

WMCA Board

Date	9 February 2024
Report title	Faith Strategic Partnership Group
Portfolio Lead	Inclusive Communities - Councillor Kerrie Carmichael
Accountable Chief Executive	Laura Shoaf, West Midlands Combined Authority email: laura.shoaf@wmca.org.uk
Accountable Employee	Ed Cox, Executive Director of Strategy, Economy & Net Zero email: ed.cox@wmca.org.uk

The WMCA Board is recommended to:

- (1) Note the newsletter from the independent Faith Strategic Partnership Group at Appendix 1.
- (2) Consider the implications and opportunities of working with faith communities for the WMCA and its constituent local authorities, particularly relating to the Faith Covenant.

1. Purpose

- 1.1 The Co-Chairs of the Independent Faith Strategic Partnership Group, Amrick Singh Ubhi, and Steve Botham will attend to share a brief update on their activity through 2023 and their developing priorities for 2024.

2. Background

- 2.1 The Faith Strategic Partnership Group (FSPG) was established in 2021 to ensure people of faith across the West Midlands worked together in areas of shared concern such as homelessness, education, employment, poverty, community relations and leadership where faith community groups can help work together for a better West Midlands. The FSPG creates space to allow faith leaders to influence policies and programmes and ensure faith communities' voices are reflected in the work of the WMCA. The FSPG has established three working groups – Homelessness, Mental Health and Emerging Leaders - each of which has developed a clear vision and action plan. The FSPG has also worked to promote the 'Faith Covenant' in the region.

2.2 The Faith Covenant is an initiative of the All Party Parliamentary Party on Faith and Society which calls upon faith communities and local authorities to work together around a set of principles that guide engagement, aiming to remove some of the mistrust that exists and to promote open, practical working on all levels.

2.3 The Faith Covenant principles include:

- Communities are free to practice 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.
- The voice, participation and solutions that faith groups bring are important and valued.
- Public services and faith-based social action groups will respect service users from all backgrounds, with no discrimination on the basis of one or more of the protected characteristics as defined by the Equality Act 2010.

2.4 Public sector signatories to the covenant commit themselves to:

- Building relationships and trust with faith groups;
- Adopting strategies for the engagement of faith communities in consultation exercises;
- Encouraging faith groups and their members to be involved in the reshaping and redesign of local services;
- Sharing training and learning opportunities between faith communities and the local authority.

2.5 In September 2023, the Mayor and other local authority leaders signed the Faith Covenant on behalf of the wider WMCA. Some local authorities have signed in their own right and all WMCA local authorities have made commitments to consider their own responses to the Faith Covenant.

2.6 Further to signing the Faith Covenant, the FSPG would like the WMCA and its constituent authorities to consider the implications and opportunities generated by these commitments. These might include:

- Better representation of faith communities on the different boards and working groups of the WMCA and its constituent authorities;
- Encouraging better 'faith literacy' within statutory bodies to break down perceived communication barriers and improve the accessibility of services;
- Support for the capacity-building of groups and organisations representing faith communities.

2.7 The FSPG would also like to promote a Regional Faith Summit to bring together a wide range of local leaders to discuss key issues of concern to the region's faith communities.

3. Strategic Aims and Objectives

3.1 FSPG activity relates to the Combined Authorities' priority to: *Develop and support a varied portfolio of citizen engagement activity across the WMCA to ensure decisions are shaped by citizens and that our policies, practices, and investments deliver real value for everyone living and working in the region.*

4. Financial Implications

- 4.1 The FSPG has a small operational budget which supports events and meetings. There are no specific financial implications from the board noting this newsletter update. Any future initiatives that may require funding would come back to board for consideration.

5. Legal Implications

- 5.1 There are no legal implications arising from this report.

6. Single Assurance Framework Implications

- 6.1 None arising from this report.

7. Equalities Implications

- 7.1 The FSPG works closely with the WMCA equalities team, and those of the constituent and non-constituent Local Authorities. Engaging with faith communities can play an important role in addressing both actual and perceived inequality.

8. Inclusive Growth Implications

- 8.1 The WMCA defines Inclusive Growth (IG), as “a more deliberate and socially purposeful model of growth, measured not only by how fast or aggressive it is, but also, by how well it is created and shared across the whole population and place, and by the social and environmental outcomes it realises for our people”.
- 8.2 Creating spaces for faith Leaders to share their insights and influence policy-making connects well with the Power and Participation Inclusive Growth Fundamental. Power and participation are about the extent to which people have a voice in influencing the things that matter to them. People who feel that they have power over their circumstances will feel a greater share in the prospects of a place.

9. Geographical Area of Report’s Implications

- 9.1 The FSPG is inclusive of representatives from all constituent members of the WMCA, and open to non-constituent members.

10. Other Implications

- 10.1 None.

11. Schedule of Background Papers

- 11.1 None