

Cabinet Meeting

29 November 2017

Report title	Faith Covenant
Decision designation	AMBER
Cabinet member with lead responsibility	Councillor Paul Sweet Public Health and Wellbeing
Corporate Plan priority	People - Stronger Communities
Key decision	Yes
In forward plan	Yes
Wards affected	(All Wards)
Accountable Director	Mark Taylor, Strategic Director People
Originating service	Community Safety, Public Health
Accountable employee	Karen Samuels Head of Community Safety Tel 01902 551341 Email karen.samuels@wolverhampton.gov.uk
Report to be/has been considered by	People Leadership Team 30 October 2017 Strategic Executive Board 7 November 2017

Recommendations for decision:

The Cabinet is recommended to:

Agree adoption of the Covenant and proposals for implementation.

1.0 Purpose

- 1.1 To seek approval on the final draft covenant attached as Appendix 1 and subsequent actions post-signing.

2.0 Background

- 2.1 The Covenant for Engagement was first launched in 2013 by the All Party Parliamentary Group on Faith and Society, supported by Faith Action. It provides a framework for local authorities (and partners) and the faith sector to better understand how they can cooperate. This cooperation could cover commissioning for services, supporting social actions and providing greater coordination during consultations. The Covenant has also been seen as timely, given the increasing financial pressures across the statutory sector, for service delivery contributions within the faith sector to be formally recognised.
- 2.2 There are four guiding principles for the Covenant covering freedoms to practise; equalities act adherence; recognition of the role of faith communities within the larger community; and confirmation on the importance of multiple funding streams.
- 2.3 To date, seven authorities nationwide have adopted their own version of the Covenant, including two in the West Midlands Police force area. The Covenant has been cited as good practise in both the Oasis Foundation's report on 'Faith in Public Service: The role of the Church in public service delivery', and the Commission on Religion and Belief in British Public Life's report 'Living the Difference: Community, Diversity and the Common Good'.

3.0 The Covenant in the West Midlands

- 3.1 Birmingham City Council and Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council have both signed the Covenant, Birmingham being the first authority to sign up to the Covenant in December 2014. Both councils capitalised on strong inter-faith forums to promote and help write the Covenant, but worked in differing ways. Birmingham approached the Covenant as a bilateral agreement, working on very specific target priorities and in building awareness of the profile of faith groups; these priorities were outlined before the Covenant was signed. Solihull signed the Covenant as part of a 'partnership' approach, bringing in partner agencies to ensure a coherent means of working, with focus spread across a much wider range of areas. Walsall Metropolitan Borough Council are also beginning to develop the Covenant alongside their inter-faith forum.

4.0 Adopting the Covenant in Wolverhampton

- 4.1 The idea for Wolverhampton to adopt the Covenant was first suggested at a meeting of the Community Cohesion Forum by the Diocese of Lichfield's Inter-Faith Officer. The concept was explored by the Community Safety Team, in conjunction with the Wolverhampton Voluntary Sector Council.

4.2 Authorities from across the country that had adopted the Covenant were contacted to clarify points and their processes, including a visit to Leeds City Council. The Community Cohesion Forum endorsed this on-going work at their February 2017 meeting, and suggested that, were Wolverhampton to adopt the Covenant, it should be approached on a partnership basis. This would be similar to the approach taken in Solihull, where a multi-agency partnership signed the Covenant alongside the faith forum, with other faith partners encouraged to sign if they wish.

4.3 As with other local authority areas that had adopted the Covenant, work has been conducted with the city's interfaith organisation, InterFaith Wolverhampton. The faith sector has been positive to the idea of adopting the Faith Covenant, due to the collaborative approach to working between the statutory sector and the faith sector.

5.0 Benefits for Wolverhampton if the Covenant is adopted

5.1 Adopting the Covenant has been seen by Local Authorities who have adopted it as having a multitude of benefits. These include:

- Providing good practice evidence toward their Public-Sector Equality Duty (Equality Act 2010)
- Evidencing good practice toward the Local Government Equality Framework (Leeds cited that it assisted them in achieving Excellent)
- Enhancing safeguarding practice across the faith sector
- Promoting and celebrating city cohesion and the positive contribution of the faith sector with schemes such as the City of Sanctuary and Places of Welcome.

6.0 Proposals for Implementation in Wolverhampton

6.1 Meetings have taken place, to scope and develop the Covenant for Wolverhampton. These meetings have had representation from the City of Wolverhampton Council, West Midlands Police, InterFaith Wolverhampton and the Wolverhampton Voluntary Sector Council.

