

## **APPG Faith Covenant Forum Meeting, Monday 5 October 2020**

Attendees:

- Rt Hon Stephen Timms MP
- Asmina Remtulla, Barnet
- Amrick Singh Ubhi, Birmingham
- Abdullah Salloo, Brent
- Danny Maher, Brent
- Kirit Wadia, Brent
- Archbishop Jerome Lloyd, Brighton & Hove
- Melinda King, Brighton & Hove
- Rik Child, Brighton & Hove
- Revd Canon Hilary Barber, Calderdale
- Andrew Lowing, Essex
- Revd Canon Ivor Moody, Essex
- Cllr John Spence, Essex
- Moira Groborz, Essex
- Geoffrey Turnbull, Leeds
- Jay Anderson, Leeds
- Cllr Mohammed Iqbal, Leeds
- Cllr Nweeda Khan, Preston
- Penny Craig, Preston
- Pat Wilkinson, Solihull
- Jason Murphy, Southampton
- Rt Revd Debbie Sellin, Southampton
- Debbie Smith, Wolverhampton
- Ali Gordon, Office of Stephen Timms MP
- Hannah Lawson, Office of Stephen Timms MP
- Daniel Singleton, FaithAction
- Matt Allen, FaithAction
- Jeremy Simmons, FaithAction
- Andrew Welsby, FaithAction
- Heather Ratnarajah, FaithAction

### *Visitors:*

- Marek Lubelski, Luton Council
- Waheed Akhtar, Rotherham Council
- Karl Wightman, UK Baha'i Community
- Maeve Carlin, Women's Interfaith Network

### **Daniel Singleton, FaithAction**

- Welcomed everyone to the meeting.
- The last session was useful to connect with people, and it is great that people were able to join us again.
- Danny Kruger report has just been launched mentioning a new deal for faith and a consideration for community cohesion. People reporting to FaithAction have reported great interactions between different faith groups and between faith groups and local authorities, but it could go the other way, so we are at a time of crossroads.

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

- Found the first Covenant Forum fascinating and is pleased so many came today.
- The Danny Kruger report has called for new deal for faith communities as part of a wide-ranging review looking at how we sustain the great community efforts put in place over the last few months. The Prime Minister's letter commissioning the report specifically called for a look at faith groups, and Kruger specifically mentions the work of the APPG for Faith & Society and the Faith Covenant as a template for how a more focused government effort could look.

- Over the summer, the APPG, supported by the Trussell Trust and the Halley Stewart Trust commissioned a survey by Goldsmiths, University of London looking at the relationships between local authorities and faith groups during the pandemic. A questionnaire was sent to over 400 councils across the country, and 49% responded. Virtually every council has been working with faith groups to distribute food over the last few months, reversing the trend of distrust that councils had working with faith groups. This has been a positive experience for local authorities. The report will be launched later in the month.
  - *(Editor's note): Due to a change in COVID-19 restrictions across the country, the recommendations section of this report has had to be altered. Due to this delay, it will now be published in early November.*

### **Rt Rev Debbie Sellin, Southampton**

- Came into post just over a year ago, had 6 months of normality before COVID hit. Was struck by how much the council wanted to work with faith groups. Part of her induction process was to meet with the chief executive of the council and now has quarterly catch-ups. There are also regular meetings between church representatives and staff from the city council.
- Cross-Church Group, Love Southampton, was invited into Council Response Group at the start of the crisis and have been able to provide centralised church response. Started with food for those in need which has carried on through the crisis. They are able to buy food through grants, donations and church giving and are averaging £18,000 worth of food being given out every week since beginning of lockdown.
- Wanted to help the rough sleepers in the city. Managed to get funds and volunteers to provide cooking facilities for rough sleepers in Bed and Breakfasts. There are still people rough sleeping on the streets, and 950 meals per week are being provided for them.
- There were also three areas they worked on to expand on already existing provision: Befriending and supporting families in need - this has increased under COVID with more volunteers trained up to support families; Working with refugees and migrants, particularly English language cafes; Support for those self-isolating – 8 trips for shopping or pharmacy per day.
- One of the biggest positives from this is that the group were able to work very well together, and work quickly. They are also working closely with the City Council, helping identify those they should be involved with. They want to take this into the future. 3 churches involved in the response have received match funding from Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport which will allow them to build on the work already done. The grant is to tackle poverty and hardship and they want to continue to provide food (but need to work out what this looks like in a post-COVID environment), and also provide Debt Advice & employment training.

