



# All-Party Parliamentary Group on Faith and Society

2016-17 Summary Report  
August 2017

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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 2016-17 were the following:

Chair: Rt Hon Stephen Timms MP  
Vice Chair: Gary Streeter MP  
Vice Chair: Fiona Bruce MP  
Vice Chair: The Baroness Neuberger DBE  
Vice Chair: Rt Hon the Lord Tyler  
Secretary: Rt Hon David Lammy MP  
Treasurer: Steve Double MP

At the group's inaugural meeting of the new Parliament on 18 July 2017, the following officers were elected, with FaithAction maintaining its secretariat role:

Chair: Rt Hon Stephen Timms MP  
Vice Chair: Gary Streeter MP  
Vice Chair: Fiona Bruce MP  
Vice Chair: The Baroness Neuberger DBE  
Vice Chair: The Lord Singh of Wimbledon CBE  
Secretary: Rt Hon David Lammy MP  
Treasurer: Steve Double MP

The aims of the group are:

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

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

## The Faith Covenant

The roll-out of the Faith Covenant continues to be the focus for most of the APPG's public work.

The Covenant emerged from a series of roundtable meetings held by the APPG in 2012 to explore the work of faith-based organisations. 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. For further information on the development of the Faith Covenant, and its text, see the Appendix.

## Updates on Covenant activity

The Covenant has been signed in **Birmingham, Leeds, Northamptonshire, Barnet, Solihull, and Calderdale**, meaning that over 3.25 million people live in areas that have adopted it.

FaithAction continues to offer advice and support to faith groups and/or councils in areas that are considering adopting the covenant, as well as connecting them with existing Covenant areas in order to share learning. The following are known to be currently considering adopting a Faith Covenant:

- London Borough of Brent
- Brighton and Hove
- Blackpool
- London Borough of Enfield
- Essex
- London Borough of Hackney
- Plymouth
- Walsall
- Wolverhampton

Recent activity in those areas that have already adopted the Covenant includes:

**Barnet** – the Covenant has been named in the area's Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy as the basis for engagement with faith communities. Barnet Multi Faith Forum and Barnet Council have worked in partnership with other key organisations in the borough to run 'Celebration Barnet Unity in the Community: A Festival of Faith & Culture', with funding and staff time from the Council. The forum and council have also issued joint statements condemning recent terrorist incidents.

*"The Covenant will be upheld in the design and delivery of the activities described in the JHWB Strategy as faith communities are a valuable partner for improving health and wellbeing in the borough."*

Keeping Well, Promoting Independence: A Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy  
2015 – 2020, London Borough of Barnet

**Leeds** – having signed the Covenant with a small number of faith groups, the council has been working to raise awareness among more faith communities. FaithAction has facilitated a meeting between a health commissioner and the Chair of Leeds Faith Forum.

**Solihull** – faith groups report a much greater awareness of faith on the part of Solihull Council and its Partnership (police, health services and the voluntary sector) and their willingness to include the Faith Forum in consultations and civic events. For example, the council's Emergency Planning Officer has addressed the Faiths Forum and a consultation with faith groups is now being arranged.

## Faith in Local Government reception



**(L-R) Daniel Singleton of FaithAction, the Rt. Hon. Stephen Timms MP, the Rt. Hon. Sajid Javid MP, Steve Double MP and the Rt. Hon. Dame Caroline Spelman MP at the Faith in Local Government reception**

The APPG and FaithAction hosted a 'Faith in Local Government' reception in Portcullis House on Monday 14th November, at the start of Inter Faith Week. The event celebrated the Faith Covenant, and the keynote speaker was the Rt Hon Sajid Javid MP, Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government.

Sajid Javid was vocal in his support of faith, describing it as "undoubtedly a force for good in our country", and committing himself to supporting faith-led initiatives in the future.

The evening's other speakers were the Rt Hon Stephen Timms MP, Chair of the APPG, Daniel Singleton, National Executive Director of FaithAction, Cllr Waseem Zaffar of Birmingham City Council, Cllr Mohammed Iqbal of Leeds City Council, and Trevor Alexander, Vice Chair of Barnet Multi Faith Forum.

