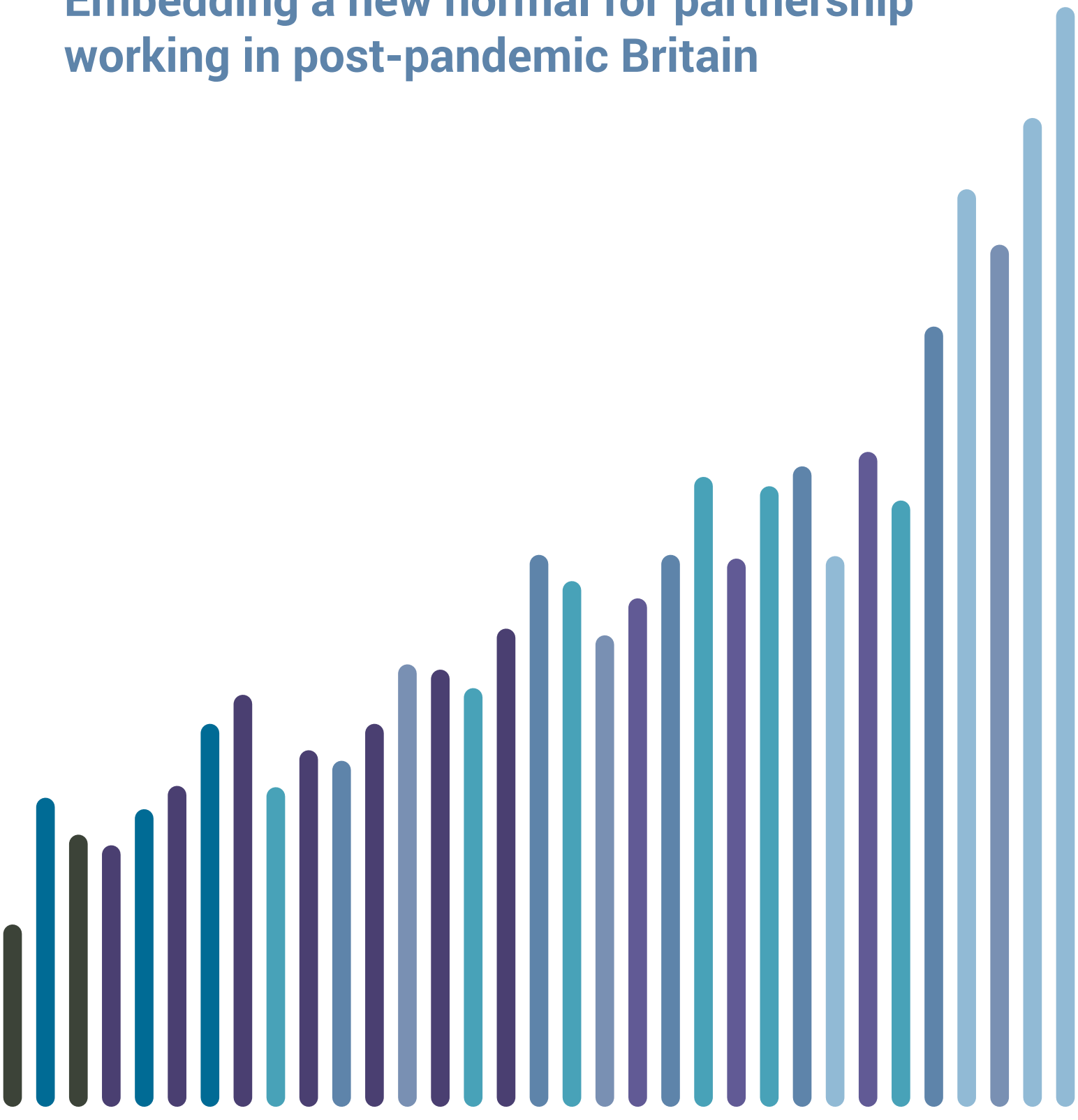
all-party parliamentary group
appg faith and society

Keeping the Faith 2.0

Embedding a new normal for partnership working in post-pandemic Britain



Foreword

The “Keeping the Faith” report was published in November 2020. It was commissioned by the All Party Parliamentary Group on Faith and Society and prepared by a team at Goldsmiths University of London led by Professor Chris Baker.

The report charted the dramatic increase in collaboration between local authorities and faith groups at the start of the pandemic crisis. Two thirds of local authorities reported an increase in partnership working with faith groups after the pandemic began. The report found that over 90% of the local authorities described their experience of working with faith groups in the pandemic as “very” or “mostly positive”, and that over three quarters expected the partnerships to continue in the future.

The team responsible for the earlier report has now compiled this follow up. It is drawn from in depth interviews with faith group and local authority leaders from around the UK, carried out in the year after the earlier report. It assesses how partnerships between local authorities and faith groups forged in the intense initial months of the pandemic have developed since.

The research showed that the initial focus of partnerships on food distribution had broadened out to encompass first vaccination, and then wider mental health and wellbeing support. Faith groups were being more systematically involved in service provision. Their pandemic experiences, and the greater recognition it had brought them, had galvanised their sense of mission and purpose, and strengthened their confidence.

Local authorities had become much more aware of what faith groups were doing, and of how well they were doing it. The success of the partnerships had deepened dialogue and strengthened relationships. Many of the collaborative initiatives at the start of the pandemic crisis had been highly innovative. Respondents were reflecting on how the same ethos and approach might now be applied to tough, longer term challenges.

The All Party Parliamentary Group on Faith and Society, established ten years ago, is convinced that Britain’s communities will be better if faith groups play a larger role than they have tended to in the recent past. In 2014, we published our “Faith Covenant” with ground rules for collaborations between local authorities and faith groups, now adopted in a growing number of local authority areas.

We warmly welcome this new report, highlighting lessons from the intense collaborations formed as the pandemic crisis broke, and suggesting how those lessons can best be applied and developed in the future.

Rt Hon Sir Stephen Timms MP
Chair, All-Party Parliamentary Group on Faith and Society

Executive summary

This report reflects the views and experiences of senior representatives and practitioners of both local authorities and faith groups across England, expressed in 35 in-depth interviews. It is a follow up report to the original *Keeping the Faith* report, published in November 2020 and covers the 12 months of experience of working in partnership to tackle COVID-19 since the time of that publication.

The key theme emerging from the research is that we are now entering a more reflexive stage of the pandemic as we move from 'rescue and emergency' mode to 'building back better'. In other words, addressing the longer-term implications of partnership working if the 'new normal' - identified in the original report as being the useful learning and practices developed in the 'eye of the storm' of the first lockdown - is to be preserved and built upon.

These longer-term implications are expressed in areas of policy and technical change, many of which are highlighted in the appendix to this report and include those associated with the 'hotspots' of policy partnership that have emerged in this second phase of the pandemic. As well as the ongoing need for emergency food relief and food distribution, faith groups and local authorities have also found themselves collaborating closely in areas of mental health, public health, domestic violence, the care and integration of refugees and migrants, mentoring highly vulnerable families and individuals, being the conduits for other clinical and public health interventions in their recovery, as well as providing emergency childcare services via fostering and adoption services. The growing use of worship and other faith-based centres in the delivery of statutory mental health and public health is likely to be a permanent feature of health and social care provision going forward.

However, the bulk of the content of this report is concerned with highlighting the importance of values as the basis for more effective and sustainable partnership and policy development. The key message around the capability of faith/secular partnerships to build back better is that 'shared values' are much more likely to lead to 'shared outcomes'. Shared values identified as being held in common across both local authorities and faith groups include: compassion, social justice (including an end to discrimination and poverty), friendship, an ethos of service, kindness, empathy, and hope.

The final section of the report goes on to identify the implications of deploying these shared values as the basis for ongoing partnerships committed to building back better. These include changing mindsets and cultures, as well as beginning with the more democratic and inclusive principles and techniques associated with co-creation, rather than simple co-production. A series of eight policy areas for developing toolkits and co-created training opportunities, building on the insights of this project's data, that both local authorities and faith groups can devise and deliver, are proposed.

Whilst these toolkits and training resources can be used to further develop existing partnership practice between faith and secular partners, they are also offered as a useful and effective contribution for the

development of community covenants which may, at some point in the future, be an element in delivering the levelling-up agenda envisaged by Government. These resources could then involve the participation of wider community groups, businesses and statutory networks, not just faith groups and local authorities.

Finally, this executive summary is being compiled under the cloud of the illegal Russian invasion of Ukraine on February 24th 2022, which has already led to the displacement of over 3 million Ukrainians, representing the largest humanitarian crisis in Europe since the Second World War. As many seek their way to the UK to join existing families or be welcomed into the homes of concerned strangers, it is already clear that Ukraine represents a new 'not normal' which can learn from the old 'not normal' of faith contributions in the pandemic, and the partnerships that were formed across different sectors and faith/secular divides. The method, questions and sampling contained in this report predate the Ukraine war but nevertheless the lessons are there to be reflected upon and developed.

Introduction

'In a time of crisis, things that are already dying, die quicker. Things that are already innovating, innovate quicker.' (Church leader and welfare hub co-ordinator, South of England)

This report is a follow up to the original *Keeping the Faith* report which was published in November 2020.[1] That report covered the intense and upending experience of the first six months of the pandemic from March to August 2020 as local authorities and faith groups scrambled resources to cope with challenges they faced. This account covers the 12 months that have elapsed since then and seeks to understand how partnerships between local authorities and faith groups[2] forged in the heat of that first wave have developed.

The quotation framing this introduction captures some of the brutal changes to our collective life and institutions wrought by the pandemic – including to faith groups and local authorities.

But it also highlights the immense opportunities and energy that have been released by the pandemic, and the challenges it presents to both sectors to radically re-imagine the basis on which partnerships should be created and the outcomes they can deliver. It takes courage and moral intentionality to identify and then allow old ways of doing policy and politics to die so that new and sustainable solutions and structures can emerge. Will our local authorities and faith communities (indeed the wider community and voluntary sector) be up to this challenge? To use the conceptual framework from the first Keeping the Faith report; will the comforting certainties of the 'old normal' that existed pre-pandemic, and which dictated the way decision and priorities were decided, be reinstated by default? Or will a 'new normal' way of doing things, detected by the first report, and forged out the crucible of the first wave of the pandemic, be sustained and developed as we 'build back a better Britain'?

1 Keeping the Faith - Partnerships between faith groups and local authorities during and beyond the pandemic APPG Faith and Society (2020) APPG_CovidReport_Full_V4.pdf (faithandsociety.org)

2 For the sake of ease and brevity we are using the term 'faith group' to denote places and centres of worship, institutional structures, faith-led projects and initiatives and faith-based organisations such as charities and NGOs. The sample of 'faith group' interviewees cover all these aspects of faith. Similarly the term 'local authority' refers only to England, and covers unitary authorities, district and county councils and London Boroughs. The sample of 'local authority' interviewees cover all these elements of local government.

