

Faith covenant consultation results

Contents

Introduction	1
Responses	1
Council commitments.....	2
Faith group commitments	3
Our response	5

Introduction

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.

Brent Council has enjoyed a good relationship with many faith groups, and specifically, Brent Multi-Faith forum for several years. The relationship would benefit from formal commitments from the council to faith groups, and vice versa.

The 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.

To gain the views of faith organisations and people of faith in and around Brent about this covenant, a consultation was run for five weeks, from Monday 27 February, closing on Sunday 02 April.

Responses

There were 28 individual responses, 24 on behalf of faith organisations. The responses came from four different faith groups: Christianity; Hinduism; Islam; and Judaism. There were no compulsory questions, and not all respondents replied to each question.

Council commitments

Respondents were asked whether they agreed, disagreed, or neither agreed nor disagreed, the council should make these commitments to faith communities. In each case, the majority agreed that the council should make these commitments.

Commitment	Agree	Neither	Disagree	Don't know
Actively building trust, and sustaining productive relationships with faith based organisations	21 (77%)	4	1	1
Ensuring faith based organisations are included in appropriate consultation and civic engagement events	21 (78%)	3	1	2
Encouraging faith groups and their members to be involved in the reshaping and redesign of local services	19 (70%)	5	2	1
Developing awareness raising and training and learning opportunities between faith communities and the local authority	22 (81%)	1	2	2
Seeking to develop opportunities for the council and faith organisations to work together creatively in promoting and enhancing community tolerance and cohesion	21 (78%)	2	2	2
Providing open and transparent communication in all aspects regarding funding	20 (74%)	3	2	2
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 for the council to deliver services within equality law and its partners are adhering to its Equality and Diversity strategy	19 (70%)	1	2	5
The council should respect and understand the underlying humanitarian ethical values of the faith communities, as well as of communities with no religious beliefs	25 (93%)	2	0	0

Comments received about the council's commitments included:

"The council should give recognition to principles and practices held by faith groups and not create legislations that forces faith groups to violate those principles and practices."

"Glad to see an expressed positive view on this. Will seek to see observe where this is working."

"All the main faith groups should be celebrated and treated equally."

“These journeys are never entirely simple. Human self-interest pulls in numerous directions and often disguises itself as religious obligation. We need to commit to the long term aim and patiently navigate the frustrations and complications along the way.”

“Sounds excellent. Given the potential and opportunity that the Council has to be supported by faith communities in Brent and the fact that our faith community members are sometimes under served by public services because of lack of engagement I suggest that the Council financially support the Brent Multi Faith Forum to support socially excluded residents in our borough.”

“We are not aware of this Group existed as there has been no effective communication with our Temple. We have sought guidance from LB of Brent without success”

“This is the first that I have ever heard about it!”

Faith group commitments

Respondents were asked whether they agreed, disagreed, or neither agreed nor disagreed, the faith groups should make these commitments. In each case, the majority agreed with the commitments.

Commitment	Agree	Neither	Disagree	Don't know
Seeking opportunities to bring people together to serve the community, particularly its poorest and most isolated members	25 (89%)	2	0	1
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	19 (68%)	5	1	3
Ensuring excellence in child protection, health and safety, accountability and transparency	27 (96%)	1	0	0
Responding to consultations where appropriate	24 (86%)	3	0	1
Developing and sharing training and learning opportunities between faith communities and Partners for Brent	24 (86%)	2	0	2
Understanding the 2010 Equality Act and Brent equality strategy and policy; challenging the council to deliver the services accordingly where appropriate	22 (81%)	3	0	2

The commitment: “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” received the smallest proportion of respondents agreeing. Of the nine respondents who did not select agree, only one respondent disagreed, all others stated that they neither agreed nor disagreed, or didn't know.

The comments about this commitment suggested that respondents were unsure about proselytising and what was meant in this commitment by it:

“Faith groups should be free to respond to enquiries on faith received in the process of service to the community.”

“Proselytising: this needs further clarification because to the best of my knowledge, there is no faith group that does not carry an inherent component of sharing their faith with others (?). In the most extreme cases where the freedom of others to disagree are ignored, proselytising is certainly wrong, but proselytising viewed positively increases awareness and promotes religious and humanitarian dialogue. It may also cause a faith group to re-evaluate its position on certain subjects.”

“I would like to see proselytism defined more clearly. It is of the essence of the Christian faith that we are able to share that faith, perhaps in the open air, perhaps by giving out leaflets. There is a difference between ramming Christian faith down people's throats, which is clearly unacceptable, and sharing good news. I sense that in many cases, any attempt to speak publicly about one's faith is not acceptable. This would be regrettable.”

There were more comments of a more general nature:

“Council should communicate with Faith Organisations stating very clearly what they do and how will they assist the faith Organisations in Brent and the Contact person”

“.... I have been here for years running a very busy church and I have never heard from the council in all that time, nor had anything to do with them, so I really can't answer many of these questions.”

“.....Working together across long established boundaries requires great patience. Again, this needs to be approached with a long-term perspective.”

“Again, the Council needs to recognise that some faith communities will need some financial resources to carry out consultations with their congregations.”

Our response

As a result of this consultation, all commitments will be included in the Faith Covenant. The faith communities' commitment about proselytising had many comments. Most of them agreed with us that faith should not be forced upon service users, but if asked about their faith believers should be able to talk freely about it. The council understands that faith communities offer these services because of their faith. The intention of this commitment is for people in need to access services offered by faith communities, without being obliged to talk about, or hear about the faith or belief of the organisation providing the service. It is not intended to stop faith communities talking about their faith in other situations.

A number of comments mentioned contact with the council, and some were unaware that Brent Multi-Faith Forum existed. Currently the council meets four times a year with Brent Multi-Faith Forum. The council will consider how it can communicate better with faith groups. The council would like to encourage faith groups to participate with the forum.

This consultation was available online, and each person contacted was invited to share this consultation with their organisation members. Paper copies of the consultation were also available which were sent to organisations on request. The council did not financially support the organisations to respond to the consultation, but did try and make it as accessible as possible, in line with similar consultations run by the council.

The council has an equality policy. When decisions are made, equality is always considered and the impact on different groups with protected characteristics assessed.

There are a number funding opportunities available in Brent, some of which are directly administered by the council. These are open to residents, community organisations, and voluntary organisations to apply for to provide services to Brent residents. Grants are awarded using a clearly defined process, and all faith organisations in Brent are able to apply for these. Information about funding available is on the Brent website, which includes a link to the funding portal which provides information about all funds, local and national.
<https://www.brent.gov.uk/your-community/voluntary-sector-advice/>

We would like to thank everyone for taking part in this consultation and expressing your views about the commitments in the faith covenant. All comments have been considered. The covenant will be discussed by Cabinet on Monday 24 April at 7pm. This meeting is open to members of the public so you are welcome to attend. If you would like to say something at the meeting, please contact Tom Cattermole, Head of Executive and Member Services:
Thomas.Cattermole@brent.gov.uk