

All Party Parliamentary Group for Faith & Society

Minutes of meeting: Tuesday 25th April 2023

Inaugural Meeting of 2023 Parliament

Rt Hon Sir Stephen Timms MP
Baroness Sherlock
Lord Singh of Wimbledon
Baroness Uddin
Afzal Kahn MP
Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi MP

Alasdair Gordon
Daniel Singleton
Matthew Allen
Jeremy Simmons
Jenny Hadgraft
Lucianne Baltrock-Nitzsche

Apologies:

Sir Gary Streeter MP, David Linden MP, Baroness Morgan, Lord Taylor of Warwick, Baroness Brinton, Lord Griffiths of Burry Port, Baroness Cox

Minutes:

1. Welcome

Sir Stephen Timms MP welcomed those present, thanking them for attending and offering the apologies of those listed above.

2. Election of officers

Officers were elected as follows:

Chair: Rt Hon Sir Stephen Timms MP
Vice Chair: Sir Gary Streeter 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
Vice Chair: Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi MP
Vice Chair: Rt Rev Dame Sarah Mullally
Secretary: Rt Hon David Lammy MP

3. Aims of the APPG

The aims of the group were confirmed as:

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

4. Activity of the Group 2022-23

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

Jeremy Simmons, FaithAction

Faith in Partnership Week saw the successful launch of *Keeping the Faith 2.0* at a well-attended event, featuring faith leaders and Paul Scully MP, Minister of State for Local Government at the time.

The Faith Covenant Toolkit was also published during the week – a document for local authorities and faith groups that may be interested in having the Covenant in their area.

First in, Last Out was also launched during Faith in Partnership Week, which focuses on the work that faith groups did to support the NHS during the pandemic.

The APPG supported and promoted the work of the Faith in Community campaign by Spurgeon's College. The project aims to capture stories of the work of faith groups during COVID-19 and preserve for future generations.

The APPG held three Faith Covenant Forum meetings. These meetings focus on sharing best practice and hearing from local Covenant areas. These meetings took place in July, November and March and topics included faith hate, cost of living and the Warm Spaces programme.

The Faith Covenant

Matthew Allen and Daniel Singleton, FaithAction

Momentum has slowed a little, but Coventry became 25th signatory of the Faith Covenant. Other areas are showing interest in signing; this trend is encouraging.

Comments

There are many active groups in Manchester around climate and environmental issues.

Tower Hamlets have a lot of groups doing outstanding work, including Account 3, London Muslim Centre and the Chinese Association of Tower Hamlets.

Questions

Are there any areas that should have signed the Covenant but have not?

It would be ideal if areas represented by officers have signed up. The areas are cross party but with a slight lean towards Labour controlled areas. Hertfordshire has done a soft launch and West Midlands Combined Authority are set to sign before the summer. It would be good to see signings in Scotland and Wales. There is also interest from Westmorland and Furness.

Have there been talks with Tower Hamlets and City of London? The areas are multi faith and the Covenant would work well.

There have been talks with Tower Hamlets, FaithAction are the secretariat for the local faith forum. However, the forum is currently in a period of transition following the retirement of the Chair.

5. New Areas of Work (Daniel Singleton, FaithAction)

As the previous Faith in Partnership Week was a great success, we hope to build on this in the coming year and also tap into some funding. We will also be encouraging Covenant areas to hold their own celebrations.

Faith Covenant Forums will continue, these discussions are very fruitful.

There is potential for launching a Faith Covenant for Health. Linking in with ICS areas, the Covenant could pick up more on the practical support of food and chaplaincy. There has been some interest from NHS. ICS are tasked with engaging VCSE in their local areas – so it makes sense to ensure that faith is part of that picture. During COVID-19, Brighton succeeded in continuing chaplaincy visits at a time when other areas did not – the area used the Covenant to allow this.

An event around the Faith New Deal – the funding for this was significantly delayed but Southampton had success.

The subject of health inequalities is of a particular interest to the Bishop of London, including social prescribing, and inequalities in pregnancy and maternity.

The APPG could be a conduit for conducting ‘knotty issues’ roundtables – three to four sessions could be held on themes around challenging issues.

Comments

Agreement that the proposals are good, and that the first three areas of work ought to be prioritised (Faith in Partnership Week, an event around the Faith New Deal programme, and a series of meetings and events regarding health inequalities).

Mental health is a big issue and engagement with women is needed – lots of organisations are doing good work with women including the Anisa Women’s Society in Brent.

Political figures may be more responsive to getting involved as it is a pre-election year.

Sir Stephen Timms MP then thanked attendees for joining and closed the meeting.