



Cabinet
24 April 2017

**Report from Director of
Performance, Policy and
Partnerships**

Brent Faith Covenant

1.0 Summary

- 1.1 Brent Council has enjoyed a good relationship with faith groups, and specifically, Brent Multi-Faith forum for many years. The relationship would benefit from formal commitments from the council to faith groups, and vice versa.
- 1.2 The All Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on faith and society introduced a Faith Covenant. Brent Multi-Faith Forum has been working with the council to develop this covenant and the commitments from the council to faith groups, and from faith groups to the council, contained within it.

2.0 Recommendations

- 2.1 That Cabinet agree the Brent Faith Covenant attached at Appendix 1.

3.0 Detail

- 3.1 In May 2016, there was a debate in Parliament about the contribution of faith organisations to the voluntary sector in communities. The All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on Faith and Society had introduced a Faith Covenant, and following this debate pressed for national support and uptake of the covenant.
- 3.2 In Brent, more than eight out of ten people declare a faith, higher than the average for both London and England. As well as the six main beliefs, Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, Judaism, Buddhism, and Sikhism, Brent has followers of 36 other religions, including 2,500 Jains, the second largest number in London.
- 3.3 Brent Council has enjoyed a good relationship with faith groups over many years, meeting regularly with the Brent Multi-Faith Forum to discuss issues in Brent and work together to raise awareness, promote tolerance and enhance

community cohesion in the Borough. This relationship will benefit from a clear statement of the council demonstrating its willingness to work in partnership with the forum and commitment to the faith groups in Brent.

3.4 The draft covenant is set out in Appendix 1. It sets out principles for the relationship between local authorities and faith communities, and is a useful tool for engagement.

3.5 The Faith Covenant is built on four principles:

- Faith communities are free to practise their beliefs and religious observances without restriction, and to raise their voice in public debate and to be respected, within the framework of UK law.
- Public services and faith-based social action should respect service users from all backgrounds, with no discrimination on the grounds of religion or lack of religious beliefs, gender, pregnancy and maternity, marital or civil partnership status, race, age, sexual orientation, gender identity, disabilities or long term health conditions. The needs of socio-economic and vulnerable groups should also be considered.
- The voice, participation and solutions that faith communities bring are vital, and consultation should enable them to be brought to bear for the benefit of the wider community.
- Organisations and services are stronger for drawing on diverse sources of funding; monopolies of funding, action and participation are damaging

3.6 The covenant commits Brent Council to “welcoming the involvement of faith groups in the delivery of services and social action on an equal basis with other groups, and faith communities to work actively with local authorities in the design and delivery of services to the public.”

3.7 There are eight commitments from the council to faith groups. The council will commit to:

- 3.7.1** Actively building trust, and sustaining productive relationships with faith based organisations;
- 3.7.2** Ensuring faith based communities are included in appropriate consultation and civic engagement events;
- 3.7.3** Encouraging faith groups and their members to be involved in the reshaping and redesign of local services;
- 3.7.4** Developing awareness raising and training opportunities between faith communities and the local authority;
- 3.7.5** Seeking to develop opportunities for the council and faith organisations to work together creatively;

3.7.6 Providing open and transparent communication in all aspects regarding funding;

3.7.7 Clearly communicating the council's obligations under the Equality Act 2010, and the Public Sector Equality Duty, the Human Rights Act 1998, and other relevant legislation; and ensuring that its partners are adhering to its Equality and Diversity strategy;

3.7.8 Respect and understand the underlying humanitarian ethical values of the faith communities.

3.8 The Faith Covenant will formalise and strengthen the ongoing work the council does with faith communities, providing a strong basis for continuing and expanding this work.

3.9 A public consultation, open to faith groups in Brent, on the commitments of faith groups to the council ran from 27 February for five weeks, closing on 02 April 2017. The consultation received 28 responses, from four different faith groups: Christianity, Hinduism, Islam, and Judaism. All commitments were agreed by the majority of respondents, and all comments have been acted on. There are six commitments from faith groups, which are set out below. The report summarising this feedback is included as Appendix 2.

3.9.1 Seeking opportunities to bring people together to serve the community, particularly its poorest and most isolated members;

3.9.2 Serving all local residents **seeking to access non-religious, public services** equally, without proselytising, irrespective of their religion, gender, marital status, race, ethnic origin, age, sexual orientation, mental capacity, or long term condition;

3.9.3 Ensuring excellence in child protection, health and safety, accountability and transparency;

3.9.4 Responding to consultations where appropriate;

3.9.5 Developing and sharing training and learning opportunities between faith communities and Partners for Brent;

3.9.6 Understand the 2010 Equality Act, and Brent Equality strategy and policy, challenging the Council to deliver the services accordingly where appropriate.

4.0 Financial Implications

4.1 There are no specific financial implications.

5.0 Legal Implications

5.1 The principles set out in the covenant appear to be consistent with the council's equalities duty as it is an opportunity to foster good relations between different people in promoting and enhancing community tolerance and cohesion.

6.0 Diversity Implications

- 6.1 The Faith Covenant will not only ensure that the council's relationship and commitment to faith groups living in Brent is clearly set out, but will also enable a more structured and productive partnership working with the Multi-Faith Forum that plays a key role in raising awareness, promoting tolerance and enhancing community cohesion in the Borough.

7.0 Staffing/Accommodation Implications (if appropriate)

- 7.1 None

8.0 Background Papers

9.0 Contact Officers

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