Section 1
Keeping the Faith 1.0 – Trajectories

The purpose of the original report was twofold. First, to measure the *quantity* of pandemic-response work undertaken by local authority and faith groups via a bespoke survey sent to all local authorities in the UK in the first six months of the pandemic (i.e., March – September 2020). Second, to record the *quality* of experience generated by this pandemic activity via semi-structured interviews with 55 participants. The report aimed to analyse whether increased activity had led to a change in the relationship between local authorities and faith groups or whether the crisis had simply consolidated old ways of working. The data featured input from 194 local authorities (i.e., 48% of the available cohort) and showed that:

- 67% of local authorities reported an increase in partnership working since the pandemic started;
- 91% said their experience of pandemic partnership working with faith groups was 'Very Positive' or 'Mostly Positive'; and
- 76% said they expected the partnership to continue on either current practices or on a more enhanced basis in the future.[3]

When the analysis from both the survey and interviews was combined, an emerging narrative took shape that had three interlocking elements:

- *Relationship building:* a commitment to understand and explore further the more honest and authentic relationship building that occurred during the pandemic;
- *Resources and Innovation:* a renewed appreciation and understanding of the resources and innovation that faith groups brought to the pandemic response and a commitment to share more innovation in the future; and
- *Vision and Strategy:* a commitment to a more active co-production model of partnership focussed on shared visions for improvement and the potential strategies required to fulfil them.

Keeping the Faith 2.0 Methodology

To get under the skin of how the intervening 12 months had impacted on partnership working we conducted a series of deep interviews with 35 key personnel from across England who are working at the coalface of these issues. Because the previous report had focused primarily on the perspective of local authorities, we decided this iteration would prioritise faith group experience, so two thirds of the sample came from that cohort. Under the ethical protocols of the research all participants have been guaranteed anonymity, and so any direct quotes used in this report will be unattributable.

3 These findings and many others are detailed in the original report: APPG_CovidReport_Full_V4.pdf (faithandsociety.org)

However, whilst clearly not a representative survey, every effort has been made to incorporate as wide a range and diversity of experiences as possible. Participants were roughly 50/50 split in terms of gender, and 40% were from minority ethnic backgrounds. Some of the interviews engaged with faith and local authority leaders from that same locality. Some locations were also selected because of the existing presence of the Faith Covenant scheme,[4] and whilst the research was not designed as an evaluation of that initiative, it nevertheless was referred to during the interviews held in those areas. Local authority areas for this research covered a variety of London boroughs and major conurbations in the South, Midlands and Northwest and North of England. They also covered individual post-industrial towns as well as rural councils across England as a whole.

Faith-based participants were drawn from most of the main faith traditions in England including Bahai, Christian, Hindu, Jewish, Muslim and Sikh. Most of the participants were in leadership roles in either interfaith or multi-faith fora, congregations, or assemblies, or of faith-based organisations, networks, or NGOs. A few were advisors to faith leaders or national faith-based welfare programmes.

Local authority participants were either lead councillors or senior officers with responsibility for engaging with religion and belief, and typically held portfolios focusing on cohesion, equalities, social justice, and community participation.

Each interviewee gave a recorded interview lasting between 45 – 90 minutes and after confirming their areas of policy engagement, were asked the following questions including:

- Describing the nature of the partnership (s) they are involved in;
- Reflecting on who brings what to the table;
- Reflecting on the extent to which the COVID-19 pandemic changed the nature of the relationship and if so, how;
- Describing the hallmarks of a good working partnership;
- Describing partnerships where these hallmarks are absent and areas of current tension; and
- Thinking of up to three policy initiatives or changes to existing arrangements that would take partnership working between local authority and faith groups/organisations to the next level.

Transcripts for each recorded interview were coded and cross referenced to afford basic codes that were then clustered into organising and global themes. The areas of discussion framed by the questions serve as the section headings by which we will uncover and analyse the key points arising from this data.

4 Full details of the principles that the constitute the Faith Covenant framework are available at Faith Covenant in Full - APPG on Faith and Society (accessed 21st January 2022)

Section 2
Findings from the data

1. The new post-pandemic frontiers of faith-based partnership with local authorities

This section analyses the key shifts in policy area collaborations between local authorities and faith groups over the last twelve months of the pandemic and reflect on their implications. The main issues covered in this section include mental health and wellbeing, the rise in domestic abuse and refugee and asylum seeker support.

(i) From food to public health

The first report found, unsurprisingly, that for the first six months of the pandemic most faith groups suspended their normal community and welfare activities to focus on the immediate needs of food poverty and distribution. Their contribution was vital and extensive. 65% of local authorities relied on faith-based transport to distribute food parcels. 60% relied on food bank provision resourced by faith communities. 66% relied on faith groups to signpost public health messages and advice on how to access resources and support from the council and other providers.

Whilst continuing these key activities, the major shift in emphasis over the past year for faith groups has been on providing mental health and physical wellbeing services, as the full impact of the collateral damage wrought by the pandemic on hugely overstretched NHS services becomes apparent. At the time of compiling this report the NHS waiting list for those waiting for procedures across the UK that had been delayed or cancelled on account of the pandemic numbered 5.7 million.[5] Meanwhile, the number of medical staff vacancies in the NHS back in March 2021 numbered over 76,000 or 6% of all staff.[6]

It is now clear, in ways that weren't in the summer of 2020, that faith groups have been integral to the rollout of both NHS vaccination and test and trace programmes amongst all sections of the community; including those most hesitant about taking the vaccine, or likely to fall outside the health and welfare system. A church leader in a large market town reflects that their premises 'became the vaccination and blood donor centre for the whole town' because they were perceived by their local health authorities 'to have run these services in a professional and deeply respected manner'. Further discussions of how delivery of key public health services can be permanently co-ordinated from this building are currently under discussion.

A mosque, located in a community with some of the worst infection and death rates in the UK, had similarly worked with its local NHS trust in increasingly significant healthcare partnerships. The confidence and willingness of this faith group to contribute to the public health agenda, was met by a concomitant increase in the willingness of local health commissioning bodies to commit resources to make it happen.

5 Record 5.7m people in England waiting for hospital treatment | NHS | The Guardian (accessed 20th November 2021)

6 The NHS workforce in numbers | The Nuffield Trust (accessed 20th November 2021)

'We opened as one of the eight lateral flow test centres in our borough. This was a community-wide initiative open to all members of the community, and it was our first involvement in COVID. But we wanted to go further, and we felt we had the space and know how to do so. So, in September 2021 we launched our mosque vaccination programme in association with our local GP surgeries and NHS team and we have for the past 6 months vaccinated all members of our community irrespective of race or religion or whether they believe or not. On the last count we had vaccinated over nine and a half thousand people. But then we became interested in following that through. So, we are at the moment helping with the booster programme and we have also been in meetings about the vaccination of 12 – 15-year olds.'

(Mosque Trustee, London Borough)

(ii) Mental health and wellbeing, domestic violence, and refugees

Pre-pandemic, some faith groups had innovated key worker schemes for homeless people and vulnerable families. A Christian worship centre in the West Country had previously pioneered a year-long programme mentoring struggling families and young people in their own homes. Volunteers would visit once a day, once a week or once a month depending on the level of need. The success of the programme allowed statutory services to bolt-on other professional care services that were provided by local schools, housing and social services and health care providers. This worship centre now receives direct funding from its local authority to co-ordinate the prescribed multiagency response for families most devastated by the pandemic. Before lockdown it was caring for 60 families. Now it is caring for over 200. The project leader reflects, 'It has more than trebled in size throughput lockdown and we are still not meeting demand. We have a four-month waiting list that is full and on top of that we're turning away two or three referrals a day.'

The same faith-group has also pioneered drop-in centres for homeless and vulnerable young adults including refugees and sex workers. Since the pandemic, this has attracted multi-agency working across a number of key services which they also co-ordinate. 'We have counsellors who hold sessions here, you can get GP visits and vaccinations, we have mental health nurses, sexual health nurses, domestic violence workers, housing advisors, our homeless support team.' These clinical and public health outcomes are however, always offered in an holistic approach to support and hospitality: 'These are places where you can come and play chess, you can come and learn a musical instrument, and you can come and create art.'

Other areas of policy engagement spearheaded by faith groups during the pandemic include the rise in domestic violence created by lockdown conditions. A Hindu temple in a London borough, noticing the large amount of effort already going into emergency food aid, decided instead to tackle the rises in domestic abuse occurring within its locality. They piloted a simple initiative, which is now widespread practice, which involved the distribution of 12,000 'family activity packs' containing 'a squeezy ball, and colouring items, box and pens, skipping rope and other toys … to try and alleviate the boredom that can trigger domestic violence.' (Hindu Temple Trustee)

A Christian faith group leader reported that they were negotiating with their local authority to invest a million pounds for three safe houses in a major city in the South of England. 'We are aiming to provide support for elderly or young mums who are transitioning out of domestic violence. Like for three to twelve months accommodation whilst our support workers work with them to help get them more established and secure - like getting on a proper social housing list, financial and employment advice.'

Meanwhile, a local authority leader from the Midlands identified the emergency care and the long-term settlement of refugees and migrants as a major 'cross-

cutting area' of policy with the faith communities. This is because this issue 'resonates very well with faith-based values', but also because the council lack the resources to deal with the issue. 'It is having to align itself to what faith groups are saying on this issue.' This local authority now donates warehouse space for extra capacity for faith-based projects to store their food for Afghan and other refugees.

Other local authorities have designated faith-based groups as lead agencies in identifying and recruiting landlords who might be eligible to provide suitable accommodation. 'The council already fund us to manage existing landlord contracts for asylum seekers and refugees and they are going to us and saying, "What if you become the agency for future needs for Hong Kong refugees?" It's early days but we have supported Syrian refugees for five years now and we are trying to point them to access education, employment, healthcare and all that sort of stuff.' (Christian faith leader, Southwest of England).[7]

Other areas of increased post-pandemic collaboration highlighted by interviewees included climate emergency awareness and response, knife crime and anti-social behaviour, responses to spikes in hate-crime aimed at minority ethnic religious communities, and increased capacity for emergency fostering services.

(iii) Faith as resource for both clinical and public healthcare outcomes

Our data suggests that collaboration between religion and healthcare authorities will be more systematically developed as the long-term impacts of COVID-19 become more evident. Pre-pandemic, faith-based engagements in this field were largely piecemeal, small scale and volunteer led, with a few healthcare professionals operating in primarily an advisory or training capacity.

Post-pandemic, the situation seems likely to be transformed. Expect more churches, mosques, and temples to have clinical health care facilities grafted onto them or integrated into the existing building infrastructure. Expect more professional care staff to be operating out of worship centres as primary health, social and mental care is carried out from these locations rather than GP surgeries or traditional outpatients' departments. This shift reflects the fact that, for some 'hard to reach' communities, their local place of worship is now a more accessible, friendly, and trusted place to receive primary and clinical care than GP surgeries. Since the pandemic, traditional medical spaces such as surgeries have perhaps become unhelpfully associated in the eyes of some with bureaucratic stress, inaccessibility, and suspicion of government agendas on issues such as mass vaccination.

