

**Faith Communities Forum
Minutes of the Meeting 20 April 2015
Harlech Room, Cathays Park**

Present:

First Minister	Chairperson
Minister for Communities and Tackling Poverty	Deputy Chairperson
Archbishop of Wales	Church in Wales
Peter Richards	Free Church Council of Wales
Aled Edwards	Churches Together in Wales
Jim Stewart	Evangelical Alliance Wales
Elfed Godding	Evangelical Alliance Wales
Saleem Kidwai	Muslim Council for Wales
Stanley Soffa	Jewish Faith
Lisa Gerson	Jewish Faith
Naran Patel	Hindu Council of Wales
Nirmala Pisavadia	Hindu Council of Wales
Christine Abbas	Bahá'í Council for Wales
Viv Bartlett	Bahá'í Council for Wales

Officials in attendance:

Jo Glenn	Fairer Futures Division
Andrea Adams	Fairer Futures Division
Beverley Morgan	Head of the Tackling Poverty Policy Team
Lucy Corfield	Head of Climate Action and Resilience Team

Apologies:

George Stack	Archbishop of Cardiff
Ahmed Darwish	Muslim Council for Wales
Surinder Channa	Sikh Faith
Alan Bayes	Interfaith Council
Nordzin Pamo	Buddhist Council of Wales

Welcome and Introductions

1. The First Minister opened the meeting by referring to the sad news of the passing of Kathryn Delpak MBE. The First Minister said Kathryn's advice and wisdom on faith matters will be much missed at future meetings. Kathryn was one of two representatives of the Bahá'í faith on the Faith Communities Forum and made huge contribution to the interfaith work in Wales. The First Minister told the Forum he had written to Kathryn's family to send his sincere condolences for their loss.
2. The First Minister welcomed everyone to the meeting.

Minutes of Previous Meeting

3. Minutes of the previous meeting were circulated to members in advance of the meeting. The minutes were agreed for accuracy.

Action Points from last meeting

4. A summary of the action points from the last meeting together with updates was sent to members in advance of the meeting. These were noted.

Matters Arising

Public bodies to be aware of faith festivals affected by the lunar calendar

5. At the last meeting the First Minister asked to revisit the matter of schools and public bodies' awareness of faith festivals affected by lunar calendars.
6. The First Minister confirmed there is no guidance available to schools however, in a wider sense there are already opportunities within the foundation phase and curriculum, through the exemplar framework on RE, for schools to deliver topics on the nature of various festivals and religious rituals, which could include those relating to lunar festivals and others that fall within term time. It is up to schools which resources and specialist providers they choose to engage in the delivery of their curriculum obligations.
7. The First Minister referred to the Equality and Human Rights Commission's launch of its report in March on how religion or belief affects people's experiences in the workplace and in using the services and facilities they need in everyday life. Nearly 2,500 people responded to the call for evidence. The Commission will be drawing on the findings to produce guidance to improve employers' and service providers' understanding of the law and how to deal with the issues the report has highlighted. The Commission will use the results of the call for evidence to inform their report on the adequacy of the laws protecting religion or belief, to be published later this year.
8. In discussion the following points were made:
 - The EHRC Advisory Group will redraft guidance to public bodies for the workplace and at recruitment about faith festivals affected by lunar calendars. The Commission will publish three guidance documents in 2015.
 - Many faiths follow a lunar calendar and therefore the dates of observance change each year. There are difficulties for schools and colleges to plan for this period particularly during examination periods. There are many different faith festivals and it would be challenging for schools and colleges to mark them all.
 - The Jewish Council and the Hindu Council for Wales are producing faith calendars to be used at schools and colleges.
 - Students are marked as absentees if they do not attend during faith festival days. Some observances involve fasting or abstaining from travel or work.
 - It should be explored if the statutory position of religious education in Wales is different from that of the rest of the UK.

9. The First Minister stated he will commission a paper from officials in the Department for Education and Skills for the next meeting. The paper will address the current position in Wales regarding time off for religious festivals and compare it with the position in England. It will consider what guidance could be provided to ensure a consistent approach so children and older students are not penalised for taking a day off to attend religious festivals. It will also explore if different faiths are recognised in Wales to the rest of the UK. **(Action: Officials in Department for Education and Skills)**

Agenda Item1: Presentation from Beverley Morgan Head of the Tackling Poverty Policy Team about the revised Child Poverty Strategy for Wales.

