



# All-Party Parliamentary Group on Faith and Society

2017-18 Summary Report  
September 2018

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# Contents

Introduction	3
Activity in 2017-18	4
What Works in Prisons?	4
The Faith Covenant: Update Report	5
Future plans	12
Appendix	
The Faith Covenant: development and text	13

## 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 2017-18 were the following:

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

At the group's Annual General Meeting on 11 September 2018, the same officers were re-elected, with FaithAction maintaining its secretariat.

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.faihandsociety.org](http://www.faihandsociety.org)

## Activity in 2017-18

### What Works in Prisons?



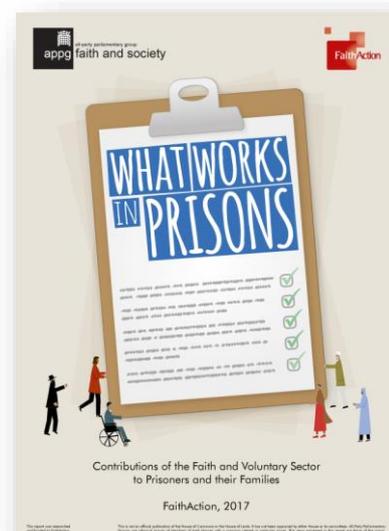
(L-R): Rt. Hon. Stephen Timms MP, Rt Hon Dominic Grieve QC MP and Fiona Bruce MP at the What Works in Prisons? event

At the APPG's 2016 Annual General Meeting, it was suggested that a potential 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 produced the report *What Works in Prisons: Contributions of the Faith and Voluntary Sector to Prisoners and their Families*.<sup>1</sup>

The report was launched at a joint event with the APPG on Penal Affairs on 15 May 2018, entitled **What works in prisons? Faith and the Voluntary Sector: Supporting Better Outcomes**.

The meeting in the House of Commons was chaired by Stephen Timms, and the speakers included the Rt Hon Dominic Grieve QC MP, Co-chair of the APPG on Penal Affairs; Andy Keen-Downs, Chief Executive of Pact (the Prison Advice and Care Trust); Hazel Alcraft, Development Officer for Health and Justice at Clinks, Paula Harriet, Head of Prisoner Engagement at the Prison Reform Trust; and Daniel Singleton, National Executive Director of FaithAction. Paula Harriet's contribution was of particular note, with her personal



<sup>1</sup> Available to download at [www.faithaction.net/download/what-works-in-prisons](http://www.faithaction.net/download/what-works-in-prisons) (registration required).

experience of time in prison bringing a unique and vital human perspective to the discussion.

The report highlights the different kinds of support that faith-based organisations provide for prisoners, whether by supporting them with their individual faith, or with other practical and emotional needs. It illustrates the often innovative approaches they take – approaches which also offer considerable value for money. And it also considers the important work of the wider voluntary sector.

## The Faith Covenant: Update Report

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. It is a joint commitment between faith communities and local authorities to a set of principles that guide engagement, aiming to remove some of the mistrust that exists and to promote open, practical working on all levels. It is built on the recognition that in order to meet the challenges the country faces, we need to unlock the potential of every part of civil society to contribute – including faith groups.

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

### Covenant areas

The Covenant has been signed in **12** local areas, meaning that over 5 million people live in areas that have adopted it.

- Birmingham
- Leeds
- Northamptonshire
- Barnet
- Solihull
- Calderdale
- Southampton
- Blackpool (Partnership Agreement)
- Essex
- Brent
- Wolverhampton
- Preston

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. Brighton and Hove and the London Borough of Hackney are among the areas known to be currently exploring a Faith Covenant.

Updates from several of the Covenant areas have been received and are summarised below.

## Recent activity under the Covenant

### **Birmingham: expanding engagement**

*Covenant adopted December 2014*

The Covenant was signed first in Birmingham, the largest local authority in Europe, at a relatively small launch event in December 2014. A larger event was held in September 2015 as part of the Covenant development process, at which examples of existing joint working between faith groups and the Council or other statutory services were identified.

Birmingham City Council made efforts to **engage with a wider network of faith organisations** than it had in the past, guided by the Covenant. It launched a Faith Network, as a key consultation forum for all its service provision and a vehicle for taking the Covenant forward. Membership went from around 15 to 67, with faiths represented that were not in the past.

Engagement between the Council and faith groups was planned around specific issues of interest to both parties, including keeping children safe, with a meeting facilitated by the Birmingham Safeguarding Children Board. The Council officer involved commented that the Covenant had triggered a greater level of involvement by faith communities in consultations run by the Council, and in shaping services.