## Other activity in 2016-17

### Public Faith and Finance



Some of those attending the Public Faith and Finance roundtable (L-R): Megan Morris of Oasis UK, Felicity Smith of FaithAction, Dr Therese O'Toole of the University of Bristol, Daniel Singleton of FaithAction, Dr Katya Braginskaia of the University of Bristol, Omar Shaikh of the Islamic Finance Council UK and the Rt. Hon. Stephen Timms MP

A policy roundtable discussion was held on Thursday 14 July in Portcullis House, focusing on faith-based organisations' responses to issues of finance, poverty and austerity. The event marked the publication of the report *Public Faith and Finance: Faith responses to the financial crisis*, which was presented by authors Dr Therese O'Toole and Dr Katya Braginskaia of the University of Bristol.<sup>1</sup> Omar Shaikh of the Islamic Finance Council UK spoke about the Council's work, and its joint project with the Church of Scotland to develop ethical financial services. Steve Double MP also shared his thoughts in response.

### What Works in Prisons

At the APPG's 2016 Annual General Meeting, it was suggested that a future focus of the group's work could be the work of faith-based organisations in the prison system.

FaithAction accordingly carried out an exploration of faith-based work in prisons, alongside that of some other voluntary organisations, and has produced the report *What Works in Prisons: Contributions of the Faith and Voluntary Sector to Prisoners and their Families*.

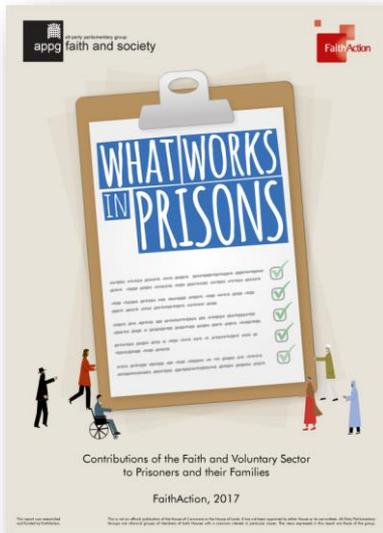
The report considers, and provides case study examples of: services for families of offenders; mentoring and skills courses; accommodation support for offenders and ex-offenders;

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<sup>1</sup> For details of the project see [www.publicspirit.org.uk/faith-and-finance](http://www.publicspirit.org.uk/faith-and-finance)

chaplains; services that support young offenders; and services that support older people in prison.

The key findings are:



- Faith-based organisations (FBOs) often provide specific support for targeted groups of prisoners
- FBOs offer spiritual and pastoral support to prisoners that is open to all
- FBOs often provide a holistic approach to prisoner support
- Both faith-based and non-faith organisations are keen to share best practice and use existing models of support
- FBOs are innovative in their approach to supporting prisoners
- FBOs and voluntary organisations have sustainable banks of committed volunteers
- The support of prison governors and staff is critical in determining the success of prison-based programmes
- FBOs save the taxpayer money, although many find it difficult to measure the impact of their services

The report was finalised shortly before the 2017 general election was announced. It will be launched later in 2017: please see 'Future plans' below.

## Future plans

A roundtable discussion, taking the *What Works in Prisons* report as a starting point, is planned for the autumn of 2017, with involvement also from the APPG on Penal Affairs. The topic of how faith-based organisations are helping to reduce re-offending rates, and the issues they face in their work, continues to be of interest to the group.

The APPG has been approached by a team at the Centre for Religion and Public Life at the University of Leeds, regarding a research project it is undertaking to explore **religion and the UN Sustainable Development Goals**. The researchers are investigating the role of faith in development policy and practice in the UK, Ethiopia and India, and establishing a research network across these countries, to include the contribution of faith-based actors. They have invited the APPG to host a launch event for the final publication in the autumn of 2018.

Members of the APPG have been invited to visit faith organisations and council representatives in Birmingham, which would act as a follow-up to the group's 2013 visit and would be an opportunity to see what has been achieved since Birmingham adopted the Faith Covenant.

Other areas of interest to members of the group include the role of faith-based organisations in supporting families and fathers, and the issue of religious illiteracy. We welcome suggestions of further topics for the group to consider.

## Appendix

### The Faith Covenant: development and text

#### Background

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

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

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

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

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

#### Covenant text

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

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

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

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

The Covenant principles are currently in draft form. 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.

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