10. The Minister for Communities and Tackling Poverty introduced the background to the revised Child Poverty Strategy for Wales, which was launched by the Welsh Government on 27 March. The revised Child Poverty Strategy reaffirms the Welsh Government commitment to the ambition to eradicate child poverty by 2020. There are huge challenges to delivering this commitment, particularly in light of the impacts of Welfare Reform. However, the Welsh Government is committed to doing that it can and to using all available levers to tackle this issue.
11. The Minister said although there is not a direct link between religion and poverty, we know certain ethnic groups are more at risk of living in poverty. Within the revised Child Poverty Strategy, we commit to doing more to support these groups. It is critical these individuals are not left behind when it comes to tackling poverty in Wales, a commitment which is also reflected in the Welsh Government's Strategic Equality Plan.
12. The Minister said it is vital that the revised Child Poverty Strategy is not seen in isolation. The Tackling Poverty Action Plan will remain the key delivery mechanism for the Strategy. The Annual Report on the Action Plan provides the opportunity to set out any new actions and commitments, for delivering the strategic objectives and five priorities of the Child Poverty Strategy, on an ongoing basis.
13. The Minister explained the Welsh Government cannot deliver on this agenda alone and it remains fully committed to taking forward a collaborative approach to tackling child poverty in Wales. The Strategy highlights the need to work collaboratively across Welsh Government departments, Private Sector and external partners.
14. Beverley gave an overview of the Welsh Government's approach to tackling child poverty. There are approximately 700,000 people living in poverty in Wales, of which 200,000 are children. Poverty is higher in Wales than the rest of the UK.
15. The First Minister's focus on tackling poverty has helped officials and other Ministers to maintain a strong focus on improving the outcomes of low

income households. Officials in the Tackling Poverty Division work closely with other Departments, with a particular emphasis on delivering the targets and milestones included in the Welsh Government's Tackling Poverty Action Plan.

16. The Welsh Government defines poverty as a long-term state of not having sufficient resources to afford food, reasonable living conditions or amenities or to participate in activities (such as access to attractive neighbourhoods and open spaces) which are taken for granted by others in their society. Children from families living in poverty are more at risk of having poor health, low birth weight and are less likely to do well at in terms of educational attainment. The Welsh Government has a strong history of mitigating the impacts of poverty and investing in the early years.
17. Poverty is expensive – families may be unable to access cheaper goods and services, and may also pay disproportionately more of their income for things like food and heating. Workless households are particularly at risk of living in poverty, but it is also important to recognise the growing issue of in-work poverty.
18. The Revised Child Poverty Strategy for Wales reaffirms the Welsh Government's ambition to eradicate child poverty by 2020. It also reaffirms the three strategic objectives of the 2011 Strategy, which are focussed on: (i) reducing worklessness (ii) increasing skills and (iii) reducing inequalities in health, education and economic outcomes.
19. In addition, the Strategy sets out two new strategic objectives:
 - To use all available levers to create a strong economy and labour market which support tackling poverty and reduce in-work poverty in Wales.
 - To support families living in poverty to increase their household income including through debt and financial advice, action to address the poverty premium where households pay disproportionately more for goods and services, and action to mitigate the impacts of welfare reform.
20. The Strategy also commits to developing new actions to support five key priorities for tackling child poverty. These priorities are: food poverty, childcare, in-work poverty, housing and regeneration, mitigating the impacts of welfare reform.
21. Beverly invited the Forum to consider how faith groups can work collaboratively with the Welsh Government to deliver better outcomes in the community, in relation to tackling poverty and improving the outcomes of low income households. Beverly asked the Forum to consider how the work already being taken forward by faith groups could link with the Welsh Government's key tackling poverty programmes – particularly in terms of work that relates to the objectives of the Child Poverty Strategy and its five key priorities.

22. In discussion the following points were made:

- Faith Groups have a long history of working with low income households and disadvantaged groups, such as food banks, poverty, skills volunteers. When people are poor, they have less choices. Lifting people out of poverty can provide options and choices. In Wales, we had a history of heavy industry, now our industries have changed.
- Public and private sectors should publicise the role of credit unions. The Church in Wales is working with the prison service to raise the profile of credit unions in Cardiff and Swansea prisons. There is a credit union in Swansea providing services which meet Islamic criteria and credit unions have been set up in some prisons. The Minister for Communities and Tackling Poverty stated there was a conference on credit unions in June and she would arrange for an invitation to be sent to members of the Forum. **(Action – Secretariat)**
- One challenge for food banks and associated services is to ensure the development of a strategic approach to delivery. Support needs to be available in the communities that need it most.
- Examples of work being carried out which faith communities are involved in include the City of Sanctuary project and the collections in mosques and churches for food banks.
- There are different aspects of poverty, spiritual poverty is one factor. Viv Bartlett provided a written statement from the Bahá'í International Community concerning aspects of spiritual poverty.

