



# **All Party Parliamentary Group on Faith and Society**

**2013 Summary Report**

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# Introduction

FaithAction approached the Rt Hon Stephen Timms MP in April 2011 with the idea of an All Party Parliamentary Group to explore the role that faith plays in society, particularly through the work of faith based organisations.

The group held its inaugural meeting in January 2012 after receiving a large amount of support and interest from parliamentarians that wanted to be a part of the group. The group discussed the rough programme for the APPG and the terms of reference.

In the Annual General Meeting of 2013 the officers were confirmed as the following, with FaithAction maintaining a secretariat role:

Chair: Rt Hon Stephen Timms MP

Vice Chair: Sharon Hodgson MP

Vice Chair: Gary Streeter MP

Vice Chair: Tim Farron MP

Vice Chair: Baroness Neuberger

Vice Chair: Baroness Sherlock

Secretary: David Lammy MP

Treasurer: Lord Indarjit Singh

The aims of the group were confirmed as:

1. To promote understanding of faith based organisations engaged in social action in the UK and recognition of their value;
2. 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.
3. To consider regulatory and legislative arrangements which can make the most of the potential contribution of faith based organisations;
4. To learn from and contribute to international conversations, policy and civic action on the contribution of faith based organisations.

## Activity over 2013

### Covenant

#### Background

The Covenant has emerged from the findings of a series of roundtable meetings held by the APPG through 2012. This work explored the work of faith-based organisations in four areas:

- Welfare to work
- Children and young people
- Health and wellbeing
- International work of Faith groups

A common theme emerging from these discussions revolved around concerns about the relationship between faith-based organisations and local authorities, specifically:

- Local authorities and grant-making bodies often appear to be uneasy about faith playing a part in service delivery, and as a consequence faith-based organisations often feel compelled to downplay the role and importance of faith in their work. For many of these organisations, faith plays a central part in their work and to downplay this would result in a lack of integrity.
- It is difficult to explain what the faith-based organisations call “faith logic” to local authority service commissioners. Religious illiteracy amongst local authorities’ means there is a difficulty in understanding what such organisations are about and how best to relate to them.

During the 2013 Annual General Meeting several possible responses that could be taken forward by the All Party Group were discussed:

**Gary Streeter MP** suggested an exploration of the relationship between faith groups and local authorities – perhaps highlighting best practice.

**David Lammy MP** suggested that faith groups might be able to get local authorities to sign up to a charter which centres on the relationship between the two.

It was agreed that the APPG would look into promoting a charter for local authorities to sign, concerning the relationship between faith-based organisations and local authorities.

## The Covenant

In 2013 the APPG **Covenant** was developed. The Covenant aims to promote open and practical working between faith communities and local authorities, setting out a joint commitment to a set of principles that guide engagement, aiming to remove some of the mistrust that exists and to support good working.

The Covenant was sent to APPG members for comment and feedback, and the finalised document can be seen in the pages which follow.

The Chair of the APPG, Stephen Timms MP, is currently in conversation with Birmingham City Council and Birmingham Faith leaders, who intend to be the first to pilot this initiative.

*"Faith-based service providers are rooted in the communities they serve. For too long many local authorities have been reluctant to work with them. I hope the idea of a Covenant will go some way to help."*

- The Rt Hon Stephen Timms MP

## All Party Parliamentary Group on Faith and Society

### *Covenant for Engagement*

The coming decade will see the country facing new social needs and tough new challenges. There will be fresh demands on public health, social care, education, employment support and community inclusion.

These challenges will require the identification of a new set of resources. We will need to unlock the potential of every part of our society to contribute together towards solutions.

We believe that one important resource can be realised by supporting faith-based organisations to work constructively and effectively, as part of civil society, with local authorities. That will mean ensuring that local authorities are confident in commissioning services from and transferring assets to appropriately qualified faith-based organisations, and that they include faith groups when they look for solutions to social needs.

The APPG on Faith and Society is convinced that faith groups have a great deal to offer as providers and advocates for the communities in which they serve, and that some of their potential is being unnecessarily overlooked at present. To help tackle the problem, the Group has drafted a Covenant which can be adopted by faith groups and local authorities in cities across the UK.

## The Covenant

**The Covenant is a joint commitment between faith communities and local authorities to a set of principles that guide engagement, aiming to remove some of the mistrust that exists and to promote open, practical working on all levels.**

**Together, local authorities and faith communities should work out a local version of the commitments below, according to the priorities and needs of that locality.**

### **The Covenant is built on the following principles:**

- Faith communities are free to practise their beliefs and religious observances without restriction, and to raise their voice in public debate and to be respected, within the framework of UK law.
- Public services and faith based social action should respect service users from all backgrounds, with no discrimination on the grounds of religion, gender, marital status,

race, ethnic origin, age, sexual orientation, mental capability or long term condition.

