



**'Extremism and Hate'**  
**Report of the Lewisham People's  
Parliament March 2026**

**This report is written in plain English**

## **The Lewisham People's Parliament**

The People's Parliament is here to represent the views of people with learning disabilities who live in Lewisham. It is a project run by Lewisham Speaking Up and it is currently funded by the City Bridge Foundation.

There are six Lewisham People's Parliament reps who are elected by other people with learning disabilities. They are paid above the London Living Wage for their work with Lewisham Speaking Up.



## **Background to this report on Extremism and hate**

This Lewisham People's Parliament was held to find out what people with learning disabilities think about extremism and hate.

This is our first People's Parliament on this topic, but we have had many in the past on the topic of hate crime. We have talked mostly about disability hate crime, but also racism in 2023.

In July 2024, we discussed the far-right riots in our Zoom group, and people said they felt scared and intimidated. We have continued to talk about riots and protests against refugees and immigrants, and the far-right's role.

We also held a specialist training session with Exit Hate in 2025, about how to spot signs of extremism and what to do if we think someone is facing radicalisation. We learnt that extremist groups are beginning to target autistic people to radicalise. We have worked 1:1 with people who are looking at extremist views on the internet, and supported them to talk openly about their views so they can stay safe. We have also supported others who have faced hate crime or abuse due to other people's extremist views.

People's Parliament members voted for us to talk about this topic as they felt it was important that the voices of people with learning disabilities and autistic people are heard by decision makers about this.

## The Parliament meeting



**Sam chairing the meeting**

The meeting was held in the Lewisham Council Chamber. We would like to thank Lewisham Council for letting us have the rooms for our meeting.

We invited people to join us on the 6<sup>th</sup> March and 44 people with learning disabilities came in person.

This included guests from Advocacy In Greenwich, Bromley Together and People First. We would like to thank them for joining us.

The meeting was chaired by People's Parliament rep Sam Attah.

Sam welcomed everyone to the meeting and went through some ground rules. Then he made a speech to open the Parliament.

Sam said that we would be talking about:

- What can we do to stop hate getting worse?
- How do we keep ourselves safe from people who want to recruit to extremist groups?
- How does the media affect extremism and hate?

Sam said that he has experienced hate as someone who came to the UK from Nigeria. When he first moved to the UK, he lived on the Isle of Wight and people called him names because of the colour of his skin. He moved to London and for the most part, has felt part of the community here. He has been called names still, and it makes him feel down.

Sam said he feels very proud to be British, because he has had good support for his epilepsy from the NHS. He is disappointed that there are people that don't think he should be part of this country, or that we shouldn't be working together to make things better for all of us!

### **Sam then introduced our first guest speaker, Meetra from the Lewisham Refugee and Migrant Network**

Meetra said that the Lewisham Refugee and Migrant Network gives advice, advocacy and emergency support to immigrants and refugees.

The network works on the Borough of Sanctuary campaign too. Lewisham is the first official Borough of Sanctuary, which means it is a safe place for refugees and immigrants, regardless of their immigration status.

They also give awards to Schools of Sanctuary who support children who are refugees to be part of their community.



**Meetra giving her speech**



**Alex giving her speech**

### **Then Sam invited our next guest, Alexandra from Prevent**

Alexandra explained that Prevent safeguards people who might be engaging in terrorism. They work with people who are getting involved in all different kinds of extremism.

She explained what radicalisation is. She said that people start by having a problem with something in society, and they are slowly persuaded to support terrorist violence to fix these problems.

She talked about some of the big themes that she sees in her job right now:

- Gaming – people meeting extremist groups while gaming online. They get them to join private chats and radicalise them there
- Extremist groups who use sexual images of people to blackmail them into doing violent acts
- “Incels” who believe that women have taken over society and are anti-male. They might be dangerous to themselves, and to women and girls
- People who are very interested in violence, like Axel Rudakubana who killed 3 children in Southport in 2024
- Particular problems people have with society right now are to do with the conflict between Israel and Palestine, antisemitism, and anti-LGBTQ+ views

Alex said that Prevent have noticed a trend in more autistic people being radicalised, especially people who haven't been diagnosed yet. She asked what we thought, because no one really knows why. Some people think it is because autistic people can have special interests in topics, and so are more at risk of getting interested in violence.

One of the people attending the Parliament spoke passionately about how autistic people often feel outside of things. She said they can feel like they are not listened to and they don't belong. When extremists make them feel welcome, it can lead them into thinking and doing bad things. She said this might be one reason why autistic people are more vulnerable to being radicalised.

### **Sam then invited everyone to join one of three workshops:**

- A workshop on 'prevent and radicalisation'
- A workshop on 'free speech Vs hate speech'
- A workshop on 'the media's role in hate'

### **Workshop 1 – Prevent and radicalisation**

This workshop was run by Alexandra from Prevent

Why are autistic people being radicalised by extremist groups?

- Autistic people are targeted because they have different thoughts to other people
- They want to feel included
- They are lonely, isolated and vulnerable
- If you are unhappy with your home life you can be attracted to extremism

What can we do about it?

