

APPG Faith Covenant Forum Meeting, Tuesday 2 June 2020

Attendees:

Rt Hon Stephen Timms, MP	Geoffrey Turnbull, Leeds
Keith Brown, Southampton	Gulab Singh, Preston
Councillor Nweeda Khan, Preston	Andrew Lowing, Essex
Tarang Shelat, Birmingham	Marek Lubelski, Luton
Vincent Harvey,	Jason Murphy, Southampton
Es Rosen, Barnet	Danny Maher, Brent
Melinda King, Brighton & Hove	Shammi Jalota, Essex
Paul Woodman, Southampton	Debbie Sellin, Southampton
Zohrah Zancudi, Calderdale	Councillor Satvir Kaur, Southampton
Councillor John Cotton, Birmingham	Lara Thompson, Solihull
Revd Canon Ivor Moody, Essex	Suwinder Bains, Birmingham
Rik Child, Brighton & Hove	Kirit Wadia, Brent
Revd Canon Hilary Barber, Calderdale	Pat Wilkinson, Solihull
Stan Keller, Essex	Jason Murphy, Southampton
Asmina Remtulla, Barnet	Ali Gordon, Office of Stephen Timms MP
Cllr Jasbinder Dehar, Wolverhampton	Daniel Singleton, FaithAction
Archbishop Jerome Lloyd	Matthew Allen, FaithAction
Bishop Roger Morris, Essex	Jeremy Simmons, FaithAction
Shazia Hussain, Brent	Jenny Hadgraft, FaithAction
Lelir Yeung, Leeds	

Rt Hon Stephen Timms MP, Chair of APPG Faith & Society

- Thanked people for joining the meeting. Faith groups play an important role but often run into difficulties working with local councils and the Covenant provides ground rules for both sides in the hope of building trust and removing barriers.
- Covid 19 has forged new partnerships – councils are discovering that only faith groups have the potential to reach some communities – this is something that hasn't happened before.

Revd Canon Ivor Moody, Essex

- The covenant aims to cover the whole county of Essex, eight out of twelve area districts have signed up and hope that more will follow.
- Pandemic has defined what the faith covenant stands for - It has been a very busy time but has helped define what the covenant stands for – thankful for the council's support and its engagement with the covenant.
- Future work: The Covenant and council will continue to work in partnership to look at financial impacts, faith festivals and easing of lockdown.
- The faith covenant has worked on a county wide level is because the council had full buy in – this couldn't have worked without that couldn't have done it without this buy in. The short answer is the support of county council is vital.

Bishop Roger Morris, Essex

- Relationships have had to form fast, with vulnerabilities shared openly and work had to be done collaboration – the situation has been a catalyst that in ordinary times would not have happened.
- There is a significant BAME community in Essex and they will be looking into the issues around covid and the suffering of this community.

Stan Keller, Essex

- The covenant has brought different strands together from different inter faith communities – knowledge-based sharing has been valuable - for advice on funerals, excess deaths and how these things are dealt with.

Andrew Lowing, Essex

- The covenant has good representation from many faiths but does need stronger Muslim representation – this group had not always been able to participate fully in the covenant but covid has strengthened these relationships and there is also now a separate working group and it is hoped to work together a lot in the future. The Jewish community fed into the communications about Passover. FaithAction have also supported the comms work with a national perspective, Jeremy Simmons attended weekly calls on this.
- The council produced leaflets/social media communications for many issues around covid.
- Moving forward – the faith and communities working group will link with the TCG (Tactical Coordinating Group, a vehicle for moving beyond the crisis) with a focus on maintaining communications and to inform development of pandemic response work – of which the scope will be widened cover all protected characteristics.

Councillor Nweeda Khan, Preston

- The Preston model is based on good connection at a district level with faith communities so are able to engage efficiently. The faith sector is vital for reaching as many people as possible.
- The covenant has worked with a local university to provide food for 600 international students and set up 3 food hubs and 10 food banks in the area.

Gulab Singh, Preston

- The covenant is a very good conduit for multi faith collaboration and action – it is a way of coming together strategically and to feed into local resilience forum.
- The covenant provides a way to have dialogue to show inclusivity and that connections are strategic upwards and downwards. Providing meals to the university was logistically easy and not a burden on one organisation or faith.
- Covid has mobilised lots of voluntary activity – it is important to capture and harness this extra activity.

Councillor Satvir Kaur, Southampton

- Southampton is most diverse city in the southern region.
- When Southampton signed there was already a good relationship with faith communities, the covenant allowed to link up and cement the joint working partnership. The council is very comfortable in commissioning faith groups – to ensure they are part of redesigning services and policy development.

Es Rosen, Barnet

- The covenant has been instrumental to the covid response, the faith community was automatically included in strategic partnerships.
- They have produced a multi faith video with Middlesex University to demonstrate their work on looking after the vulnerable and lonely.
- More coordination – wants a broader connection – interesting groups that are part of that – more than just dialogues but a separate strand that could be linked in so that people can meet and discuss issues in FC and to support others to get involved with covenant.
- Government needs to understand the capacity and funding needs of faith communities.

Councillor Jasbinder Dehar, Wolverhampton

- Good practice – lots of activity on community togetherness and cohesion. Plans for a community conference . Good links with director of public health with funeral comms etc.

Revd Canon Hilary Barber, Calderdale

- Close partnership between local authorities and faith comms, signed covenant eight years ago.
- Faith groups commissioned for many issues e.g. asylum seekers, food banks. Worked together on sensitivities around funerals. Moving toward reopening and shared messaging

Geoffrey Turnbull, Leeds

- Second local authority to sign up to faith covenant.
- Urgency of covid produced strong engagement. A strategic faith leaders' network and meetings that are open to all.
- Building strong foundations, faith networks have been invaluable to response services.
- Plans to review the covenant in the future.
- Leeds has very diverse faith sector – now we are working with smaller faith groups e.g. Greek Orthodox. These relationships will strengthen and continue.

Councillor John Cotton, Birmingham

- Birmingham has strong connections to faith groups – a good foundation, tested by covid crisis. Messaging went out re Eid, funerals.
- Crisis has exposed inequalities – faith communities can bring a lot to developing this evidence. Also lobbying government – made useful changes and would like to use this as a means of resetting commitment to covenant.

Rik Child, Brighton & Hove

- Signed in 2018 – only recently that it has gained a lot more momentum.
- Runs faith tours to places of worship – popular.
- Creating film, about what the faith covenant is doing in the crisis – will be there for posterity to show all of the work. Other faith orgs are really engaged, will have greater influence and profile of faith groups will rise.

Abdullah Salloo, Brent

- Brent is one of most diverse boroughs in London.
- Working with GPs to offer pastoral support – the aftermath of covid will see many people in isolation and with mental health issues.

Asmina Remtulla, Barnet

- Raised issue that there was a lack of BME representation in the meeting.

Daniel Singleton, FaithAction – Covenant Next Steps

- Identify how often faith covenant forum meetings should take place (poll)
- More areas to sign up to faith covenant – possibly invite interested parties to a future meeting.
- Possible academic piece on faiths response and relationship between faith and local authorities.