

# Civil Society Strategy Engagement

## Exercise: Response from FaithAction

This response is provided by FaithAction, a national network of around 2,000 faith-based and community organisations involved in social action and delivering public services ([www.faithaction.net](http://www.faithaction.net)). FaithAction provides the secretariat for the All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on Faith and Society, and the response incorporates the views of some of the members of this group. The points below respond to selected questions from the consultation and focus on the contribution of faith communities and faith-based organisations to UK society. We refer to “faith groups/communities” and “faith-based organisations” interchangeably, to designate both worshipping communities and faith-based or faith-inspired charities.

### OUR CIVIL SOCIETY

#### What are the strengths of civil society today? (p.11)

##### *Faith is too significant to ignore – voice*

It is clear that there is a growing number of faith-based organisations (FBOs): faith-based charities now form over a quarter of those registered with the Charity Commission, and over the ten years from 2006-2016, a higher proportion of faith-based charities (34%) was registered with the Charity Commission than non-faith-based (25%).<sup>1</sup> The work of faith groups, both for their own members and for wider society, is as varied as it is large – from spiritual support in the form of pastoral work and chaplaincy to social action work around; for example, the environment and poverty. There are now many public service contracts delivered by FBOs and social enterprises which have faith roots. Faith therefore constitutes a very significant sector of civil society, representing many hundreds of thousands of people.

##### *Faith reaches the parts nothing else can – advocacy*

Faith groups are often the entry point to society for new arrivals in the country or those who are ‘below the radar’ of statutory organisations. It has often been faith communities who have been the first to respond to crisis, for example through foodbanks, through acting as community hosts for Syrian refugees, and on the scene following the Grenfell Tower disaster. Faith is often seen as a sanctuary, a safe place, especially for those who find themselves marginalised. Faith groups therefore have a significant role in advocating for those whose voices might not otherwise be heard.

##### *Faith is money well spent – alternative capital*

Many faith groups are using their social assets: buildings, volunteers, passion and expertise to make a difference both in their localities and overseas. Many social return on investment (SROI) assessments rate faith-based action as being good value for money (see specific programmes such as the Integrated Family Support programme run by the Prison Advice and Care Trust, which found a return of £11.41 for every £1 invested;<sup>2</sup> and the recent Faith Action Audit by the Cinnamon

<sup>1</sup> Wharton, R. and de Las Casas, L. (2016). *What a difference a faith makes: Insights on faith-based charities*. London: New Philanthropy Capital.

<sup>2</sup> Estep, B. and Nicholles, N. (2012). *Economic study of Integrated Family Support Programme (IFS)*. London: New Economics Foundation.

Network, which estimates that the value of the time given by the UK church and faith groups to their communities each year is worth £3 billion.<sup>3</sup>

### *First in and last out – consistency*

Faith groups become familiar and trusted presences, with many having considerable longevity in their communities. The staying power of faith groups, which are often among the first to respond to need and the last to leave the scene, underpins much of the success of their work.

### **How can government help to increase the impact of civil society? (p.11)**

FaithAction members and the APPG on Faith and Society were surprised and shocked that in the early announcements relating to the Civil Society Strategy, there was no acknowledgement of faith as a significant part of civil society and a specific audience to be consulted. Thus, the first action that must be undertaken in the formulation of the strategy is a recognition of the 'faith factor' which drives much positive action as a part of civil society in the UK today.

An active seeking of faith voices in the development of policy and projects is essential. But this must not be tokenism, nor focused only on clergy or faith leaders; rather, it must endeavour to take into account the voices of those who are on the ground delivering services and are supporting those who fall through the gaps between services.

Members of faith groups find themselves motivated to make positive changes in the situations they encounter; take, for example, the rise of foodbanks run by churches in response to identifying that people in their communities are going hungry. Therefore, giving space for the development and presentation of solutions, as well as the identification of problems and risk, is a vital element of partnership with faith groups, and one which needs further development.

Funding is, of course, helpful, but so is an appreciation of how regulation changes have the potential to aid the work of faith groups. For example, a nuanced approach to the application of equalities legislation should recognise that a service can be valuable even if it is not available to all. To take one instance, social care services provided by Jewish charities for the Jewish community serve a particular section of the community and would not be chosen by all, but still represent a significant saving to the taxpayer.

