure was seen by some as disappointing, adding to a perception that the needs of LGBT people in the borough was often ignored by authorities.

While the key to achieving a greater sense of community cohesion may lie in interaction between different ethnic, faith, age, and sexuality populations within Waltham Forest, given their fears of the harassment that may ensue if they were to more openly display their identity, many LGBT people feel reluctant to initiate such interaction.