Expect local authorities to also develop more practices that reproduce the street-based outreach activities faith groups have been pioneering for years to reach the most vulnerable in society. A faith leader in the North Midlands described how their church and other faith groups directly support the work of two street-based community health workers employed by the council. One is a community matron, the other a key worker. This leader reflects, 'Boy they are good - they go round and care for the homeless. They are amazing. We work really closely with them. We are with them every day.'

7 As the final stages of this report were being compiled, Russia started its illegal bombardment of Ukraine on 24th February 2020, generating an exodus of Ukrainian refugees that is currently 3 million strong and rising. There is little doubt that the networks generated by faith groups and local authorities over the care and resettlement of previous waves of refugees from Syria and Afghanistan with local families will be integral to the ability of local systems to cope with the arrival of what is expected to be tens of thousands of new refugees under the Government's Homes for Ukraine support scheme 'Homes for Ukraine' scheme launches - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk) (accessed 16th March 2022).

Expect faith groups in return to be increasingly involved in the leadership and management of 'secular' referrals and key worker care in the community, and to be in receipt of increasingly significant amounts of public funding to do this. A trustee of a Sikh gurdwara in the West Midlands reflects, 'We have been talking with our local authority about how the temple can be a hub and a location for many activities around mental and physical wellbeing because we have a lot of presence and a lot of opportunities.' (Sikh Gurdwara Trustee, West Midlands) A church-based health project reports, 'They (health commissioning body) are kind of exploring whether they build a health centre attached to the church so that we can collaborate moving forward. Can they fund some of our family support workers and locate then in GP surgeries?' (Christian project leader, Southwest England)

A local authority leader from the Northwest is convinced that the trajectory of future partnerships with faith groups going forward from the pandemic will be 'refracted through a health lens.'

2. Who brings what to the partnership table? Resources and Attributes

This question allowed an honest appraisal of how each cohort identified not only what they brought to the partnership table, but also what they saw the other party as bringing. Local authorities were perceived as bringing three elements 'to the table':

- *Authority*: i.e., compelling or encouraging partners to come together for a meeting or an event to effect a change or improvement. One local council lead suggested, 'It's about convening meetings that confer democratic legitimacy.' This authority is linked to councils' statutory duties to co-ordinate and ensure basic levels of service delivery in key areas of policy;
- *Knowledge*: i.e., the ability to bring data and intelligence about local situations was much appreciated by faith sector partners. But also, knowledge of the wider ecology of networks and other key players in the area – a sort of bird's eye perspective – that can identify gaps in the system that can be filled by other partners; and
- *Signposting*: i.e., directing faith groups to other partners in the locality working in similar areas, but also signposting faith-based projects to appropriate funding and development structures inside and outside the resources of councils.

The contributions of faith groups on the other hand were defined in terms that were generally less technical and hierarchical:

- *Resources*: i.e., important assets such as buildings and volunteers, but also networks of engagement that spread deep and across localities and communities. Also, expertise on how to engage and understand the experience of key communities and stakeholders that local authorities sometimes struggle to connect with;
- *Credibility*: i.e., being trustworthy and effective, but also derived as being perceived to lie outside bureaucratic (often referred to as 'top-down') structures that were assumed to be the modus operandi of local authoritie; and.
- *Motivation*: i.e., an asset deriving from the values and beliefs that faith groups bring to issues of commitment to their local communities. Their desire to problem solve, and collaborate for the sake of improving the life chances of not only their own members but also those of the wider community is noted by secular partners. This does not mean that local authority personnel do not bring their values and beliefs to bear on the work they do. It's simply that values and motivation are more clearly associated with the faith sector rather than the policy sector.

3. The difference a pandemic makes

The shock of the changes wrought by the pandemic is well summarised in this report's opening quote. The pandemic continues to ruthlessly expose the long-term underinvestment in goods and services across the UK, and high levels of social and economic inequality. This has meant the suffering, poverty and lack of hope experienced by many communities before the pandemic has simply been exacerbated in ways that many service providers find even more overwhelming.

Yet paradoxically, our respondents report that COVID-19 has also unleashed a new sense of hope and determination to make a real change, and to see it as an opportunity to reconfigure tired and outdated thinking and practice. For faith groups and local authorities this reconfiguration has meant somewhat different things. For faith groups it was about discovering a new sense of confidence and power and a desire to return to core and shared values. For local authorities, it's about recognising these trends and discovering a commitment to explore deeper innovation and relationships as a result. This data therefore confirms, but also deepens, the direction of travel identified by the first Keeping the Faith report.

(i) An enhanced confidence and sense of power

Many faith sector respondents reported that the pandemic had galvanised their sense of mission and purpose and had contributed to an enhanced sense of confidence and belief in what they were doing. One church leader offers a theologically inflected account of the change in mindset generated by the pandemic in their faith community. 'If we think that returning to the four walls means that people will come flocking, then we will delude ourselves. COVID-19 has given us the opportunity of incarnational ministry that we have never had before. Alongside welcoming people back to church, we need to meet them in their need and create homes and create communities. We need to share the journey of recovery with them.' (Christian Leader, Southwest England)

A faith community hub leader in a London Borough reflects 'We now realise that we are here to shape our environment and our neighbourhoods in the place where we live. So, it's about invading the public square - we have a part to play in terms of shaping how things are done and therefore you have to be in the room in order to shape it. Our goal is to be part of that shaping and the bringing of solutions to the fundamental issues in the place where we work.'

A Pentecostal leader from the West Midlands suggested that the pandemic has demonstrated how 'new and emerging faith communities have become increasingly vocal and engaged over that period'. A faith sector participant from a Muslim-based project reflects, 'I think we have a much stronger voice, and the role of the faith communities is much more strongly recognised.' A manager of a network of faith-based hubs across England felt that the pandemic 'had reversed the narrative that all faith groups are in decline in the eyes of secular partners.' This growing sense of engagement and purpose has engendered a newfound confidence to disagree where necessary with local authorities and offer instead constructive criticism. A senior Muslim cleric in a large Northern town describes what they define as the ability to 'push back'. 'It's a sign of strength of the partnership that our interfaith forum feels they are able to refuse to endorse messages and push back and not be pushed around.' Another faith-based respondent from the Jewish community reflects, 'There were times before the pandemic when we thought the council kept moving the goalposts, and out of a sense of respect and self-care, we had to learn to say "No". Don't jump through hoops for people and if you think the model is wrong, then don't operate under it. Since the pandemic I think we are more confident on that now.' (Jewish/interfaith leader, London)

However, there is also confidence to be derived in knowing the limitations of what you can achieve, but also seeing that limitation as a positive catalyst for exploring solutions with others. A leader of a faith-based hub in the North of England offers this insight, 'There is a genuine sense that we don't have all the answers, but we have something. It's a confidence thing – you might have just a bit of the answer.'

Crucially, this enhanced sense of confidence and self-belief experienced by the faith sector participants is mirrored back by secular partners. A local authority team leader in the West Midlands stated, 'I think the pandemic has raised the profile of the partnership that existed in the first place, and I think workers across the board in the council are much more aware of the faith organisations and the fact that they exist in community and how important they are to work alongside that. And that's a big change.' A diversity officer from the South Midlands suggests that the pandemic has shifted not only awareness but also brought home to local authorities the indispensability of the faith sector to key aspects of their work. 'The pandemic has deepened, intensified and reaffirmed the partnership in important ways, including the realisation that the council completely relied on its faith sector to lead to fill the gaps in providing information.' A policy consultant who works across both cohorts summarised the situation created by the pandemic thus. 'So, they [local authorities] have recognised how valuable faith can be. And if they put faith in their communities and put faith in the faith groups in their communities, their programmes can reach parts that they wouldn't reach otherwise.'

(ii) Deeper relationships

As we discovered from the Keeping the Faith 1.0 survey, 76% of local authorities expressed a commitment to develop partnership working with the faith sector in the future. That commitment to forge deeper relationships has continued in the twelve months since then. A Consultation and Involvement officer from a London Borough observed that the pandemic had generated 'a stronger desire for wanting to do things collaboratively with faith and a desire for them to make more of a call on the resources of the council.' A Stronger Communities officer from a city region in the South of England offers a vivid sense of the collaboration and partnership that had evolved during the pandemic. 'We are all friends – that is a genuine word. We know that we can ask each other things to get things done – we can rely on each other much more because there is no skin off anybody's nose to do that now.'

The commitment to deeper relationships has also allowed a greater maturity to emerge that is comfortable being open to diverse views and perspectives without feeling defensive or threatened. A diversity lead in a South Midlands town noticed that 'Faith leaders were becoming very vocal on issues of public health. We created an Open Doors policy for them with the Director of Public Health to keep the information loop going as well. But within that, some of the faith groups were very challenging around the impacts of particular interventions and the lack of understanding of the needs of particular communities, including the ways in which narratives might be racialized. So that kind of intelligence was absolutely critically important to the council.'

(iii) Deeper innovation

The original survey highlighted a definite commitment to innovation on the part of local authorities. In response to the question 'Which initiatives would be of value or relevance to your local authority?:

- 93% of local authorities said, 'wider sharing of best practice in coproduction between local authorities and faith groups' was 'important or very important';
- 83% said they would like to 'see increased resources to develop partnership working';
- 83% said they would like to 'see safe spaces for honest discussion regarding Religion and Belief'; and
- 77% said that they would like to 'establish and revitalise the work of the Local Interfaith Forum'.

The ensuing twelve months have seen this momentum develop further. A Cohesion and Integration lead from a London Borough reflects that both Muslim communities and Pentecostal churches were already very active in providing social and welfare support. 'At the start of the pandemic we said to these faith communities "We are going to need your help." There are 150 languages spoken in the borough. Since the pandemic, we have solidified our relationship with the faith sector into a very agile and capable response model. We could ramp this back up with minimal funding if another pandemic emerged - we know that we have now got this.' This example highlights how lessons learned from COVID-19 have been implemented so that they can be called upon for to provide effective and resilient responses to future global catastrophes.

In a similar vein, a senior local authority interviewee from another London Borough observed that the pandemic had showed, 'how we were able to move really speedily in a time of crisis and almost clear some of the red tape and obstacles out of the way'. They raise a key question lying at the heart of this report. 'Can we not take the same ethos and approach and apply this to some of the longer-term challenges we now face as a city - which is where some of our pandemic recovery framework strategy is rooted. How are we going to reduce child poverty for example?' A former faiths diversity lead from the West Midlands suggests that local authorities are now more likely to link the idea of values and motivation to effective and sustainable policies going forward. They should become more adept at knowing how to use the civic and political leverage of these motivations in the formation and delivery of key services. 'Faith groups have premises, volunteers, discipline, motivation, and value systems and local authorities can use these conduits for messaging and collaboration. The local authority is currently appreciating and valuing all of that.'

