



## 2021-22 Summary Report

### April 2022

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# Introduction

The All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) exists to explore the role that faith plays in society, particularly through the work of faith-based organisations. It was formed after an initial idea by FaithAction in conversation with the Rt Hon Stephen Timms MP.

The group held its inaugural meeting in January 2012 and has continued to receive support and interest from parliamentarians.

We are grateful to the group's officers, who in 2021-22 were the following:

- Chair: Rt Hon Stephen Timms MP
- Vice Chair: Sir Gary Streeter MP
- Vice Chair: Fiona Bruce MP
- Vice Chair: David Linden MP
- Vice Chair: Jon Cruddas MP
- Vice Chair: Baroness Neuberger
- Vice Chair: Lord Singh of Wimbledon
- Officer: Baroness Uddin
- Secretary: David Lammy MP

The aims of the group are:

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.

The APPG website is [www.faithandsociety.org](http://www.faithandsociety.org).

## Key activity in 2021-22

### Fourth Faith Covenant Forum – February 2022

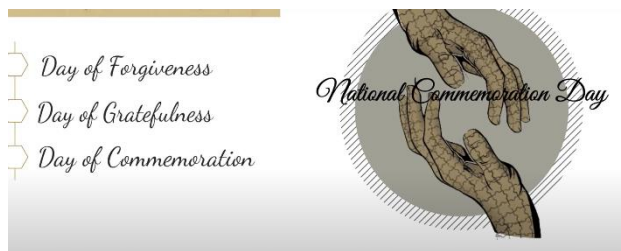


The fourth meeting of the Faith Covenant Forum took place in February 2022. The meeting brings together council and faith representatives from across the Faith Covenant areas to share ideas best practice. It has also proved to be a valuable opportunity for prospective or interested local authority areas to attend and gain insight as to what signing a Covenant might involve. The meeting was chaired by Rt Hon Stephen Timms and Daniel Singleton, National Executive Director at FaithAction. It was attended by 45 individuals and 13 Covenant areas represented, with an additional 2 prospective areas.

The meeting featured an update from Prof Chris Baker on the upcoming follow-up report to the *Keeping the Faith* report (2020), an overview from FaithAction of the Faith Covenant Toolkit, currently being produced, and a discussion on expanding Covenants from local areas to combined authority areas, led by speakers from Leeds City Council, and faith representatives from Birmingham. Each section gave attendees the opportunity for Q&A.

### Leeds Beckett University: Concepts for a COVID-19 Commemoration Event – November 2021

We held a session with Leeds Beckett University on Wednesday 24th November. At the event, two students from the UK Centre for Events Management, based at the University, put forward their concepts for a National Commemoration Event for the UK to mark the COVID-19 pandemic.



During the session, senior lecturers Reverend Ruth Dowson, Dr Ian Lamond and Bernadette Albert, gave some background information about the brief given to the students. Students Olivia Preston-Lee and Beatriz Lobato-Castilla, then presented their plans for

holding nationwide events that would mark the pandemic. The plans formed part of their BA Event Management Level 5 option module: Celebration Ritual & Culture. Representatives of the APPG, including Rt Hon Stephen Timms MP, participated in a Q&A session with the panel.

## Event with the University of York: Churches, COVID-19 and Communities – December 2021

We hosted a report briefing with the University of York on Thursday 9th December. The report, [Churches, COVID-19 and Communities](#), is a joint publication by the University of York, Historic England, the Church of England, the Association of English Cathedrals, the National Churches Trust, and the Historic Religious Buildings Alliance.



The report examines the impact of closing church buildings and restrictions on activities provided or hosted by churches, on the lives and wellbeing of individuals and communities. It also looks at how churches and other faith groups were able to respond creatively to COVID-19 challenges and adapt to meet new circumstances and needs.

The report was presented by Revd Professor Dee Dyas, Professor of the History of Christianity and Co-Director of the Centre for the Study of Christianity at the University of York, and Becky Payne, who works as a freelance consultant undertaking projects on sustaining historic places of worship.

A panel discussion followed the presentation; Baroness Uddin, Dr Kate Giles of University of York, and Daniel Singleton of FaithAction gave their reflections on the report. Participants at the meeting then took part in a Q&A session.

## Research update: *Keeping the Faith 2.0*

Work began this year on a follow-up report to 2020's *Keeping the Faith*, a joint initiative from the APPG for Faith and Society and the Faiths & Civil Society Unit at Goldsmiths, University of London.

Subtitled "Embedding a New Normal in partnerships between faith groups and local authorities during and beyond the pandemic" the report will explore how partnerships between faith groups and local authorities, forged during the

pandemic, might form a platform for ongoing partnership work. It will also identify hallmarks for effective partnership between the statutory and faith sector.

50 interviews were conducted this year with representatives of faith groups and local authorities, with data forming the basis for the report and recommendations. Publication will take place in early 2022/23.

