



Community Leadership Committee

24 June 2015

Title	Covenant with faith communities and Charter with the voluntary sector
Report of	Director of Strategy
Wards	All
Status	Public
Enclosures	Appendix A – Full text of the All Parliamentary Party Covenant for Engagement between Faith Communities and Local Authorities Appendix B – Barnet Charter with the Voluntary and Community Sector
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Summary

In December 2014 the Chairmen of the Policy & Resources Committee and the Community Leadership Committee agreed to explore whether the Council should adopt the All Parliamentary Party Covenant for Engagement between Faith Communities and Local Authorities, and work in partnership with the Barnet Multi-Faith Forum to implement it.

This report sets out the background to the Covenant and the actions the Council is planning, in consultation with local faith groups, to take to implement it, in the context of the diverse relationships the Council already has with the Borough's faith communities. It asks the Community Leadership Committee, on behalf of the Council, to adopt the Covenant, endorse its principles, and note the action plan.

The report also notes that the Council previously developed and launched a Charter with the Voluntary and Community Sector and updates Members on plans to mainstream this more widely across the organisation.

Recommendations

- 1. That the Committee, on behalf of the Council, adopts the All Parliamentary Party Covenant for Engagement between Faith Communities and Local Authorities, endorses its principles and authorises officers to carry out the planned actions under the five commitments, set out in paragraphs 1.10 to 1.14 of this report.**
- 2. That the Committee notes and endorses the planned actions to further develop and mainstream use of the Council's Charter with the Voluntary Sector, as set out in paragraph 1.17 of this report.**

1. WHY THIS REPORT IS NEEDED

Background – the Covenant for Engagement between Faith Communities and Local Authorities

- 1.1 The Council maintains positive relationships with the Borough's faith communities, whether this is through relationships with faith organisations who are also service providers (such as faith schools or housing associations) or through its broader community engagement routes.
- 1.2 In 2014, the All Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) for Faith and Society developed a draft Covenant for Engagement between Faith Communities and Local Authorities. The purpose of the APPG is to highlight the contribution to society by faith-based organisations, identify best practice, and promote understanding of innovative work being carried out by faith groups around the UK. The Covenant sets out principles for the relationship between local authorities and faith communities and organisations.
- 1.3 The Covenant was developed in order to ensure that there is potential for faith groups to provide services to, and advocate for, the communities in which they serve are not overlooked. It sets out principles for the relationship between local authorities, faith communities and organisations. The full text of the Covenant is set out in Appendix A.
- 1.4 Last year, the Barnet Multi-Faith Forum approached the Council to explore whether the Council would be willing to adopt the Covenant and work with the Multi-Faith Forum to implement it. Barnet Multi-Faith Forum is an active forum made up of volunteers representing the major faith groups in Barnet. It works to ensure faith communities have a voice in relevant matters affecting issues of faith and belief in the Borough, celebrates cultural diversity, supports social action projects, promotes dialogue between different groups and advocates for freedom of expression.
- 1.5 The Council and Barnet Multi-Faith Forum work together through the Council's Communities Together Network, which brings local statutory agencies and community organisations together to promote community cohesion and resilience.

- 1.6 In February 2015, the Chairmen of the Policy & Resources and Community Leadership Committees met the Multi-Faith Forum and agreed to explore how the Council could adopt the Covenant.
- 1.7 The Covenant commits local authorities to:
- welcome the involvement of faith groups in the delivery of services and social action on an equal basis with other groups.
- 1.8 It commits faith groups to:
- work actively with local authorities in the design and delivery of services to the public.
- 1.9 The Council has developed a plan, in consultation with the Multi-Faith Forum, for how its commitments will be implemented, and the actions which underpin this are set out below.

Principles, commitments and actions for the local authority

- 1.10 **Commitment 1: Building relationships and trust with faith groups:**
- Following on from recent consultation events with local voluntary and community sector (VCS) groups, the Council is developing a programme of engagement with the local VCS and will include proactive engagement with faith groups as part of this programme.
 - In particular, the Council will continue to work with faith groups through the Communities Together Network and to build on its strong relationship with the Barnet Multi-Faith Forum.
- 1.11 **Commitment 2: Adopting strategies for the engagement of faith communities in consultation exercises:**
- The Council will continue to use the Communities Together Network and Barnet Multi-Faith Forum to share information about relevant consultations and invite faith communities to respond.
 - The Council will also ensure that our consultation toolkit continues to contain a guide to best practice in engaging with faith groups, and tools to support officers in doing this.
- 1.12 **Commitment 3: Encouraging faith groups and their members to be involved in the reshaping and redesign of local services:**
- The Council will ensure it consults and engages with faith groups at a formative stage on key strategies and policies through the Communities Together Network and, it is proposed, through a new borough-wide strategic VCS forum.
 - The Council will engage with members of faith communities when co-designing relevant services and work with faith groups alongside other

potential providers when considering how to commission relevant services.

1.13 Commitment 4: Establishing clear guidelines around funding:

- The Council will ensure that its guidelines around grants and funding are clear about opportunities for faith groups to access funding.

1.14 Commitment 5: Sharing training and learning opportunities between faith communities and the local authority:

- The Council will maintain its current networks and continue to use them as opportunities to share learning.
- The Council will continue to work with faith groups to organise specific events aimed at celebrating the diversity of faiths and culture in Barnet, including Peace One Day (21 September 2015) and a joint faith and cultural festival planned for 2016.