A community engagement lead from another London Borough offers a further reflection on this emerging trajectory that links values to added value. 'This [the pandemic] is where it gets interesting. The faith groups now want to engage more with the council, and we want to engage with them as well. There has been more of an urgency about our work – it has increased. But maybe it's not just simply more work but maybe there is more value attached to that work. I think we have been more effective together because of this added value.'

This section has explored the ways in which the pandemic has produced positive outcomes in faith sector and local authority relations, despite the huge pressures and stresses involved. These include a greater sense of empowerment and the forging of deeper relationships and deeper innovation. As one local authority participant observed, 'It feels like something special is going on in spite of a lot of things.' A faith hub co-ordinator from a London Borough sums up the past twelve months thus. 'COVID-19 worked as a permission thing – the local authority has kind of stepped into something else.' The idea that COVID-19 has acted as a 'permission' or invitation mechanism to step together into a different type of experimental and uncharted space is a compelling one that generates and requires new forms of partnership to sustain it.

Section 3
Ten hallmarks of a good partnership

The following hallmarks are culled from the insights of both cohorts and reflect the responses to the question 'What are the hallmarks of a good partnership?' These hallmarks were offered as values and attitudes on the one hand, and as specific practices on the other. The first five hallmarks address the former, whilst the last four address the latter.

1. Developing Trust

Trust was mentioned over 80 times in the data and was seen as foundational to any good partnership. It is conceived as having multiple and having far-reaching impacts that covered all aspects of policy, governance, and collaboration. Trust is intimately linked to the following impacts and processes:

- Addresses barriers to competition or market share so that innovation can take place;
- Focuses attention on traditional hierarchies of power to create jointly owned structures, operational tools, and shared outcomes;
- Challenges traditional understandings of knowledge and expertise so that values and ethos can be shared and better understood;
- Adapts usual protocols around contact to allow ease of access to key players (for example via mobile phones or direct emails) in appropriate and effective ways that save time and focus on key issues;
- Addresses suspicion and wariness of authority that allows access to communities as well as effective transmission of messages to be heard and responded to;
- Dismantles suspicion of hidden agendas that allows safe spaces to be created where it is ok to experiment and to fail, or it is ok to make yourself vulnerable to receive emotional support;
- Dismantles cultures of ignorance or blame that allows instead for spaces and processes that enable confidence and validation; and
- Calls into question traditional cultures of technical proficiency and expertise to create instead spaces and opportunities for greater honesty around the complexity of tasks and inherent limitations, which in turn manages expectations more successfully.

A senior leader from a Northern local authority summarises the positive and enduring impacts that a proactive approach to developing trust can produce. 'A responsive council understands that when trust starts to get stronger then people feel more confident about being able to speak about things in a safe space where you know that no blame will be attached when things are being discussed. There is the realisation that we are not working against each other, but we are working with each other to support each other and going beyond our normal activities.'

2. Cultivating Transparency

A key concept mentioned in close juxtaposition to trust was the concept of transparency. It is understood as a commitment to being open and honest about one's motivation and agendas, but also the resources one has at one's disposal and the ways in which one will distribute those resources. One senior local authority lead from the North of England expresses the relationship thus. 'Trust and transparency are the most important hallmarks of any partnership. If the relationships with our faith communities are trustworthy and transparent things will happen. It's hidden agendas and suspicions of them that prevent things from happening.' Without a commitment to this openness and transparency, expressions of trust will never be credible or lead to the deliverable outcomes on which a good partnership relies.

3. Sharing values, ethos, and motivation

The observation from a faith leader in the previous section that '…knowing that the people you are working with share your values and therefore want the same outcomes' forms the basis of an increasingly prevalent motif evidenced by the data. The discussion around sharing values (and the associated concept of ethos) revealed the following aspects:

- Values are recognised as a powerful source of motivation that enable you to remain committed to places and situations for the long-term. This in turn conveys reliability and respect to those you work with;
- Shared values identified by both cohorts included ideas of social justice, including specifically the eradication of poverty and inequality, a deep respect of all irrespective of ethnic or religious background, and an ethos of service to all;
- Compassion is also seen as a shared value. 'We have some pretty compassionate people that are both officers and councillors and we're pretty compassionate as well. A strong motivation – really similar values.' (Faith Leader, North Midlands);
- Faith groups also espoused the value of seeing the whole person, that includes considering spiritual and moral considerations, alongside economic and policy criteria for the development of a healthy and happy life. 'Faith groups have a long history in the community because they are the people of that community. They have an ethos of service and viewing the whole person. It's not just a service with one aspect of the person in mind. It's really rooted locally, and it means that they understand and know that community. It can be wrapped up too much in local politics, but it can also be a great asset.' (National faith-based hubs co-ordinator);

- Theological ideas have a place when it comes to contributing to policy debates. A cabinet member of a West Midlands authority, referring to the ethnic and religious diversity of their communities reflects, 'Our partnerships are very much rooted in a sense of shared purpose and the whole social justice agenda. We have partners who come at this from a theological, rather than political perspective. Our interests are aligned because we are both angered by poverty and disadvantage, and we want to break down barriers for communities and individuals in the city'; and
- Leadership and personnel are integral. The extent to which shared values are discovered, reflected upon, and implemented depends on whether leaders and managers see this as a priority. Thus, without commonly understood frameworks and policy guidelines that prioritise this approach, there is always a possibility that outcomes will be subject to the fluctuations in the agendas of individuals. 'Certain characters make a huge difference or equally don't make a huge difference – there is not a script that can guarantee positive evolutionary relationships – it all depends on skill set and motivation.' (Diversity officer, South Midlands).

What clearly emerges from this research is the importance of shared values as a key criterion for the forging of successful and resilient post-pandemic partnerships. A few years ago, the idea of secular local authorities considering faith-based values and beliefs as an important tool in their policy locker might have seemed somewhat fanciful. Now, within the context of both austerity and the pandemic, there seems a greater willingness by some local authorities to engage creatively with religiously inspired values and beliefs and the motivations they engender. 'As far as you can generalise, I think it is fair to say that local authorities recognise the power of faith-based organisations to make a difference and try to find ways, by and large, to use this kind of social/ spiritual capital and join it in some ways to financial and building capital with all kinds of government structures.'[8] (National Faith Consultant)

8 For a wider discussion on the concept of spiritual capital, and its important relationship to other forms of capital see Baker, C. and Skinner, H. (2006) Faith in Action: The dynamic connection between religious and spiritual capital, Manchester: William Temple Foundation (2006) and Baker, C. and Miles-Watson, J. (2008) 'Exploring Secular Spiritual Capital; An Engagement in Religious and Secular Dialogue for a Common Future', International Journal of Public Theology, 2(4), p442-464.

4. Embracing a new mind set

Both cohorts agreed that exploring trust, transparency and shared values entails a significant change in view and approach. Models of governance and finance were frequently discussed as the main areas that needed to be radically readjusted if they were to be fit for purpose for the challenges posed by a post-pandemic society.

(i) Re-imagining the governance of partnerships: representative vs. participatory

A large but potentially creative tension has been exposed by the pandemic on this issue. On the one hand, it has increased the necessity of faith groups speaking with one voice and organising themselves within more strategic units (such as multifaith fora) to meet the growing demand on their resources and talents from local authorities. Local authorities are increasingly dependent on 'one-stop (faith) shops' through which they can deliver effective messaging and services, but also channel increasingly large sums of money in recognition of the confidence they now have in the proficiency and compatibility of faith-based services. In other words, there is the push towards centralisation and professionalisation in the delivery of faith-based services.

However, this shift has produced counter-reactions from some faith traditions who are perhaps more attuned to issues of misrepresentation and having their perspectives marginalised. A Hindu faith leader who has also worked at senior management levels in local authorities observes that 'The representative model of engagement is increasingly disliked and diminishing. It encourages the faith leaders to be more prone to succumb to a positioning mentality. They feel they have to put on a persona and say "This is us" when really it isn't. You get these "pillars", and the politics goes within and between them and all this limits the potential of the people to say this is the real thing.' (Hindu faith leader, West Midlands)

A by-product of this representative model is that it encourages other faith communities to see how one group is funded and to then expect that they will receive the same level of support, rather than carrying out their own assessment of what is required and offering their own strategy for supporting it. In other words, the representative approach encourages a dependency model and a static understanding of analysis and response.

This interviewee goes on to outline an alternative model. 'Instead of sticking to this "pillars" model for interfaith work, if instead the interfaith organisation has moved to work around education, employment, criminality, then actually you are finding a different conduit to make things happen rather than the representative model. I think that local authorities can do more with their existing interfaith forums.' (Hindu faith leader, West Midlands)

A Bahai representative reflects that their local faith forum is largely made up of self-appointed representatives who cannot possibly speak for all members of that faith group. 'There is a lot of goodwill. Our local authority is very keen to have the voice of faith but it's representative rather than drilling down a bit more as to what (for example) all Muslims or Sikhs feel.' (Bahai Interfaith member, Northwest England)

The main thrust of these remarks is that the representative model of governance favoured by local authorities is in danger of holding back and excluding some of the innovation, flexibility, and diversity of faith-based response to the pandemic. The challenges but also the opportunities presented by a post-pandemic era require a more participatory approach rather than a representative one. What this looks like in practice will be addressed in later in this report.

(ii)Reimagining the financing of partnerships: towards a value-based economy?

Another area deemed to require a new mindset is the issue of how partnerships are financed. Many respondents regard the traditional funding models as no longer fit for purpose in a post COVID-19 world. Faith-based interviewees observed that the current procurement model not only reinforces a static and embedded sense of hierarchy between 'experts' (i.e., the local authority) and 'supplicants' (i.e., faith and voluntary sectors). It also favours certain types of instrumental and technical language that doesn't connect with faith communities. The old model is opaque and often favours either larger providers who can work to economies of scale, or those who already have existing contracts. It promotes suspicions of favouritism and mistrust, as the process is usually highly competitive. The other mantra from local authorities over the past decade is that their budgets have been substantially cut as part of the policy of austerity, and therefore there is no money to dispense anyway. Whilst this is true, it is a deficit-framed, rather than growth-framed, way of looking at how to solve increasingly challenging problems, and the high number of rejections of applications from the faith and voluntary sector for small amounts of money simply leads to 'low morale' (Local Authority respondent, West Midlands)

A more creative approach, accelerated by the pandemic, is to start with the problems that need to be addressed, and then come with some possible solutions and action-plans. Only then should funding be discussed. A faith leader from the West of England, whose project has received hundreds of thousands of pounds from public funds for its innovative social and mental health care work reflects, 'Funding is the last thing I ever talk about.' Rather they prefer to start with a series of inductive and open questions. 'What is God calling us to do? What's the city calling us to do? And how are we responding to God's call?' This approach immediately aligns the task of problem solving and asset allocation with personal and institutional core values, thus minimising the danger of burn out and resentment. The invitation to local authorities is to invite them to ask the same sorts of questions (but clearly without the God language) and to do to this in a parallel or in a shared space and process with their faith communities. 'We gave them (our local authority) the space to think creatively and individually and not have to reinvent the wheel every time.' (Faith-based community hub leader, West of England)

A faith lead from a rural setting in the Southwest similarly reflects that a conversation that begins from the position of 'call' rather than the position of 'resources' releases new energies and thinking that is indispensable to the needs of the moment, and planning for the future. 'I don't want to be problem-solving all the time, because economically it's a waste of money – instead of putting sticking plasters on stuff, we want to swim upstream, and let's not get hung up too much on labels or channels by which we are doing this work.'

