

# The All-Party Parliamentary Group on Faith and Society

## Keeping the Faith 2.0

*Embedding a new normal for partnership working in post-pandemic Britain*

Wednesday 7<sup>th</sup> September, Mary Sumner House, 24 Tufton St, London SW1P 3RB

### **Welcome and housekeeping** - Propa Rezwana Anwar, Vice President, Barnet Multi Faith Forum

Propa thanked FaithAction, the All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG), Daniel Singleton and Jenny Hadgraft. She introduced herself as a children's TV host and student at King's College London who cares about Interfaith. Propa is also a representative of the Faith and Belief Youth Forum and Barnet Multifaith forum. The new report highlights the enduring value of cross sector working and recommendations for partnership working.

### **Introduction** - Chair of the APPG: Sir Stephen Timms MP

Sir Stephen Timms MP thanked the Mothers Union, Paul Scully, Daniel Singleton, and everyone at FaithAction and the chair of APPG on Faith and Society. The new report builds on the first faith report published in November 2020.

Since 2012, there has been a realisation that faith groups can be seen as a problem to local councils due to suspicion, bias, and political issues. As a result, communities missed out on the valuable contribution faith groups can make. During the pandemic councils had to depend on all faith settings in a way never seen before because faith groups were able to provide the support needed. Sir Stephen Timms relayed the positive outcomes of faith groups' partnerships with local authorities as detailed in the first Keeping the Faith report. The Faith New Deal Pilot Fund is a good way to bring people together and build faith bonds in Modern Britain. We need to recognise where resources are to change things so that the better can be found.

### **Speaker** - Paul Scully MP: Minister of State at the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities

Paul Scully thanked Sir Stephen Timms, the APPG, FaithAction, Professor Chris Baker and the team at University of London.

A range of communities bring faith, delegation and a sense of community which is important. I came into this job to champion faith organisations and strengthen the social fabric of the country. In my short time in this role, I've been fortunate see work first hand. Paul gave a few examples including visiting the Hindu temple in East London which is making a massive difference to the community: working with public health representatives across London e.g. working with Black churches and visiting Europe's first crematorium to the meet needs of Hindu and Sikh communities.

Faith forums are a powerful demonstration of what can be achieved when faith groups work hand in hand. They inform national guidance, promote public health messaging, and build and work together to create solutions.

Paul gave an overview of the faith groups and the benefits of partnership working as detailed in Keeping the Faith 1.0. Paul then discussed Danny Kruger's report which recognised the importance of actively supporting organisations of all faiths.

The Faith New Deal Pilot funds 16 organisations to work with public sector providers to use collective skills to tackle local problems. Deep collaboration across sectors and faith groups is vital in the months ahead.

### **Presentation - Keeping the Faith 2.0 - Prof Chris Baker, Goldsmiths, University of London**

Prof Chris Baker gave an overview of Keeping the Faith report 1.0 (2020-1). The main finding was that local authorities' experiences with faith groups are overwhelmingly positive.

Prof Chris gave an outline of Keeping the Faith report 2.0. The second report covered the second and third lockdowns. It is completely qualitative and includes 35 in-depth interviews with senior leaders.

Prof Chris gave an overview of the main issues of partnership; other areas of increased post pandemic collaboration and the 10 aspects essential to sustaining good partnerships.

#### New mindset on finance (how might restructure finance)

Before the pandemic the consensus was that traditional funding models are no longer fit for purpose. The current procurement model re-embeds static hierarchy; favours technical language and larger providers or those with existing contracts creating suspicion of favouritism. There is a deficit rather than growth framed approach to solve challenging problems.

How the pandemic can change our approach:

- Start with the problem and then decide on how funding can work around this
- What is God and the city calling us to do?
- Align task of asset allocation with personal, institutional and core values
- Start from the position of call rather than resources to release new energy to respond to crisis

#### Conclusions

- Covid-19 highlighted the need for us to be authentic and dynamic and embrace a participatory form of governance
- We must move towards Values-led (e.g., compassion, motivation, kindness etc.) rather than financially led economy. The values led approach can help to describe the hallmarks of good partnership and should be at the heart of funding
- Develop a 5-year faith action plan connected to cross-cutting policies e.g., climate emergency planning
- Out scale existing multi-faith centres for strategic messaging and clinical public health provision
- Boost awareness of the Faith Covenant and revise and strengthen remit

**Panel discussion -** Dr Russell Rook, Good Faith Partnership  
Laura Marks, Mitzvah Day & Nisa Nashim  
Dr Jagbir Jhutti-Johal, University of Birmingham  
Shermara Fletcher, Churches Together in England  
Dr Omer Moghraby, British Islamic Medical Association

**Question to the panel: What is the role for faith in an era of ‘levelling up’?**

**Dr Russell Rook**

Faith communities make good stuff happen. There are exciting things to come from the reports. Faith communities aren't stopping good things happening. There was a unique movement out of COVID, and churches do not want to lose making good things happen. We want more good stuff to happen, and faith communities aren't stopping good things happening. The next 6-9 months are expected to be difficult for faith communities. Churches and other faith groups are on schedule to provide warm welcome centres over the coming months.