## **Renewing the Faith Covenant**

Brent and Barnet both decided to hold renewal events for the Faith Covenant in 2021. The events formed part of Inter-Faith Week 2021 and were opportunities for the councils to refresh their commitments to the aims of the Covenant, allow any new personnel to formally recognise the importance of the Covenant locally, and commit to further strategic partnership work going forward.

In both cases, the councils wanted to recognise the enormous contribution of faith communities during the Covid-19 pandemic and look ahead to future strategic initiatives.

## **The Faith Covenant: Update Report**

The roll-out of the Faith Covenant continues to be a focus for the APPG's public work. The Covenant emerged from a series of roundtable meetings held by the APPG in 2012 to explore the work of faith-based organisations. It 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. It is built on the recognition that, in order to meet the challenges the country faces, we need to unlock the potential of every part of civil society to contribute – including faith groups.

For further information on the development of the Faith Covenant, and its text, see the Appendix.

## **Covenant areas**

The Covenant has been signed in 23 local areas, meaning that over 5 million people live in areas that have adopted it.

- Leeds
- Northamptonshire
- Barnet
- Solihull
- Calderdale
- Southampton
- Blackpool
- Essex (county wide)
- Basildon
- Braintree
- Chelmsford
- Colchester
- Maldon
- Rochford
- Brentwood
- Uttlesford
- Castle Point
- Harlow

- Epping Forest
- Brent
- Wolverhampton
- Preston
- Brighton and Hove

FaithAction continues to offer advice and support to faith groups and/or councils in areas that are considering adopting the Covenant, as well as connecting them with existing Covenant areas in order to share learning. Other areas that are currently exploring adopting the Covenant include:

- Bradford
- Hertfordshire (county wide)
- Greater London Authority
- Luton
- Coventry
- Rotherham
- Thurrock
- Watford
- Cornwall
- Kendal

## Other Faith Covenant Developments

- Leeds have proposed some additions to the Covenant and currently have a consultation open. They are also looking at potential regional/metro area covenant.
- Birmingham looking to refresh the Covenant.
- Cornwall are interested in signing the Faith Covenant and met recently to discuss.
- We are continuing discussions with Hertfordshire County Council and faith representatives in the area.
- We are in discussions with Kendal.

## Supporting Faith Covenant Adoption

### Coventry interest in Faith Compact and Faith Covenant

FaithAction's Matthew Allen presented at the discussion in Coventry about the proposal of a national Faith Compact, along with Together in Action Trust. Coventry hosted discussion on the Faith Covenant and Faith Compact, and Deputy Leader of the Council, Abdul Salam Khan signalled intent to sign up to the Covenant.



### Hertfordshire Faith Covenant interest

FaithAction have been supporting Hertfordshire County Council in their journey towards adopting a Faith Covenant, presenting at three meetings to this end in 2021, including the Diversity and Inclusion Board in April 2021, and a meeting between the County Council and Inter-Faith Network in early 2022. Hertfordshire remain committed to adopting the Covenant and are exploring next steps. FaithAction have connected Hertfordshire with representatives of Essex Faith

Covenant so that learning can be shared around adopting the Covenant at a county-wide level. We expect progress to be made on the development of a Covenant for Hertfordshire throughout 2022/23.

## Updates from existing Covenant areas

### Brent (Covenant adopted 2017)

Brent Council and Brent Multi-Faith Forum (BMFF) came together during Inter Faith Week to mark the fourth anniversary of Brent's accession to the Faith Covenant and renew their Covenant commitment. The event was a celebration of all the Covenant had allowed the borough to achieve.



The event was attended by the Mayor of Brent and other key figures from the council, in addition to members of the faith community, including Daniel Singleton of FaithAction, who commented that “just as a dog isn't just for Christmas, the close relationships formed between the Council and local faith groups during the height of the pandemic cannot be allowed to wither and must be actively maintained by both sides.”

The Mayor of Brent, Councillor Lia Colacicco said: “This was a great chance to come together in mutual respect and cooperation. Figures suggest that most people in Brent are religious, and we were reminded during the pandemic how often places of worship are also places of refuge. Brent Council looks forward to working with local faith leaders and organisations in the future”.

Going forward, Brent Multi-Faith Forum will coordinate action through a number of task groups. Mario Philip, the Chair of the forum, introduced these task groups at the event, and the chairs of each. They are as follows:

1. Faith Communities Outreach and Engagement - Rev Ali Taylor and Bea Jackson
2. Youth Empowerment and Advocacy against Inequalities - Pastor Yinka

3. Mental Health - Tahseen Mehar
4. Borough of Sanctuary – Susan Grace
5. Disaster & Conflict Response, and the Environment – Mario Phillip
6. Work with the Police - Frank Dabba-Smith

## **Barnet (Covenant adopted September 2015)**

Barnet Council and faith partner Barnet Multi-Faith Forum (BMFF) renewed the Barnet Faith Covenant in 2021 at a short ceremony in Hendon Town Hall. The event marked the beginning of Inter Faith Week 2021 and was a public renewal of the council's partnership with the borough's diverse faith communities. The re-signing of the covenant follows the publication of Barnet's Community Participation Strategy earlier in the year.

