

Greater Manchester Combined Authority

Date: 22nd March 2024

Subject: Greater Manchester Faith, Belief and Interfaith Covenant

Report of: Cllr Arooj Shah, Portfolio Lead for Equalities and Communities, and Sara Todd, Portfolio Lead Chief Executive for Equalities and Communities

Purpose of Report

This report sets out and seeks endorsement for a new Greater Manchester Faith, Belief and Interfaith Covenant, a joint commitment between Faith and Belief communities and Greater Manchester Combined Authority (GMCA) to a set of principles that guide engagement, collaboration and delivery at all levels.

Recommendations:

The GMCA is requested to:

Endorse the Covenant and commitments within it.

Contact Officers

Adrian Bates, Head of Equalities Strategy, GMCA

adrian.bates@greatermanchester-ca.gov.uk

Equalities Impact, Carbon and Sustainability Assessment:

Recommendation - Key points for decision-makers

Endorse the Covenant and commitments within it

Impacts Questionnaire

Impact Indicator	Result	Justification/Mitigation
Equality and Inclusion	G	The Covenant will strengthen the role of Faith and Belief (as protected characteristics) within policy making and service delivery Faith and Belief brings together and supports people from all socio-economic backgrounds, places and identities. The Covenant will strengthen the role of Faith, Belief and Interfaith in supporting communities and individuals, advancing equality. Faith and Belief organisations deliver important community services across a range of areas, including health and wellbeing, childcare, housing and cohesion The Covenant provides a framework for strengthening the involvement of Faith and Belief in decision-making Faith and Belief organisations play a leading role in community cohesion, often through Interfaith Networks which this Covenant promotes
Health	G	Through the Covenant, Faith and Belief spaces could be better utilised to provide support for physical health e.g. healthy eating Faith and Belief provides spiritual wellbeing to over 1.8million residents of Greater Manchester, and the Covenant aims to enable greater recognition of this Through the Covenant, Faith and Belief spaces could be better utilised to provide support for physical activity e.g. health walks Faith and Belief organisations often support the most disadvantaged and isolated in society. The Covenant will ensure this is recognised and valued Through the Covenant, Faith and Belief buildings and infrastructure can be better utilised to deliver healthcare services e.g. vaccinations Faith and Belief organisations are main providers of food and foodbanks. The Covenant will strengthen their relationship with GMCA.
Resilience and Adaptation	G	Interfaith networks overcome differences and strengthen community cohesion, reducing the risk of public safety threats of extremism, and providing mutual aid, for example during the pandemic or floods. The Covenant will support their role in society Faith and Belief organisations provide immediate response to communities in times of crisis and emergencies. The Covenant will ensure this is recognised and valued Faith and Belief organisations support the most disadvantaged residents, and have strong values regarding the environment. The Covenant will enable opportunities to be maximised. Faith and Belief organisations require support, and can assist in tackling Hate Crime. The Covenant will strengthen relationships between communities and with public services Faith and Belief buildings contain greenspaces that could be better utilised
Housing	G	Faith and Belief organisations support people that are homelessness and rough sleeping. The Covenant will ensure this is recognised and valued
Economy	G	Faith and Belief organisations should be Good Employers and Real Living Wage employers. The Covenant will support this aim when undertaking commissioning. Faith and Belief organisations deliver community learning and digital inclusion programmes, and their spaces could be better utilised to reach the most disadvantaged. The Covenant will build relationships to enable this
Mobility and Connectivity		
Carbon, Nature and Environment		
Consumption and Production		
Contribution to achieving the GM Carbon Neutral 2038 target		The Covenant will reinforce the partnership working already underway through the GM Faith Net Zero Group, enabling more improvement programmes to be delivered
Future	G	Positive impacts overall, whether long or short term.
	A	Mix of positive and negative impacts. Trade-offs to consider.
	R	Mostly negative, with at least one positive aspect. Trade-offs to consider.
	RR	Negative impacts overall.

Carbon Assessment

Overall Score

Buildings	Result	Justification/Mitigation			
New Build residential	N/A				
Residential building(s) renovation/maintenance	N/A				
New build non-residential (including public) buildings	N/A				
Transport					
Active travel and public transport	N/A				
Roads, Parking and Vehicle Access	N/A				
Access to amenities	N/A				
Ve La La	No associated carbon impacts expected.	High standard in terms of practice and awareness on carbon.	Mostly best practice with a good level of awareness on carbon.	Partially meets best practice/ awareness, significant room to improve.	Not best practice and/ or insufficient awareness of carbon impacts.

Risk Management

This paper describes work to manage risk relating to engagement with Faith and Belief communities.