- Try and remove harmful content
- Do more regulation of social media
- People can report harmful content to Prevent
- It is hard to regulate because it is global
- Companies think of profit over people
- Games online are too addictive, we need to speak to someone if we are addicted

How are people radicalised?

- People have their own certain beliefs and listening to other people can make their views more extreme. Peer groups can influence your views
- If you are already traumatised, that can make you use certain people as a “scapegoat”, where you blame them for what you have been through

What support do people need when they are radicalised?

- Provide counselling
- Education
- Monitoring their online world for a bit, but in the least restrictive way possible
- Companies that run social media and games need to take more responsibility



## Workshop 2 – Free Speech Vs Hate Speech

This workshop was led by Lewisham Speaking Up

What we say about free speech

- It's not full freedom, it's limited
- Be careful what you say and where you say it
- Express your opinion, but do it in an acceptable way
- Stay calm when you speak
- You can say what you think but listen when someone disagrees
- Where you say things matters – for example when you're with your friends or when you're at work
- There are different standards in different places
- Content matters (what you say), as well as what you mean
- Someone can say something as a joke, but it can still hurt people
- Saying and receiving can be very different
- Language, or words, are important. Some words always hurt, and are always offensive
- We need to be more understanding of each other
- Older people tend to be more discriminatory in the words they use
- Rap music can be very offensive

What we would like to change:

- A campaign about the "R" word – a slur that people use a lot for people with learning disabilities. More than half the group said it should be banned
- Attitudes and context is important
- Social media should take responsibility for harmful content. They put profit before people's safety
- Stop following America, where hate seems to start at the minute
- It's a difficult balance to get right
- People should be more respectful of each other.



**Workshop 2 having their discussion**

### **Workshop 3 – the media’s role in hate**

This workshop was led by Lewisham Speaking Up

The group looked at examples of news articles that have been called “hateful”. They found some themes:

- Refugees and immigrants – the news dehumanised them and made out like they were invading the country
- Transgender people – some people are made out to be lying or like they don’t really know what they are talking about
- Particular celebrities – like Megan Markle, it is often non-white women

What do we think of the news in general?

- Not positive
- Nasty
- Generalising
- More focused on making money. They write negative things because it will sell
- Stops your mind from focusing properly
- Brainwashing
- Makes you do bad things
- Corrupt
- Makes you more aware, teaches you how to stay safe
- We need to know about some negative stories, like Epstein and Prince Andrew's crimes
- People have told me to "go back home". They get it from the news

What can we do about it?

- Don't let the news run you down
- The world needs help, the government needs to step in
- More rules for what the news is allowed to say
- Remember the news isn't just written to inform you, it is corrupt and needs to make money
- Report hate to Ofcom



**Workshop 3 during their discussion**

## Summary

Extremism is a difficult topic to talk about. Lots of our members said that it doesn't affect them because they are not being targeted. People were surprised to hear that there is some risk of extremism in the activities they do, like gaming or social media.

Many people who attend the people's parliament are autistic. Some also have a learning disability, but others don't. Many people said it makes a lot of sense that extremist groups target autistic people. This is because they are more likely to be lonely and isolated, and to have faced discrimination and trauma that might make them angry. People felt the best way to really prevent extremism, terrorism and violence is to make things better for everyone in society. People should be kept safe, and have somewhere to go if anything bad happens to them.

In all of our workshops, people said that social media and traditional media needs to take more responsibility for hateful and extremist content. Everyone felt that media companies don't do this because they put profit over keeping people safe. On social media, extremist content isn't taken down because they will lose customers who spend a lot of time on the social media.

Newspapers print news articles that encourage hate and discrimination, because it sells more. It is hard to regulate this, especially online, but most people said that the government needs to do more to regulate all kinds of media.







Most people felt that there are certain offensive words that should be banned, and there isn't any context where they are okay. One example is the "R" word, which many people said they had been called before.

We think that it is important to talk to people with learning disabilities and autistic people about extremism and hate. It means explaining a lot of jargon, but we should not think that some people won't understand. It is an issue that is becoming more common in the news and in people's lives. , People have more understanding of this issue than we might think.

## What did people say about the Parliament?

To evaluate the success of the People's Parliament on Extremism and Hate, we used an accessible method with facial expression stickers.

We asked people with learning disabilities to rate the Parliament by choosing a face sticker. 38 out of 44 people (86%) put up a sticker. This is what they thought about the Parliament meeting:

Stickers	Number of stickers
Yellow smiley face (good)  =	31
Orange unsure face (in the middle)  =	7
Red sad face (bad)  =	0
Total of all stickers  +  +  =	38

It was interesting to see that this was one of the highest numbers of 'unsure' faces we have had. We think this shows that this is a difficult topic to cover.

## What Next?

These are the things that the People's Parliament will do next:

- Send this report to Local Members of Parliament, Lewisham Council, service providers in Lewisham and other people who may be interested
- Present this report to the Lewisham Learning Disability Partnership board and the "Life with Opportunities" subgroup
- Send this report to Learning Disability England and other self-advocacy groups around the country
- Share this report with Prevent, and organisations working to stop hate in the UK

For more information or to discuss anything to do with this report, contact Lewisham Speaking Up.

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