

THE FAITH COVENANT

WHAT, WHY, HOW

A PRIMER
FOR FAITH
COMMUNITIES

faithAction



all-party parliamentary group
appg faith and society

Faith communities have always been at the heart of efforts to serve local needs. Recent crises have made this apparent to all, and more and more local authorities have begun collaborating closely with faith groups to identify and reach communities, and co-design and deliver solutions to community needs.

No matter how readily your local authority has sought to work with faith communities in the past or present, if any of the following apply to you and your faith community, the Faith Covenant could be for you:

- You feel passionate about decisions being made in your community and would like **more of a voice** into them.
- You have **assets to offer** - buildings, expertise, volunteers, etc. - and would like to use them to support your council.
- You are already doing things that complement statutory services and want the council to be **more aware**.
- You would like to know how to **access funding** to carry out the work you are doing.
- You have worked closely with the council throughout the **Covid-19 pandemic** and would like to see that commitment to partnership continue.
- Relationships with the council have never been strong or have grown strained in recent times, and you would like to establish a **renewed commitment** to partnership working around shared values.

Adoption of the Covenant can:

- **Increase your impact** through close working/co-production with your local council and other faith communities
- Mean you and your community are **consulted more regularly**
- Turn good working relationships into a **recognised partnership** with your local authority
- Open up **channels of communication** between your local authority and faith communities
- Outline a set of commitments to which your council can be **held accountable**

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

Essex

Signed October 2017

Progress towards a Faith Covenant in Essex followed the publication of a report mapping faith and statutory partnerships around mental health provision, work undertaken by a group called Essex Mind and Spirit. Ivor Moody, chair of the group and Vice Dean and Canon Pastor of Chelmsford Cathedral, later invited interested parties to explore a county-wide Covenant, including Essex Police, the Equalities and Partnerships Team at the council and East of England Faiths Agency.

Work was driven forward by Ivor and the Head of Equalities and Partnerships at the Council. He and Ivor convened a further four meetings of what had now become the Faith Covenant steering group. Two conferences in 2015 and 2016 generated more county-wide interest and allowed stakeholders to input into its development. The Covenant was signed at a launch event in October 2017, attended by Stephen Timms MP, Chair of the APPG for Faith and Society, with participating faith groups invited to “sign” post-its and attach them to a symbolic tree.

Ivor Moody remains Chair of the Covenant; the steering group continues to provide oversight of Covenant activity, meeting quarterly. It represents Faith Covenant signatories, and comprises members of the faith/voluntary sector, as well as Essex County and Borough and District Councils. Whilst the Covenant has been in place at a county-wide level since 2017, individual districts have been invited to sign up at their own pace, allowing them freedom to adopt wording and commitments that suit their local situation.



What has the Faith Covenant achieved?



[The Faith Covenant has] made a good impact in terms of making us feel listened to and addressing issues and concerns... from hate crime to gaining support for funding in order to set up educational, social and recreational activities.

Kailash Parekh
Preston

The Faith Covenant has given faith-based organisations the ability to have a voice, it has fostered participation on a multi-faith and public sector basis, and provided recognition for the fact that faith-based organisations have different solutions and expertise in reaching out to communities.

Gulab Singh MBE DL, Preston

The faith community is being valued in a way it was not previously in Brighton and Hove. It helps local authorities reach groups they cannot reach otherwise and helps with contracts and funding ... it helps with alleviating suspicion between statutory authorities and people of faith too.

Rik Child
Brighton and Hove

We already had good working relationship between the faith communities and the local authority and this provided a way of formalising that relationship.

Canon Hilary Barber
Calderdale

The Faith Covenant has helped us introduce new faith-based projects into our area and has set some standards for charities to abide by.

Paul Woodman
Southampton



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.**



[The Faith Covenant has facilitated] regular communication between the faith communities and the local authority [...], creating the space for shared vision and the sharing of resources, both financial and in kind, [which] make for a strong partnership. The Covenant gives us a framework to review and revisit along the journey.

Canon Hilary Barber
Calderdale

Faith communities may also want to consider...

- Explore what **existing mechanisms** there may be for engaging with your council. Is there an Interfaith forum, for example?
- **Identify like-minded faith groups** with a similar desire to form partnerships with the council. Seek a collegiate approach, building on rather than replacing previous work, and honour others' past efforts in building partnerships.
- Are there **councillors or council officers** with a desire or remit for engaging with faith? They may be good people to approach first. Councillors who are themselves people of faith may also have a particular interest in this area.



[Have] clear objectives, genuine interest and commitment ... [and maintain] clear, open, honest communication between all parties.

Kailash Parekh
Preston



Don't set yourselves up to fail. Developing personal relationships pays dividends. Understand how to get some quick wins. Generating good will on both sides can take you a long way.

Canon Hilary Barber
Calderdale

Take time to talk to all partners about the Covenant so that when it is set up there is wide ownership. Share the Covenant often with partners as staff members and leaders change often.

Paul Woodman
Southampton



Solihull

Signed September 2015

In Solihull, faith groups asked for the Head of Planning to come and speak to them about the planning process, via the Faith Covenant, so that they could get more involved in building a better community. The council says that, in general, the faith groups are now bolder in approaching them, and the faith groups say that they are getting more involved in strategic decisions.

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.



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.

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.

