



# All-Party Parliamentary Group on Faith and Society

2018-19 Summary Report  
January 2020

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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 2018-19 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

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 2018-19

## Celebrating Faith in Action – September 2018

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**. It was a celebration of the work that faith groups do, with presentations on community projects and their positive effects by Tracey Wade of *Hear Here* in Guildford, and James Henderson of *Places of Welcome*.



## APPG -Keeping Faith in 2030: Religions and the Sustainable Development Goals – February 2019

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. In February of this year, we hosted a launch event where they discussed their research and its findings.



## Leadership in Religion and Politics – February 2019



The APPG held a lively panel discussion at Parliament focusing on leadership in religion and politics on 25<sup>th</sup> February this year. The panel consisted of MPs Stephen Timms (Chair of the APPG), Steve Double (Treasurer of APPG) and we were joined by Gareth Wallace (director of Conservative Christian Fellowship and Christians in Politics). The discussion was chaired by Daniel Singleton, National Executive Director of FaithAction, which is the secretariat for the APPG. The event was attended by students from King’s College London and lecturer Dr Daniel Nilsson DeHanas.

The MPs talked about a variety of topics, such as how faith affects their political views and values and if the Establishment is a good or bad thing. The university students then put questions to the panel, with subjects ranging from current topics such as sex education in schools, to what advice they would give to students interested in a career in politics.

## RSE Legislation Workshop – May 2019

In light of the new RSE practices in schools, there was a panel discussion organised with members of the Department of Education and representation from Ofsted. There was input from a number of Jewish education groups. One of the areas of controversy was to do with the role of state and the responsibility of parents and of Faiths.

## Right Up your Street – Loneliness Report Launch – July 2019

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**. A report was written by FaithAction to further highlight the work of faith in this area. In July 2019, we launched the report at Westminster with a very well attended event. We were very pleased to have speaking the Minister for



L-R: Daniel Singleton, FaithAction; Neil Churchill, NHS England; Kudzai, who described her experiences of isolation; Rt Hon Stephen Timms MP; Mims Davies MP, then Minister for tackling loneliness; Steve Double MP; Rodie Garland and Jeremy Simmons, FaithAction

tackling Loneliness at the time, Mims Davies MP, alongside Neil Churchill, Director for Experience, Participation and Equalities at NHS England, and Tim Farron MP, as well as Rodie Garland and Jeremy Simmons – the authors of the report. Present were many people active in Faith and Community groups and initiatives and Social Prescribing. There was an atmosphere of agreement and anticipation of what may happen next. Recommendations were made:

- National initiatives aimed at tackling loneliness to intentionally include faith communities and faith-based organisations
- Public services promoting social connections, those mapping local activities, and those involved in social prescribing to actively consider what faith groups in their area have to offer.
- Faith-based organisations to articulate what they are doing to tackle loneliness, and ensure that others working on the issue locally know about it.

We continue to look at these recommendations as we look towards the Loneliness Strategy a year on in the coming months.

## Compliance, Assessment and Enforcement: Promoting Positive Outcomes in RE and RSE – July 2019

This discussion followed the previous RSE panel in May and was a joint event with the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Religious Education.

The discussion covered the importance of the relationship between RSE and RE in education. It called for a level of faith-literacy in Ofsted inspectors and further training for teachers in non-denominational schools on the teaching of RE. The panel consisted of Nick Gibb MP - Minister of State for School Standards, Chris Jones - Head of Corporate Strategy at Ofsted, David Burrowes – Executive Director of Strengthening Families Manifesto, Matthew Watt – Headteacher at Tynedale Community School (primary) and Ron Skelton – Headteacher at Broadway Academy (secondary).

## **Demos Report Launch: *Holy Alliances* – September 2019**

Our final event of the year was a report launch on Church-secular partnerships for social good, which we held in conjunction with Demos. The report, *Holy Alliances*, co-authored by Demos and Good Faith Partnership, called for local authorities to seek to address any practical barriers to partnership working between churches and non-Christian groups, such as making funding for social action projects more accessible to churches.

It also made a number of other recommendations, including the discouragement of blanket policies against working with faith groups, and for local authorities to build on the good work of the All Party Parliamentary Group on Faith and Society and adopt their own version of the Faith Covenant.

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

The roll-out of the Faith Covenant continues to be a focus for the APPG's public work. The Covenant emerged from a series of roundtable meetings held by the APPG in 2012 to explore the work of faith-based organisations. It is a joint commitment between faith communities and local authorities to a set of principles that guide engagement, aiming to remove some of the mistrust that exists and to promote open, practical working on all levels. It is built on the recognition that in order to meet the challenges the country faces, we need to unlock the potential of every part of civil society to contribute – including faith groups.

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

### **Covenant areas**

The Covenant has been signed in 13 local areas, meaning that over 5 million people live in areas that have adopted it.

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

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. Walsall, and Rushmoor in Hampshire, are currently exploring adopting a Faith Covenant.

Updates from some of the areas to have adopted the Covenant are provided below.

**Barnet** (Covenant adopted September 2015)

Es Rosen of Barnet Multi Faith Forum (BMFF) reports that the Covenant has given BMFF the strategic voice and profile to discuss issues with the Council. It has also allowed the BMFF to work strategically as the 'faith partner' with the local voluntary sector network, police and emergency services – meaning that faith communities are represented in emergency planning, and that information ranging from borough-wide events to issues relating to exiting the EU has another route to filter down to community level.