### **How can civil society be supported to have a stronger role in shaping government policy now and/or in the future? (p.12)**

The Faith Covenant,<sup>4</sup> developed by the APPG on Faith and Society, provides a set of principles and thus a foundation for joint working between local government, commissioners and FBOs. It is relationship, not just consultation, which enables this partnership. More such mechanisms need to be developed to enable the voice of faith to be available to policy makers and indeed government ministers. The US White House under Presidents Bush and Obama had some success with its Office of Faith Based Initiatives and Neighborhood Partnerships. The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG, then DCLG) did have a faith consultative group, but there is a need for faith organisations to have representation linked to practical action, rather than having engagement deteriorate to events such as receptions for faith leaders and clergy.

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<sup>3</sup> See [www.cinnamonnetwork.co.uk/cinnamon-faith-action-audit/](http://www.cinnamonnetwork.co.uk/cinnamon-faith-action-audit/) (accessed 21.05.2018).

<sup>4</sup> See [www.faihandandsociety.org/covenant](http://www.faihandandsociety.org/covenant) (accessed 21.05.2018).

In the past, the government had the Churches Main Committee, now the Churches' Legislation Advisory Service.<sup>5</sup> This is a vehicle for conveying to the government the views of churches on legislation and other matters which directly affect them, and providing information on the impact on the churches of legislation and proposals for legislation. There is potential for a group such as this to play a stronger role, as part of civil society, in shaping policy – for example, by looking at cross-cutting themes through a holistic lens. Common issues for faith leaders now would be areas of legislation such as housing, poverty and mental health.

**We interpret civil society as inclusive of all those outside of the public sector, who share the mission of building a stronger society and improving lives, regardless of traditional sector boundaries such as charity or private and for profit or not. What are the advantages of using this interpretation in developing this Strategy? (p.12)**

The advantage of the term 'civil society' is that it removes the ranking that the term 'third sector' implies. It brings together some quite disparate areas, which nonetheless are motivated in the common good.

**What are the disadvantages? (p.13)**

The issue with such a broad term, however, is that it lumps together some very different groups. While they may have the common good in common, they may also have very different approaches and missions.

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<sup>5</sup> See [www.churcheslegislation.org.uk](http://www.churcheslegislation.org.uk) (accessed 21.05.2018).

## PEOPLE

### **Reflecting on your own experience or examples you are aware of in the UK or abroad, how have people successfully taken action to improve things for themselves and their communities? (p.15)**

FaithAction has produced a collection of these examples, *Inspiring others: The impact of faith on public health*.<sup>6</sup>

### **Are there any additional changes that would enable more people to take action on issues that matter to them? (p.15)**

Those FaithAction heard from in compiling this response (faith leaders, MPs and workers in FBOs) were tired of grand-sounding objectives that do not result in tangible change. Voluntary, community and social enterprise sector (VCSE) organisations need to be efficient with their time like any other sector, and therefore smaller, incremental gains are more important than sweeping statements. 'You said, we did' should be at the heart of this strategy. Based on our experience, people also need to know the scope of their own 'agency' – i.e. where can they effect change and where they cannot. Steps to make this clear would be welcome.

### **Considering all the changes you discussed in this section, how could these be implemented now and/or in the future? (p.16)**

Through our work as part of the Department of Health and Social Care's VCSE Health and Wellbeing Alliance, we know that a great number of FBOs are working to improve health and wellbeing in their communities. This work ranges from providing formally commissioned services, such as social care or support for homeless people, to informal work that promotes healthy lifestyles or combats social isolation, such as clubs for older people or parent and toddler groups.<sup>7</sup> We propose that a cabinet minister with responsibility for health should, as part of their remit, have some civil service resource dedicated to developing the work of FBOs (rather than ministerial responsibility for faith relating only to inter-faith and community cohesion work as it has tended to in the past). Lessons could be learned here from the American system.

### **Are there any additional things that are important to further grow involvement in youth social action? (p.17)**

Faith-based youth activity has always been larger than the youth services provided by local government, and the latter is now under pressure to make better links with church and faith-based youth services in order to support and promote its work. We are aware that when churches in Southampton, under the 'Love Southampton' umbrella, approached the local council to offer help following the financial crisis of 2008, youth services were one of the key areas identified by the council as a pressure point with which churches would be able to provide support. It was recognised that there were more youth workers in the churches than there were in the statutory youth service.

