

APPG Faith Covenant Forum Tuesday 5th July 2022

Attendees

Baroness Uddin	Geoff Sweeney, Derby
Zeb Noormahomed, Solihull	Dr Peter Rookes, Birmingham
Devi Bansal, Wolverhampton	Philip Shirfield, Cornwall
Charu Joshi, Hertfordshire	Jason Murphy, Southampton
Temi Fawehinmi, Hertfordshire	Violet Owen, Birmingham
Tracy Haycox, Sheffield	Surinder Jassi, Birmingham
Paul Woodman, Southampton	Ali Taylor, Brent
Matt Bunday, Southampton	Esmond Rosen, Brent
Moira Groborz, Essex	Revd Alan Green, Tower Hamlets
Andrew Lowing, Essex	Deepak Naik, Coventry
Jay Anderson, Leeds	Alisdair Gordon, Office of Sir Stephen Timms MP
Archbishop Jerome of Selsey, Brighton & Hove	Steve Miller, London Boroughs Faith Network
Jamarl Billy, Brighton & Hove	Jessica Hazrati, Faith & Belief Forum
David Currie, Kirklees	Daniel Singleton, FaithAction
Zohrah Zancudi, Calderdale	Andrew Welsby, FaithAction
Jaquetta Gomes,	Jenny Hadgraft, FaithAction
Rhiannon Watson, GLA	Jeremy Simmons, FaithAction
Jonathan Stephen, West Yorkshire Combined Authority	

Minutes

Daniel Singleton, National Executive Director, FaithAction

- Thanked people for joining the session.
- Explained that Rt Hon Sir Stephen Timms MP gave his apologies as he was unable to chair the session due to government business.
- Recapped that 24 local authorities have signed the Faith Covenant so far – with more areas moving towards signing the Covenant.

Alisdair Gordon, Office of Rt Hon Sir Stephen Timms MP – on behalf of Sir Stephen Timms MP

- At recent AGM of the APPG, faith hate was raised as an area for discussion, so the group is seeking to hear experiences around the issue and flesh out ideas for constructive actions.
- Longevity within Faith Covenant – the APPG are interested in hearing about what maintains momentum with the Faith Covenant after changes in council make up following local elections.
- The APPG are planning to launch a follow up report to *Keeping the Faith* in September – the new research from Professor Chris Baker and Matthew Allen of FaithAction is based on a series of interviews leading to recommendations for partnership working.
- Highlighted that people can get in touch with Sir Stephen Timms MP if there is anything that he can do to help.

Faith Hate

Baroness Uddin

- Thanked the APPG Faith & Society for inviting her to speak.
- Gave background of her early years as an activist, living in East London, witnessing faith hate.
- Any discrimination or hatred of any faith or religion is unacceptable and it is important that society does not institutionalise the centuries-old hatred of Muslims.
- Highlighted that there is lots of good practice within local communities and that she is deeply proud of the work that is happening.
- The importance of the work of different organisations, and the contribution of Muslim women within the family.

Discussion

Archbishop Jerome of Selsey, Brighton & Hove, the area has encountered a 400% increase in reported hate crimes, but Brighton & Hove Faith in Action (BHFA) have tried to react positively by creating videos of different faiths that are then shown in schools. They also conducted faith tours and incorporate these into the videos. The videos are aimed at key stage 3 and recognise that faith hate is often due to ignorance. The huge rise in reported crimes may partly be due to the launch of a third-party reporting system, so it was easier for people to report, as people are supported by community members to make a complaint.

Tracy Haycox, Sheffield, commented that sometimes the police have their own ideas on how faith hate should be reported. People in the area are concerned, that is why they are not going ahead with the third-party hate crime centre.

Jessica Hazrati, Faith & Belief Forum commented that people need to feel confident and supported to report hate crime – some people encounter these issues of their way to places of worship.

Dr Peter Rookes, Birmingham, commented that there is lots of mis-reporting of hate crime and violence against women and girls; it is difficult to distinguish between race hate and faith hate. People do not report crimes as it takes a long time for anything to happen, and they feel that the repercussions of reporting are worse than the hate itself.

