



All Party Parliamentary Group on Faith and Society

2014-15 Summary Report
June 2015

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Introduction

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

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

We are grateful to the group's officers, who in 2014-15 were the following:

Chair: Rt Hon Stephen Timms MP

Vice Chair: Fiona Bruce MP

Vice Chair: Gary Streeter MP

Vice Chair: Tim Farron MP

Vice Chair: Baroness Neuberger

Vice Chair: Baroness Sherlock

Secretary: David Lammy MP

Treasurer: Lord Indarjit Singh

At the Annual General Meeting on 16 June 2015, officers were elected as follows, with FaithAction maintaining its secretariat role:

Chair: Rt Hon Stephen Timms MP

Vice Chair: Gary Streeter MP

Vice Chair: Fiona Bruce MP

Vice Chair: Baroness Neuberger

Vice Chair: Rt Hon the Lord Tyler

Secretary: David Lammy MP

Treasurer: Steve Double MP

The aims of the group are:

1. To promote understanding of faith-based organisations engaged in social action in the UK, and recognition of their value;
2. To highlight the social, civic and spiritual capital that faith-based organisations contribute to communities throughout the UK, and to identify and promote best practice among organisations;
3. To consider regulatory and legislative arrangements which can make the most of the potential contribution of faith-based organisations;
4. To learn from and contribute to international conversations, policy and civic action on the contribution of faith-based organisations.

The APPG website is www.faihandssociety.org

The Covenant

Background

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

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

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

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

The full text of the Covenant can be found in the Appendix to this report. The Covenant is a joint commitment between faith communities and local authorities to a set of principles that guide engagement, aiming to remove some of the mistrust that exists and to promote open, practical working on all levels.

Adoption of the Covenant

Birmingham City Council and faith leaders in Birmingham became the first to adopt the Covenant, at a public launch held at the Library of Birmingham on 11 December 2014. The event marked the culmination of a lengthy process of negotiation and agreement among different council and faith representatives – but the successful signing of the Covenant in what is Europe's largest local authority sets an exciting precedent for other areas to follow.

Alongside the adoption of the Covenant, Birmingham City Council has supported the formation of a faith leaders' network. FaithAction will continue to work with the council and the network over coming months to help facilitate joint working.

“Faith communities have always been called upon to tackle hardship and need in our communities. It is the absolute bedrock of what it means to have faith, and people of faith were serving their communities long before the state ever woke up to the fact that it had responsibilities, too.

“Every day our faith groups give an enormous amount to Birmingham, and do so in the ever-changing landscape of public services. The Faith Covenant provides a set of working principles that help us all get the biggest social benefit out of this partnership, as those public services continue to change.”

Cllr James McKay, Cabinet Member for Social Cohesion, Equalities and Community Safety, Birmingham City Council



Birmingham City Council and faith group representatives, pictured with APPG Chair, the Rt Hon Stephen Timms MP, sign the Covenant



“On a global level, we are seeing the resurgence of faith and it is too significant to ignore. As service providers, faith communities bring professional abilities and values like humility, compassion and cultural sensitivity to the public sphere. The cooperation between local government and faith communities is a significant development and we thank the APPG and FaithAction for taking a lead on this work.”

Bhai Sahib Bhai Dr Mohinder Singh Ahluwalia,
Chairman of Guru Nanak Nishkam Sewak Jatha and Nishkam Civic Association

Leeds was the second local area to adopt the Covenant, with representatives from Leeds City Council and the Leeds Faiths Forum signing it on 5 March 2015. A steering group has been established to help put the principles of the Covenant into practice, and FaithAction will continue to offer this group support.



Cllr Peter Gruen of Leeds City Council, Revd Canon Charles Dobbin of Leeds Faiths Forum and Daniel Singleton of FaithAction (left) and other Council and faith group representatives (right) sign the Covenant

"We are delighted to sign this Covenant, which underlines the council's ongoing commitment to build positive relationships and partnerships with all faith and belief groups in our city.

"Included in the Covenant are a range of principles which will guide our future work with faith and belief groups. This will not only be beneficial in helping us engage better with residents in our communities, but also inform how the delivery of important council services can be further improved."

Cllr Peter Gruen, Chair of the Adult Social Services, Public Health and NHS Scrutiny Board, Leeds City Council

The next areas due to adopt the Covenant are Northamptonshire and the London Borough of Barnet, and FaithAction is working with several other local councils that have expressed interest. FaithAction is also developing a package of support for local areas that have adopted or are planning to adopt the Covenant, to facilitate joint working between commissioners and faith groups and identify the impacts that this has.

