Mayor of Tower Hamlets pledges to fight growing LGBTQ+ hate crimes after murder of Ranjith Kankalamage

The Mayor of Tower Hamlets has expressed his solidarity with the LGBTQ+ community in the wake of the suspected homophobic murder of Ranjith (Roy) Kankalamage.

The LGBTQ+ community was left reeling in August after Kankalamage was violently attacked in Tower Hamlets Cemetery Park, dying at the scene of blunt force trauma to the head.

Mayor John Biggs explained Tower Hamlets is a No Place for Hate borough, and he will do everything in his power to fight the increase in homophobic hate crimes.

Mr Biggs said: "I am aware there has been an increase in reported LGBTQ+ hate crimes in the borough and we are intolerant of this. We stand in solidarity with our residents who face discrimination in this area.

"We will use all the force of the law to challenge people who act hatefully towards people because of their sexuality."

This week, during Hate Crime Awareness Week, Kankalamage's friends, family and community members paid their respects at a vigil organised by Let Voice Be Heard, an LGBTQ+ support group.

Tarek Chowdhury, vice chairman of Let Voice Be Heard, said: "The council and the Metropolitan police are trying their level best to support the community."

According to the Home Office, <u>LGBTQ+ hate crimes have been rising across the country.</u> In the past year, 15 per cent of 124,000 hate crimes recorded in the UK were against a person because of their sexuality, with LGBTQ+ hate crimes rising by 7 per cent from 2020 to 2021.

Mr Chowdhury added: "If any people die who are LGBT, it makes us uncomfortable, it makes us feel unsafe. What's happening is not only in our community, hate crime is rising. It makes us really uncomfortable, but we have to survive."

Mr Chowdhury, however, remains hopeful for the future of LGBTQ+ people in the borough. He said: "Being LGBT in Tower Hamlets is very powerful. There is change, more acceptance, more freedom. We want love, and people that show love and care about us."

If you've experienced a hate crime in Tower Hamlets, you can call the Tower Hamlets Hate Crime Team on 020 7364 6120 or 020 7364 6105, or email <u>hatecrime@towerhamlets.gov.uk</u>.