Legal Considerations

As set out in section 149 Equality Act 2010, a public authority (which includes the GMCA within its definition) must, in the exercise of its functions, have due regard to the need to—

- (a) eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under this Act;
- (b) advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.
- (c) foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.

This legislation is more commonly known as the Public Sector Equality Duty and will be supported, amongst other things, in GM, by the Covenant set out in this report.

Financial Consequences – Revenue

N/A

Financial Consequences – Capital

N/A

Number of attachments to the report: 0

Comments/recommendations from Overview & Scrutiny Committee

N/A

Background Papers

The statement by the Faith and Belief Advisory Panel on the Contribution of Faith and Belief to society can be viewed here <https://www.greatermanchester-ca.gov.uk/media/8447/gm-faith-and-belief-contribution-statement.pdf>

Tracking/ Process

Does this report relate to a major strategic decision, as set out in the GMCA Constitution

No

Exemption from call in

Are there any aspects in this report which means it should be considered to be exempt from call in by the relevant Scrutiny Committee on the grounds of urgency?

No

Bee Network Committee

N/A

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

N/A

1. Introduction

- 1.1 Faith and Belief is integral to the fabric of Greater Manchester's society, providing spiritual and wellbeing support as well as delivering essential services. In recent years, this has seen Faith, Belief and Interfaith organisations supporting communities through the pandemic and cost-of-living crisis, providing food, warm spaces and accommodation, and responding to both local, national and international emergencies, such as the Manchester Arena attack and most recently in Israel and Gaza. Beyond these times of crisis, the Faith sector are important service deliverers, supporting people of all ages and open to all residents (regardless of religious belief), including supporting often the most disadvantaged in society, for example the care of refugees.
- 1.2 However, there is a more unique role of Faith, Belief and Interfaith, which has far wider impacts on communities, and for the public services that support them. In the Census 2021 over 1.8million people in Greater Manchester (63% of the population) stated they followed a religion. Faith and Belief gives people hope, comfort and belonging. It fosters community understanding, cohesion and collaboration, and challenges hate, often through local Interfaith networks.
- 1.3 This unique 'contribution' to society was set out in a statement published by the Faith and Belief Advisory Panel in 2023, which was endorsed by political leaders including the Mayor of Greater Manchester (<https://www.greatermanchester-ca.gov.uk/media/8447/gm-faith-and-belief-contribution-statement.pdf>).
- 1.4 The Faith, Belief and Interfaith Covenant builds on that statement, setting out how the contribution can be maximised by working in partnership, empowered through a joint commitment between Faith and Belief communities and Greater Manchester Combined Authority (GMCA) to a set of principles and commitments that guide engagement, collaboration and delivery at all levels (see Annex below).
- 1.5 In addition, the Covenant is aligned with a national programme led by the All Party Parliamentary Group of Faith and Society. So far 20 Local Authorities have signed a Covenant, with West Midlands becoming the first Combined Authority to in September 2023.
- 1.6 Furthermore, the Covenant is grounded in the principles of the Public Sector Equality Duty, which requires public bodies, and services funded by them, to have due regard to the need to eliminate discrimination, advance equality of opportunity, and foster good relations.

2. Faith and Belief Advisory Panel

- 2.1 The Covenant has been developed by the Greater Manchester Faith and Belief Advisory Panel in collaboration with a working group of Council and GMCA officers, ensuring from the outset a partnership approach that meets the needs of all parties.
- 2.2 The Panel is made up of over 30 Faith, Belief and Interfaith organisations from across the city-region, working collaboratively with public service officers to design new ways of working, which positively uses the assets, strengths and resources in our community. For example, the Panel is actively involved in the Action Networks and the Task Forces tackling homelessness, food security, climate action, digital inclusion and Real Living Wage.

3. Benefits of the Covenant

- 3.1 *“The coming decade will see the country facing new social needs and tough new challenges. There will be fresh demands on public health, social care, education, employment support and community inclusion. These challenges will require the identification of a new set of resources. We will need to unlock the potential of every part of our society to contribute towards solutions. We believe that one important resource can be realised by supporting faith-based organisations to work with local authorities constructively and effectively, as part of civil society. That will mean ensuring that local authorities are confident in commissioning services from, and transferring assets to, appropriately qualified faith-based organisations, and that they include faith groups when they look for solutions to social needs.”*

All Party Parliamentary Group on Faith and Society www.faihandociety.org/covenant/