**Dr Omer Moghraby**

Dr Omer gave insight on the pandemic and reflections on faith. Discussing faith opens the conversation for faith groups to tailor needs around what services they require. Doing this enables needs to be better served and outcomes to be met. Challenging orthodox medical issues. Moving forward we need mainstream conversations to strengthen communities and their engagement with services. Improve element of trust. Valuing engagement and being present helps to support the challenges ahead of us.

**Laura Marks**

I get a sense we are not levelling up but levelling down. However, from an optimistic perspective we must think about why we do this? I do it because I believe that we are all created in the image of God. When that is the starting point, there is a responsibility on each of us and for each of us to play a role in levelling up, to make the community better for everyone.

**What are the efforts of faith communities to levelling up?**

How can faith groups feed into central government, housing, education, business and beyond? Religion is the runt of protected characteristics. Talking about faith can be uncomfortable. There is a rise in online harms and faith crimes.

**Levelling up of faith communities**

All faith communities feel the most hard done by. Corrosive trend we're seeing – more stereotyping, online harms and blaming each other. We need ongoing cross collaboration and long-term with government and long-term round table. We also need to consider who is round those tables and whether women are present. Laura gave an example of an event between two faith communities and only one woman was present. Having women around the table is not just because of equality, but the women are “carrying the load” and bringing perspective, community and family. However, in discussions around cost of living and the environment, women are excluded. Faith communities must take this seriously.

## **Shermara Fletcher**

People come to faith level up their lives. Shared values align with levelling agenda to spread equality.

Ways faith can contribute to levelling up:

### **1. Devolution**

Governance structures of faiths tends to model devolution. Faith communities understand theology and live out their spirituality. Soft asset of devolved leadership keeps collaboration process between government and faith communities.

### **2. Wellbeing**

Provide services. Shermara gave example of Black Churches setting up domestic violence forum in 2020 and in the West Midlands, Churches looked at major health challenges faced by global majority communities.

### **3. Geographical presence**

Faith communities have a wide geographical scope to engage on national and international level.

## **Dr Jagbir Jhutti-Johal**

Jagbir gave an overview of the challenges the Sikh and other faith communities will face during the cost-of-living crisis.

Faith communities get into the community and have their trust of local communities. They know what the issues are and what and who needs targeting. This will be important during the rise in cost of living to know who are most vulnerable, who will not get meals etc. We must harness support to give faith communities the space to get on with what they are already doing. Particularly around financial support. Donations to faith communities will not meet the costs in the months ahead. Communities are giving what they can, but volunteers may not be able to volunteer due to financial pressures.

There needs to be recognition of cultural and religious diversity. Humility towards what faith communities do and the values of faith they hold. Local authorities need to go and open conversation around issues they are uncomfortable with, especially racial justice. Faith communities also need to look inwards and make sure everything they do is inclusive.

**Q&A** – The audience will be invited to put questions to the panel

### **Questions**

- Religion and belief are the most neglected protected characteristics. What can the government do about this? How can we use the report to say religion matters?
- The pandemic exposed disparities in everything. How much more can we work with local authorities by releasing assets?
- People view religion as an unbending thing. The point should be made that faith communities are flexible in unprecedented ways. The government may not give us as much money as we want. Therefore, flexibility may require us to work with very little resource, how do we do that?
- How do we uphold values when government runs fast utilitarian and instrumental approach which has an impact on local authorities? Speaker gave example of their faith programme being defunded by local council next year. How are we supposed to work with public sector partners?
- What can we do to support faith communities to do their work safely?

- What are we doing to help teachers handle the religious literacy of today?
- How can we encourage faith groups to shout louder about their good stories?

### **Comments/Answers**

- There is a lack of private sector inclusion in these discussions. They have a large philanthropic input. In light of the funding struggle, we should consider talking to the private sector.
- It's important to bridge the gap between service provision and, helping faith communities and people understand and access support that is available to them. The reasons why most people don't access funding is because they lack awareness. Statutory services should become literate and not assume religious groups are homogenous. Regarding the private sector, we need to understand how to access it without strings attached.
- We need data backed solutions. Women should not just be invited to the table after decisions have been made.
- There is a lack of religious literacy. This is something that needs to be addressed.
- Faith groups do a lot with minimal resources; faith programmes and local authorities must learn from this.
- Faith Covenant should extend beyond Local Authority to other agencies. The "P" that is missing is prescribing. Faith programmes are in an ideal position to be part of social prescribing.

### **Closing comments**

#### **Dr Russell Rook**

Faith communities do not live in unprecedented times. They are not a fluke. We are certain of what we hope for and certain of what do not see, that is the real key to levelling up. Holding strongly to what we know we're about.

#### **Shermara Fletcher**

Spark your own city. We should honour our faith legacy to move forward.

#### **Dr Jagbir Jhutti-Jahal**

In response to the good news stories, the Sikh community does acts of selfless service as part of our faith. For us to shout about the work we do may detract from our theology.

Sir Stephen Timms thanked all of the speakers and attendees and closed the meeting.