Other Activity in 2014-15

Launch of the Housing Justice Shelter Quality Mark

On 27 November the APPG and the charity Housing Justice hosted a reception at the House of Commons to mark the launch of the Housing Justice Shelter Quality Mark. The Quality Mark is designed to support churches and other groups who wish to run a night shelter for homeless people in their premises. The scheme offers advice, support, training and all the resources needed to help get a night shelter set up and established. The Quality Mark is also designed to be used by existing church night shelters as a standard of excellence, assuring funders, local authorities, insurers and the local community that the shelter is run to the highest standard. Further information is available at www.housingjustice.org.uk



Rt Hon Stephen Timms MP, Alastair Murray of Housing Justice, Daniel Singleton of FaithAction and guests at the Shelter Quality Mark launch

The way in which church night shelters work is described in FaithAction's recent report, *What a Difference Faith Makes...to Homelessness*, alongside many other case studies that demonstrate faith-based activity in the UK in response to issues of homelessness. The report identifies the 'faith factors' that make this work unique, and sets out recommendations for both faith groups and government. It is available at www.faithaction.net/portal/faith-and-health/our-projects/homelessness

Beyond Forgiving

The APPG held a special roundtable event on 22 May 2014 in association with Initiatives of Change (IofC). IofC works to inspire, equip and connect people to address world needs, starting with themselves, in the areas of trust building, ethical leadership and sustainable living.



The event featured a screening of part of the award-winning documentary film 'Beyond Forgiving', alongside a discussion with the film's two protagonists. Letlapa Mphahlele is a former freedom fighter and President of the Pan African Congress. In 1993 he gave the order for an attack on the Heidelberg Tavern in Cape Town, in retaliation for the killing of black school children by South African Defence Forces. Ginn Fourie's daughter Lyndi was killed in the attack. The film tells the story of how Ginn decided to forgive Letlapa, and of the transformative effects of that action.

The objectives of the day included: evaluating the part that faith can bring in releasing forgiveness and realising reconciliation; raising public awareness of how restorative justice can operate in communities; and highlighting how the act of storytelling can help bring about reconciliation. In keeping with the IofC approach of starting with the individual, after the film screening Ginn asked those present to reflect on how it made them feel, and then to share their impressions with their neighbour. This led to a wide-ranging discussion chaired by the Rt Hon Stephen Timms MP and Daniel Singleton of FaithAction, covering topics including: restorative justice; the nature of forgiveness; the historical role of Britain in the world; and the responsibility of the individual.

Plans for 2015-16



On 15 July 2015 a parliamentary reception for faith leaders will be held in conjunction with Restored, the Christian-based charity working to combat violence against women and girls, and FaithAction. The event, to launch a faith leaders' charter against domestic abuse, will be hosted by Lord McColl of Dulwich and takes place in the Attlee Suite from 6:30-8:30pm. For further information contact Felicity Smith, felicity.smith@faithaction.net or 0845 094 6350.

Support for local areas as they adopt the Covenant, as described above, will form a key part of the APPG's work in coming months.

In addition, we plan to explore how faith groups can be involve in supporting the delivery of health services in their local areas, and to highlight instances of where faith groups and health services have worked successfully together, with positive outcomes for communities. This will build on FaithAction's work on the links between faith and public health (a summary of the FaithAction symposium on faith and public health, held in September 2014, has been distributed to APPG members).

The group could also explore the work that faith-based groups are doing with offenders. Daniel Singleton of FaithAction has attended an initial meeting with the Rt Revd James Langstaff, Bishop of Rochester and Bishop to Prisons. The Bishop has been approached by Christians in Probation about an idea to create a relationship between churches and probation services, whereby churches are seen as a resource for probation in a way similar to that in which Street Pastors currently provide a resource to the police. The idea and how it might work is currently being considered by representatives from the probation services, prison chaplains and others.

Appendix: The Covenant for engagement

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

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

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

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

The Covenant principles are currently in draft form. Local authorities that are interested in adopting the Covenant should contact FaithAction.

The Covenant

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

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

The Covenant is built on the following principles:

- Faith communities are free to practise their beliefs and religious observances without restriction, and to raise their voice in public debate and to be respected, within the framework of UK law.
- Public services and faith based social action should respect service users from all backgrounds, with no discrimination on the grounds of religion, gender, marital status, race, ethnic origin, age, sexual orientation, mental capability or long term condition.
- The voice, participation and solutions that faith communities bring are important, and consultation should enable them to be brought to bear for the benefit of the wider community.
- Organisations and services are stronger for drawing on diverse sources of funding; monopolies of funding, action and participation are damaging

The Covenant entails the following commitments:

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

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

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

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



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

For more information visit

www.faithaction.net

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