

THE FAITH COVENANT

WHAT, WHY, HOW?



A PRIMER
FOR COUNCILS

faithAction



all-party parliamentary group
faith and society

Recent years have seen partnership work between local authorities and faith groups flourish, whether that's collaboration to better identify and reach communities, or co-design and deliver solutions to community needs.

The Faith Covenant is designed to be a vehicle for partnership, long-term relationship, and trust.

If any of the following apply, the Faith Covenant could be for you:

- You want to work more **collaboratively** with your diverse population but are not sure how;
- You've seen the benefit of working with faith groups sporadically, but want to make this **more consistent**;
- You have good connections with different faith communities but no **central mechanism** through which to collaborate with them;
- You have thriving partnerships with local faith groups and want to **recognise, celebrate** and **cement** these;
- Relationships between statutory agencies and faith groups have become strained; **trust needs to be rebuilt** or new relationships established.

Adoption of the Faith Covenant can:

- Form part of a **strategy for engagement** with your diverse populations;
- Be an opportunity for **co-production and dialogue**, where bespoke principles are discussed, "difficult issues" worked through, or projects established based on shared values and common vision;
- Be a practical way to **harness the momentum** of recent years or build on existing partnership and relationships.
- Enable you to **overcome the continuity challenges** that can occur when staff (or community leaders) move on;
- Provide a symbolic way to **celebrate** faith-based social action, and publicly signal your intent to deepen collaboration;
- Help **build and repair trust** where relationships have broken down.

Read the Faith Covenant in full at www.faithandsociety.org.uk/covenant/full/

I think there is a trust there, now, between us and faith-based organisations, I think there is increased awareness of the issues that we face, and there's an eagerness to work together going forward as well...

Andrew Lowing
Essex County Council

It has strengthened our interfaith infrastructure and relationships [as well as our ability] to understand tensions and barriers to participation. It provided us with a strong base to deal with the Covid-19 pandemic in our local communities, citywide.

Geoffrey Turnbull
Leeds City Council



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Barnet

Signed September 2015

According to Esmond Rosen, President of Barnet Multi Faith Forum (BMFF), Barnet Council's adoption of the Covenant in 2015 was "the result of an excellent dialogue between the Council and the Forum". For the Council, the Covenant represented a strategic fit with Barnet's Corporate Plan and commissioning model and would enable it to better engage with a network of faith and community partners.

Initial work under the Covenant centred on three main themes:

- **Developing a voluntary and community sector (VCS) forum**, with BMFF as a member of the forum's steering group, and faith groups officially recognised as a part of the VCS. This would help realise the Covenant's commitment to allow faith groups to shape borough strategy and link with decision-making processes.
- **Community participation and engagement**, involving faith groups in the design and delivery of services. This involved the Covenant being named in the Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy as the basis for engagement with faith communities.
- **Community cohesion and counter-extremism**, through which BMFF developed an action plan for work under the Covenant, including a programme of activity involving the Youth Forum, interfaith activity, campaigns (such as around gender and modern day slavery), wellbeing, poverty, safeguarding, emergency response and community safety.



Why did you sign the Faith Covenant?

We wanted to strengthen our relationship with the Brent Multi Faith Forum and provide a solid base to work from.

Anne Kittapa
Brent Council



[Because] places of worship and people of faith have an integral and essential role to play in unifying and supporting the most vulnerable in the city.

Jason Murphy
Southampton City Council

The Faith Covenant provides a set of working principles that help us all get the biggest social benefit out of this partnership.

Cllr James McKay
Birmingham City Council



To overcome barriers to an effective collaborative working relationship between the city council and faith organisations by formalising the relationship between the council and the faith sector in the city.

Geoffrey Turnbull
Leeds City Council

What did it achieve?

It's really the main forum in Essex to engage with faith-based organisations and dialogue with public services, and it's not just local authorities, it's Essex fire, Essex Police, the Fire, Police and Crime Commissioner, and increasingly a number of health colleagues, too.

Andrew Lowing

Essex County Council

Having a faith Covenant has been invaluable in showing faith communities that we wish to have a strong and collaborative relationship. It established our commitment, and also that of faith communities, to work together in partnership and to focus on areas of joint concern and deliverables.

Geoffrey Turnbull

Leeds City Council



[Thanks to the Faith Covenant] we have a strong network of places of worship which play into our local systems, particularly so with regard to homelessness and the pandemic response.

