

**All Party-Parliamentary Group on Faith and Society**  
**Minutes of meeting: 20 April 2021, 3pm**

**Inaugural Meeting of 2021 Parliament**

**Present:**

Rt Hon Stephen Timms MP  
Steve Double MP  
Fiona Bruce MP  
Sir Gary Streeter MP  
Jon Cruddas MP  
Marsha De Cordova MP  
Tim Farron MP  
Baroness Sherlock

Baroness Neuberger  
Lord Singh of Wimbledon  
Baroness Uddin  
Alasdair Gordon  
Daniel Singleton  
Matthew Allen  
Jeremy Simmons  
Jenny Hadgraft

**Apologies:**

<b>Minutes</b>	<b>Actions</b>
<p><b>1. Welcome</b> ST welcomed those present, thanking them for attending and offering the apologies of those listed above.</p> <p><b>2. Election of officers</b></p> <p>Officers were elected as follows:</p> <p>Chair: Rt Hon Stephen Timms MP Vice Chair: Sir Gary Streeter MP Vice Chair: Fiona Bruce 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 Secretary: Rt Hon David Lammy MP Treasurer: Steve Double MP</p> <p><b>3. Aims of the APPG</b></p> <p>The aims of the group were confirmed as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>a. To promote understanding of faith-based organisations engaged in social action in the UK, and recognition of their value;</li><li>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;</li><li>c. To consider regulatory and legislative arrangements which can make the most of the potential contribution of faith-based organisations;</li></ul>	

- 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 in 2019-20

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

##### **Past year (Matthew Allen, FaithAction):**

All events occurred online but a busy and productive year for the APPG, with new initiatives, new reports, and new interest being demonstrated in the Faith Covenant.

Establishment of the Faith Covenant Forum, a regular meeting that brings together council and faith representatives from each of our current Covenant areas to share best practice.

Six local authorities are actively looking to establish a Covenant at present: Luton, Rotherham, Bradford, Watford, Hertfordshire and the GLA.

There has also been interest demonstrated in the Covenant from non-local authority partners for the first time – notably the British Army and Housing Associations.

Launch of the *Keeping the Faith* report in November that demonstrated the ways in which councils have worked much more closely with faith communities during the COVID response, also showing that the great majority desire to maintain those close working relationships beyond the pandemic.

Recommendations from the report are: Appointment of a Faiths Commissioner, nationwide adoption of the Faith Covenant, development of a toolkit to facilitate effective partnership under the faith covenant and establishing a new “Faiths Advisory Council” to develop more effective ways for faith groups and Government to engage in strategic planning.

FaithAction hosted the Building Back Better conference with the APPG and a few other partners, also in November of last year, which included the launch of *The Church and Social Cohesion* report along with various panel discussion.

Stephen Timms commented that the Keeping the Faith report highlighted that faith groups provided the infrastructure for delivering food and help to people and that it came as a shock to some that no one else was already doing this. APPG has long been pressing for better links between faith groups and councils and this model has now come into its own in a dramatic way.

Baroness Neuberger added that faith groups have been the main source of support for asylum seekers and that local authorities were until now unaware that faith groups are the emergency service for supporting these families.

Baroness Sherlock concurred that the Keeping the Faith report captured a moment in history that demonstrated that local authorities had no idea that faith groups were out there. Quotes from the report were very striking, and she feels that this is the moment for faith groups to step into the space that is now recognised by local politicians.

Stephen Timms commented that the question now is how to build on the extraordinary momentum and that the APPG could ask Goldsmiths to look at this by the way of follow up research – ideas welcome on this.

Baroness Uddin commented that she is grateful for all the work done by the APPG over the years, agrees with others that the work of faith groups is now being recognised, and referenced a report by Anisa, the Kidmer report? Women, faith-led organisations have been at the bottom of priorities, particularly Muslim and Sikh but have been doing lots of great work. She would welcome looking at this in the future.