Another creative approach to finance favoured by faith groups is to see what works at a low cost and then creatively 'outscale' it. A faith-based project leader from the North Midlands describes a community café they run, and its patronage by local addicts and other vulnerable citizens. 'It's not desperately expensive – we run our café mainly through volunteers. It's not that hard – they love doing it. It's not really expensive. It saves far more money than mental health beds – all that methadone. We pull it all together with other partners and we know all the right people who want to contribute.'

Many faith-based projects reflect remarkably good value for money because they start first and foremost with clear values that people can join and invest in for their own sense of wellbeing and satisfaction. They are also more willing to explore how to 'outscale' the impact of projects like this in ways that may require some financial resources, but without tying those resources up in endless red tape and other bureaucratic processes.

A Prevent educator lead in the North of England confirms, 'It's working together to build relationships and share assets – it's not about money. It's about everything we have, combined with the considerable insight we all have into feelings in communities and tensions.' They conclude by way of advice to other colleagues in their local authority. 'Take more time to fund the people who you can actually work co-operatively with rather than chucking money at the usual suspects.'

The experience of the pandemic has heightened the need for a more authentic, participatory, and dynamic form of governance and decision making that is both pragmatic and flexible, but also more explicitly values-led. There is increasingly coherent support for the idea of experimenting with a values-led, rather than a purely financially led, economy. In a values-led economy outcomes are framed with perhaps unusual words, uncovered by this data, to describe the hallmarks of a good partnership between local authorities and faith groups; words such as kindness, empathy, compassion, motivation, hope and friendship. This is possibly a yet still new and unfamiliar vocabulary or lexicon that might nevertheless come more into the policy mainstream as the UK attempts to build back better after COVID-19.

5. Committing to potential culture shift

As we have observed, institutional practices and mindsets arguably create a work-based culture, which is often reinforced by its own (bureaucratic) language. This language can perpetuate notions of hierarchies and ingroups (usually based on levels of perceived technical competence or institutional knowledge). It can also be impenetrable and opaque to those outside that institution or membership.

The potential for culture clashes seems pertinent to faith groups and local authorities: both have their institutional norms and hierarchies, and both come from different understandings of what might count as truth, ethics, and knowledge. This has certainly historically been the case when trying to reconcile or recognise the different integrities of religious and secular actors. A faith-based actor reflects: 'There needs to be dialogue and discussion – rather than us being defensive and saying we are going to carry on regardless. We have these cycles that you just repeat because this is the way that we work. Instead, let's think of some new ways of working and be open to do things differently.' (CEO, Faith-based charity)

There is in fact evidence to suggest, as highlighted in the first Keeping the Faith report, that the journey towards a rapprochement between local authorities and faith groups started two decades ago in the light of 9/11 and the rise of global terrorism. It picked up considerably in the decade of austerity following the global financial crash of 2007/8. It has since been turbocharged by the experience of the pandemic. A local authority respondent based in the Northwest reflects, 'We need more understanding with one another as distinctive cultures before we make the assumption about the way things work.'

However, for all the incentives and opportunities that COVID- 19 has created to develop a culture shift - from an inwardly looking to one that is outward looking - there is no guarantee that this shift will happen on its own. It will require determined, sustained, imaginative, forgiving and permission-granting work. A church leader running projects in the South of England reflects on what is entailed in preparing for a culture shift. 'As churches we are guilty of thinking we know what the community needs, and we are going to do it to them – and that has to be completely rethought. Actually, we need to hear what you have got to say and don't assume that we have all the knowledge – that is the culture shift. And the culture shift for the local authority will be made for them thinking through some of the timewasting things that are going on and giving people permission to think a bit differently and come up with more creative solutions.'

6. A commitment to talking honestly about conflict and misunderstanding

The previous sections have identified much that is positive in terms of building on good and innovative practice emerging from the pandemic. However, there was an undercurrent of experience which still points towards what one faith-based participant refers to as 'pockets of suspicion'. This word tends to crop up in relation to a misunderstanding of some of the language that is used in policy circles, or when a relatively small number of powerfully contentious issues, linked to religion, emerge in the local community.

One example of the former is supplied by a Christian faith leader in the South of England. 'When someone says, "God told me to do this" it doesn't necessarily mean that they are hearing voices in their head'. Rather, as they point out, '… the person who says this is simply trying to point out – clumsily rather than weirdly – that they consider the faith dimension of what they do as important to explain their motivation.'

A further example of linguistic misunderstanding cited by this interviewee regards the issue of fostering, demand for which has soared during the pandemic. 'Some Christian foster carers told the local authority that they felt uncomfortable at fostering Muslim children. This was heard in the first instance by the social work department as Islamophobic, until one of our workers had a conversation with the families and discovered that it was their lack of knowledge about Islam that was playing out in their anxieties about fostering Muslim children.' This faith leader relayed this information back to the Social Work Department with the result 'that they were allowed to be foster parents within a few months.'

These small-scale and day-to-day incidents inevitably play out at a wider community level which can then lead to national headlines. Current policy hotspots summarised by a senior faith advisor working for church leaders in the West Midlands include 'Geopolitical conflict and its impact on local politics in the UK, sex education and the schools' curriculum and the right of religious parents to withdraw from it, and LGBTQ rights and approaches to same-sex partnerships and marriage.' The same interviewee reflects that it is perhaps easy for local authorities and the media to take a simplistic view of these flashpoints without taking the time to fully understand the complexities that surround these cases or create a space 'for some really difficult conversations that need to happen and are going to explode.'

In their view 'these robust conversations' should happen in order establish and maintain what they call the 'working friendship' between faith groups, particularly those with very clear views that could be interpreted as being socially conservative, and local authorities. 'I have talked in our city about the way to get relationships deeper. I think there needs to be an increasing faith or spirituality literacy for civic leaders. Once they have been on it most say, "Wow I had no idea it was so complex and what that means." For example, you can't presume that one individual speaks for everyone else in that faith group.' (Senior Faith Advisor, West Midlands) This interviewee concludes, 'We need to know how to take faith groups seriously in their own terms and therefore we need to take seriously their spirituality and their beliefs and why they are doing stuff and be comfortable to let that come out. You need to find new ways of having the conversation because otherwise people just don't engage.'

7. Willingness to communicate regularly

The discussion of communication and its contribution to effective partnership working falls under several headings.

- The value of good communication in terms of publicising events taking place amongst other faith communities as well as discussions and reports that are related to the topic. Some Diversity and Engagement officers undertake the production of regular newsletters as part of their job brief, and these are highly valued and appreciated by the faiths sector.
- *Consistent communication* between local authorities and faith groups is valued for the ethos of 'trustful relationships' it communicates. A Consultation and Involvement officer in a London Borough reflects, 'Always try and be consistent in following up enquiries and keeping our language clear and easy.'
- *Communication as a two-way process*. Mistrust is created when communication is perceived as a top-down stream of information that has not been contextualised for its audience. Better communication occurs when faith groups feel as though they have a chance to influence how messaging is being received. A local authority community development officer reflects that previously, '… the council has been the big organisation that holds all the aces and can either choose to work with groups and communicate with them or not' (Community Development Officer, South of England). Now, due to the pandemic, the nature of that relationship and that communication has changed. The same interviewee observes, 'Faith groups can now hold the council better to account because they are working together. For example, they are scrutinising lots of the council's environmental acts and statements and are wanting to see how the council are going to meet these targets. But also, how the faith sector can play a part in helping the council to do that.' In other words, two-way communication at its best also engenders a sense of mutual accountability

8. Come with (data-backed) solutions

A hallmark of faith-groups' post-pandemic confidence is the ability to devise and implement solutions that councils and local authorities then adopt. 'Build relationships. Come with solutions. But also, be willing to hear other solutions. Our approach is in the first place to create places and spaces of welcome that lead to the sharing of stories which in turn lead to solutions. All are equally welcome. Our philosophy is be formed by people and not driven by projects!' (Christian faith-based welfare hub leader, London Borough).

A highly innovative solution shaped by this hub envisages the future delivery of key healthcare and welfare interventions being steered by multidisciplinary networks, including faith groups, based on where people are already congregating in the course of their daily lives. 'We are just launching this new strategy around neighbourhood networks which is basically how do you develop networks in a neighbourhood that find a way to develop mechanisms to join up those places where people already connect. It might be a corner shop café, a pharmacy, a community hall, the hairdresser. For example, what happens if the hairdresser knows who she can contact if she is worried about one of the clients like the old guy who comes to the greasy spoon and hasn't been seen for five days.' This two-year pilot is funded by the local authority with the promise of extra funding if successful - and 'all out of the experience of the pandemic' (Christian faith-based welfare hub leader, London Borough).

Other examples of innovative faith-based solutions include an interfaith-funded initiative to create fifteen mental health friendly places of worship, resourced by fifteen mental health first aiders. The success of this project has led to further conversations between mental health leads and faith leaders 'so that the service sector has a greater understanding of the connexion between faith and mental health' (Faith-based social enterprise leader, South Midlands) and further pilot projects and evaluations can be discussed. The faith-based project currently in discussion with its local authority to purchase additional houses to cater for the increase in domestic abuse victims since the pandemic, is in this position because, according to its director, it was able to provide reliable data as to the effectiveness of its work. 'Because we are getting good results preventing the frequent regular attenders to A & E, we are getting good outcomes in terms of further opportunity and collaboration.' (Christian worship hub leader, West of England)

9. Developing shared goals and action plans

A key hallmark of any good partnership was a commitment to action planning, which ensured that aspirations and good intentions were grounded in ambitious yet achievable frameworks for completion. 'Have an action plan. Be outcomes-based and have clear goals and time scales' (Interfaith Forum Leader, Home Counties). This interviewee continues, 'We, the public sector, should think about how we dedicate this type of resource [administrative resource to support plans] behind faith empowerment – because if you have that, you can really take it to the next level, and fast track a lot of lofty ambitions that the interfaith groups have.'