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

- Is what happened over the last 6 months different to what has happened in the past? Have the faith groups in Southampton had an issue with the wording of the Covenant which states that public funds won't be used for proselytising, feeling that they can't do any religious outreach work?

### **Rt Rev Debbie Sellin, Southampton**

- More than before – more organised and structured. Without the relationships it wouldn't have worked. City council knew they could rely on faith groups to respond during the crisis. Council knew of Love Southampton and had worked with them on previous projects, e.g. Fostering. How to work together in an emergency is the new part – how can they share information while protecting data.
- Working through the idea of proselytising is a stumbling block for a couple of churches – but Christians can show their faith through their actions without using words and following Jesus' example of showing love is sometimes even more important than what we say.

**Trevor Howard, Executive Vice-Chair of the Board of CiC International**

- Is there an interest from government agencies to connect beyond food?

**Rt Rev Debbie Sellin, Southampton**

- The new grant is taking it beyond food, to the wellbeing of people

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

- Survey asked about a number of areas where partnerships were formed. Food was the biggest, but wasn't the only one – Debt advice, loneliness, fostering also appear. Great variety of things going on in partnership. There should be data on the extent in the report.

**Jason Murphy, Southampton**

- Local authority have had to follow rather than lead. Lots of issues have come up that churches and places of worship were thinking about that the local authority wasn't – e.g. loneliness. Local authority would be looking at it in a strategic sense, but churches were there meeting the operational needs. This has highlighted that LAs are not the experts on everything & need to be open to working with others. Proselytising isn't an issue, if people want to help each other, we need to set aside any distractions and work out how we do it. If there is a crisis in the future, then Places of Worship will be there to help fill the gap, and there needs to be a policy shift to accommodate this.

**Revd Canon Hillary Barber, Calderdale**

- Has been working with the local authority on suicide prevention. Large numbers of men committing suicide in Halifax over the last 12-18 months. Have set aside a space in Halifax Minster where support can be offered. Also involved in joined up work support families who have suffered the loss of a child.
- Been able to extend the Winter Shelter for the Homeless provision with money from the local authority - Staying Well Project, small grants to engage with people who are lonely and isolated.

**Waheed Akhtar, Rotherham**

- Similar approaches to Southampton – Community Hub with volunteers that have come organically from the community, but particularly from faith groups.
- Most of those volunteering in food banks were elderly who needed to shield, so additional support was needed.

- Faith Groups have been positive on how to work within the guidance on funerals, burials and cremations, helping the council plan for the worst case scenario.
- Older people and people who are isolated & in need of mental health support- working with Faith groups to identify these people.
- Also want to promote messages coming from the faith communities on community tensions and using faith communities to promote official messages e.g. from Public Health Officials.

#### **Cllr John Spence, Essex**

- Haven't been as proactive as in some places in getting faith groups to take on some tasks e.g. homeless, fostering and befriending.

#### **Marek Lubelski, Luton**

- Reached out to faith & community leaders at the start of the crisis and got them onto a weekly Zoom call about emergency response. Really key way to disseminate public health messages – Luton has gone in and out of being an area of concern – managed to pull out of that through dialogue with faith leaders on how to manage local outbreaks in particular neighbourhoods and how to get messages out. Also helped find out about issues on tensions, where certain groups are being blamed for outbreaks.
- LA have had to learn about how to deepen the existing trust between Faith organisations and the LA, using the Faith Covenant as a framework.

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

- What is encouraging is that the idea of the covenant is about faith groups & LAs working together, and how to formalise this relationship, and this is something that is already happening in Luton.