1.15 The Committee is asked to adopt the Covenant on behalf of the Council; to endorse its principles and authorise officers to carry out the planned actions under paragraphs 1.10-1.14, in order to augment and strengthen its existing relationships with the Borough's faith communities.

Background – Barnet's Charter with the Voluntary and Community Sector

1.16 In 2014, the Council worked in partnership with local residents and voluntary and community groups to develop a new Charter with the VCS. The Charter sets out six key principles for engagement between the Council and the VCS, reflecting their shared values and aspirations. The VCS Charter was adopted by the Cabinet Member for Customer Access and Partnerships in March 2014. The text of the Charter is attached as Appendix B of this report.

1.17 There are affinities between the principles set out in the Charter and those set out in the Covenant with faith groups, and the adoption of the Covenant has provided an opportunity to review how well the Charter has been integrated into the Council's work with the VCS. There has also been some feedback from local VCS groups that they would like to see a more public commitment from the Council to the Charter. This report therefore proposes:

- That the Council re-publishes the VCS Charter alongside other information available to local voluntary and community groups, to increase its visibility
- That rollout of the Charter is incorporated into the implementation of the Council's Community Participation Strategy, with particular reference to integrating its principles into work with commissioners to improve the way in which the Council procures services from the VCS.

1.18 The Committee is asked to note and endorse these actions.

2. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 Adopting the Covenant will help to promote community cohesion and build stronger relationships with Barnet's faith communities. The Council will need to work closely with faith groups to build community participation and resilience in order to meet the challenges of the next five years.
- 2.2 Feedback has been received from local VCS groups that the Charter is not sufficiently visible or integrated into the way the Council works. The recommended actions are designed to mitigate this.

3. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED AND NOT RECOMMENDED

- 3.1 The Council could choose not to review the VCS Charter at the same time as the Faith Covenant, but this would miss an opportunity to strengthen its relationship with local voluntary and community organisations.

4. POST DECISION IMPLEMENTATION

- 4.1 If the recommendation to adopt the Faith Covenant is approved, the Council will implement the actions set out in paragraphs 1.10-1.14 above and will work with the Multi-Faith Forum and other faith groups in the Borough to develop their plans for implementation.
- 4.2 The Faith Covenant will be formally launched at the Peace One Day celebration on 21 September 2015.
- 4.3 The VCS Charter will be republished on the Council's website and taken forward through the Council's Community Participation Strategy.

5. IMPLICATIONS OF DECISION

5.1 Corporate Priorities and Performance

- 5.1.1 Adopting the Faith Covenant and rolling out the VCS Charter more widely will support the objective in the Corporate Plan 2015-20 to develop more involved, resilient communities; building stronger partnerships with faith groups and coordinating and improving the support the Council gives to communities.

5.2 Resources (Finance & Value for Money, Procurement, Staffing, IT, Property, Sustainability)

- 5.2.1 The adoption of the Faith Covenant will be met from within existing resources and the launch carried out through an event which supports and complements the principles of the Covenant.
- 5.2.2 The Covenant will also promote better access to the Council's grants and funding processes for faith groups.

- 5.2.3 The rollout of the VCS Charter will be met from within existing resources and will support the Council's commissioning and procurement practices to become more effective, taking account of a greater range of existing providers and supporting the development of greater community capacity in the Borough.

5.3 **Legal and Constitutional References**

- 5.3.1 Council Constitution Section 15, Responsibility for Functions (Annex A) sets out the Terms of Reference for the Community Leadership Committee. These include:

- To maintain good relationships with Barnet's diverse communities ensuring that all communities have the opportunity to participate fully in the Borough's affairs.
- To approve any non-statutory plan or strategy within the remit of the Committee that is not reserved to Full Council or Policy and Resources Committee.

5.4 **Risk Management**

- 5.4.1 The recommendations set out in this report mitigate the risk of a decline in the relationship between the voluntary and community sector and the Council.

5.5 **Equalities and Diversity**

The 2010 Equality Act outlines the provisions of the Public Sector Equality Duty which requires public bodies **to have due regard** to the need to:

- eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct prohibited by the Equality Act 2010
- advance equality of opportunity between people from different groups
- foster good relations between people from different groups

Under the Equality Act 2010, the relevant protected characteristics are age, disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation. The broad purpose of this duty is to integrate considerations of equality into day business and keep them under review in decision making, the design of policies and the delivery of services

These proposals support the aims of the Public Sector Equality Duty by advancing equality of opportunity and promoting good relations between faith groups and the wider community.

5.6 **Consultation and Engagement**

- 5.6.1 The Council has engaged with the Barnet Multi-Faith Forum on the implementation of the Faith Covenant and will continue to do so if the Committee agrees that it should be adopted.

- 5.6.2 The VCS Charter was developed in partnership with local residents and voluntary and community groups, including a working group made up of representatives from the Council and the VCS.

- 5.6.3 Two meetings of the working group were convened to allow participants to

contribute ideas and to refine the principles and commitments to better reflect the shared values and aspirations between their sectors.

- 5.6.4 The principles set out in the Charter were subject to an open online consultation for six weeks up to 31 January 2014, which included a workshop held at Hendon Town Hall. Responses were discussed and amendments to the Charter agreed at a final working group meeting on 27 February.

6. BACKGROUND PAPERS

- 6.1 Initiation of Charter for Barnet with the Voluntary and Community Sector, Decision of Cabinet Member for Customer Access and Partnerships, 10 March 2014
<https://barnet.moderngov.co.uk/ieDecisionDetails.aspx?ID=5254>