

**Sandwell Health and Wellbeing Board
15 December 2021**

Report Topic:	Faith Sector representation at the Health and Wellbeing Board
Contact Officer:	Lisa McNally Ali Al-Osaimi
Link to board priorities	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. We will help keep people healthier for longer 2. We will help keep people safe and support communities 3. We will work together to join up services 4. We will work closely with local people, partners and providers of services
Purpose of Report:	To support the engagement work with the Faith Sector and have representation at the Health and Wellbeing board
Recommendations	<p>Agree to include a representative from the faith sector to the Health and Wellbeing board in recognition of the significant contributions made by the sector during the pandemic, but also places them in the centre of our post COVID recovery and rebuilding of our communities.</p> <p>Support the work with the faith sector to structure the engagement and build ongoing support.</p>
Key Discussion points:	Our faith communities in general remain an enormous resource for society. Every faith has charity, and particularly voluntary financial redistribution, at its heart: the Jewish and Christian tithe, the Sikh dasvandh, the Muslim zakhat, and the Hindu dana. Every religion has a duty of

hospitality to the stranger, and a duty to seek peace.

The Christian church in the UK (all denominations, not just the established Churches of England and Scotland) is estimated to have five million members, based in 20,000 local churches and supporting 15,000 charities. The combined revenue of these churches and charities is £11 billion per year, almost 20 per cent of all charitable income in the country. According to the last Census, there are almost 4.5 million members of other, non-Christian, faith communities, who in 2016 together raised just over £5 billion.

Faith communities have a greater asset than their wealth when it comes to providing support and relief to people in need. Their values, their concern for the spiritual wellbeing of individuals and society, provide a motivation and commitment that often exceeds that of paid professionals. They have deep roots in local communities and are there for the long-term. Indeed they often have big buildings in the heart of communities, including the poorest, and they operate both nationally and at the local level. The networks of a faith community, the relationships within a congregation or faith group, are a source of huge resilience and opportunities for the people they seek to help and understanding of issues of common concern.

Over the past 2 years, we have seen first-hand how faith groups have been instrumental in providing invaluable support throughout the pandemic - from delivering food to front line workers, supporting

vulnerable members of society including people who were shielding, those who were lonely or isolated and collaborating with the councils to ensure volunteers were able to provide on-the-ground support to communities in need. Faith sector buildings throughout Sandwell were and still are available for community members to pick up their Lateral Flow Tests (we have four faith sites established). Faith buildings were available for vaccination and a place where community members can receive Public Health messages and support particularly for communities most affected by the pandemic including BAME groups.

In Sandwell, we have built knowledge of our local faith communities which includes a database of faith sector with 202 organisations from all faiths. Our local faith leaders have been instrumental throughout the Covid-19 pandemic in the reinforcement of Public Health guidance and supporting wider Public Health response. Messages coming from trusted community and religious leaders encouraged adherence to government guidelines in local community languages. Places of worship in Sandwell acted as vital points of support and access to communities in so many ways, for example:

- We have been producing local Covid-19 guidance supported and coproduced by our local faith leaders.
- Food security and support to the vulnerable individuals in the community – food banks and community support schemes

- Early messages to keep safe and support to Public Health messages in community languages
- Mental Health support and point of referrals to crisis services.
- End of life support and bereavement support
- Testing messages and access to testing for high risk groups
- Increasing uptake of vaccination particularly for BAME groups

In a recent consultation with faith leaders, the following topics were identified as key areas where the faith sector could make the greatest contributions to Sandwell:

- Tackling the underline causes of Health Inequalities which is widened by Covid-19 pandemic particularly for marginalised and BAME groups.
- Tension monitoring and community safety
- Youth and women engagement work
- Education and faith supplementary schools
- Prevent & community cohesion
- Healthcare services, Public Health and prevention including mental Health
- Homelessness
- End of life care and bereavement services
- Representation of faith communities
- Equality and diversity

The local faith communities provide an exciting opportunity to engage communities who are least likely to be engaged through other means. Central government are proposing a number of deals to

engage faith sector through the ‘duty of cooperation’ with faith groups attached to all public grants and contracts. The work on the ‘Faith Covenant’ which sets out principles of cooperation between faith groups and local authorities, and this could be the basis for the practicalities of the new deal for the faith sector which is currently being developed.

There is an opportunity to build on the success we have had during the pandemic and a chance to build the relationship with our faith sector to tackle underline causes of Health inequalities particularly for marginalized groups highlighted by the pandemic. This could start with making sure the sector is recognised and included in all local decision making processes and structures starting with the Health and Wellbeing board.

Representation of Faith sector to Health and Wellbeing Board

In a meeting with Faith Leaders on 26 November 2021, the Terms of Reference (TOR) were discussed which will include how the group will be represented at Health and Wellbeing Board. A group of faith leaders will be working on the detail of the terms of reference which will include how the Faith Sector will be represented and also the selection of a chair and vice-chair for the sector.

Implications (e.g. Financial, Statutory etc)

There will be a requirement to support the faith sector set up which will require an officer’s time to build the required structures to support the sector.

There will also be the requirement to continue to provide ongoing support to coordinate the related sector activities and facilitate engagement with the sector for the long-term.

What engagement has or will take place with people, partners and providers?

- Monthly Faith Sector briefing with Dr Lisa McNally which will continue jointly with the wider community and voluntary sector monthly briefings
- Fortnightly meeting to support the establishment of faith sector structures
- Monthly themes to support communication and engagement with faith audiences
- Climate change and air quality projects (10 faith centres part of this project)
- Ongoing support and communication with faith leaders and communities

Reference

Guidance: Faith New Deal Pilot Fund prospectus, Updated 23 September 202
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/faith-new-deal-pilot-fund/faith-new-deal-pilot-fund-prospectus>

Levelling up our communities: proposals for a new social covenant