6.2 It was decided that the optimum approach within Wolverhampton to adopting the Covenant would be to follow the Leeds model, to gain signatories on the Covenant initially, and use it as a vehicle for further faith engagement within the city. This was instead of planning specific goals for the Covenant before signature.

6.3 Engagement has taken place with a number of faith groups across the city, including the main representative groups for individual and multiple faiths. This was to gauge views on proposals for development of a Covenant, and seek input on shaping this. Positive views were received about the Covenant as a concept, and consensus reached on the value of its development.

6.4 Specific engagement around the Covenant has occurred with the following organisations: City of Wolverhampton Council, The Standing Advisory Council for Religious Education (SACRE), West Midlands Police, Wolverhampton Voluntary Sector Council, University of Wolverhampton, Wolverhampton Clinical Commissioning Group, InterFaith Wolverhampton, the Bishop of Wolverhampton, Wolverhampton Council of Mosques, Wolverhampton Ahmadiyya Association, Wolverhampton Council of Gurdwaras.

- 6.5 After receiving feedback on the Covenant, several changes have been made. Sections of the Covenant have been rewritten to ensure that it is in Plain English, allowing it to be understood better. The information regarding the Equality Act and adherence to it has been tightened, and wording around the design of services has also been clarified. There is now also explicit reference to the non-faith community, and the reasoning behind the Faith Covenant.
- 6.6 Post signing, it is planned that a working group would be established to progress practical areas of implementation. The working group would be made up of key signatories, including a number of faith representatives, who would meet periodically to coordinate activity under the auspices of the Covenant. A discussion would be had as to where oversight for this group would sit.
- 6.7 The subsequent working group will develop an action plan on targeted and generic work across the city, build on work already being done in areas such as the City of Sanctuary, and could provide the nucleus for a faith forum linked to the Council similar to the Faith Hub created by Leeds City Council.
- 6.8 The following areas of specific focus have been proposed for development within the first year of the Faith Covenant:
- Safeguarding within the faith sector
 - Celebrating the contribution of the faith sector to the city, and how the statutory sector can support them in their work
 - Identifying best means of engagement between statutory and faith sectors
 - Collaboration around faith and community response to incidents of resilience and cohesion.
- 6.9 The working group will identify lead organisations to take the above priorities forward in the first quarter post signing. These leads, which will include statutory, third sector and faith sector partners, will have expertise in specific areas and will be best placed to further their area of work, using the Covenant as a means to engage the faith community.

7.0 Post-signing proposed activity

- 7.1 As the proposed Covenant is a Partnership approach, it will be forwarded to Partnership Boards during November 2017 for endorsement and sign-off. If sign-off is granted by Cabinet, a formal signing event is envisaged for December 2017.

8.0 Evaluation of alternative options

- 8.1 The possibility of a pan Black Country Covenant was explored, however, after consulting with the other authorities, it was deemed that there were sufficient differences within the faith makeup of each area to make this logistically and practically difficult to create and implement.

9.0 Reasons for decision(s):

- 9.1 CWC will be in a stronger position to work alongside its faith sector, and can utilise the Covenant as a vehicle for further faith engagement in the city. It will also provide a clear signal of the commitment the city has toward its faith sector, and acknowledges the positive contribution the sector has to the city as a whole.

10.0 Financial implications

- 10.1 There are no financial implications relating to this report. Any costs arising from actions detailed in this report and attached appendices will be met from existing budgets.
[AJ/02112017/J]

11.0 Legal implications

- 11.1 The stated actions will support the Council's compliance with its Equality Duty under the Equality Act 2010, in relation to working with the faith sector. It will also strengthen the city's collective response to areas such as safeguarding and the Prevent Duty (Counter Terrorism and Security Act 2015).
[RB/02112017/W]

12.0 Equalities implications

- 12.1 The Faith Covenant explicitly references the Equality Act, and adherence to it, as a stipulation for signatory. The Covenant will ensure that working with the religion strand of the Equality Act is evidenced, and that Faith Groups adhere to the other protected strands of the Act.

13.0 Environmental implications

- 13.1 There are no environmental implications.

14.0 Human resources implications

- 14.1 There are no human resources implications.

15.0 Corporate landlord implications

- 15.1 There are no Corporate Landlord implications.

16.0 Schedule of background papers

- 16.1 APPG Faith Covenant template <http://www.faithandsociety.org/covenant/>

17.0 Appendices

- 17.1 Appendix 1 - Wolverhampton Faith Covenant Draft