

All Party-Parliamentary Group on Faith and Society

Minutes of meeting: 18 July 2017, 1pm, Portcullis House

Inaugural Meeting of 2017 Parliament

Present:

Rt Hon Stephen Timms MP (Chair) (ST)
Sir Peter Bottomley MP
Reverend Rose Hudson-Wilkin
Rt Hon David Lammy MP (DL)
Rachael Maskell MP
The Lord Singh of Wimbledon CBE (IS)
Dame Caroline Spelman MP (CS)
Gary Streeter MP (GS)

Chris Burley – Office of Steve Double MP
Alasdair Gordon – Office of Stephen Timms
Johnny Monro – Office of Fiona Bruce MP
Office of Lord Singh
Daniel Singleton – FaithAction (DS)
Rodie Garland – FaithAction (RG) (minutes)
Emily Yillah – FaithAction

Apologies:

Fiona Bruce MP
Steve Double MP
The Baroness Goudie
The Baroness Neuberger DBE

The Lord Rowe-Beddoe
Gavin Shuker MP
Rt Hon the Lord Tyler

Minutes	Actions
<p>1. Welcome ST welcomed those present, thanking them for attending and offering the apologies of those listed above.</p> <p>2. Election of officers Officers were elected as follows: Chair – Rt Hon Stephen Timms MP Vice Chair – Fiona Bruce MP Vice Chair – Gary Streeter MP Vice Chair – The Baroness Neuberger DBE Vice Chair – The Lord Singh of Wimbledon CBE Secretary – Rt Hon David Lammy MP Treasurer – Steve Double MP</p> <p>3. Aims of the APPG The aims of the group were confirmed as:</p> <p>a. To promote understanding of faith-based organisations engaged in social action in the UK, and recognition of their value;</p> <p>b. To highlight the social, civic and spiritual capital that faith-based organisations contribute to communities throughout the UK, and to identify and promote best practice among organisations;</p> <p>c. To consider regulatory and legislative arrangements which can make the most of the potential contribution of faith-based organisations;</p> <p>d. To learn from and contribute to international conversations, policy and civic action on the contribution of faith-based organisations.</p>	

<p>4. Activity of the group in 2016-17</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A report on the work of the group over the previous year was distributed. • ST explained the history of the Faith Covenant, which arose from the group’s meetings with faith organisations. It became clear that there was a real issue in partnership working between faith-based organisations and local authorities. DL suggested we take responsibility for drawing up a charter, which we now call the Covenant. Seven local authorities have now signed up, with Blackpool and Essex intending to do so over the next few weeks. This group cannot claim to taken the world by storm, but the level of interest suggests that we are clearly on to something. ST is keen to take this forward, attract more interest and gather feedback on what should be included in the Covenant. The APPG held an event in November at which the Rt Hon Sajid Javid MP (Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government) spoke in favour of the initiative. • ST introduced Daniel Singleton as National Executive Director of FaithAction and asked him to confirm when Blackpool and Essex plan to launch their Covenants: the dates are 19 September and 14 October respectively. • DL suggested that the group push within the new Parliament for faith leaders to write to local authority leaders, or otherwise communicate with local leaders through their networks. A letter signed by the Archbishop of Canterbury and others might help to gain a critical mass of local authorities more quickly. The LGA might be another route to take. • ST suggested that the group approach the LGA and ask them to promote more formally. • DS and RG pointed to a report (available at the meeting) from the LGA and FaithAction, <i>Working With Faith Groups to Promote Health and Wellbeing</i>, which mentions the Faith Covenant favourably as a way of promoting joint working between local authorities and faith groups. • DS suggested that other members of the group follow the example of Caroline Spelman and promote the Covenant in their own constituencies. He suggested David Lammy contact Pastor Nims. DL agreed he could certainly promote the Covenant in Haringey and asked FaithAction to remind him to do so. • ST noted that one place where faith leaders are very much together and behind this initiative is Birmingham. The group has been invited to go back there, having visited in 2013. Bishop David Urquhart could be an ally in approaching the Archbishop. DL suggested that the Bishop of London might be a better person to approach at first, rather than the Archbishop. • ST reported that aside from the Faith Covenant, which has been the group’s major piece of work, a roundtable discussion was held on public faith and finance, led by researchers from the University of Bristol. Fiona Bruce had also been keen that the group looked at the work of faith-based organisations in prisons, and this is on the list of work for the coming year. • ST invited questions. IS asked about the work in prisons so ST suggested the discussion move on to this, following the work by FaithAction to produce the report, <i>What Works in Prisons: Contributions of the Faith and Voluntary Sector to Prisoners and their Families</i>.¹ 	<p>FaithAction to approach contact at LGA</p> <p>FaithAction to remind DL to promote the Covenant in Haringey</p> <p>FaithAction to agree with ST on approach to Bishop of London</p>
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¹ This work emerged from discussions at the annual general meeting in 2016, at which Fiona Bruce MP and Lord Singh spoke about the value of work by faith-based organisations and chaplains in the prison system.