Jason Murphy

Southampton City Council

It has enabled us to better understand the city's faith infrastructure and what support they need to be strong and sustainable partners with the council. It has enabled us to reach faith communities and groups with which we have had a less strong relationship in the past. It has enabled us to connect our faith communities with other public bodies, link them more strongly into the Third Sector and with the private sector as well.

Geoffrey Turnbull

Leeds City Council

Practical tips for establishing a Covenant

- **Develop a steering group early on.** Bring together a group of trusted individuals, representing diverse viewpoints, to flesh out the wording and aims of a Covenant. Be as inclusive and representative as possible, but don't worry about including every voice at this stage. You can start small and grow.
- **Identify at least one champion on each side.** Who are the key faith representatives with real reach into communities? Who on the council has a passion to work closely with faith communities? It is essential to identify these key individuals to unlock the potential of the Faith Covenant.
- **Explore different structures.** The Faith Covenant serves different needs in different areas and has taken a different shape in many locations as a result. Make sure your structure matches your goals. (Speak to FaithAction for examples of structures adopted elsewhere.)
- **Set a practical vision.** What needs could the Covenant fill? In the process of deciding the wording and structure of the Covenant, identify the deliverables you want it to achieve. This could simply be clear and effective communication, or a project or programme of work the Covenant can underpin.
- **Host a launch event.** This can be a great way to exercise the symbolic benefits of the Faith Covenant and communicate your appreciation of faith communities and your desire to collaborate with them to provide local solutions. This should not be a one-off affair, but followed up with a regular programme of meetings and/or annual celebratory events to keep the momentum going.

**For personalised advice, please contact FaithAction.
Email info@faithaction.net or call 0800 804 8829.**

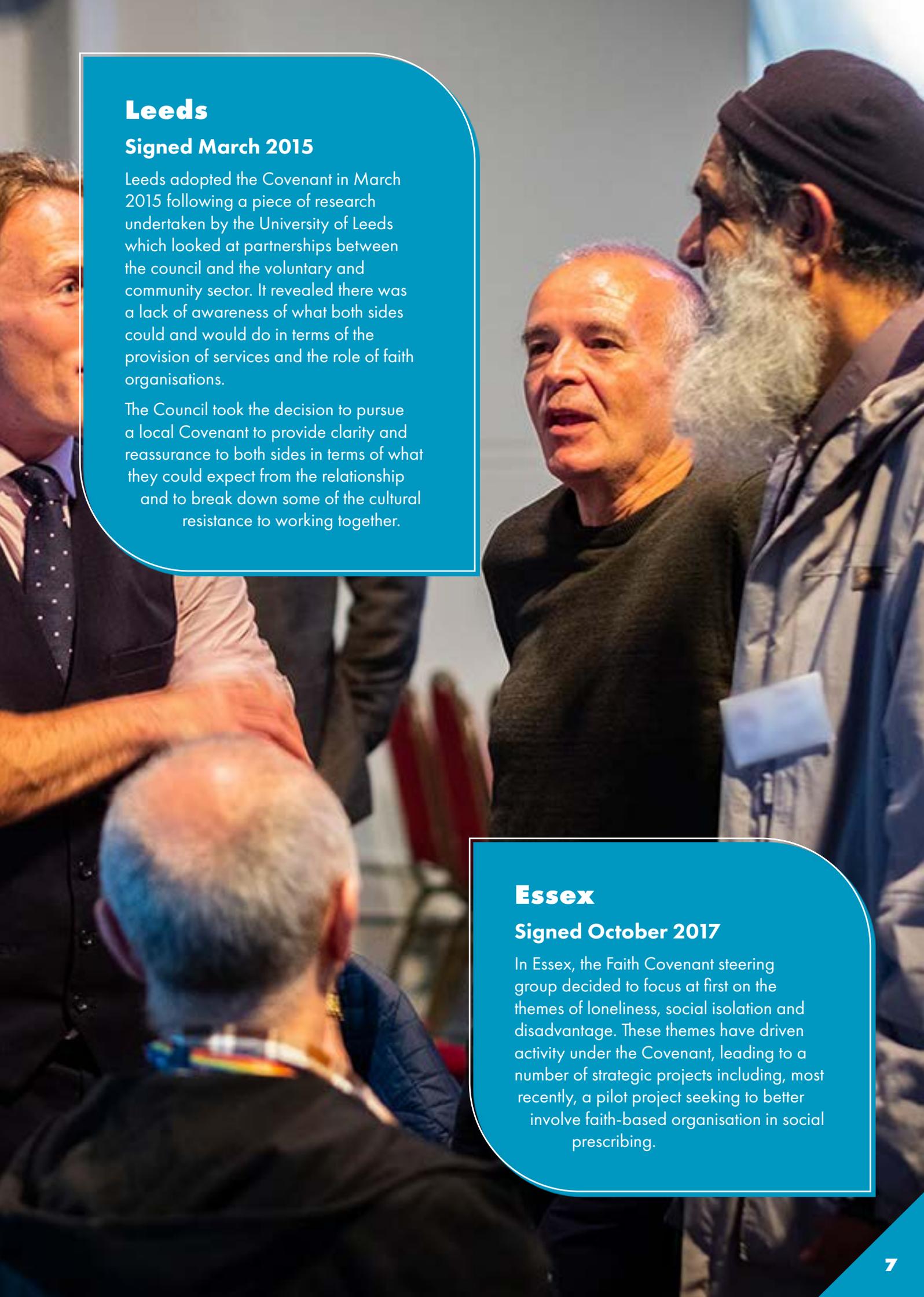
Work together to choose the wording that is right for you all. Discuss what both groups want from the Covenant and if there is anything else that is pertinent to your area which has not been covered by other covenants and how you can include this.

