

Report of Assistant Chief Executive Citizens and Communities

Report to Executive Board

Date: 11th February 2015

Subject: Covenant between Religion or Belief Organisations and Leeds City Council

Are specific electoral Wards affected? If relevant, name(s) of Ward(s):	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
Are there implications for equality and diversity and cohesion and integration?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
Is the decision eligible for Call-In?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
Does the report contain confidential or exempt information? If relevant, Access to Information Procedure Rule number: Appendix number:	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No

Summary of main issues

1. This report sets out the background and context to the proposal to sign a covenant for engagement between the Council and Religion or Belief organisations in Leeds.
2. It informs Executive Board of the work that has been undertaken with Leeds University over the last three years to give due regard to religion or belief equality in terms of the delivery of the Councils services.
3. It sets out proposals for ongoing support to and engagement with the Religion or Belief Third Sector via the Third Sector Partnership.

Recommendations

4. Members of Executive Board are recommended to:
 - i) note the work being undertaken to deliver the recommendations from the report 'Leeds City Council – Taking Religion or Belief Seriously', and;
 - ii) agree that the Assistant Chief Executive (Citizens and Communities) should make arrangements for the City Council to formally sign the covenant (attached at appendix 1) between the Council and Religion or Belief organisations in the city.

1 Purpose of this report

- 1.1 During 2014 work was progressed, in partnership with the University of Leeds, to look at religion and belief and the role of faith organisations in city decision and policy making arrangements. Whilst Leeds has a well-established partnership approach with multi-faith organisations and representatives in the city, work undertaken nationally through the All Party Parliamentary Group on Religion or Belief identified a range of issues that local authorities should consider.
- 1.2 In the summer of 2014 a report titled 'Leeds City Council – Taking Religion or Belief Seriously' was produced and included a number of recommendations. This report is available as a background document.
- 1.3 One of the recommendations of that report was for the Council to publish a clear strategy for engagement with religious communities which outlines the parameters and limits of engagement and which sets out a series of fixed principles by which the council operates.
- 1.4 In July 2014, the University of Leeds put us in contact with Faith Action who act as the Secretariat for the All Party Parliamentary Group on Religion or Belief. The All Party Parliamentary Group have commissioned Faith Action to produce a draft covenant template that Local Authorities and other public bodies such as Police and Crime Commissioners can use as a template for establishing a formal engagement relationship with their local Religion or Belief communities.
- 1.5 Working with Leeds Faith Forum the Council have amended the template to produce a Leeds focused document that will set out the relationships between ourselves and Religion or Belief organisations in the city.
- 1.6 The Covenant is 'a joint commitment between faith communities and local authorities to a set of principles that guide engagement, aiming to remove some of the mistrust that arises due to a lack of mutual understanding, and to promote open, practical working on all levels.
- 1.7 Our aim is that Leeds City Council and faith communities should work together to achieve the commitments outlined in the covenant on the basis of the priorities and needs of all communities'.

2 Background information

- 2.1 The report 'Leeds City Council – Taking Religion or Belief Seriously' identified a number of key challenges for the Council in engaging with Religion or Belief communities including:
 - Requirements placed on the council via equality legislation
 - An increased central government focus on involving Religion or Belief communities, in particular in service delivery
 - Funding constraints

- Potential cultural resistance amongst staff to working with religion or belief organisations through misunderstanding
- A commitment to the Council as a 'secular' organisation.
- A lack of a strategic approach to engaging with religion or belief organisations and communities (despite the good work undertaken via the Councils 'Religion or Belief Hub')

2.2 The report highlighted six key recommendations:

- That a series of workshops be offered to staff across Leeds City Council to increase awareness to religious communities and dynamics and by challenging common myths and misunderstandings;
- A detailed audit of existing Leeds City Council engagements (formal and informal) with religious or belief groups to help identify common patterns of engagement and develop metrics for measuring effectiveness;
- Leeds City Council, in conjunction with the Centre for Religion and Public Life, host a national conference to share experience and best practice; promote religious literacy and develop models for the engagement of religious and non-religious groups in public service delivery. This conference will provide an opportunity to showcase Leeds as the 'Best City' for religion and belief in which Local Authority practice is joined up, and works successfully in partnership with religious and non-religious communities to maximise outcomes and work in the interests of local people.
- The identification of a senior council officer within each directorate with designated responsibility for engagement with the equalities hubs at every stage of policy development and delivery.
- The updating of religious literacy guidance formerly published by Yorkshire and Humber (2002) and the development of an online tool to assist council employees in being attentive to religion in their day-to-day operations. This should highlight to officers the complexity within and between religious communities and organisations, and offer a simple set of principles by which to engage and understand dynamics, for example via model 'case studies' for religious engagement in policy development and consultation; delivery of services; and commissioning or partnering.

