

<b>Subject:</b>	<b>Brighton &amp; Hove Faith Covenant</b>		
<b>Date of Meeting:</b>	<b>NICE Committee 8<sup>th</sup> October</b>		
<b>Report of:</b>	<b>Executive Director Neighbourhoods, Inclusion Communities and Equality</b>		
<b>Contact Officer:</b>	<b>Name:</b>	<b>Emma McDermott</b>	<b>Tel: 01273 291577</b>
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<b>Ward(s) affected:</b>	<b>All</b>		

## **FOR GENERAL RELEASE**

### **1. PURPOSE OF REPORT AND POLICY CONTEXT**

- 1.1 The purpose of the report is to seek approval from committee for the council to sign up to a covenant with the faith communities of Brighton & Hove which commits both the council and the communities to working together in an open, respectful and collaborative manner for the benefit of the city.
- 1.2 The covenant sets out practical commitments within the partnership with the common goal of helping more people and communities in the city to flourish and meet their full potential.

### **2. RECOMMENDATIONS:**

- 2.1 That, on behalf of the council, NICE committee approves the Brighton and Hove Faith Covenant as set out in Appendix 1.

### **3. CONTEXT/ BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

- 3.1 Birmingham City Council was the first local authority to respond to a call from the All Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on Faith and Society for all local authorities across the UK to sign the newly-developed Faith Covenant. The Birmingham City Council and faith group representatives signed the Faith Covenant December 2014. Since then eleven other<sup>1</sup> local authorities have signed up to a faith covenant for their area.
- 3.2 The APPG's aims were to highlight the contribution to society by faith-based organisations, to identify best practice, and to promote understanding of the groups providing innovative solutions around the country. The APPG is convinced that faith groups have a great deal to offer as providers and advocates for the communities in which they serve, and that some of their potential is being unnecessarily overlooked at present.

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<sup>1</sup> Blackpool, Preston, Leeds, Calderdale, Wolverhampton, Solihull, Northamptonshire, Essex, Barnet, Brent, Southampton

3.3 To help tackle the problem, the APPG has drafted a Covenant which can be adopted by faith groups and local authorities in cities across the UK. Together, local authorities and faith communities should work out a local version of the commitments below, according to the priorities and needs of that locality.

3.4 The Faith Covenant is a joint commitment between faith communities and local authorities to a set of principles that guide engagement, aiming to remove some of the mistrust that exists and to promote open, constructive and collaborative partnership working.

#### **4. ANALYSIS & CONSIDERATION OF ANY ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS**

4.1 Do nothing however this would not help provide clarity and reassurance to both faith communities and the council in terms of what they could expect from the relationship and to break down some of the cultural resistance to working together from both sides.

#### **5. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT & CONSULTATION**

5.1 Representatives from the Brighton & Hove Faith Council including its coordinator and chair worked together with officers from the council's Communities, Equality and Third Sector team to develop the covenant as presented in appendix 1. In early 2018 the co-ordinator sent a draft of the covenant to all faith communities in the city. Sixty-six faith groups signed up in principle to the draft covenant covering the following denominations: Christian, Jewish, Muslim, Spiritualist and Buddhist.

5.2 In August and September the co-ordinator recirculated the covenant to all faith groups in the city asking if any objected to signing off the final text. Representatives from 41 faith groups, including the Anglican Bishop of Lewes, have said they have no objection and wish to proceed. No faith group has raised any objection. The BHFA board of trustees (who manage the Faith Council) is made up of Christian, Muslim, Jewish and Buddhist representatives and they have given the text their unanimous support.

#### **6. CONCLUSION**

6.1 Approval to sign up to the covenant is sought in order to establish a clearer partnership relationship between the council and faith communities. The covenant will provide a platform for that relationship to develop and deepen. This will help to maximise the impact of council and faith communities resources for the benefit of the city.

6.2 The next steps will be to hold a formal signing ceremony during Interfaith week in November and to identify the areas of joint interest to start working together on. The faith council has indicated that it is keen to work with public sector and other civil society groups on reducing social isolation, homelessness and substance abuse.

## 7. FINANCIAL & OTHER IMPLICATIONS:

### Financial Implications:

- 7.1 There are no financial implications arising from the recommendations made in this report.