Lord Singh commented that many gurdwaras, along with other faith groups, had been helping local communities during the pandemic but questioned the cooperation with the different faith groups and that it is worth looking at.

Baroness Neuberger commented that lots of interfaith work had been happening, for example in food banks and food runs – probably worth tracking for further reports, some led by Quakers and that various Christian, Jewish-Muslim groups had also been working together. For example in City of Westminster, very long established.

Baroness Uddin commented that East London Islamic Centre also did a lot of outstanding interfaith work.

Stephen Timms commented that this could be considered for future work.

Daniel Singleton commented that his time spent on the faith and places of worship taskforce and had seen a growing significance of those types of settings, particularly around undocumented people and vaccine encouragement. FaithAction involved with a project distributing PPE to places of worship with East London Mosque. Interesting to talk about these things in practice.

## **5. New areas of work (Daniel Singleton, FaithAction)**

### **Development and Distribution of the Faith Covenant Toolkit**

FaithAction are devising a toolkit to encourage closer working relationships between councils and faith communities and provide guidance on how to establish a Faith Covenant to facilitate that work, as recommended in the *Keeping the Faith* report.

Initially, a brief document will be sent to local authorities that participated in the Keeping the Faith survey, outlining what the Faith Covenant is, why it is important and the initial steps for setting up a Covenant in their area. This document will be tailored for both councils and faith groups.

A more detailed interactive online toolkit will be produced, which will include more detailed information on the Covenant, as well as top tips and case studies from current Covenant holders.

### **Faith Covenant Expansion (News Areas and New Partners)**

We will continue to work closely with prospective Faith Covenant areas to encourage its official adoption in the near future, including the Greater London

Authority and will be working closely with their Community Engagement team to support this initiative.

We will be discussing ways the Covenant may need to be adjusted to suit partnerships between faith communities and new partners such as housing associations and the army.

### **Faith in the Future event**

FaithAction are proposing that the APPG consider hosting an event on Faith in the Future, building upon last November's *Building Back Better: The Role of Faith* conference.

The event will bring together a range of different parties to present and discuss ideas to the APPG around the role of faith in rebuilding after the pandemic.

### **COP26 Faith and Climate event**

The APPG may host an event in June on Climate Change on COP26 (the United Nations Climate Change Conference).

The COP Faith Task Force (the group organising the event) are hoping this event will be an opportunity for a diverse range of parliamentarians and faith representatives to understand each other's priorities in the run-up to COP26 and build ongoing working relationships to achieve positive change.

### **Other suggestions:**

Lord Singh commented that there needs to be more dialogue about the commonalities and differences of different faiths to increase understanding and respect.

Stephen Timms commented that the group should reflect upon on a suitable format for the conversations.

Lord Singh suggested that the APPG members from different faiths could each explain their own religion and then take questions from the group.

Tim Farron commented that the new plan for immigration could result in a two-track asylum system and that a range of faith groups should come together to question this in a collegiate way and that it would be good to get the views of faith groups into the consultation at the earliest opportunity. To express concern over possible labelling over 'deserving' and 'undeserving' refugee.

Baroness Neuberger commented that the Quakers and Safe Passage are doing lots of work on this issue. Many faith groups involved with Safe Passage.

Daniel Singleton also suggested speaking to The RAMP Project and Welcome Churches.

Tim Farron commented he is talking to RAMP and added that faith communities can state that the proposed legislation does not represent that Britain they believe in and that the claims the country is overwhelmed by asylum seekers is wrong – faith communities are providing the resource that means the country does have the capacity to cope with asylum seekers.

Baroness Sherlock commented that it would be helpful to demonstrate how bad policies would affect integration if people and families cannot put down roots in an area and that it may be effective to show example of good cohesive communities.

Daniel Singleton commented that the APPG website can be used for faith profiles (re Lord Singh proposal).

Lord Singh replied that face to face discussion and questioning is also needed.

**6. Close**

- ST asked if there was any other business. There being none he thanked everyone and closed the meeting.

**Date of next meeting:**