

APPG Faith Covenant Evaluation Forum Monday 14th September 2026

Attendees

Aklima Begum (GLA)	Kwabena Osayande (West Midlands Combined Authority)
Andrew Lowing (Essex)	Louise Mulvey (City of Manchester)
Ash Brook (Leeds)	Mark Gilmore (Evangelical Alliance)
Bibhas Neogi (Guildford and Waverly)	Mustafa Field (Brent)
Carolyn Neogi (Guildford and Waverly)	Nadia Khan (Brent)
Chris Burden (West Midlands Combined Authority)	Sarah Frost (Worcester)
Clinton Sealy (Cornwall)	Simon Phillips (Leeds)
Cllr Muazzam Sandhu (Barking and Dagenham)	Stephen Vickers (Surrey)
David Hodson (Torbay)	Susan Snashall (Guildford and Waverly)
Dr Peter Rookes (Birmingham)	Tim Jones (Brighton and Hove)
Gill Bain (Dundee)	Valerie Skottowe (Welwyn Hatfield)
Halima Khanom (Camden)	Yovone Cook (Essex)
Hayet Shahrezaey (Guildford and Waverly)	Daniel Singleton (FaithAction)
Islam Jalaita (Basingstoke and Deane)	Jeremy Simmons (FaithAction)
Jamie Hooper (Westmorland & Furness)	Andrew Welsby (FaithAction)
Janice Curran (Rotherham)	

Minutes

Daniel Singleton, FaithAction

- Welcomed participants to the session.
- Faith seems to be topical again, with a lot of focus on the new Prime Minister, Andy Burnham, and his faith.

Launching the Faith Covenant Guidebook

Jeremy Simmons, FaithAction

- Introduced the Faith Covenant Guidebook and explained why it had been developed
- The Guidebook follows the first independent evaluation of the Faith Covenant since the first Covenant was signed in 2014.
- The evaluation was carried out by Coventry University and funded by the Sir Halley Stewart Trust. It looked at what is working, what is not working, whether Covenants build trust and relationships, and where further strengthening is needed.
- The Guidebook responds to requests from local Covenant areas for clearer national guidance and examples of what has worked elsewhere.

Faith Covenant Guidebook

- The Guidebook is an interactive, online resource rather than a fixed national framework. It is intended both for existing Covenant areas that want to review, refresh or renew their commitments and for areas considering a Covenant for the first time.
- Local co-production is central: the principles and recommendations should be adapted to local priorities, challenges and circumstances.

- The Guidebook is structured around three broad questions: What is a Faith Covenant? Why adopt one? How can a strong Covenant be built?
- The resource is intended to develop over time and may need to respond to changes such as local government reorganisation.

Governance as Stewardship

- The Guidebook frames governance as stewardship: the structures, relationships and ways of working that enable effective collaboration across sectors.
 - Stewardship of purpose: being clear about why the Covenant exists and revisiting its purpose where circumstances have changed.
 - Stewardship of relationships: actively nurturing relationships, refreshing membership and ensuring that changing local faith communities are represented.
 - Stewardship of action: moving beyond a symbolic agreement to identify shared challenges, take practical action and assess progress.

Recommendations for Local Covenant Areas

- Have named leads on both the faith and statutory/public-sector sides, with visible commitment from both partners.
- Consider a representative steering group, including different faith traditions and relevant public-sector partners.
- Use shared ownership and, where appropriate, co-chairing so that responsibility does not drift to one side of the partnership.
- Agree a small number of local priorities each year, focusing on practical issues where joint working can make a difference.
- Embed the Covenant within mainstream public-sector systems and strategic planning rather than leaving it isolated within one team or department.
- Maintain regular meeting rhythms, work plans and accountability arrangements that support action without creating unnecessary bureaucracy.

Local Experiences and Discussion

Nadia Khan, Brent

- Identified faith literacy within local government as a significant issue affecting who is engaged in consultations, events and conversations.
- Brent has established a staff multi-faith forum and is developing faith-literacy activity beyond cultural or religious celebrations.
- There was interest in developing training for frontline staff, potentially linked to existing equality, diversity and inclusion training.
- A related Faith Climate Action Toolkit developed with LSE was mentioned as an example of practical guidance for staff working with faith communities.

Sarah Frost, Worcester

- Worcester was working towards a Faith Covenant before organisational restructuring and wants to pick up the idea again. The council wants it to be more than a tick-box exercise.

- The Covenant is being considered alongside work to become a Council of Sanctuary, with churches and mosques supporting refugees and asylum seekers.
- A key challenge is building meaningful engagement and trust with Muslim communities.
- Local government reorganisation creates additional uncertainty, but there was a desire to continue developing the work rather than simply wait for structural changes.

Jamie Hooper, Westmorland and Furness

- Highlighted the importance of seeing faith communities as an asset, particularly in rural communities.
- The local authority is facing significant budget pressures and recognises potential contributions from faith communities, social enterprise and others.
- The Covenant had been developed with awareness of the experience of other rural areas, including Cornwall.

Valerie Skottowe, Welwyn Hatfield

- Reported that the Covenant is not always at the forefront of people's minds and may need to be refreshed.
- Suggested using a local issue such as hate crime as a practical focus for renewed partnership with the council.
- There is an opportunity to involve newer faith leaders, including a recently appointed Anglican vicar who is already engaging with the local interfaith group.

David Hodson, Torbay

- Highlighted the value of mapping the contribution and activity of faith communities when engaging with local authority strategic planning.
- The Gather Movement's '[Heart of the Neighbourhood](#)' work was discussed as a way of providing evidence of what faith communities are already doing locally. Gather's mapping and Faith Covenants were described as complementary: mapping can provide evidence of activity, while the Covenant can provide a framework for collaboration.
- Examples of faith-community activity mentioned included food provision, parent and toddler groups, youth work and other community support.

Building Relationships with Under-Engaged Communities

- **Tim Jones (Brighton and Hove)** emphasised that relationship-building is an ongoing process rather than a one-off activity. Where particular communities are difficult to engage, it can help to identify community leaders and connectors beyond formal institutional roles.
- Public meetings or events around a shared local issue can provide a practical starting point for building relationships.
- Responsibility should then be shared with faith-side partners, giving them genuine agency in arranging future activity rather than treating engagement as a one-way process.

Wider Challenges

- Local government reorganisation and changes in personnel can disrupt relationships and institutional memory.
- Covenants can lose momentum when they remain confined to one department or when there is no clear ownership.
- There is a need to avoid treating faith communities simply as service providers; meaningful partnership requires shared ownership and agency.
- Large or geographically dispersed areas may need more localised approaches and practical structures that reflect local circumstances.

The Gather Movement “Heart of the Neighbourhood” Report

- FaithAction has been involved in the launch of Gather's mapping work through the APPG on Faith and Society. The mapping seeks to identify and evidence the activity and impact of faith communities in particular areas.
- It was suggested that areas such as Worcester and Torbay might benefit from undertaking this kind of mapping. The work was presented as complementary to Faith Covenants rather than duplicating them.

Next Steps

- Participants were encouraged to review the online Guidebook and provide feedback while it is being developed.
- FaithAction will continue to support areas that are developing or struggling to progress a Faith Covenant, with support packages tailored to local circumstances.
- Covenant activity is developing in a number of areas, including Wiltshire, Worcester, Lancashire and Torbay.
- Participants were encouraged to remain in contact with FaithAction and share local developments, challenges and examples of practice.

Close of meeting

Daniel Singleton thanked participants and encouraged continued engagement.