Some local authority representatives were clear that their vision for post-pandemic growth strategies now need to have the faith sector at their heart. 'We have a vision for the future of what we would like our faith engagement to look like, and it sits across some really tough challenges related to number 1; the pandemic and ongoing effects and 2; longer term funding and establishing a strong funding model for the sector.' (Senior Policy and Performance Officer, North of England)

Others are already planning and implementing faith strategy plans in the light of the experience of the last 12 months. 'Our faith strategy plan has four key objectives that inform how we work together: Information sharing; Shaping neighbourhoods; Learning and Development; Health and wellbeing' (Consultation and Involvement officer, London Borough). Another local authority has devised an action plan that includes '… organisational literacy, having an elected member champion and having senior officers in the organisation take a lead and promoting work with religion and belief communities.' (Safer and Stronger Communities lead, North of England)

In similar vein, a faith leader involved in co-ordinating multiple projects in their city explains how faith communities have helped to shape a city-wide action plan that goes deep into the future, thus transcending short-term and reactive policies. 'This is the civic plan for the next 30 years – it says that by 2050 our city will be a fair, healthy and sustainable city, a city of hope and aspiration where everyone can share in its success. The church brought the idea of the city of hope, and the city has adopted it as part of its basic vision statement for the next 30 years.' (Christian faith leader, West of England)

10. Telling good stories and celebrating achievement

Effective communication was seen as an integral component to any good partnership and was described as a series of different but interlocking elements. It is identified as a specific recommendation for investment going forward by many contributors:

- Tell good new stories about faith and its links to other positive stories of what is happening in localities and cities. Such a strategy would contribute to media literacy as well as counter negative stories that promote social polarisation, for example, terrorism or vaccine hesitancy. Examples that were given included the Sikh community providing langar to lorry drivers and international students stranded far from home and tree planting initiatives to combat climate emergency. As one faith representative observes, 'Keep sharing stories and plenty of chat. As soon as it gets removed, over the years you lose the magic.' (Christian Leader, West of England);
- Faith-based human-interest stories encourage local authorities to 'see beyond the data' (Pentecostal minister, London Borough). According to this interviewee, regular and positive news stories, and social media feeds 'create more empathy with local authorities and media outlets', as well as reinforcing the point 'that one size doesn't fit all'; and
- Creating spaces for the regular sharing of stories and experiences is essential for developing innovative and co-produced solutions to local problems. Such activity presupposes an attitude of hospitality and interest in the experiences of others as an essential component in sustaining good partnerships. 'In our experience, creating spaces of welcome leads to stories which lead to solutions. All are equally welcome at events that we run. We aim to be formed by people and not driven by projects, which is a huge trap.' (Christian Leader, West of England).

Section 4

Re-imagining partnership: foregrounding the relational over the procedural

In this section we convert the data from the semi-structured interviews into a framework for understanding different elements of partnership. Different permutations of these elements will influence whether partnerships between faith groups and local authorities will be resilient and flexible enough to rebuild the goods and services required for a post-pandemic future.

Different elements of partnership

This diagram condenses the ideas and data discussed in the previous section into a simplified visual representation. Rather than opting for a pyramid, which can appear hierarchical and uni-directional, this diagram seeks to work with the idea of 'levels or 'strata'.

Institutions/Entities	
Shared Goals	Procedural
Practice Innovation/Problem-solving	
Reflexivity Self Awareness/Limitations/Language/Conflict	
Transparency Shared Values/Shared Narratives/Motivation	Relational
Trust	

At the bedrock of all good partnerships is the notion of *trust*. Trust was the overwhelming criterion essential for partnership working identified by many actors across both cohorts. Above this bedrock one could place the level of *transparency* which, as defined earlier, describes '…a commitment to being open and honest about one's motivation and agendas, but also the resources one has at one's disposal and the ways in which one will distribute those resources'. We have referred to this motivational energy, picking up the terms of one of our interviewees, as spiritual capital and the suggestion being proposed here is that this values-based motivation has a key part to play in the production of other forms of capital in a mixed economy of values, finance, and social assets.

A commitment to trust and transparency also entails a degree of *reflexivity* – namely a developing awareness of one's limitations of knowledge and expertise, and the ability to handle a diversity of opinions and views (including those that might conflict with your settled perspective). Reflexivity also includes an awareness around the potential for language to be misunderstood and misinterpreted. The reflexivity level might be the one at which one might introduce interventions aimed at addressing religious and belief literacy.[9]

Emerging from these three foundational strata is *practice*, which if it has been 'filtered' through the levels below it stands a better chance, according to our interviewees, of being orientated towards innovation and problem solving. A cohesion policy officer from the West Midlands refers to this innovation as 'collective intelligence' - rather than shoring up inefficient, reactive, or outdated approaches. *Goals* are the next stratum up and both reflect and emerge from practices. All participants agree that in an ideal world they will be *shared goals* of some kind. The top strata or surface level is that of *institutions and associated entities* with which policy must interact and from where it has to begin. It is the space from which all the actors who contributed to this research speak about their experience and aspirations for the future.

Relational vs. Procedural partnerships

At the side of this framework are two terms which roughly correspond to either the top or lower three strata. The bottom three strata, namely trust, transparency and reflexivity tend to be used, according to our data, towards deepening and sustaining relationships in partnerships between faith groups and local government – i.e., they build relational capital. The top three levels tend to aim at addressing or improving procedures and technical performance. We assume that these strata address the more procedural (or surface) levels of partnership between faith groups and local authorities.

In an ideal world, our interviewees are suggesting, partnerships would be capable of delivering benefits at all these levels. In other words, the relational elements nurture the procedural ones, which in turn encourage the relational to rise to a deeper level of commitment and understanding. One can imagine channels or arrows of intent welling up from the bottom to reach the surface and trickling down from the surface to reach and replenish the bedrock of the partnership.

However, what tends to happen is that often laudable and necessary attempts at developing shared goals and innovative practice across institutional cultures rarely go down to the lower strata, but rather stay at the surface, or institutional and procedural, level.

9 Dinham, A and Francis, M. (eds.) (2018) Religious Literacy in Policy and Practice, Bristol: Polity Press

Partnerships that don't take risk of engaging with the relational levels may remain stuck at the level of the procedural and will tend to feel like they are going round in circles. This scenario was attested to in the data when interviewees were asked to describe what partnerships feel like when the hallmarks that form the basis of good partnerships were absent. Mistrust, inertia, lack of balance in meetings in terms of participation and power, long and protracted conversations which bear little or no sense of achievement, characterised by wariness, an ease in attaching blame, the sense of 'closed shops', a sense of drift, and 'tokenistic'; these are all terms and perceptions used by both parties. 'When trust is absent it doesn't work. The communication goes and then you are not aware of what is happening – and this where the danger lies' (Senior Advisor, Equalities and Partnership team, South of England).

Section 5

The difference a pandemic makes – shifting policy discourses on local authorities and faith groups

Since the arrival of COVID-19 in the UK and the first lockdown in March 2020, there has been a growth in the number of conceptual policy frameworks deployed to try and capture the new relationship between faith and society that the pandemic has ushered in. These concepts seem to hover and move between three poles: Covenant, New Deal and Compact. Each term carries a different but important nuance and emphasis. In this section, we locate the findings and recommendations of this report within the broader flows of the current terms of this debate.

From a Covenant to a New Deal model

Since the publication of the original *Keeping the Faith* report in November 2020, the policy landscape has already shifted in the some of the directions it anticipated. The report, due to its commissioning by the APPG on Faith and Society, directed some of its attention to the reception of the Faith Covenant initiative, which is currently being developed by FaithAction, the Secretariat of the APPG on Faith and Society.

Launched in 2014, the Covenant is designed as a framework of principles to guide engagement between local authorities and faith communities. From a local authority perspective, these principles include ensuring the right of freedom to practise belief without restriction and free from discrimination. They also include welcoming the practical experience and participation that faith groups bring and being open to this participation being funded from a variety of different sources including, where appropriate, public funding.

Faith groups in return commit to actively deliver public services to the whole community irrespective of belief or identity, but particularly in respect to the poorest and most isolated members of society. They pledge to do this at the appropriate level of professional standards. There is also a commitment from both sides to share training and learning opportunities whenever possible and appropriate. There are currently 24 local authorities across England who have signed up to the Covenant process, covering 5 million people. The principles and practices associated with the Covenant are being shaped and implemented in localised and contextualised ways, rather than being implemented and monitored centrally.

The other element shaping the reception of the original *Keeping the Faith* report was the Kruger report, *Levelling up our communities: proposals for a new social covenant* published in September 2020. It was commissioned by the Prime Minister, Boris Johnson to understand and build on the upsurge in volunteering and organised self-help inspired by the pandemic, but also the 'innovation, flexibility and can-do spirit from charities and social enterprise', as well as 'the unprecedented

degrees of collaboration between local authorities, the public sector and civil society; and businesses of all sizes stepping forward to support communities' (p.5). The Prime Minister specifically requested that the report develops proposals to 'maximise the role of volunteers, community groups, faith groups, charities and social enterprises to contribute actively to the government's levelling up agenda' (p.5).

In short, the Kruger report is tasked with the job of trying to 'bottle' the community spirit and innovation generated by the unprecedented conditions of the pandemic for use in developing future economic and social policy.

Interestingly, as part of its attempt to define the essence of this community spirit, the Kruger report deploys the idea of *covenant* as a core organising theme. However, it expands its meaning to cover all aspects of civic engagement and policy, not just the relationships between local authorities and faith communities. According to Danny Kruger, Conservative MP for Devises and the author of the report, the language of covenant is preferred because '…it is both more substantial and less transactional than a "social contract", the common phrase to describe the respective duties of citizen and state'. Covenant is also the word or idea that best communicates the sense of mutuality that needs to be restored to the policy sphere, namely, 'the mutual commitment by citizens, civil society and the state, each to fulfil their discrete responsibilities and to work together for the common good of all' (p.14).

This sense of mutuality is envisaged under three policy headings with recommendations attached to each: Power, People and Places. A central plank of the People strand is entitled 'A New Deal with Faith Communities'. This section reminds the policy world of the historically significant contribution faith communities made to the social advancement and betterment of society, long before the Welfare State, but equally now to the fore again within the context of austerity and the pandemic. The sources of this contribution are values and motivations derived from belief, networks, resources, and independence from outside official channels. This independence historically has led to mistrust from secular agencies, bordering sometimes on intentional prejudice (what Kruger refers to as 'faith phobia') on the part of public servants, thus eroding the true plurality of the public square (p.36).

With these ideas in mind, the Kruger report recommends a new deal with (not for) faith communities, which involves each faith community at a national and local level committing 'to mobilise their congregations and commit their resources to tackling one or more besetting social problems in our society' (p.36). Whilst this general sentiment is nothing new and describes what many faith communities are doing already, the new deal envisaged by the Kruger report does seem to envisage a more rigorously framed and strategic type of policy partnership. Faith communities at local and national level could receive a heavy steer from government as to the policy issues they will be expected to address. Indeed, the report at one point suggests that faith groups 'may be asked to choose, from a menu of missions, one that suits local needs and capabilities' (p.36). In addition, faith groups will have to agree with government 'a way of working, including where appropriate, a set of proven interventions and methodologies, which it would deliver with the permission of the relevant statutory agencies'. Once their methodologies and interventions have been approved by government (the assumption seems to be that this is central government) the faith group in question would 'commit to fully funding this work from its own resources' (p.36).