The Lord Mayor of Birmingham has accepted the honorary presidency of the Council of Faiths; while this was also the case before the Covenant was adopted, the relationship is now more formalised. Since adopting the Covenant, the Council of Faiths has coordinated Inter Faith week with a launch event in the Council House.

The Council also created the **Birmingham Faith Map**, a tool to help the Council and faith communities connect with each other. This detailed the activities run by faith communities and the groups they support, and had more than 650 entries. Unfortunately, when the Council moved to a new web hosting service, the map was lost. Recent efforts have been directed towards renewing the map, with a view to hosting it on the Birmingham Council of Faiths website. A student from Birmingham City University will be working on renewing the online map and updating some of the information; the Council of Faiths hopes to obtain funding to carry out further updating.

Activity came to something of a hiatus before the 2018 local elections, but as there were no major changes at the Council, existing relationships have been preserved and the Council of Faiths plans to meet with the relevant cabinet member in autumn 2019 to discuss future work.

### **Barnet: recognising the strategic role of faith**

*Covenant adopted September 2015*

Barnet is one of the most populous borough in London, with a growing and diverse population which includes the largest Jewish population in the UK. Barnet's adoption of the Covenant was the result of many months of dialogue between the Council and Barnet Multi-Faith Forum (BMFF), which promotes the celebration of cultural diversity, advocates for free speech and promotes social action projects. From the Council's perspective, the Covenant

represented a strategic fit with Barnet’s Corporate Plan and commissioning model, and would enable it to engage better with the strategic network of faith and community partners to implement the Plan.

Initial work under the Covenant centred on three main themes: firstly, developing a voluntary and community sector (VCS) forum, with BMFF as a member of the forum’s steering group and participating as an equal community partner with the rest of the VCS. This **formal recognition of faith groups as a part of the VCS** would help realise the Covenant’s commitment to allow faith groups to shape borough strategy and link with decision-making processes.

Secondly, community participation and engagement, involving faith groups in the design and delivery of local services and building the capacity of faith volunteers. The Covenant was also named in the area’s Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy as the basis for engagement with faith communities. And thirdly, BMFF continues to be a key partner in the community cohesion and counter-extremism agenda.

BMFF has now developed an **action plan for work under the Covenant**, in areas including the Youth Forum, events, interfaith activity, campaigns (such as around gender and modern day slavery), wellbeing, poverty, safeguarding, emergency response and community safety.

*“The Covenant will be upheld in the design and delivery of the activities described in the JHWP 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

### **Solihull: an active partnership**

*Covenant adopted September 2015*

Several factors led to the adoption of the Covenant in Solihull: the active interest of the Rt Hon Caroline Spelman MP, a member of the All Party Parliamentary Group on Faith and Society; the production of a Cinnamon Faith Action Audit<sup>2</sup> in Solihull; and an existing relationship between the Council and an active Faiths Forum, which supported the idea. The Covenant in Solihull is a partnership agreement with other partners such as the Police and Fire services involved as well as the Council. The local Clinical Commissioning Group, secondary care trust and mental health trust also signed the Covenant.

The initial impact of the Covenant in Solihull, as reported by the responsible Council officer, was the **increased engagement of faith groups in strategic dialogue**, allowing them to have

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<sup>2</sup> [www.cinnamonnetwork.co.uk/cfaa-reports](http://www.cinnamonnetwork.co.uk/cfaa-reports)

an influence on policy in areas of concern to them. The steering group of the Faiths Forum also seemed to become bolder in approaching the Council with requests, citing the Covenant.

An area identified by the Faiths Forum as one in which it wanted to develop dialogue and strategic influence was that of safeguarding. The Council therefore facilitated conversations with the managers of the Local Safeguarding Children Board and Safeguarding Adults Board, and drew those from the faith groups with active involvement in safeguarding together for further discussions with the safeguarding boards. The faith groups also wanted a greater understanding of the planning process and how they might be involved in influencing planning in order to build stronger communities, so the Council arranged a meeting with the Head of Planning to facilitate this.

The Faiths Forum continues to hold regular meetings at which Council representatives also take part: for example, the Assistant Director for Stronger Communities spoke at a recent meeting on the Council's approach to community development. A faith leader from the Forum also sits on the Safer Solihull Board (the local Community Safety Partnership).

A **refresh and re-signing of the Covenant** is planned for 2018-19, over three years since it was first adopted and in view of the fact that some personnel have moved on. For Inter Faith Week in November 2018, the Faiths Forum will be adopting the Council-wide theme of 100 years since the end of the First World War, looking at peace and cohesion, giving thanks for what has gone before and looking to the future.