- 3.2 This Covenant will enable mutually beneficial relationships to thrive, achieving our shared ambitions for Greater Manchester. The Covenant embeds aspects essential to the development and sustaining of good partnerships - developing trust, cultivating transparency, sharing values, ethos and motivation, and embracing new mindsets, including reimagining the structures of governance and finance.
- 3.3 Within Greater Manchester, collaboration with Faith, Belief and Interfaith organisations offers communities and public services:
- Resources: important assets such as buildings and volunteers, but also networks of engagement that spread deep and across localities and communities. In addition,

expertise on how to engage and understand the experience of key communities and stakeholders that other sectors sometimes struggle to connect with

- Credibility: being trustworthy and effective, but also derived as being perceived to lie outside bureaucratic (or 'top-down') structures, and
- Motivation: an asset deriving from the values and beliefs that Faith, Belief and Interfaith groups bring to issues of commitment to their local communities. Their desire to problem-solve and collaborate for the sake of improving the life chances of not only their own members but also those of the wider community.

3.4 Whilst in the first instance the Covenant will be adopted by GMCA, it is envisaged that Councils and local Faith, Belief and Interfaith organisations will use the Covenant to strengthen their relationships, ensuring they reflect the different challenges being faced by public services and communities, and exploring the positive impact investment of support and resources could achieve.

4. Implementing the Covenant

4.1 It is essential that this Covenant leads to new opportunities, stronger partnerships and tangible change. GMCA officers and the Faith and Belief Advisory Panel will work together to develop a measurement framework to track progress. A workplan will be developed that will test, enable and deliver the Covenant, supporting the ambitions of the Greater Manchester Strategy through practical activity on key areas such as homelessness, food security, good employment, digital inclusion, climate justice and action on poverty and wellbeing.

4.2 In addition, local relationships and outcomes will also be developed with Council leads and local Interfaith Networks. This will enable impact to be tracked and good practice to be shared.

5. Annex

Greater Manchester Faith, Belief and Interfaith Covenant

This Covenant is a joint commitment between Faith and Belief communities and Greater Manchester Combined Authority (GMCA) to a set of principles that guide **engagement, collaboration and delivery** at all levels.

The Covenant has been developed by the Greater Manchester Faith and Belief Advisory Panel, an advisory body made up of Faith, Belief and Interfaith organisations from across the city-region, and Greater Manchester Combined Authority, made up of the ten Greater Manchester Councils and Mayor of Greater Manchester.

By working together, we can achieve our shared ambitions.

We want Greater Manchester to be a place where everyone can live a good life, growing up, getting on and growing old in a greener, fairer, more prosperous city region

Greater Manchester Strategy

The Faith, Belief and Interfaith Covenant is built on the following principles:

- Organisations and services can strengthen by drawing on diverse sources of funding, participation and action
- The voice, participation and solutions that Faith and Belief communities bring are important, and engagement and consultation enable them to contribute for the benefit of the wider community.
- Public services and Faith, Belief and Interfaith social action respect service users from all backgrounds, with no discrimination on the grounds of age, disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation
- Recognition that Faith and Belief intersects with other protected characteristics, for example race and sex
- Faith and Belief communities are free to practise their beliefs and religious observances without restriction or discrimination, and to raise their voice in public debate and to be respected, within the framework of United Kingdom law.

The Faith, Belief and Interfaith Covenant entails the following commitments:

Greater Manchester Combined Authority (GMCA) commits to welcome the involvement of Faith, Belief and Interfaith organisations in the delivery of services and social action on an equal basis with other organisations. In addition, GMCA commits to:

- Building relationships and trust with Faith, Belief and Interfaith organisations
- Adopting appropriate strategies for the consultation and engagement of Faith and Belief communities in policymaking
- Encouraging Faith, Belief and Interfaith organisations and their members to be actively involved in the shaping and design of local services, through a collaborative and asset-based approach
- Developing and sharing training and learning opportunities between Faith, Belief and Interfaith organisations and GMCA, including strengthening Faith and Belief literacy
- Maintaining open and transparent procedures for funding and commissioning of services that welcome Faith and Belief organisations as potential service providers
- Providing resources to enable proactive and positive engagement with Faith, Belief and Interfaith organisations, including the Faith and Belief Advisory Panel

Faith, Belief and Interfaith organisations commit to work actively with Greater Manchester Combined Authority in the design and delivery of services to the public. In addition, they commit to:

- Seeking opportunities to bring people together to serve the community, including its most disadvantaged and isolated members
- Balancing different Faith and Beliefs in a way that promotes good relations between people and communities, and engaging in dialogue and activity that overcomes tensions
- Using resources provided for delivering a service wholly for that intended purpose,
- Ensuring excellence in child and vulnerable adult safeguarding, health and safety, accountability and transparency
- Proactively responding to consultation and engagement
- Sharing training and learning opportunities between Faith, Belief and Interfaith organisations and GMCA