In return for this approved and funded work, the government could direct all public servants (including at the highest level) to facilitate the work of the faith groups in respect to the 'agreed mission or missions'. This will include a 'duty of cooperation' attached to all

public grants and contracts with faith groups which local authorities and public sector providers would have to sign. However, the implication is that this 'duty of cooperation' could only be issued once faith groups are approved as fit for purpose providers that public sector organisations can – presumably via some, albeit 'light-touch' licensing or kite-marking system – signpost resources to with confidence (p.36).

The New Deal model appears to mark a decisive shift of mindset over the role of faith in the policy arena by building on the growing trust, confidence and mutual respect developed between local authorities and faith groups during the pandemic, much of which is captured in the first Keeping the Faith report.

From a New Deal to a Compact model

In September 2021, the government launched its Faith New Deal Pilot Fund (henceforth FND Pilot Fund). This created a competitive grant programme worth a million pounds to support faith-based organisations who wish to use their resources and transferable knowledge in respect to building trust and strengthening engagement between national and local government and faith groups. The prospectus picks up key themes identified in the Kruger report including the aim to 'reset the public sector's mindset towards faith groups' and to create a culture in which 'local public services routinely invite faith groups to co-design solutions to social problems and commission services with confidence'.[10] The funding call, echoing a key concept deployed in the original Keeping the Faith report refers twice to the importance of 'embedding a new normal' of national and local government partnership working with faith-based groups.

It also identifies more clearly than the Kruger report, the five policy areas (designated as post-COVID-19 recovery objectives) that faith groups will be expected to apply to for government approval. These include:

- Mental wellbeing and loneliness;
- Debt advice;
- Employability;
- Food poverty; and
- Increasing community engagement through volunteering.

A further policy idea for framing the post-pandemic landscape between religion, belief and policy emerges from this prospectus. The good practice and innovation generated by the FND Pilot Fund could feed into the development of a new Faith Compact, which currently is simply described as a 'set of partnership principles for sustainable collaboration and partnership working between national government, local government, and faith communities'.

At the time of writing this report, the successful entries to the FND Pilot Fund have not yet been announced. However, the policy trajectory has shifted from the concept of Covenant to that of a Compact via the language of a New Deal. The language is therefore appearing to signal a move from a governance model based on ideas of the voluntary and unregulated, to something that is more formally binding. Here, governance is defined as the potential willingness and ability to sign up to a pre-defined list of policy objectives, which will also carry with it a degree of professionally binding regulation and monitoring criteria that are centrally defined by the State. The idea of governance seems to be moving from a more informal and consensual model to one that is more systematised and accountable.

10 https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/faith-new-deal-pilot-fund (accessed January 9th, 2021)

Most recently, the conceptual framing appears to be circling back to the idea of the theme of covenant, with a recent Levelling Up White Paper focussing on the idea of community covenants. In line with the earlier thinking contained in the Kruger report, the idea of covenant is being imagined in a more generic sense as 'agreements between councils, public bodies and the communities they serve, seeking to harness the energy, know-how and assets of local communities.' In addition, the White Paper envisages that these community covenants '… would also set out how local social capital and infrastructure can be built and sustained to encourage confident and active communities. A Covenant approach would see local authorities and communities work together to take a holistic look at the health of local civic and community life, set out a driving ambition for their area, and share power and resources to achieve this.'

The reference to holistic vision envisages the possibility of new sorts of partnership in which values, motivation and relationships are more firmly imagined alongside the economic and technical aspects of welfare delivery. Faith groups, having high capacity in many of these areas, much of it brought into new strategic focus by the pandemic, would be well-placed to bring their resources to bear as part of such a vision.

In conclusion to this section, we note that this volume of policy debate marks some major shifts in expectation and understanding of the value of faith-based social action at a time of national need and emergency. Faith groups will doubtless welcome this renewed attention and appreciation, and the opportunity to contribute goods and services without being required to 'edit out' their core religious values and beliefs. But as the latest references to community covenants shows, there is still considerable fluidity and lack of specific definitions around terminology and expectations across faith and secular experience and practice, and as the Government suggests elsewhere in the White Paper, it will 'learn through experimentation and doing what these community covenants look like and how they might function'.

In the final section of this report, we therefore go on to outline a set of proposals that might make a practical contribution to this process of experimentation and reflection on emerging best practice. The eight areas of development and training being proposed are envisaged to develop deeper working relationships between local authorities and faith groups. But although these areas emerge from the specific experience of local authority and faith groups, they also emerge from common wisdom and insight as to what makes for more effective partnerships. This means our recommendations are applicable to all attempts to build back better on the basis of deeper trust, transparency and relationship building across difference and diversity.

Section 6
Principles and practices for post-pandemic partnerships

During our analysis, we have discovered that three significant areas of growth in the relationships between local authorities and faith groups were attributed to the pandemic. These were:

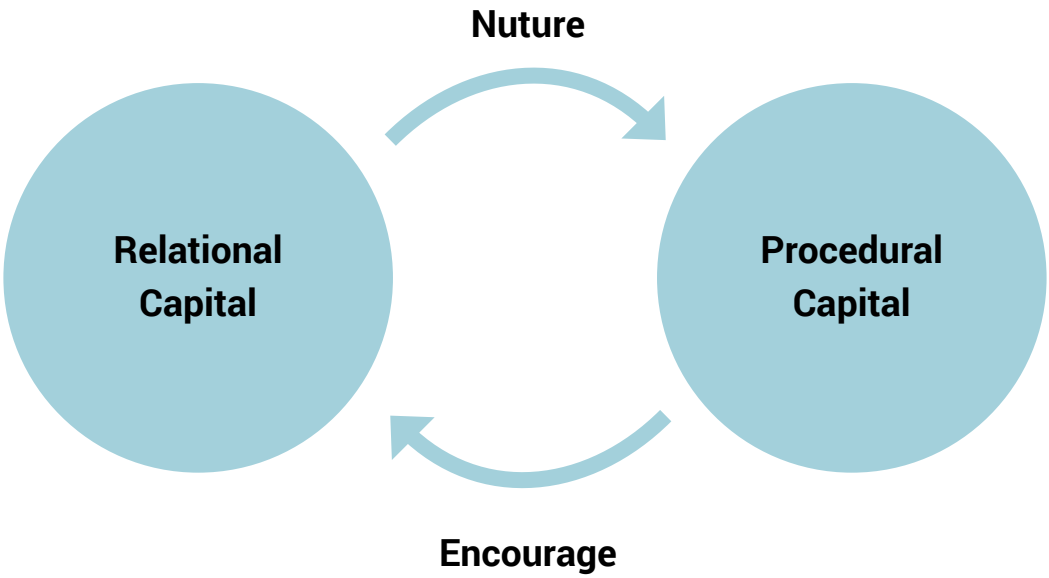
- An enhanced sense of confidence and power for faith groups;
- Deeper relationships forged out of the experience of the pandemic; and
- Deeper innovation generated out the experience of the pandemic.

We have also distilled ten aspects of what both cohorts independently view as essential to the development and sustaining of good partnerships. These include:

- Developing Trust;
- Cultivating Transparency;
- Sharing values, ethos, and motivation;
- Embracing new mindsets, including reimagining the structures of governance and finance;
- Committing to potential culture shift;
- A commitment to talking honestly about conflict and misunderstanding;
- A willingness to communicate regularly;
- Coming with data-backed solutions;
- Developing shared goals (derived from shared values) and action plans; and
- Telling good stories and celebrating achievements.

Finally, we have identified six different elements or dimensions of partnership from the data which we propose operate at two levels and not in isolation. The first level we have labelled the 'procedural' dimensions and include such elements as formalising institution to institution co-operation, devising shared goals and attempting to innovate shared responses to often deep-rooted problems. The second level we have called the 'relational' dimensions, and they include a commitment to reflexivity, transparency, and trust.

The aim of the framework that follows is to create a virtuous cycle between the procedural and the relational, whereby the one adds value to the other in the context of deeper and more sustainable partnership working.



Out of these various findings we propose four principles that distil the essence of what has been learned about effective and sustainable partnerships during the pandemic. These four principles are embedded into practice with the help of eight proposed areas of development and investment between local authorities and faith groups which we elaborate here.

Principle 1: Encouraging values

This principle could have two elements of training, work packages and development attached to it.

Development Area 1: Articulating values

We have recorded in both reports the many ways in which the challenging and existential threat posed by the pandemic forced all parties to focus on how individuals wanted to express how they lived, worked, and contributed to their communities. In a time of crisis, when usual assumptions and protocols were found to be inadequate, certain values helped provide a coherent moral and commonly understood framework into which practical decision-making could be funnelled. These values included: compassion, social justice (including an end to discrimination and poverty), friendship, an ethos of service, kindness, empathy, and hope.

The hope articulated by the participants is that identifying and sharing values in the context of policy should not just be practice of last resort, but in fact be an established principle of partnership going forward. This not only establishes a more ethical approach to locality development, but as already reported, creates significant improvements in impact, productivity, and the general quality of the goods and services being provided.

More research and training could focus on understanding the changes in attitude and practice that occur when these values and virtues are placed more centre stage, rather than an afterthought or subject to a tick-box exercise.

Development Area 2: Sharing sources of motivation

The other dimension related to the principle of Encouraging Values, is the idea of sharing sources of motivation. Extensive evidence from this research, in line with the Kruger report, showed how the pandemic appeared to release a desire in people to volunteer and to make a tangible difference to their local communities. This desire to reconnect with others, to make a difference and in some instances to radically re-orientate the priorities of one's life, is vital to maintain if we are to keep the momentum going towards participation in, and democratisation of, local life.

The way to do this, proposed by both of our research cohorts, is to ensure that the desire to become involved and make a contribution is aligned to our deepest values and beliefs. In other words, we need to move to more inclusive and hospitable policy spaces where beliefs, values and worldviews can be 'edited in' to decision making and implementation processes, rather than 'edited out', which was generally the default position under the 'old normal' relationships between local authorities and faith groups

Of course, creating opportunities for 'editing in' sources of motivation will require a light but confident touch so that it doesn't unnecessarily impede the proper processes of strategic decision making. *However, there is widespread agreement that a more explicit shift in this direction is an essential requirement of the 'new normal', and that training and sharing around best and effective practice could be an important element in sustainable partnership working.*

Principle 2: Deepening Knowledge

This principle could have two elements of training, work packages and development attached to it.

Development Area 3: Appreciating Assets

Faith-based contributions to policy uncovered by this research comes in the form of both 'hard' and 'soft' assets. Hard assets include contributions in the form of physical space for the provision of vaccinations, test and trace facilities and emergency food supply and distribution outlets. It also includes trained volunteers as well as paid workers whose work is increasingly invaluable as society begins to rebuild the lives of traumatised individuals as well as larger sections of society and localities.

'Soft' infrastructure assets, highlighted once more by the current conditions, include the leadership that has been supplied by the faith sector. This leadership not only applies to the management of large multi-agency providers with increasingly big budgets. It also refers to levels of expertise developed within the faith sector in developing practice innovation, new policy ideas and strategic visioning, and training and mentorship.