BMFF is able to ensure that the Council is aware of all the work being done on issues such as safeguarding, housing and by local churches, synagogues, mosques, temples and Gurdwaras. It has found the Covenant to be very helpful in enabling it to engage and to access information: for example, it has become aware of funding programmes through its engagement with the Council.

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

Brighton and Hove Faith in Action has so far held a number of useful events with input from the Council. These have included a Celebrating Faith day in June, and the new Mayor held an event for faith leaders in the Mayor's parlour. It is hoped that this engagement will gather momentum towards the end of this year.

**Brent** (Covenant adopted November 2017)

The focus in Brent has been on the process of becoming a Borough of Sanctuary, part of the City of Sanctuary movement.<sup>1</sup> Brent Council is supporting the Multi Faith Forum as it takes the lead in this work, which has arisen as part of adopting the Covenant. A successful interfaith Winter Shelter of Sanctuary was run over the winter months and preparations are being made to do the same in the coming winter. Anne Kittappa, Senior Policy Officer at Brent Council,

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<sup>1</sup> <https://cityofsanctuary.org/>

reports that the Council is considering holding an event to celebrate two years of the Faith Covenant, tied in with Brent's Borough of Culture celebrations.

### **Calderdale** (Covenant adopted November 2015)

In Calderdale there is a close working relationship between the local authority and faith communities. The Vicar of Halifax Minster, Hilary Barber, meets regularly with the Leader and the Chief Executive to discuss issues affecting the Borough; he is also Chair of the Board for Standards in Public Life and Mayor's Chaplain. The Minster and local authority are working together to co-host a conference for the officers of the Diocese of Leeds in Calderdale, looking at 'Post Industrial Towns and the Rural Economy' in Calderdale, and how the Church of England might strengthen its partnership with the local authority.

The Council supports the Interfaith Council through a nominated lead officer, Sail Suleman, who is one of the Interfaith Council's founding members; and through funding for interfaith activity. Elected Members from the main political parties have also been nominated to serve on the Interfaith Council and the Mayor of Calderdale continues to chair the meetings.

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

Coinciding with the national Inter Faith Week in November 2019, Essex County Council held a large event to showcase what has been achieved in the two years since the Faith Covenant was adopted across the county. The aim was to show that the Faith Covenant is very much a live and going concern. The initial priorities for the Covenant were to tackle loneliness, isolation and disadvantage. Some of the ongoing projects that the Council is highlighting are:

- In Rochford, two churches are providing free hot meals once a week to those in need, as well as help with groceries and clothing, and support to access the Council services to which they are entitled. Council staff are able to refer people to the help provided by the churches, while Tesco and Waitrose are donating food. Rochford District Council's Portfolio Holder for the Community, Cllr Mike Webb, said: "This is a welcome response from the church and the community to seek to help those in need in a very practical way."
- Sporting organisations in the county have pledged their support to the Essex Faith Covenant, to use participation in sport as a way of bringing people of all faiths together. Active Essex, the county sports partnership, has brought together high-profile sporting organisations to commit their support and share the Essex Faith Covenant's vision of using sport to tackle loneliness, isolation and disadvantage felt within Essex's minority communities.

- A partnership between Maldon District Council, Maldon CVS and the Diocese of Chelmsford, with support from Essex County Council, is running the Four Ts Village Friend initiative. This aims to support residents in Tollesbury, Tolleshunt D’Arcy, Tolleshunt Knights and Tolleshunt Major by using a range of opportunities for residents to socialise and access help and support, in order to reduce social isolation.

**Solihull** (Covenant adopted September 2015)

Pat Wilkinson of Solihull Faiths Forum reports that since adopting the Faith Covenant, the forum has much more engagement with the council than it ever did before. For example, its steering group has recently been invited to attend a 'locality working' event in November 2019. Pat says that there is now much more awareness on the part of the council that the interfaith forum exists, and by extension, more awareness about people of faith.

## Future plans

In this coming year, we look towards the Loneliness Strategy as it approaches one year on from the launch and hope to bring further recommendations and insight from our report.

In these last few months, we have had some involvement in the discussion around the RSE legislation in schools. Twice now, we have hosted a discussion around the legislation and its effect on Faith schools or school children and parents of faith. It is likely that this conversation is not over and there may be cause to host further discussion in the coming year.

Following the publication of the Loneliness report, we were contacted about a new campaign Home for Good has been developing. This exciting project centres around recognising the potential within faith communities, particularly churches, to solve the current blockages in the system for enabling approved Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children to come safely to the UK. We met with Home for Good to provide guidance on this project. Additionally, we provided input on how to establish the newly founded APPG on Adoption and Permanence (of which Home for Good is co-secretariat alongside Adoption UK). We look forward to providing support to similar projects and APPGs this year.

In March of this year, we will host an event around Human Trafficking and the effect of Faith Groups within this area. This event will be presented by University of Sheffield and hosted jointly with the APPG on Human Trafficking and Modern Slavery.

*“I think the Faith Covenant has been a positive development in the Solihull borough. We have much more engagement with the council than we ever did before (...) There is much more awareness that we as an interfaith forum (and therefore many people of faith) exist (...) this is a big improvement on say, five years ago.”*

– Pat Wilkinson, Solihull Faiths Forum

We are also in discussion with researchers from Cardiff University about hosting an event about the work of Faith Groups in the area of alcohol treatment, centred on the launch of the report ‘Faith in recovery: Service user evaluation of faith based alcohol treatment in England and Wales’.

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

## Appendix

### The Faith Covenant: development and text

#### Background

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

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

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

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

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

#### Covenant text

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

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

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

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

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

### **The Covenant**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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