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<sup>6</sup> See [www.faithaction.net/portal/evidence/case-studies-public-health](http://www.faithaction.net/portal/evidence/case-studies-public-health) (accessed 21.05.2018).

<sup>7</sup> Garland, R. (2017). *Keeping pressure off hospitals: Exploring the care and support offered by faith-based organisations within the local community*. London: FaithAction.

## PARTNERSHIP

### **Reflecting on your own experience or examples you are aware of in the UK or abroad, how are partnerships across sectors improving outcomes or realising new potential? (p.20)**

Partnerships are often brought about by a common interest (such as entering a consortium bid to deliver a contract) or a common issue (such as knife crime). There is a heightened level of engagement when a project has a practical outcome which is obviously beneficial to the communities which organisations serve. Numerous winter night shelter programmes run by local faith groups for homeless people demonstrate this; they often work in partnership with local health services to ensure that their guests receive appropriate care when they are facing health issues.

### **Are there any additional changes that would improve the funding and financing environment for the voluntary and community sector? (p.25)**

The Rt Hon Matt Hancock MP, Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, has spoken of a 'Grants 2.0' system, and we welcome this. While it is right that performance-related contracts play a role in the funding environment, the preventative activity that the faith and VCSE sectors are involved in is often hard to quantify in a way suited to contract delivery. However, good practice in this area is beginning to emerge and lessons should be learned from this.<sup>8</sup>

Measurement of social outcomes needs to be further developed: new mechanisms for measuring value are important in order to appreciate what civil society accomplishes – and therefore for to provide access to funding. There is useful work being done in this area by the Social Audit Network.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> See for example: Baird, B., Cream, J. and Weaks, L. (2018). *Commissioner perspectives on working with the voluntary, community and social enterprise sector*. London: the King's Fund.

<sup>9</sup> See [www.socialauditnetwork.org.uk](http://www.socialauditnetwork.org.uk) (accessed 21.05.2018).

## PLACE

**Reflecting on your own experience or examples in the UK or abroad, how have local people, businesses, voluntary and community organisations, and decision makers worked together successfully to break down barriers in our communities and build a common sense of shared identity, belonging and purpose? (p.30)**

In this section of the consultation document, there is a focus on barriers, but energy also needs to be put into making connections and building community. FaithAction has done some initial work on community and collected a set of examples in its publication *What is community?*<sup>10</sup> The work of Fiona Bruce MP and Lord Farmer on strengthening families through establishing local family 'hubs' is also relevant here.<sup>11</sup>

**What are the most important changes needed to enable local public services to respond further to the needs of communities? (p.33)**

From the perspective of FaithAction and the APPG on Faith and Society, better links between local public services and the FBOs in their areas is key. The Faith Covenant can act as a first step in this process, as shown in the areas that have already adopted it: in Leeds, for example, faith centres have been accepted as venues where hate crime can be officially reported, while Barnet has named the Faith Covenant in its Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy as a mechanism for engaging with faith groups. In one rural area, the main homelessness service is run by a faith-based organisation; a good relationship with the local police force means that the police contact the service when releasing a homeless person from custody, which can help to avoid a 'revolving door' situation. If such a relationship could be replicated in more areas across more services – for example through establishing links between hospitals and FBOs – more people would receive the care they need and public services could operate more efficiently.

It is our belief that issues such as integration, cohesion, loneliness and youth engagement, which are crucial for public services and for civil society, all come together in the work of faith organisations. We look forward to a Civil Society Strategy that recognises and draws on the potential of partnership with faith.

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<sup>10</sup> See [www.faithaction.net/working-with-you/faithlab/what-is-community](http://www.faithaction.net/working-with-you/faithlab/what-is-community) (accessed 21.05.2018).

<sup>11</sup> *A manifesto to strengthen families: Policies for a Conservative Government to strengthen families.* Available [www.strengtheningfamiliesmanifesto.com](http://www.strengtheningfamiliesmanifesto.com) (accessed 21.05.2018).