

## **APPG Faith Covenant Forum Thursday 9<sup>th</sup> March 2023**

### **Attendees**

Sir Stephen Timms MP

Esther Platt, Good Faith Partnership

Cllr Jasbinder Dehar, Wolverhampton

Reynold Rosenberg, Hertfordshire

David Vane, Southampton

Rhiannon Watson, GLA

Paul Woodman, Southampton

Cllr Aga Dychton, Watford

Charu Joshi, Hertfordshire

Peter Tate, Buckinghamshire

Hilary Barber, Calderdale

Steve Botham, Birmingham

Pat Wilkinson, Solihull

Deepak Naik, Coventry

Katie Galvin, Buckinghamshire

Tim Jones, Brighton and Hove

Geoff Sweeney, Derby

Warwick Hawkins, Faith in Society

Debbie Smith, Wolverhampton

Tracy Haycox, Sheffield

Prof Jim McManus, Hertfordshire

Adiba Rashid, Bradford

Mike Conefry, Westmoreland and Furness

Archbishop Jerome Lloyd of Selsey, Brighton and Hove

Jacquetta Gomes, Westmoreland and Furness

Canon Ivor Moody, Essex

Haroon Ravat, Solihull

Stan Keller, Essex

Andrew Lowing, Essex

Matt Welsh, Essex

Alasdair Gordon, Office of Sir Stephen Timms MP

Daniel Singleton, FaithAction

Jeremy Simmons, FaithAction

Lucianne Baltrock-Nitzsche, FaithAction

Matthew Allen, FaithAction

Andrew Welsby, FaithAction

### **Minutes:**

#### **Sir Stephen Timms MP**

- Welcomed everybody to the session.
- Expressed his excitement over the current attention around the Covenant, with over 20 areas at different stages of signing up to a Covenant, including Coventry who will be the latest local authority to sign in less than a week.
- Also excited that existing areas are also looking to recommit to the Covenant through re-signing events, two of whom we will hear from today.

### **Area Spotlight**

#### **Paul Woodman (Southampton)**

- Recently re-signed the Covenant, which Southampton first signed in 2017.

- Faith groups were at the forefront of helping clinically vulnerable people in Southampton during the COVID-19 pandemic. Since then, the council has managed to secure a Faith New Deal grant which included funding to look at the food distribution network in the area, and trying to draw a picture together of where food is coming from to invest in better infrastructure that makes it all possible.
- Held a conference in October funded by the Faith New Deal grant called a Cost of Living Summit. Faith groups and Citizens Advice attended to discuss actions around Cost of Living.
- 50 warm spaces have opened up in the Southampton area to support those needing somewhere to keep warm.

### **Hilary Barber (Calderdale)**

- Calderdale have also recently re-signed the covenant, which they first signed 7-8 years ago.
- Calls Calderdale 'a model of good practice' between faith and the council. They felt now was a time for a review, and as there had changes in clientele since the initial signing. There had also been a change in the Director of Public Services, and the appointment of two new vice chairs of Calderdale Interfaith Network – a prominent Hindu and a prominent Muslim.
- Felt that the pandemic has been a big opportunity for building on these relationships between the council and faith communities.
- Climate change, mental health and moral economy have been big areas of discussion in the partnership. Recently engaged in a peer review of the local authority exploring place and partnership.

## **Partnership Responses to the cost of living crisis – Warm Welcome Spaces Programme**

### **Esther Platt – Good Faith Partnership/Warm Welcome Programme representative**

- Warm Welcome started at the end of September. Over 4,000 live spaces across the UK have signed up to the programme (68% churches, 23% libraries, rest are other minority religions/community hubs). Concentrated in urban areas (Bristol, Birmingham, Manchester, Bradford). People can go on the website to find a warm space near them using a TripAdvisor facilities rating format.
- Scheme was originally born out of the ChurchWorks Commission, initially set up in response to the COVID-19 pandemic and then Cost of Living Crisis response.
- Worked with Gordon Brown, who suggested 'train-station waiting room' style spaces, however, Good Faith Partnership, who manage the programme, wanted to set up something more welcoming and with more meaning.
- 44 people per space per week on average have attended a warm space since Christmas 2022. Have held several webinars on growing more areas e.g. youth spaces.
- Quick crisis response. There was an urgency to set something up at the end of the summer so it was available by winter.
- Good Faith Partnership have worked more on a national level, but areas with really good local connections have been able to refer people and communicate with the local authorities.

### **Discussion**

- Important for faith groups to promote the infrastructure for schemes such as Warm Spaces to continue.

- Relationships have been built across Warm Spaces, especially in Birmingham, creating more partnership with the local authorities.
- Consistency in staying open is important. Spaces that run specific activities (e.g. craft or reading groups) have received more engagement. Salvation Army churches have especially been really busy due to their longstanding reputation. Newer spaces have had fewer numbers of uptake.
- Impact Evaluation will be a good way to hear from people of why they come to a space, not just to keep warm but because they feel isolated and want connection. The Jo Cox Foundation has also been a partner of Warm Spaces programme.
- Don't want warm spaces to become a fabric of the country – a long term solution is necessary.

## **Current challenges/priorities & updates**

### **Cllr Jasbinder Dehar (Wolverhampton)**

- In Wolverhampton they do a lot of engagement with BAME Muslim women
- She had been involved in arranging a women's get together every month with 400 women and children attendees The get togethers have a DJ, and she feels that this helps with emotional wellbeing.
- Interfaith Wolverhampton work very closely with Wolverhampton City Council, and have also worked with Department for Levelling Up. They have been awarded funding to deliver more projects tackling mental health, wellbeing and loneliness and improving inclusion.

### **David Vane (Southampton)**

- Has been into 3 schools this year of multiple faiths to run workshops with secondary school students about impact on various areas e.g. media, relationships. Has also had the opportunity to work closely with Southampton University, developing education as a platform.

### **Geoff Sweeney (Derby)**

- Set up warm spaces networks and was surprised at how quickly faith groups responded – knowing how to connect/engage around local authority structures is the issue rather than lack of faith sector willingness.
- We shouldn't wait for a crisis to come along before faith communities are engaged.

### **Steve Botham (West Midlands)**

- Set up a Cost-of-Living forum that meets every 2 weeks. Some themes that have emerged include:
  - Shame associated with using services which leads to low take up. The difference that faith groups brought was compassion – making spaces more welcoming.
  - Resources: Not just food banks but people resources are tired and worn out
  - Support access difficulties: People can't always access online resources.

### **Charulata Joshi (Hertfordshire)**

- Since COVID, the council has realised direct access and communication with faith communities is important so have since set up a faiths forum network.

- Looking at setting up a Covenant for the County Council. They have held a soft launch, with a full launch to come soon.

**Cllr Aga Dychton (Watford)**

- Great connections between local authorities and faith groups have been built in Watford, with a range of initiatives and activities including a vigil for Ukraine.
- Wants to extend the warm spaces programme beyond just an 8 week project.