

## **All Party Parliamentary Group on Faith & Society**

**Minutes of meeting Tuesday 26<sup>th</sup> April 2022**

### **Inaugural Meeting of 2022 Parliament**

Present

- Rt Hon Stephen Timms MP
- Sir Gary Streeter MP
- Baroness Uddin
- Sam Tarry MP
- Jon Cruddas MP
- Sir Peter Bottomley MP
- Alasdair Gordon
- Daniel Singleton
- Jeremy Simmons
- Jenny Hadgraft

Apologies:

- Afzal Khan MP
- Lord Boswell of Aynho

### **Minutes:**

#### **1. Welcome**

Stephen Timms welcomed those present, thanking them for attending and reminded attendees of the aims of the APPG on Faith & Society.

#### **2. Aims of the APPG**

The aims of the group were confirmed as:

- To promote understanding of faith-based organisations engaged in social action in the UK, and recognition of their value;
- 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;
- To consider regulatory and legislative arrangements which can make the most of the potential contribution of faith-based organisations;
- To learn from and contribute to international conversations, policy and civic action on the contribution of faith-based organisations.

#### **3. Election of Officers**

Officers were elected as follows:

- Chair: Rt Hon Stephen Timms MP
- Vice Chair: Sir Gary Streeter MP
- Vice Chair: Fiona Bruce MP
- Vice Chair: Jon Cruddas MP
- Vice Chair: David Linden MP
- Vice Chair: Lord Singh of Wimbledon
- Vice Chair: Baroness Neuberger
- Vice Chair: Baroness Uddin
- Secretary: Rt Hon David Lammy MP

#### **4. Activity of the group in 2021-22**

A report on the work of the group over the previous year was distributed.

#### **Past year (Jeremy Simmons, FaithAction)**

The APPG held a number of events online, including the fourth Faith Covenant Forum meeting, a meeting that brings together council and faith representatives of different areas, enabling peer learning and sharing best practice. The meetings gather a lot of interest and positive feedback. The meeting included an update from Professor Chris Baker of Goldsmiths University on the upcoming follow-on report to *Keeping the Faith*, and discussion about areas that would like to expand the Faith Covenant to combined authority areas.

Other online events featured an interesting discussion with students and lecturers from Leeds Beckett University, chaired by Rt Hon Stephen Timms MP. Students presented their concepts for a National Commemoration Event for the UK to mark the COVID-19 pandemic.

Another event involved the University of York and a briefing of their report Churches, COVID-19 and Communities. The report briefing was followed by a panel discussion with Baroness Uddin, Daniel Singleton of FaithAction and Kate Giles of University of York.

The APPG were also involved in research for the follow on report to *Keeping the Faith* (2020), Professor Chris Baker interviewed fifty different representatives, supported by Matt Allen of FaithAction.

Stephen Timms thanked FaithAction for their secretariat support, and added that the launch of the report is being planned, and is hopeful that a Minister will be involved.

Jon Cruddas asked how many authorities were signed up to the Faith Covenant. FaithAction confirmed that 24 local authorities have now signed the Covenant.

Stephen Timms added that there has been a lot of interest in the Covenant as the pandemic has made many councils realise that faith groups are an asset for things like vaccinations. Local authorities have looked to the Faith Covenant as a way of working for the future.

Baroness Uddin asked why Newham hadn't signed the Faith Covenant. Stephen Timms replied that relationships are growing across sectors in Newham, for example with the launch of the Newham Food Alliance during the pandemic, which the council has supported.

Daniel Singleton commented that a common issue is when one party surges ahead with interest, but the Covenant is an agreement between two parties, i.e. council officers and faith representatives.

## **5. Future Work (Daniel Singleton, FaithAction)**

### **Faith Covenant**

Areas that are currently considering signing the Faith Covenant are: Cornwall, Hertfordshire and Kendal. Essex have supported Hertfordshire as they navigate issues in completion. Members may want to consider encouraging local authority areas.

### **Other work**

The general theme of levelling up is a natural lead on from the Keeping the Faith report and from work with Faith Covenants areas, on how faith can respond to the levelling up agenda and inequalities issues, something that FaithAction have been very aware of pre COVID-19. A potential area of focus is how faith groups can contribute to increasing life chances in the UK post COVID-19.

### **Other Suggestions**

Baroness Uddin commented that it would be valuable for Faith Covenant Forum Meetings to consider faith based hate around the UK, given the post COVID-19 equality gaps. She also mentioned that MPs may want to attend the meetings.

## **6. Close**

Stephen Timms asked if there was any other business. There being none he thanked everyone and closed the meeting.