

Greater Manchester Combined Authority

Date: 22nd August 2025
Subject: Greater Manchester Faith, Belief and Interfaith Covenant
Report of: Councillor Arooj Shah, Portfolio Lead for Equalities and Communities and
Lynne Ridsdale, Portfolio Lead Chief Executive for Equalities and
Communities

Purpose of Report

This report sets out progress made in implementing the Greater Manchester Faith, Belief and Interfaith Covenant following its endorsement by GMCA in March 2024.

Recommendations:

The GMCA is requested to:

1. Note the progress of the Faith, Belief and Interfaith Covenant.
2. Champion opportunities for implementation of the Covenant in portfolios and localities, including the role of local Interfaith Networks.

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

1. Note the progress of the Faith, Belief and Interfaith Covenant
2. Champion opportunities for implementation of the Covenant in portfolios and localities, including the role of local Interfaith Networks

Impacts Questionnaire

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

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	
Vehicle procurement	N/A	
Land Use		
Land use	#####	
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

In accordance with the provisions of section 149 of the Equality Act 2010, the GMCA 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.

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 Faith, Belief and Interfaith Covenant was endorsed by GMCA in March 2024

<https://democracy.greatermanchester-ca.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=136&MId=5342&Ver=4>

Key Decision

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

1. Introduction

- 1.1 In March 2024 Greater Manchester Combined Authority (GMCA) endorsed a new Greater Manchester Faith, Belief and Interfaith Covenant; a joint commitment between Faith and Belief communities and GMCA to principles and commitments that guide engagement, collaboration and delivery (see Appendix).
- 1.2 Faith and Belief organisations are integral to the fabric of Greater Manchester's society, providing spiritual and wellbeing support as well as delivering essential services. Faith and Belief organisations support people of all ages and are open to all residents (regardless of religion), including often the most disadvantaged in society. Faith and Belief can give people hope, comfort and belonging, and can foster community understanding, cohesion and collaboration. In the Census 2021 over 1.8million people in Greater Manchester (63% of the population) stated they followed a religion, with some religions increasing as the population diversifies.
- 1.3 The Covenant was 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 is mutually beneficial.
- 1.4 The Panel is made up of Faith, Belief and Interfaith organisations from across the city-region. Its aim is to optimise the contribution of Faith and Belief to the Greater Manchester Strategy and for this contribution to be recognised and valued. The Panel galvanises the assets, strengths and resources in our community to support city-region priorities including tackling homelessness and food security.
- 1.5 For public services, collaboration with Faith and Belief organisations offers -
 - Resources: important assets such as buildings and volunteers, as well as networks of engagement that spread deep and across communities.
 - Credibility: being trustworthy and effective, lying outside bureaucratic (or 'top-down') structures, and
 - Motivation: deriving from the values and beliefs that Faith and Belief brings to issues, 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.

2. Delivery of the Covenant

2.1 The Covenant has an active delivery plan, operating across all GMCA Directorates and Portfolios, that tests, enables and delivers the commitments through practical action on key areas such as good employment, digital inclusion, climate justice, poverty and wellbeing. This has been underpinned by internal activity over the last year to understand existing relationships and map activity to identify gaps, barriers and opportunities through a collaborative network of officers.

2.1. The Covenant is aligned with two key programmes -

- Race Equity Framework – positive communication on the city-region’s diversity and inclusive engagement with communities are important elements of both the Covenant and the Framework. Over the last year there has been increased internal and external communication celebrating Faith and Belief, with more coordinated messaging being planned. This builds on the success of targeting messages to address service demands, for example fire prevention and waste management during religious festivals, with more opportunities seized across all portfolios. This will also lead to greater engagement of Faith and Belief communities, for example as Transport for Greater Manchester have done with the Faith and Belief Advisory Panel on public transport accessibility and safety, empowered by a new GMCA Participation Framework.
- Voluntary, Community, Faith and Social Enterprise (VCFSE) Accord – Faith and Belief organisations are a significant part of the VCFSE sector, and as such are embedded throughout the Accord, contributing to its specific delivery strands and benefitting from its impact. Aligned with this, Faith representatives are active members of the VCFSE Leadership Group, ensuring they contribute and benefit from a thriving sector.

2.2 In addition, the Covenant has been used locally to strengthen relationships between Councils and Faith, Belief and Interfaith Networks, supporting the development of existing networks, including the relaunch of Salford Interfaith Forum, and the creation of new networks, for example the Wigan Interfaith Forum.