The strategy reaffirms the council's commitment to involving community organisations in the design and delivery of services, and faith groups are a particularly vital partner in this. They will continue to work with the council on plans to implement the commitments in the Covenant, including strategies to involve more faith groups in consultation and to ensure members of all religions and cultures are included equally.

Cllr Reuben Thompstone, Chairman of Community Leadership and Libraries Committee said, "Through the difficult days of the Covid-19 pandemic, our faith leaders and religious organisations stepped up to help support our most vulnerable residents. They provided a vital link to residents, using their trusted role in the community to pass on messages of safety, and encouraging people to be vaccinated. I am very proud to add my signature to the Barnet Faith Covenant, and to help launch the next chapter in this story".



The event was attended by councillors and members of BMFF. Esmond Rosen, President of BMFF said "BMFF are honoured to represent Barnet's faith community in this renewal and celebration of our partnership with the council."

## **Essex (Covenant adopted October 2017)**

Following Essex County Council's adoption of the Covenant at a county-wide level in 2017, the various area districts within Essex gradually signed up. Three more adopted the Covenant in 2021 bringing the total to 11 of 12 area districts.

Essex have continued work on a local social prescribing pilot in Colchester, in partnership with the local social prescribing provider, Community 360. The pilot has been successful, ensuring faith-based organisations (FBOs) are now firmly embedded within local social prescribing structures. Through the pilot, the council and representatives of the steering group have been able to produce:

- A training programme for faith-based organisations interested in social prescribing;
- Communications assets around social prescribing aimed at faith-based organisations;
- An engagement toolkit to help FBOs interested in social prescribing;
- A resource for social prescribing professionals to better understand how to engage with faith groups.

Outputs and case studies from the pilot will continue to be developed into 2022. The Covenant steering group will meet to determine next steps for this work.

### **Brighton and Hove (Covenant adopted November 2018)**

The faith network in Brighton and Hove (Brighton and Hove Faith in Action) in partnership with the council and other statutory partners, have been working throughout 2021 to develop Street Support - Brighton & Hove, working with faith partners and local statutory and voluntary sector organisations within the city. The idea is to develop a central list of organisations offering support to people experiencing homelessness, those who are vulnerably housed and those requiring services, with a City Administrator curating the data.

They are also drawing together a coalition of faith groups to work alongside organisations and residents in the city who wish to welcome Ukrainian refugees and are also in the process of setting up a project around faith-based social prescribing champions.

## Future plans

We look forward to the launch of the follow-up report to *Keeping the Faith* at a high-profile event this summer.

The Faith Covenant Toolkit will also be published this year. Following the first *Keeping the Faith* report, it was decided that the APPG would produce a primer for organisations interested in adopting the Covenant. The Toolkit will be finalised and distributed in early Summer 2022.

We have been greatly encouraged by the interest shown in the Faith Covenant by several local authorities this year and will continue to work closely with them to encourage its official adoption in the near future.

Additionally, there are two events the APPG is preparing to host in the near future.

First, we plan to partner with Laura Marks to host a meeting on 'the female face of community leadership', with the strapline: *"...whilst tomorrow's world looks frightening and uncertain, women of the faith communities offer grass roots insights, initiatives, and inspiration for policy makers"*.

We also plan to host a meeting on how faith groups have supported people that have left Ukraine due to the ongoing war, and how that support will continue.

As always, we welcome suggestions of further topics for the group to consider.

# Appendix

## The Faith Covenant: development and text

### Background

The Covenant emerged from a series of roundtable meetings held by the APPG in 2012 to explore the work of faith-based organisations. These focused on the areas of welfare to work, children and young people, and health and wellbeing, as well as the work of faith groups internationally.

A common theme emerging from these discussions was a concern about the relationship between faith-based organisations and local authorities. On the one hand, local authorities and grant-making bodies can be uneasy about faith playing a part in service delivery. As a consequence, faith-based organisations often feel compelled to downplay the role and importance of faith in their work, although to them it plays a central part – resulting in a lack of integrity. On the other hand, religious illiteracy among local authorities means there is a difficulty in understanding what faith-based organisations are about and how best to relate to them.

During the 2013 Annual General Meeting of the APPG, the Rt Hon David Lammy MP suggested that faith groups might be able to encourage local authorities to sign up to a charter setting out an agreement for how the two would relate to each other.

This led to the development by the APPG of the Covenant for engagement between local authorities and faith groups. Professor Francis Davis also played a key part in drafting the text of the Covenant.

The full text of the Covenant can be found below. 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.

### Covenant text

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 principles are currently in draft form, and in some cases have been adapted to suit local circumstances. Local authorities that are interested in adopting the Covenant should contact FaithAction.

## **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, 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.



*FaithAction, secretariat to the All-Party Parliamentary Group of Faith and Society, is a national network of faith-based and community organisations and a member of the VCSE Health and Wellbeing Alliance, working with the Department of Health and Social Care, NHS England, and Public Health England. 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.*

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