Appreciating these complementary skillsets and assets is vital to building deeper and more sustainable partnerships in the future. Our research indicates that both local authorities and faith groups rose to their very best selves in response to the pandemic in terms of their creativity, flexibility, innovation, and hospitality in sharing key skills and assets. *It would be desirable to build into future decision-making regular opportunities to audit and reflect together on the skills, assets and leadership that have been built up over successive waves of the pandemic.* These processes will help ensure greater complementarity and synergy of output and response, based on greater knowledge and appreciation of what each partner brings. It will also minimise experiences of instrumentality that have often characterised joint working between faith groups and local authorities in the past.

Development Area 4: Appreciating different expressions of language

A key step in creating and sustaining deeper partnerships is recognising the need to change mind sets and embrace culture change. These processes are often hard to track and evaluate and rely instead on what can feel like tick-boxing exercises. However, evidence that these changes are happening can be found in the type of language being used by both partners to identify the shared space they now feel they are inhabiting, and the priorities they sense they now share. This research has detected a growing willingness to name those foundational values and aspirations (such as compassion, empathy, social justice) that are shared across ideological divides, and which are considered by both parties of sufficiently radical depth to speak into the unprecedented nature of the post-pandemic challenges facing UK society.

This shared lexicon, that appears to be emerging organically, can be a bridge into a more honest reflection about language and how it is often used to perpetuate, rather than lower, barriers. Under the 'old normal', language used in partnerships was experienced as deeply alienating and disinhibiting because it created a narrow and often stereotypical expectation of how the other behaved. It could also reinforce hierarchical types of relationships that assumed that the inability to understand 'inhouse' or technical language signalled deficiency in necessary wisdom and understanding.

A central challenge posed by the new normal is to ensure that attentiveness to language and meaning is maintained, and not considered irrelevant or unimportant. Starting from the position of shared or overlapping words to describe what is going on and what needs to happen can bypass divisive and top-down approaches to religion and belief literacy that assume there are gaps in knowledge that need to be filled, rather than celebrating what already exists and is present. *We propose that opportunities to acknowledge and reflect on the language being used in our policy spaces will be beneficial. Also beginning policy discussions with a question like 'If empathy/compassion/kindness/social justice etc. was the starting point of what we want to achieve, what does that look like in practice?' could also have a transforming effect.*

Principle 3: Nurturing Vision

This principle could have two elements of training, work packages and development attached to it.

Development Area 5: Reforming governance

As well as the use of language, another key indicator of a shift in mindset and culture is the approach to models of governance. As noted in the main body of the report, shifts to more egalitarian understandings and practices of governance help release a deeper and more shared vision for change, which potentially releases more innovation and efficiency. In effect what is required is a 'letting go' of the idea that any one party is the sole expert in technical proficiency, project management or leadership skills, given the depth and range of the challenges our society now faces. Ideas of tiered or 'pillared' forms of governance and accountability were criticised for not reflecting the nature of the pandemic partnerships being formed at the grassroots level. *We need to incorporate strategic opportunities to explore different models of governance based on case studies across the UK into our strategy forming processes to support this vital element of partnership going forward.*

Development Area 6: Giving permission for experimentation

This area reinforces the idea that the COVID-19 pandemic has acted as a 'permission' space for both religious and secular institutions to step into new and uncharted spaces of innovation, trust, and collaboration for the sake of 'building back better' out of the pandemic. Several contributors proposed that different models of finance be considered that 'out scaled' (rather than 'upscaled') small-scale and successful projects run by faith groups and others. These projects harness grassroots knowledge and

capacity rather than relying on centralised and outsourced solutions that were often more expensive and inefficient. They were also considered to be better at staying aligned to those core principles and values identified in our new policy lexicon.

More work should be undertaken to explore the idea of 'giving permission' and what it means in practice; what are the perceived and recognised benefits to such an approach from areas and neighbourhoods where this has been sanctioned; what are the anxieties and fears surrounding the term; what are the realistic expectations that can be held by such an approach; what do models of accountability and governance look like from this perspective?

Principle 4: Promoting innovation

This principle could have two elements of training, work packages and development attached to it.

Development Area 7: Transparency around processes of funding and procurement

As defined earlier, transparency involves '… a commitment to being open and honest about one's motivation and agendas, but also the resources one has at one's disposal and the ways in which one will distribute those resources'. The issue of resources – how much is available, who has access to what, how money is distributed – can be a major inhibitor to innovation if partners suspect hidden agendas. This perception not only undermines relationship-building, but continued rejection for funding applications, or receiving information at second hand, can be morale crushing rather than morale boosting.

We propose more work be done to pilot and promote effective practices of information sharing and distribution of public funding in pursuit of innovative ways of addressing local objectives and priorities as a commitment to enhanced transparency.

Another way of ensuring transparency over funding and procurement is the creation of joint enterprises, co-managed by local authorities and groups with proven track records in procurement and effective management of public funding; for example, developing jointly managed social enterprises, so that financial investment and distribution is visible and equally accessible to all parties from the very beginning. A task force could be established to explore this specific issue further.

Development Area 8: Co-creating and co-producing solutions

Our data highlights the importance of sharing stories and experiences of 'what works' as a way of consolidating a sense of excitement and practical innovation in the service of enhanced co-creation and co-production. Co-production is traditionally understood as a bureaucratic and technical process whereby stakeholders and/or consumers are involved in the delivery of a service, and usually at a later stage in the production cycle.[11] In other words, several key decisions regarding the scope, purpose and intended impact of the service have already been decided by a single party in advance. This approach reflects a pre-pandemic, or 'old normal' approach to partnership; one that no doubt aims to be enlightened and progressive, but which fails to tap into the experience, knowledge, motivation, and passion for change of those most directly affected.

Co-creation on the other hand, tends to demarcate a more radically open space, whereby citizens are not merely co-implementers of a service. They are also co-initiators (i.e., identifying the problematic that needs to be addressed and getting processes underway) as well as co-designers (of the goods or services proposed to meet the challenges of the problematic). In the spirit of the several examples uncovered by this research, we suggest that the idea of co-creation is more redolent of a 'new-normal' rather than the 'old normal' policy framework.

More could be done reflecting on the theme of co-creation and what it entails for key aspects of local government and faith-based institutions and structures, as well as approaches to culture, disposition, governance, participation, leadership, and impact evaluation. This reflection and analysis might at some point lead to more effective policy frameworks and guidance in this area.

11 See Taco Brandsen and Marlies Honingh for a helpful discussion of these terms in Co-Production and Co-Creation edited by Taco Brandsen, Trui Steen and Bram Verschuere (Routledge, 2018)

Conclusion: A proposed way forward

The sampling for this report was a purposive rather than a representative one but has nevertheless afforded the opportunity for rich detail and ideas to be explored. It has outlined in greater depth and clarity the contours of the new partnership landscape that has opened up between local authorities and faith groups under the exigences of the pandemic.

It is envisaged that the eight areas of development, broadly outlined above, can be broken down into a series of discreet or joined up toolkits and training sessions that could be run for local authorities and/or faith communities and other sectors together. They could be deployed in the enhancement and sustainability of either new Faith Compacts or Community Covenants (or both) currently being proposed across various policy themes by HM Government (see above section). These toolkits could help embed the new mindset for partnerships envisaged by the various levelling up and building back agendas at present being debated. They would allow local processes to be validated by national standards but would also allow plenty of scope for local deliberation, reflection, and implementation. These toolkits would be co-created, rather than co-produced, by teams of collaborators with grassroots practice and frontline experience at their core, and co-ordinated by the present partners (the Faiths and Civil Society Unit at Goldsmiths and FaithAction) under the continuing auspices of the APPG on Faith and Society.

Finally, and in line with the recommendations of the original *Keeping the Faith* report, we re-iterate the proposal for a newly-appointed Faiths Commissioner, who would act as a national focal point for:

- the sharing and critical reflection on best and innovative practice of faith-based and local authority partnership working as a contribution to more holistic patterns of partnership development;
- the encouragement of funding and further research in this area; and
- the development of better policy around the governance, funding and inclusion of religion and belief (including no-religion beliefs, values, and worldviews) in local authority structures and decision making.

Appendix 1

Twenty ideas for policy change to the next level

These suggestions emerge from the final section of the interview schedule, where participants were asked to nominate three policy initiatives or changes to existing arrangements that would take partnership working between local authority and faith groups to the next level.

Planning and housing

1. Faith groups repurpose their surplus buildings and property for decent housing for vulnerable groups, but especially refugees and asylum seekers and those fleeing domestic abuse.
2. Faith groups work with wider CVS and local authorities to repurpose empty town centre sites to generate footfall and local economic activity around food, hospitality, art, culture, performing arts, child-centred spaces of learning and encounter and social enterprises, together with spaces for worship and reflection/meditation.
3. Conduct local audits of all available spaces from faith sector, CVS, and local authorities to enable accessible and affordable space for public activities and programmes.

Mental health, clinical and public health

4. Designate more funding for mental health, wellbeing, and social care to build on innovative partnerships.
5. Develop holistic public health and clinical care resources that are integrated within existing worship centres that can act as a trusted bridge between community use and quality health provision.
6. Commission impact assessment research in mental health and illness prevention outcomes derived from faith-based practices and partnerships.

Poverty, inequality, and the economy

7. Faith engagement with education (including faith-based schools) to address digital exclusion (for example working with faith schools to re-cycle old laptops and mobile phones).
8. Support and develop faith-based social enterprise as part of a local economic development plan.
9. Outscale existing multi-faith centres into hubs and ‘one-stop shops’; not only space for discussion and co-ordination but also strategic centres for messaging, training, and clinical and public health care provision.

Promote policy best practice and policy innovation

10. Co-produce locally themed conferences three or four times a year to address and explore multiagency and cross-cutting responses to specific issues: for example, knife crime and anti-social behaviour, domestic violence Islamophobia, etc.
11. Commission democracy and participation pilot studies to specifically explore ideas and address best practice around more participative forms of governance and values-based economy.
12. Commission a process of religion and belief literacy as a contribution to culture shift in all partners.
13. Create safe spaces for discussion about shared values and motivations and their implications for practice and relations.
14. Network good practice between cities and regions and explore twinning arrangements to share experience and strategies for change.
15. Develop a five-year faith action plan that is connected to other cross-cutting policies; for example, climate emergency planning, equalities and cohesion frameworks, integrated care systems and pandemic recovery framework strategies.
16. Initiate and pilot a kitemark or quality assurance mechanism for faith groups that is recognised by local authorities, and functions as benchmarking tool that allows them to assess and then improve partnership working with the faith sector.
17. Remove commissioning barriers to grants under £250K to help fast-track innovation and emergency response planning by faith and other CVS groups.
18. Invest in local comprehensive communications strategies which tell good news stories about faith-secular and interfaith partnerships and ensures minority faith and ethnic group experience is also valorised.
19. A national annual faith groups/local authority conference to provide a focus and impetus for innovation for more localised and grassroots work (hosted by the new Faith's Commissioner).
20. Boost awareness of the Faith Covenant, and revise and strengthen its remit in the light of the experience of the pandemic.

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