Anne Kittappa
Brent Council



It is important that the staff from your council area have a good religious literacy as this will aid discussions with partners in the faith sector. You need to consider the faith landscape in your local area, what are their challenges and capacity to partner with you ... Consider the structures under which this will sit and how this will be managed and reviewed and its effectiveness evaluated. Consider the involvement of local politicians and, in particular, identify 'Elected Member Champions' to support the ambitions of the Covenant and your partnership approach.

Geoffrey Turnbull
Leeds City Council



Leeds

Signed March 2015

Leeds adopted the Covenant in March 2015 following a piece of research undertaken by the University of Leeds which looked at partnerships between the council and the voluntary and community sector. It revealed there was a lack of awareness of what both sides could and would do in terms of the provision of services and the role of faith organisations.

The Council took the decision to pursue a local Covenant to provide clarity and reassurance to both sides in terms of what they could expect from the relationship and to break down some of the cultural resistance to working together.

Essex

Signed October 2017

In Essex, the Faith Covenant steering group decided to focus at first on the themes of loneliness, social isolation and disadvantage. These themes have driven activity under the Covenant, leading to a number of strategic projects including, most recently, a pilot project seeking to better involve faith-based organisation in social prescribing.

6 CORE PRINCIPLES FOR A COVENANT

These principles for a successful Covenant have been developed with Covenant holders across England. Over the past decade, the APPG for Faith and Society has had countless conversations with faith leaders, council officers, and councillors about what works and what doesn't in setting up and sustaining a Faith Covenant. There have been many successes, and not a few challenges. More often than not, signing a Covenant is a journey that begins long before anyone puts pen to paper, and continues long after. "What lessons have you learned?" has been our question to those who have taken this journey.

These principles are applicable to both sides of the Covenant agreement: faith bodies, and the public sector. They might be used as a plumb line for the development of Covenant activity, underpinning any practical steps taken.



Relationship is at the heart of a successful Faith Covenant. Don't think of the Covenant as a formal framework or "contract" but as a tool to facilitate friendship.



Make the Covenant **strategic**. The Covenant certainly holds a lot of symbolic value as a signal of intent, but it has the potential to be much more. When integrated into a work plan, or when dedicated to a key area of interest or problem issue, the Covenant can become a vehicle for lasting change for your city, borough or county.



The Covenant needs **champions**: people who "get it", and are willing to do the hard work to make it happen and succeed. Finding champions from the council, as well as the faith sector, will be key.

Longevity needs to be built in from the start. Think about what will help the Covenant have lasting impact, even when personnel move on, strategies change and priorities shift.



The Faith Covenant is a **living framework**, not a one-off event. Signing the Covenant is the beginning of a long-term commitment to partnership working. It is an invitation to a way of working based on trust and collaboration, with a shared commitment to co-design and delivering solutions to local needs together. It is therefore adaptable and durable, outlasting any specific event, project or strategy.



Participation is essential. The Covenant should be co-designed, not "imposed". Seek to involve as many stakeholders as possible in the journey to launching your Covenant.