3. The Covenant in action – case studies

- 3.1 Migration and Homelessness - Faith and Belief organisations and networks contribute in many ways to society, especially to those most disadvantaged, including people experiencing homelessness as well as those seeking asylum, refugees and other migrants. For those who face barriers to mainstream or local authority services, for example if they have no recourse to public funds, it is often Faith and Belief organisations that people turn to. They are trusted, embedded in communities in a unique way and can offer spiritual, emotional and practical advice, guidance and care, in both circumstances of crisis but also by offering the sense of community and belonging required to prevent people from experiencing crisis and helping with long-term recovery. The GMCA Asylum and Migration Team, in partnership with the Faith and Belief Advisory Panel, have hosted two successful events, bringing together a very diverse range of Faith and Belief representatives to explore what support is being provided, learn from others and share good practice. These have fostered new relationships and informed a programme of activity that will enable a comprehensive understanding of the offer from Faith and Belief organisations and more collaboration between organisations. This enhances the offer to people and communities, uses resources more effectively and further strengthens cohesion. The insight will also inform future strategy, policy and practice on migration and homelessness.
- 3.1. Mapping Faith organisation's contribution to early years – GMCA are funding Gather Movement to undertake mapping of the Faith based family support offer. Building on a mapping exercise in Oldham, which identified that two thirds of under 5s attend some kind of Faith based provision (e.g. toddler group, stay and play), funding from the GMCA early years/school readiness programme will expand this across all localities. The mapping process takes a relational approach, with the Gather Movement team, building networks across Faith organisations to capture their offer. The data is then provided in a maps format with details of the provision, contact details etc. and shared with local Early Years, Family Hubs and Child Health leads to support the development of local relationships that will enable closer working. This ultimately has the potential to better integrate Faith-based

organisations into the place-based family support offer as part of the Family Hub networks across Greater Manchester.

- 3.2 Trafford Faith Action Network - Trafford Council has set up a grass roots model of community cohesion through the launch of the Trafford Faith Action Network (TFAN) last year. The network has been expanding and centres around the Council's Corporate Plan which includes priorities on the best start for children and young people, healthy and independent lives for everyone, a thriving economy and homes for all, addressing climate change and culture, sport and heritage for everyone. A recent meeting focused on children and young people and their voices, which highlighted issues around mental health, education, and a rise in hate crime and racism. The network is now working with GMCA to explore how these issues can be addressed collectively. The TFAN gathered in July with a focus on a thriving economy for all, engaging directly with the Greater Manchester Live Well strategy.

- 3.2. Community cohesion response – the unrest of summer 2024, motivated by racism and Islamophobia, were an example of where Faith, Belief and Interfaith networks are called into action to provide an immediate response to community issues and support recovery and resilience. By standing together, they provide a strong unified message of cohesion and inclusion to their local communities, as well as countering the online misinformation so prevalent in recent incidents. As political and social discourse continues, fuelled by national and international events, it is accepted that there will be the need for a collective stance in the future. To prepare for this, the Faith and Belief Advisory Panel have developed a 'mobilisation plan', that will enable members to communicate and connect immediately, drafting and sharing consistent messages across their local Interfaith Networks and into their communities. Relationships with Community Safety Partnerships will be developed to ensure the plan can be effective if needed.

3.3. Faith, Young People and Resilience – the Resilience Team at GMCA are embarking on a Co-operative Councils' Innovation Network (CCIN) Policy Lab funded project that brings together young people and Faith networks to reflect on the events and underlying causes of the summer 2024 unrest, and to explore their implications for community cohesion. Through this collaborative process, the project seeks to strengthen local responses during crises and emergencies by fostering dialogue, building trust, and empowering young people and Faith communities to play an active role in promoting resilience and unity. The project recognises how Faith and Belief intersect with other protected characteristics, such as race and age, and acknowledges the unique perspectives and strengths that arise from these intersections. At the heart of this initiative is a commitment to centring the voice, participation, and solutions of Faith and Belief communities. Their engagement and consultation are vital in shaping responses that benefit the wider community. The project creates space for meaningful contributions from these communities, particularly young people, in addressing the challenges of crisis response and community resilience.

4. Establishing thriving Interfaith Networks

- 4.1 Interfaith networks create opportunities for coming together learning and the development of friendships between those involved and provide public services an effective mechanism for engagement with the sector. They lead to the formation of coalitions for change as people and communities build on their shared values and concerns and work together on practical projects for the common good. In Greater Manchester there are clear examples of where this has led to improved social and community cohesion and supporting our communities in times of crisis.
- 4.2 To be effective though, local Interfaith Networks need to be thriving, with broad memberships and strong relationships across Faiths, and with clear connection to their local public services, including Community Safety Partnerships, and political structures. To achieve this requires adequate commitment and resources.
- 4.3 The Faith and Belief Advisory Panel are keen to support the strengthening of thriving Interfaith Networks in each locality, in partnership with local infrastructure organisations and council officers, and will be seeking a discussion with Leaders and senior officers to explore opportunities, as well as the broader potential of the Covenant in localities and Portfolios.

Appendix

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