### **Calderdale: close working relationships**

*Covenant adopted November 2015*

The Faith Covenant in Calderdale has **built upon a positive relationship** between the Council and faith communities. Having requested support from the Council, over the six months to August 2018 Calderdale Interfaith Council steering group has been supported by a dedicated Council officer, who has been helping the group to develop smarter objectives that require minimal resources (the Interfaith Council is supported in kind on a voluntary basis).

The good relationship between the local authority and the Interfaith Council is demonstrated in a number of ways:

- The Mayor of Calderdale is always Chair of the Interfaith Council, while three elected members are appointed to serve on it.
- A middle manager from the authority is working with the Interfaith Council as part of her introduction to Leadership and Continuing Professional Development.
- Calderdale Council's Director for Public Services meets regularly with the Archdeacon of Halifax and the two Rural Deans for Calderdale, and is due to speak at a Joint Synod meeting in November 2018.
- An Interfaith representative serves on the Calderdale Safeguarding Board.
- Hilary Barber, Vicar of Halifax Minster, is both as Chaplain to the Mayor and Chair of the Standards Board for Calderdale, and sits on the town board for Halifax. He was also on the interviewing panel for the new Chief Executive of the council.

- The **local authority commissions St Augustine’s Centre** (a Christian-based community centre) to be the focal point for **work associated with asylum seekers and refugees**; it also works closely with the food bank and Christian centres running community support projects and signposting people to services including health, housing and debt relief.
- The local authority also commissions the Interfaith Council to deliver an event for Holocaust Memorial Day.
- Halifax Minster is the focal point for all major civic occasions, which are nearly always of an interfaith nature.

### **Southampton: a focus on homelessness**

*Covenant adopted July 2017*

The Faith Covenant in Southampton developed out of an existing network of churches, Love Southampton, which was formed when churches realised that they were facing the same key issues, such as the need for good quality volunteers for their community projects. The churches approached Southampton City Council about the possibility of a Covenant, and the Council requested that all faiths were included. Southampton Council of Faiths was approached and came on board, and the Faith Covenant was then taken back to the Council and agreed on – the whole process having taken around two years.

Since the adoption of the Covenant, there has been a focus on engaging different faith communities and also other charities in practical action, in particular around a **homelessness initiative**. In January 2018 a course called ‘Beds, Baking and Business’ drew together around 70 people to look at tackling homelessness in the city and how things might be done differently. A third of the delegates were from faith groups, and information on the Covenant was included in delegate packs, which generated considerable interest.

Following the course, in April 2018, a website<sup>3</sup> was established that allows visitors to identify and donate to current needs in the city on a real-time basis – whether sleeping bags, sun cream or volunteer time. The next step will be to launch a **new homelessness charter**, which already has cross-party support. It is hoped that by winter 2018 many organisations will have signed up to the charter, establishing a common way of working.

One challenge is now to raise awareness of the Covenant, both across

*“We just find that with these questions that keep coming up, the Covenant just gives an underlying rationale for it all.”*

Church leader, Southampton

the Council and to greater numbers of faith groups. Implied in the word ‘covenant’ is a long-lasting agreement, which is both helpful and a challenge when council leaders and heads of service may change every year. Faith leaders tend to be in place for much longer terms, which will help to provide continuity.

<sup>3</sup> <https://streetsupport.net/southampton/>

### **Blackpool: connecting faith and public services**

*Partnership Agreement adopted September 2017*

Blackpool Council is continuing **engagement discussions** through a series of presentations at Blackpool Faith Forum looking at key social problems. A recent discussion focused on housing and homelessness, with the participation of the Council's Head of Housing. The October 2018 meeting is due to focus on loneliness and mental health, with representatives of the public health department taking part.

The Council hopes eventually to host a conference for a wider audience of local faith leaders, connecting them with a range of statutory service leads.

### **Essex: making a county-wide Covenant practical**

*Covenant adopted October 2017*

The formal launch of the Essex Faith Covenant was attended by over 120 delegates from a broad range of faith, voluntary and public sector backgrounds. Since then, the Essex Faith Covenant Steering Group (EFCSG), which is broadly representative of all the organisations that are signed up to the Essex Faith Covenant, has continued to provide oversight and support the Covenant pilot areas in developing and showcasing activity and best practice. Both faith groups and public services will use the Essex Faith Covenant Steering Group as a tool to develop activity around uniting communities to better serve Essex residents.