2.3 The final recommendation, and the one which is the primary subject of this report, was:

- The publication of a clear strategy for engagement with religious communities which outlines the parameters and limits of engagement and which sets out a series of fixed principles by which the council operates. This would include clarifying the line between religious engagement and the promotion of religious beliefs, and making clear that religious engagement can never be an 'end in itself' for Leeds City Council but only a means of improving its

practices and services (For progress and plans for the other 5 recommendations see Appendix 2).

3 Main issues

- 3.1 In responding to the final recommendation, work has been progressed to prepare a covenant between Religion or Belief Organisations and Leeds City Council and the proposed covenant is attached at appendix 1.
- 3.2 The principles of the covenant have been supported by the Board of the Leeds Faiths Forum who support the approach to highlight and clarify the roles and responsibilities of both parties, in particular in establishing clear boundaries in terms of service delivery versus religious observance/proselytising.
- 3.3 The Council's Religion or Belief Guide for staff has for many years been one of our most requested internal publications, reflecting a strong desire for clear information and support around the religion or belief agenda by Council staff.
- 3.4 Council staff share the desire of religion or belief organisations for a clear set of commitments from both parties which makes clear what can and cannot be delivered and supported in terms of the delivery of publicly funded services.
- 3.5 The Covenant will practically focus on developing the following key areas of work:
 - Sharing examples of work already being undertaken, in particular best practice;
 - Ensure the Council and the Religion or Belief sector share learning and development opportunities where possible;
 - Provide clarity around the availability of support and funding from the Council and Third Sector, and;
 - Ensure the Religion or Belief sector take part fully in city wide and local community consultations to inform the delivery of public services.
- 3.6 It is proposed that the delivery of the Covenant will be monitored by a working group which will be a sub-group of the Third Sector Partnership. Leeds Faiths Forum would act as the key delivery partners.

4 Corporate Considerations

4.1 Consultation and Engagement

- 4.1.1 Consultation on the Covenant has taken place with the Leeds Faiths Forum as well as with the Third Sector Partnership.

4.2 Equality and Diversity / Cohesion and Integration

4.2.1 An Equality Impact Assessment Screening will be undertaken of the proposals to provide ongoing support to the delivery of the covenant via a sub group of the Third Sector Partnership.

4.3 Council policies and City Priorities

4.3.1 The Covenant assists the Council in meeting its Public Sector Equality duties, our Equality Priorities and our Equality and Diversity Policy.

4.4 Resources and value for money

4.4.1 Better information sharing between the Council and the Faith Third Sector, in particular in relation to funding opportunities, may ensure better value for money use of limited resources.

4.5 Legal Implications, Access to Information and Call In

4.5.1 There are no legal implications arising from this report.

4.6 Risk Management

4.6.1 There are no risk management implications arising from this report.

5 Conclusions

5.1 The report recommendations will strengthen our approach around giving due regard to religion or belief, our relationships with Religion or Belief Third Sector partners and our organisational understanding and capacity in this area.

6 Recommendations

6.1 Members of Executive Board are recommended to:

- iii) note the work being undertaken to deliver the recommendations from the report 'Leeds City Council – Taking Religion or Belief Seriously', and;
- iv) agree that the Assistant Chief Executive (Citizens and Communities) should make arrangements for the City Council to formally sign the covenant (attached at appendix 1) between the Council and Religion or Belief organisations in the city.

7 Background documents¹

7.1 None

¹ The background documents listed in this section are available to download from the Council's website, unless they contain confidential or exempt information. The list of background documents does not include published works.

Covenant for Engagement between Leeds City Council and Religion or Belief Organisations

The coming decade will see the country facing new social needs and tough new challenges. There will be fresh demands on public health, social care, education, employment support and community inclusion.

These challenges will require the identification of a new set of resources. We will need to unlock the potential of every part of our society to contribute together towards solutions.

We believe that one important resource can be realised by supporting faith-based organisations to work constructively and effectively, as part of civil society, with local authorities. That will mean ensuring that local authorities are confident in commissioning services from and transferring assets to appropriately qualified faith-based organisations, and that they include faith groups when they look for solutions to social needs.

The All Party Parliamentary Group on Faith and Society is convinced that faith groups have a great deal to offer as providers and advocates for the communities in which they serve, and that some of their potential is being unnecessarily overlooked at present. To help tackle the problem, the Group has drafted a Covenant which has been amended and adopted by Leeds City Council and local faith groups.

The Covenant

The Covenant is a joint commitment between faith communities and local authorities to a set of principles that guide engagement, aiming to remove some of the mistrust that arises due to a lack of mutual understanding, and to promote open, practical working on all levels.