Jason Murphy, Southampton, commented that Southampton has a third-party mechanism, the area is experiencing some underlying tensions, possibly political due to different treatment of Ukrainian refugees. Southampton has many Afghan refugees placed in hotels with no move on plan and no clarity, whereas Ukrainian refugees have refuge in people's homes. The tension is low but a situation worth tracking.

Archbishop Jerome of Selsey, Brighton & Hove, commented that Brighton is experiencing a similar problem and the council turned to the faith council; funding them to do some research. The Home Office doesn't appear to want to work with the local council. The project has allowed them to employ a 'community supporter' - they go into the communities as ambassador for the third-party reporting centre.

Changes in Local Councils

Esmond Rosen, Chair of Brent Multi Faith Forum

Everyone engaged with political activity needs to ensure the refugee issue is treated as one – why are other people treated differently? Their area formed a subgroup with the voluntary sector and brought people together to deal with it.

Barnet had good relationships with the Conservative authority, but always maintained good relations with councillors and opposition. When Labour won in Barnet, the group emailed the leader of the council and four other councillors they engage with and arranged a meeting for this month to look at the manifesto and policies to restrengthen relations.

They received a positive response and engagement is good. The previous administration did not address climate change work, so this is a welcome change and good direction.

The council has also appointed a community faith worker linked into the voluntary sector to enhance capacity for voluntary and faith groups. The individual can also signpost groups to faith groups linked to the faith forum.

Revd Alan Green, Chair of Tower Hamlets Inter Faith Forum and No Place for Hate

Tower Hamlets council has changed from being Labour run to Aspire, with a previous mayor, Lutfur Rahman back in post as mayor.

In the past, Lutfur had been removed from office and cleared of corruption – accusations made against him about engaging in corrupt ways to benefit mosques were false. The reports were based upon ignorance and possibly Islamophobia – Revd. Green was involved with the grants process and the commissioners did not seek to talk to them.

There are concerns that the media could affect perceptions of the council and the borough and inflame far-right attitudes.

Aspire asked female Labour councillors to join the cabinet, as at the moment it is all male – this offer was refused. However, the new manifesto is very good – promising a lot but it remains to be seen if this can be delivered. The manifesto appealed to the entire community, not only the Bangladeshi community. The manifesto shows a clear commitment to working with the inter faith forum.

THIFF had been given good support by commissioning Coventry University and FaithAction to develop capacity for the future – this has been in place for six years and there is commitment from officers that this should continue.

With regard to hate crimes, the borough closed its third-party reporting centres – a mystery shopping exercise discovered that the centres had lost the ability to do the job well – training and policies have to be refreshed all the time. Instead, work is carried out on the basis of individual and corporate pledges and constant work with hate crime champions to ensure that hate crime is before people's eyes. The police sanction detection rate is important to monitor – as this shows the outcomes that police are achieving; this builds confidence that action is taken and has a successful result.

Matt Bunday, Southampton – Council has changed to Labour; however it is early on, and policies are still being set up.

Comments

Archbishop Jerome of Selsey, Brighton & Hove – they work under the assumption that the Faith Covenant will be in place forever and that council officers will interact with it. However, the question of balancing issues around protected characteristics has arisen – some faith leaders have taken a particular stance on marriage and transgenderism. Questions are being raised in relation to commitment to equality and the right for people to express their beliefs.

Revd Alan Green, Tower Hamlets – In 2009 Tower Hamlets stopped dealing with hate crime in silos, dealing with all types together means that there is understanding that there is a commonality regardless of identity. Eats London Mosque is very engaged with equalities work, however there is always a need for them to balance this with the interest of their worshippers.

Daniel Singleton, National Executive Director, FaithAction

- Thanked people for their contributions and closed the meeting.

Useful Links

[Tower Hamlets No Place for Hate](#)

[Waltham Forest No Space for Hate](#)

[Barking & Dagenham Faith Builds Community](#)