5. New areas of work

Prisons

- IS said that there is already a multi-faith prison chaplaincy and suggested that this group should invite a representative to come and speak. ST replied that that would be very helpful.
- IS said that reoffending should be given a lot more focus. More effort should be put into the collection of statistics by faith, which he has been doing for some time.
- ST replied that the group should ensure that Lord Singh is present at the event on prisons planned for September. Fiona Bruce's idea was to draw attention to the value of faith-based work in prisons. IS said that this was his point: the value of this work should be measured, and a possible measure could be a reduction in reoffending.
- ST observed that there seemed to be a significant interest in this topic among the group. There was general agreement to hold an event in September, invite a representative of the multi-faith chaplaincy and perhaps some others.
- IS suggested inviting the Chaplain General; CS noted that the Revd. Rose Hudson-Wilkin had recently invited a multi-faith chaplain to a breakfast and this could be a route to go down.
- ST said that he might have a good contact in the form of an Imam from Barts Health NHS Trust.
- DS pointed out that the report represents a 'menu' of different approaches that faith and voluntary organisations are taking to support prisoners.

Religion and the UN Sustainable Development Goals

- ST noted that the APPG has been approached by a team at the Centre for Religion and Public Life at the University of Leeds, regarding hosting an event to launch their research findings on this topic. This could be an interesting discussion for the group.
- ST asked for and received agreement that this would be included in the group's tentative work programme.

Visit to Birmingham

- ST noted that the group has been invited to visit Birmingham. It had a good visit a couple of years ago and has been invited to go back. He asked if there would be interest in this.
- CS said she would encourage people to go and see the Near Neighbours programme. It is working particularly well in Birmingham, as well as in other cities. Bishop David Urquhart is a big enthusiast. DCLG [the Department for Communities and Local Government] is minded to provide more resources through this route.
- ST asked whether anyone was familiar with St John's cross cultural hub. Alastair McIver has invited the group to visit. GS replied that he was, and ST said that it would therefore make sense to visit.

FaithAction to begin arranging event and invite representative from multi-faith chaplaincy and practitioners (see also CS comments below)

FaithAction to include this work in future planning

FaithAction to agree with ST approach to Birmingham (St John's hub; Bishop; council)

Other suggestions

- ST asked whether there was anything else that the group ought to be looking at in the coming year.
 - ST invited DS to speak about FaithAction's English language work. DS said that Creative English is FaithAction's programme that uses drama and fun to teach English to adults with very low levels of language. FaithAction is now in its third contract with DCLG and is delivering the programme through 36 local centres. The approach is focused much more on community cohesion than language acquisition. It focuses on the group setting and the point of safety that this creates. FaithAction is now doing a little research on what makes community: it will have a report available in October/November and hold a roundtable discussion event, which No 10 has shown some interest in. DS expects the research to show that faith is key to community, identity and forging connections that go beyond blood.
 - ST said that when the report comes out there may be a role for this group.
 - ST reported that it had also been suggested that the group look at families and fathers.
 - DS said that this was an area of interest for Steve Double, which it seems might have relevance for the group.
 - ST said he thought there would be interest. David Lammy has done some work on this topic.
 - GS agreed and said that the group should not shy away from what had the potential to be a hot potato, and the importance of having a father.
 - CS apologised for arriving late. She said that she had come in on the end of the discussion about what works in prisons. It is known that reoffending rates can be decreased from 80% to below 20%, and there were approaches that were backed up by strong evidence, but did not get mainstreamed. In particular, these included reaching into prisons and beginning a mentoring relationship before a prisoner is released. There is an interesting project at Winson Green Prison in Birmingham: a mentoring programme run by churches. However, it has met some real problems. This would be interesting to look at. The group should hear from practitioners at the charity Yellow Ribbon, who could come in and talk about the barriers they face.
 - ST agreed that an aim of this group to see what the barriers are and what can be done to address them.
 - GS recognised that the group has a lot to be doing over next few months, but asked whether at some stage it could look at issue of religious illiteracy, of people not understanding faith, which it seems this group well placed to look at.
 - DS said that in Leeds, the Covenant is being used to help address this.
- 6. Close**
- ST asked if there was any other business. There being none he thanked everyone and closed the meeting.

FaithAction to speak to SD, GS and DL about avenues to pursue work on families and fathers

FaithAction to speak to GS about work on religious illiteracy

Date of next meeting: Sept/Oct 2017 (details tbc): What works in prisons? Faith and the voluntary sector supporting better outcomes