



**West Midlands
Combined Authority**



A 2023 from the Faith Strategic Partnership Group

2022 ended with a well-attended Mayor's Faith Summit and a range of challenging outcomes for us to follow through. 2023 ends with significant progress in many areas but also the tensions and distress of a conflict in the Middle East impacting many communities here in the West Midlands. This brief newsletter is to update you on progress and give you the opportunity to comment on and engage in the work of the Faith Strategic Partnership Group and the Mayor's office.

The Faith Strategic Partnership Group

We bring together faith representatives from across the West Midlands. The group reflects the voices of the main faith groups, across the genders, generations, and geography of our region. It is strategic – looking at the big issues that reflect our communities. It is a partnership working closely with Mayor Andy Street and his team as they aim to invest in and develop our region. It is collaborative as we find that sharing ideas, best practice and concerns and effective ways to work together helps us all serve our different communities.

It is focused – it is good to talk – but more effective is that talk leads to action!

Amrick Singh Ubhi, Chair Faith Strategic Partnership Group



In 2023 we have made progress in the following areas

- Created and signed a Faith Covenant for the West Midlands. A commitment from all the councils to better understand and engage with faith and from the faith community to better serve our areas.
- Engage with young people to better understand their mental health concerns.
- Ran a series of events addressing

homelessness, sharing best practice, and identifying the preventative work we can do across our communities.

- Focused on the cost of living crisis reviewing how this was impacting our communities with a series of forums to address key issues and share best practice.
- Brought faith leaders together to address the community tensions and anxieties over the Israel / Hamas/ Gaza war.
- We committed to raise the voice and impact of the faith community and this has opened fresh conversations around health, race inequalities, the economy, shared values, and policy.

Moving forward into 2024

These are some of the key issues we will focus on in 2024.

- Homelessness – there is a growing homelessness challenge. We will look at how we best collaborate to stop people sliding into homelessness and share the best ways to help those who are homeless.
- Mental Health – we will raise awareness of the growing challenges of mental health in our young people. We will equip faith groups to respond with compassion, understanding and practical actions and give support to addressing the impact on mental health on inequality.
- Young people – as faith communities we aim to develop and encourage young people to grow as leaders and shape future strategy.
- Cost of Living – continue to monitor the impact of the cost of living crisis, share best practice and ideas and encourage faith groups to be at the heart of community based support.
- Building community cohesion – this is a key challenge for us in the West Midlands and we are committed to addressing tensions and building peace.

The Israel/Hamas/Gaza tension

FSPG builds friendships across the faiths. We are listening to each other's deep pain and grief and trying to understand the frustration and tensions in each community.

We acknowledge the depth of pain within Muslim and Jewish communities whilst recognising there is a fear and uncertainty across all our region. This could result in other outbreaks of intolerance and disruption.

We want to see faith on the forefront of building understanding and peace. We encourage faith leaders to talk to each other, understand the impact on our varied communities and build bridges. We commit to dialogue and working together.

Your responses, opinions, and input

We would love to keep you engaged. Here are three questions to help us put *faith into action*. Please respond to botham@btinternet.com

1. We have identified what we think are the faith priorities working with WMCA – are there any other issues you feel we should be looking at?

2. Any comments on our priorities? Examples of good practice? Links with people/organisations engaged in these areas?

3. Any other comments

Finally, **if you would like to work with us**, please let us know – ways to work with us include:

- Being an active participant in the Faith Strategic Partnership Group – putting our faith into action across the region.
- Being an active participant in our subgroups – on **Mental Health, Homelessness, and Community Cohesion**
- Providing expertise and advice.
- Linking with us. Networking gets things done!

Amrick Singh Ubhi
Chair, FSPG

Steve Botham
Vice Chair, FSPG