The Covenant is built on the following principles:

- Faith communities are free to practise their beliefs and religious observances, within the framework of UK law.
- Public services and faith based social action should respect service users from all backgrounds, with no discrimination on the grounds of religion, gender, marital status, race, ethnic origin, age, sexual orientation or disability.
- The voice, participation and solutions that faith communities bring are important, and consultation should enable them to be brought to bear for the benefit of the wider community.
- Faith organisations and services are encouraged to work not only with the council but with local businesses, education providers and health and other publicly funded services in order to empower communities; monopolies of funding, action and participation can be damaging.

Our aim is that Leeds City Council and faith communities should work together to achieve the following commitments on the basis of the priorities and needs of all communities.

The Covenant entails the following commitments:

Leeds City Council commits to welcome the involvement of faith groups in the delivery of services and social action on an equal basis with other groups. In addition, they commit to:

- Building relationships and trust with faith groups in particular through Leeds Faith Forum ;
- Ensuring faith organisations understand the need for the Council to deliver services within equality law and its equality and diversity policy.
- Adopting strategies for the engagement of faith communities in consultation exercises, in particular through Leeds City Council's Religion or Belief Hub and Citizens Panel;
- Encouraging faith groups and their members to be involved in the reshaping and redesign of city services in line with the aspirations and vision we all have for Leeds;
- Establishing clear guidelines around funding;
- Develop training and learning opportunities between faith communities and the local authority.

Faith based organisations commit to work actively with Leeds City Council 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, particularly its poorest and most isolated members;
- Recognising the Council must deliver services within equality law and its equality and diversity policy.
- Serving equally all local residents seeking to access the public services they offer, without proselytising, irrespective of their religion, gender, marital status, race, ethnic origin, age, sexual orientation or disability;
- Using resources provided for delivering a service wholly for that purpose, and not for any other;
- Ensuring excellence in the safeguarding of adults and children, health & safety, accountability and transparency in decision making;
- Responding to consultations where appropriate;
- Develop training and learning opportunities between faith communities and the local authority.

The Covenant will be supported and delivered by:

A partnership between Leeds City Council Communities Team and Leeds Faiths Forum.

The Covenant will be open to all faith based organisations within the city and supported by all Leeds City Council services.

Administrative support will be provided by Officers within the Leeds City Council Communities Team.

A Working Group will be established to monitor the promotion and roll out across faith based organisations. The Working Group will review the Covenant on a bi-annual basis.

The Working Group will focus on:

- Sharing examples of work already being undertaken, in particular best practice
- Ensure the Council and the Religion or Belief sector share learning and development opportunities where possible.
- Provide clarity around the availability of support and funding from the Council and Third Sector.
- Ensure the Religion or Belief sector take part fully in city wide and local community consultations to inform the delivery of public services.

Appendix 2

Recommendation	Council Proposal
That a series of workshops be offered to staff across Leeds City Council to increase awareness to religious communities and dynamics and by challenging common myths and misunderstandings.	The sub group will work with the Councils training provider for equality training (Ioda) as well as identifying other learning and development opportunities; to provide a package of support to staff who have an identified need.
A detailed audit of existing Leeds City Council engagements (formal and informal) with religious or belief groups to help identify common patterns of engagement and develop metrics for measuring effectiveness.	The sub group will work with the Third Sector Partnership and the Equality Hub for Religion or Belief to identify and map our existing engagements.
Leeds City Council, in conjunction with the Centre for Religion and Public Life, host a national conference to share experience and best practice; promote religious literacy and develop models for the engagement of religious and non-religious groups in public service delivery. This conference will provide an opportunity to showcase Leeds as the 'Best City' for religion and belief in which Local Authority practice is joined up, and works successfully in partnership with religious and non-religious communities to	The sub group will work with Faith Action and the University to arrange a national event in Leeds in Spring 2015.

<p>maximise outcomes and work in the interests of local people.</p>	
<p>The identification of a senior council officer within each directorate with designated responsibility for engagement with the equalities hubs at every stage of policy development and delivery.</p>	<p>The Councils Equality Board has recently been reviewed and re-launched with attendance at the Board now consisting of relevant Chief Officers who are able to take responsibility for engagement and feedback into Senior Leadership Teams in Directorates.</p>
<p>The updating of religious literacy guidance formerly published by Yorkshire and Humber² (2002) and the development of an online tool to assist council employees in being attentive to religion in their day-to-day operations. This should highlight to officers the complexity within and between religious communities and organisations, and offer a simple set of principles by which to engage and understand dynamics, for example via model 'case studies' for religious engagement in policy development and consultation; delivery of services; and commissioning or partnering.</p>	<p>The Council has reviewed its own 'Religion or Belief Guide' and this will be re-launched and promoted as an electronic tool for Council staff at the national event the city hopes to host in Spring 2015.</p>