#### **Amrick Singh Ubhi, Birmingham**

- Birmingham was the first place to sign up to a Covenant 6 years ago. Doesn't feel that anything was different in the response to the crisis because of the covenant. Faith communities and others stepped up to respond. May have been slowly, but it came out from local neighbourhoods and local faith groups. Local cricket ground gave up space to store food. Aston Villa gave their kitchens and staff to cook meals. What came together was the existing established networks to work on solutions.
- Had a conversation with Cllr Cotton, Leader of Birmingham City Council – How do we capture what has happened that made this so powerful? Cllr Cotton thought it was because there was no bureaucracy during this time. "We don't have time for a meeting, we have a fire to deal with".
- Trusted partners and public orgs came together to see what they can do – putting aside the rules to make it work. People offering services they wouldn't normally do.
- Street collections, growing street by street. People give 1 can, but it built up, with the idea that "Every single contact must count" - People struggling with mental health – how do you have conversations to support people during the isolation while you are dropping off food – helped to break down barriers.

### **Daniel Singleton, FaithAction**

- Where there has been pre-existing relationship, this has been followed through well – has anyone come from a standing start, has this built effectively?

### **Cllr Asmina Khan, Preston**

- Have had local interventions in place on 2 occasions. Faith groups have helped lead on work with vulnerable groups. Their Faith Covenant works slightly differently - they wanted leads from different faith sectors to be the exchange of info in their communities. Have a Preston Faith Forum which sits with the Covenant group, but they work more in activities and events e.g. Interfaith week, but also bring in info to the Faith Covenant.
- They have a good collaborative relationship with faith groups. Have continued to build on these relationships, and they want to enhance that through funding for projects.
- COVID interventions in Preston have had an effect, as shown through statistics and from talking with public health officials. They have set up 3 testing sites but testing and access to tests is a large concern, as they are not sure how long they can keep these sites open.

### **Malcolm Craig, Preston**

- Wanted to pay tribute to Lancashire Forum of Faiths – set up 4 or 5 webinars to help people with issues and have worked to introduce faith groups to refugees, which complements the more practical food bank work.

### **William Cooper, Brent**

- Using Faith organisations as a way to reach communities. Has been an issue getting messages out throughout the pandemic and it is really important to Test & Trace – need to get the message out to those who won't necessarily pay attention to mainstream communication sources. Faith communities are very useful in helping with that. Large orthodox Jewish community in Brent, they don't trust messages from the outside, so using trusted voices helps to get these messages out.
- Barnet Multifaith Forum helped produce video with Middlesex University giving faith leaders an opportunity to thank people for what they did during the crisis and continuing to remind people of the public health messages.

### **Danny Maher, Brent**

- Is grateful that there is a sense of value being recognised. Faith groups and the council have worked together well in Brent since 2017, but COVID has brought them closer together.
- Wants to thank Brent in recognising the value of working with faith groups to reach and engage with their communities, people they wouldn't normally connect with & pleased they recognise faith groups as a vehicle for engagement – things working so much better than before COVID.

## **What challenges are there to come and how can the Covenant be used to help this?**

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

- In Newham, where there isn't a history of co-operation, there has been close working over the last 6 months. Council sent out email over Easter informing people of a food bank operating out of a local church. New things have happened, but this has been built from a standing start.
- From the survey, almost all the LAs are positive in how they have worked with faith groups over the last 6 months and they want to continue these relationships to meet the challenges that will come out over the next few years.

### **Daniel Singleton, FaithAction**

- Most people who take part as NHS Voluntary responders are providing food and medicine deliveries. These activities for take 30 minutes, but delivering them also takes 30 minutes as they stop and chat with the person making the request – they are reaching out to meet a practical need, but the actual need may be more social or related to mental health. Need for things to meet loneliness, but people don't refer themselves for these issues, they will refer themselves for other reasons.

### **Rev Canon Ivor Moody, Essex**

- Has been doing important work on Dementia. The Faith Covenant group has invited Mark Neville from Alzheimer's Society onto the committee. He has been working on Faith & Communities Tactical Co-ordination Group to look at how to support people with dementia. Lots of talk about BAME communities, but dementia sufferers and their carers have also struggled to get help and dealing with social distancing.

### **Moria Groborz, Essex**

- Faith Covenant is county wide in Essex so covers 12 districts. What she has seen in her district, is those who responded to the crisis from their faith groups to help volunteer now need formal managing. Managing volunteers is an art form, and this is something some people struggle with understanding. Wants to provide volunteer management training through the Covenant group.
- Social prescribing is a thing across mid-Essex but the social prescribers haven't long been in post, so volunteering hasn't been something they have picked up yet, & it may not sit with them as they want to link into VCS.