- The voice, participation and solutions that faith communities bring are important, and consultation should enable them to be brought to bear for the benefit of the wider community.
- Organisations and services are stronger for drawing on diverse sources of funding; monopolies of funding, action and participation are damaging

### **The Covenant entails the following commitments:**

**Local authorities** commit to welcome the involvement of faith groups in the delivery of services and social action on an equal basis with other groups. In addition, they commit to:

- Building relationships and trust with faith groups;
- Adopting strategies for the engagement of faith communities in consultation exercises;
- Encouraging faith groups and their members to be involved in the reshaping and redesign of local services;
- Establishing clear guidelines around funding;
- Sharing training and learning opportunities between faith communities and the local authority.

**Faith based organisations** commit to work actively with local authorities in the design and delivery of services to the public. In addition, they commit to:

- Seeking opportunities to bring people together to serve the community, particularly its poorest and most isolated members;
- Serving equally all local residents seeking to access the public services they offer, without proselytising, irrespective of their religion, gender, marital status, race, ethnic origin, age, sexual orientation, mental capability or long term condition;
- Using resources provided for delivering a service wholly for that purpose, and not for any other;
- Ensuring excellence in child protection, health and safety, accountability and transparency;
- Responding to consultations where appropriate;
- Sharing training and learning opportunities between faith communities and the local authority.

## Other Activity

### Launch of Faith with Its Sleeves Rolled Up

On 9th May the Rt Hon Eric Pickles MP launched a new collection of essays - *'Faith With Its Sleeves Rolled Up'* - intended to record the most innovative faith based analyses of social action today which emerges from the work of the All Party Parliamentary Group on Faith in Society.

The Rt Hon Stephen Timms MP introduced the publication, saying,

*"As Chair of the APPG, and a contributor to the collection, I'm delighted to be able to launch this publication here today. Just a glance through the pages of "Faith With its Sleeves Rolled Up" shows the diversity of faith organisations working hard and offering ideas to help change UK society for the good. This is exactly the kind of work we aim to promote with the APPG; FaithAction's book brings much of our discussion into a tangible, readable form."*

In launching the book the Secretary of State Eric Pickles drew from case studies highlighted in the publication, saying,

*"The book presents a compelling case for a healthy dose of faith in other walks of life. These compelling visions and interesting anecdotes show that faith remains as relevant to this country as it ever was. And I'm keen to make sure that nothing gets in the way of this great philanthropic intent, because faith answering the call, flexing its muscles, rolling up its sleeves, getting stuck in, retains its unique to inspire, to revitalise, but above all, and most important of all, to strengthen our society."*

The Archbishop of Canterbury, the Most Revd Justin Welby, sent a letter of support which was read out at the launch, which said

*"I am delighted to have this opportunity to send you my good wishes as you celebrate the contribution of religious groups to social action in their local communities. The All-Party Parliamentary Group for Faith and Society and FaithAction have helped to make this irreplaceable work more visible by collaborating on Faith With its Sleeves Rolled Up. I hope it will bring the contributions of faith-based groups to the common good more fully into the public eye."*



## Public Spirit

On October 23<sup>rd</sup> 2013 the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Faith and Society partnered with *Public Spirit* for its launch in Westminster. *Public Spirit* is a forum for researchers, policymakers, politicians and practitioners from the voluntary and community sectors to debate recent developments in faith and public policy that crosses political affiliations and religious traditions.



The event, introduced by Stephen Timms MP, hosted a debate on faith and finance, discussing the question:

### **'Can public faith help rebuild the link between morality and markets?'**

The panel, chaired by National Executive Director of FaithAction Daniel Singleton, included:

- **Francis Davis** - founder of the Cathedral Innovation Centre and former advisor to government on faith and communities
- **Jon Cruddas** - MP for Barking and Dagenham and head of Labour's policy review
- **Liz Canelley** - Programme Director of Near Neighbours
- **Tarek El Diwany** - senior partner at Zest Advisory LLP and author of *The Problem with Interest* and *Islamic Banking and Finance*

## APPG Website

The APPG website is now online and can be accessed at [www.faithandsociety.org](http://www.faithandsociety.org)



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WELCOME!

The APPG on Faith and Society exists to:

- highlight the contribution to society by faith-based organisations
- identify best practice
- promote understanding of the groups providing innovative solutions around the country

The Rt Hon Stephen Timms MP is the group's Chair.

The APPG secretariat is provided by FaithAction.

The website, hosted by FaithAction, will act as a hub for APPG reports, events and other media.



FaithAction, secretariat to the All Party Parliamentary Group of Faith and Society, is a national network of faith-based and community organisations and a Strategic Partner to the Department of Health. FaithAction works to provide support, advice and training for its members, as well as partnering with local and central governments to highlight the contributions made by these organisations to their communities.

For more information visit

[www.faithaction.net](http://www.faithaction.net)

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