As Essex is such a large area, **four pilot areas** have initially been established: Basildon, Braintree, Chelmsford and Colchester. These areas have agreed to adopt the principles set out within the Essex Faith Covenant, and to agree local activity to address the **overarching theme of tackling loneliness, isolation and disadvantage**. This theme, which will be in place for two years, complements the shared long term Vision for Essex, particularly the ambition for strengthening communities through participation and tackling disadvantage.

Work is ongoing to map faith activity across the pilot areas that supports the principles and themes laid out within the Faith Covenant. A key focus for the EFCSG is to highlight and publicise some of the excellent faith-led and partnership work contributing to tackling loneliness and social isolation, with a number of case studies in development.



Some of the many representatives from faith, voluntary and public sector organisations who attended the launch of the Essex Faith Covenant, with their individual pledges of action

Activity since the launch of the Essex Faith Covenant includes:

- The EFCSG has been expanded, and the relationship between Essex County Council and pilot district representatives has been strengthened significantly.
  - Maldon has signed up to the Covenant, and Maldon District Council is working with faith partners to identify and tackle local health and wellbeing needs including obesity, frailty and old age, and mental health. A targeted project is being undertaken with faith groups to reduce loneliness and isolation in rural areas of Maldon.
  - Active Essex (which promotes sports and physical activity) and partners have recently signed up to the Covenant.
  - Rochford District Council is also interested in becoming involved and working towards the aims of the Covenant.
- Basildon Borough Council has **reviewed its community funding criteria to make it easier for faith groups to receive funding** for local community activities.
- Essex County Council is engaging with mosques in the pilot areas, and are hoping to explore the development of a Muslim Council for Essex in the coming months.
- The Office of the Police, Fire & Crime Commissioner (OPFCC) has been working increasingly with faith groups and has been heavily involved in coordinating the Cinnamon Network Community Transformation Project. This aims to help churches work with their communities, build relationships with those in greatest need and reduce isolation, by tackling key issues such as hate crime, anti-social behaviour, and safeguarding potentially vulnerable older victims against fraud.
- Essex County Council led a workshop at the Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner's Conference in March 2018. This offered participants the opportunity to learn more about, and contribute to the development of, the Essex Faith Covenant.
- A celebration event will be planned for the first half of 2019.

*"A key area for the Essex Faith Covenant Steering Group is to highlight and publicise some of the excellent faith-led and partnership work contributing to tackling loneliness and social isolation."*

Chris Holmes, Essex County Council

### **Brent: a Borough of Sanctuary**

*Covenant adopted November 2017*

Bringing faith, politics and local public policy together is an important focus for Brent Multi Faith Forum, which sees the Covenant as an important step in this work. Since the launch of the Faith Covenant, Brent Council representatives have continued to meet regularly with the Multi Faith Forum, and they are now developing and working on projects together. An audit of faith venues was attempted, but there were very few responses. The focus has therefore been on the process of **becoming a Borough of Sanctuary**, part of the City of Sanctuary

movement.<sup>4</sup> Brent Council is supporting the Multi Faith Forum as it takes the lead in this project, and a strategy and workplans around a number of key themes are in development.



Carolyn Downs, Brent Chief Executive, and Cllr Miller, Lead Member for Stronger Communities, sign the Covenant

## Future plans

The focus of the APPG's Annual General Meeting 2018 was on practical examples of how faith groups are active in serving their communities, particularly with regard to helping overcome **social isolation and loneliness**. Given the crucial part played by faith communities in tackling this pressing social issue, it was agreed that a fruitful focus for the APPG in the coming year could be to further highlight the work of faith in this area.

The APPG has an ongoing connection with a team at the Centre for Religion and Public Life at the University of Leeds, particularly with regard to a research project the team 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 would like to involve the APPG in a launch event for the research planned for the spring of 2019 – an event originally planned for autumn 2018 but postponed due to the political situation in Ethiopia.

We welcome suggestions of further topics for the group to consider.

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<sup>4</sup> <https://cityofsanctuary.org/>

## Appendix

### The Faith Covenant: development and text

#### Background

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

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

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

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

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

#### Covenant text

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

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

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

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

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

### **The Covenant**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

- Seeking opportunities to bring people together to serve the community, particularly its poorest and most isolated members;
- Serving equally all local residents seeking to access the public services they offer, 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

FaithAction, secretariat to the All-Party Parliamentary Group of Faith and Society, is a national network of faith-based and community organisations and a member of the VCSE Health and Wellbeing Alliance, working with the Department of Health and Social Care, NHS England and Public Health England. FaithAction works to provide support, advice and training for its members, as well as partnering with local and central governments to highlight the contributions made by these organisations to their communities.

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

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