### **Rik Child, Brighton & Hove**

- Big question for them is how can faith communities support the homeless during COVID and afterwards – especially with night shelters not being able to open. Supported housing is available until Christmas, but there is no funding after this & they have been turned down for further funding. There is a grant to get people into a supported housing situation, and then work with them on their issues e.g. employment, addition etc.
- Work already been done to feed and clothe homeless populations doesn't solve the ongoing issues, rather just enables the situation to continue.

- Production of a co-produced set of solutions with people who are homeless is being considered alongside Arch Healthcare – dedicated to the homeless population & very well respected by the users and by the statutory bodies. This is about Homeless people helping with the design of services should mean that people engage with the services.

### **Danny Maher, Brent**

- Local authorities and faith communities need to have serious conversations on how we move to an alternative to night shelters – need to be inventive with what we do & it needs to be talked about very seriously.

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

- Has anyone thought about running a night shelter this year? – have they come up with a way to do this safely? Are there initiatives that can work?

### **Cllr Asmina Khan, Preston**

- Preston Council has a link with the Foxton Centre – they have 12 bed spaces for those who don't have accommodation. There was originally 8, but they have received funding from the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government to expand their capacity. Is part of the Council outreach service. They have a wraparound service with health facilities available.
- They do have a night shelter partly owned by a housing association, but they have had to move premises, so those people have been reaccommodated.

### **Marek Lubelski, Luton**

- Council of Faiths joined up with local advocacy organisations to point out that the normal approaches that mental health services use, particularly for those from the diverse communities, don't always work well and have provided resources to help people support those with mental health issues. No current numbers of uptake, but this is a great first step to bridge gap between faith, spirituality and mental health.

### **Archbishop Jerome Lloyd, Brighton & Hove**

- Thought early on about how to allow access to volunteer and minority faith chaplains in hospitals. Worked with council and local statutory bodies to issue letters authorising access with a register of those allowed, with a 24 hour phone line to help statutory bodies verify their identity.

### **Melinda King, Brighton**

- Been having weekly meetings between the LA & Faith Partnership. Has led on some equalities work looking at the disproportionate impact of COVID.
- Key issue for those seeking mental health help is people opening up to ask for help, with different stigmas in different communities – representatives from their diverse communities suggested filming videos on how people can have those conversations, and talking about how they have found mental health a struggle during this crisis.

### **Rev Canon Ivor Moody, Essex**

- Wanted to highlight what has been done in the area, so produced a newsletter to let people know –
- This led to thinking about what the Covenant could be – could it be a gathering point for what's being going on in their community – feels this is a key role of the Faith Covenant. Wants to do some sharing on a bigger scale. Daniel Singleton, FaithAction asked if this could be passed to the FaithAction team so it could be put on the APPG website.

### **Daniel Singleton, FaithAction**

- Danny Maher raised a question about how do you get around the space rule for indoor spaces for night shelters. FaithAction will seek feed back to MHCLG about this.

### **Penny Craig, Preston**

- Preston Faith Forum was set up in 2003 and has been very successful over long term. When Faith Covenant came in, it felt that the Covenant superseded the group, and what the role of the group should be. They met with representatives of the Faith Covenant. Before the covenant, the LA would work with Faith Forum closely.
- What is the Faith Covenant's role and what is the role for the faith forum – Feels that Forum should be the doers, and the covenant should be more advisory.

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

- Depends on the situation in each area – often Faith Forum only comes out of the Covenant. Preston was different – and there may be some difficulties working out where they should be working and what the relationship should be, but hopes the faith covenant isn't pushing out something that is already working well, and it is not the role of the covenant which is just supposed to be a set of principles.

### **Daniel Singleton, FaithAction**

- The Covenant is a set of principles and shouldn't necessarily be an organisation. Some LAs approach FA to work on the Covenant, some faith groups do it, and some work together.

### **Daniel Singleton, FaithAction - Looking to the Future**

- FaithAction to follow up with a number of resources that have been suggested today
- Report on the Survey run by the APPG will be launched in the coming weeks, which will be made available to the group
- FaithAction to draw from the discussions and from the chat to propose some ways forward, particularly around homelessness and ministry that need to be overcome.
- FaithAction would like the group to share any stories and issues on serving the wider community, so FaithAction can share with both MHCLG and the Department of Health.