*Finance Officer Consulted: Name Michael Bentley Date: 21/08/18*

### Legal Implications:

The proposals will assist the Council in meeting its public sector equality duty to advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations (Section 149 Equality Act 2010),

*Lawyer Consulted: Elizabeth Culbert Date: 22/08/18*

### Equalities Implications:

- 7.2 The Faith Covenant is inclusive of all faith communities in the city and the Faith Council includes members from across the city's faith groups. The covenant specifically recognises that differences between faiths are to be respected and that public services provided by faith groups are to be accessible to all, meaning that the council's public sector equality duties of fostering good relations and promoting equality of opportunity are supported.

### Sustainability Implications:

- 7.3 Working together to achieve communities' needs and aspirations the faith covenant supports activity to strengthen the sustainability of communities.

### Any Other Significant Implications:

- 7.4 None

## **SUPPORTING DOCUMENTATION**

### **Appendices:**

1. Brighton and Hove Faith Covenant 2018

Crime & Disorder Implications:

1.1 Working together to achieve communities' needs and aspirations the faith covenant supports activity to tackle crime and disorder issues in the city.

Risk and Opportunity Management Implications:

1.2

Public Health Implications:

1.3 Working together to achieve communities' needs and aspirations the faith covenant supports activity to tackle public health priorities.

Corporate / Citywide Implications:

1.4 By signing up to the covenant the council is recognising the role that faith communities play, independently of the public sector in supporting the communities.

## Draft Brighton and Hove Faith Covenant - A Covenant for Engagement

2018

This agreement is between the faith communities of Brighton and Hove and Brighton and Hove City Council. The purpose of the covenant is to provide a set of principles to guide partnership working between faith communities and the city council to ensure an open, collaborative and respectful relationship. It also sets out practical commitments for the faith communities and the city council to abide by to create a constructive partnership with the common goal of helping more people and communities in the city of Brighton and Hove flourish and meet their full potential.

The covenant sets the following principles for partnership between the city council and faith communities, that:

- Faith communities are a key component of civic society; free, within the framework of UK law, to practice their beliefs and religious observance, to speak their voice in public debate, to be respected and respectful.
- Faith communities hold different and distinct doctrinal beliefs and respect their equal dignity. This may lead them to contribute to the common good as individual communities as well as working together.
- Public services and faith based social action should be accessible to all, without discrimination on the grounds of sex, gender identity, marital status, pregnancy/maternity, race, ethnicity, age, sexual orientation, disability and or belief, religion or none.
- The voice, the participation and the solutions that faith communities bring are important and involvement of faith communities in local decision making will enable them to help more residents and communities in the city.
- Mutual respect and appreciation for the resources and unique role of the council and faith communities. This includes the council's status as a democratically elected public body with a wide range of statutory responsibilities, and faith groups' status as independent, community-led, volunteer run organisations.

As part of the covenant the city council commits to:

- Welcoming and encouraging the involvement of faith communities in the delivery of social action and improvement of public services on an equal basis and same terms as other Civil Society groups;
- Building relationships and trust with faith communities;
- Facilitating appropriate strategies for the engagement of faith communities in local decision making;
- Recognising Brighton and Hove Faith Council as a vehicle for developing and maintaining partnership working between faith communities and secular society, and for the city council to maintain an ongoing relationship with the Faith Council, including attending meetings wherever possible
- Alerting the Faith Council to relevant city council committees that may be of interest to faith communities and ensuring faith communities are aware of how to participate in the democratic process;
- Sharing, where possible, training and learning opportunities with faith communities;
- Treating faith based groups fairly and equally in council tendering processes, with the same expectations as other organisations bidding either from the Voluntary and Community Sector or the Private Sector, ensuring faith based groups are aware of how to participate in the council's commissioning and funding processes.

As part of the covenant faith communities, via representative faith based groups, commit to:

- Working to support diverse communities in the city to achieve their goals and aspirations and to support the delivery of services to the public. This maybe independent to or in collaboration with the city council;
- Seeking opportunities to bring people together to serve the community, building social cohesion and empower people - particularly mindful of its poorest and most isolated members;
- Serving all people seeking to access services equally, irrespective of sex, gender identity, marital status, pregnancy/maternity, race, ethnicity, age, sexual orientation, disability and or religion, belief, or none.
- Participating, where possible, in the Faith Council as a vehicle for developing and maintaining partnership working between faith communities and secular society, and feeding back to their communities on work of the Faith Council with and independent of the city council
- Ensuring excellence in accountability and transparency, safeguarding, child protection, health and safety, and collaborating where appropriate with public agencies on these issues.
- Responding to local and national government and other public sector organisations' consultations when they are likely to impact on faith communities
- Sharing, where possible, training and learning opportunities with the city council.