23. The First Minister summarised the discussion by stating poverty was relative and it was a major issue in Wales where communities are dealing with the aftermath of economic change. If we can keep people out of poverty they will have the confidence to contribute to their communities.

24. Beverley said she will raise the points made at the meeting with relevant policy officials. Beverley was invited to visit the City of Sanctuary project, to give a presentation at the City of Sanctuary meeting.

Agenda Item 2: Presentation from Lucy Corfield Head of Climate Action and Resilience on the Climate Change Policy - Impacts on Vulnerable Communities

25. The First Minister said whilst climate change is a global phenomenon, the impacts are felt at a local level. It can be the most vulnerable in society who are often disproportionately impacted; those who have limited ability to adapt to extreme weather events and climate change. This can include people living in deprivation, the less educated and those who are physically or mentally ill.

26. Properties in deprived areas can be older, run down and the costs of adaptation higher. Lower income levels can make it harder for communities and individuals to take adaptive actions themselves, and when events do take place such as flooding, recovery time in poorer communities can be longer, prolonging the impacts.
27. Faith groups can play a key part in engaging local communities - identifying local risks and helping to build local resilience. Compassion for others is a common thread within faiths and raising awareness of the human impacts on others both beyond our local and international borders is also a key consideration and links in with the principles and goals of the Well-being of Future Generations Bill.
28. Lucy Corfield Head of Climate Action and Resilience gave a presentation about the faith communities' role in climate change. Lucy explained climate is the long term average of weather (usually 30 years), and trends in these average conditions are climate change. Weather is what we experience day to day and can be variable. The weather is already changing with average temperatures in Wales increased by 0.7 degrees centigrade. Reduction in summer rainfall in Wales by 24% (1914-2006) and 2014 was the warmest year on record – both globally and in the UK.
29. The Intergovernmental Panel on climate change reports climate change will increase existing risks for food security, health inequalities and will also create new risks. These risks are unevenly distributed and are generally greater for disadvantaged people and communities.
30. The Joseph Rowntree Foundation highlighted that poverty is an important factor increasing social vulnerability to river flooding and heatwaves and we need to look at solutions that not only tackle climate change but also reduce existing inequalities.
31. The Programme for Government aims to create a sustainable, low carbon economy for Wales, to put sustainable development at the heart of government, reduce greenhouse gas emissions in areas of devolved competence and support effective adaptation to the impacts of climate change through the implementation of the Welsh Government's Climate Change Strategy.
32. The Welsh Government reported on its progress in its Annual Report in 2014, which showed that we have reached our 3% reduction target, however further action is needed to meet our 40% target.
33. Wales has shown policy innovation through a numbers of areas such as being the first area in the UK to introduce a charge for plastic bags, winning international awards for our Wales for Africa Programme, where we plant a Tree in Wales and one in Africa for every child born in Wales.

34. The Welsh Government is also taking a leadership approach through its package of legislative reform with the Well-being of Future Generations Bill and the Environment Bill.
35. The Welsh Government has recently launched its Resource Efficient Wales service which provides people (including businesses, community, voluntary and the public sector) with a single point of contact for support on using resources such as energy, materials and water more efficiently. The service can give people advice on potential funding streams to take action on climate change, which not only reduces emissions but also saves individuals and communities money.
36. The Welsh Government wants to work with Faith Groups to help Wales reduce emissions and to build community resilience in the run up to the international negotiations later on this year in Paris. The Forum is invited to engage with Welsh Government to achieve these aims.
37. In discussion the following points were made:
- 'Green pilgrimage' – this concept examines going on a pilgrimage in the most eco-friendly way including aspects of travel and choosing eco-friendly hotels. This is something that could be considered in Wales where tourism to religious sites is increasingly popular. Viv Bartlett handed Lucy a statement from the Bahá'í International Community concerning global action for environment and development.
 - It may be helpful for Officials to make links with the John Ray Initiative - a Christian educational charity which has useful resources.

Agenda Item 3: Presentation from Rev'd Mark John about Chaplaincy Service in Her Majesty's Prisons in Wales

38. Mark explained that all Chaplains in prisons are required to have endorsement through their faith communities and this is supervised by the NOMS Chaplaincy Headquarters. Chaplains cannot be appointed or work within the HM Prison Service (HMPS) without this faith endorsement.
39. There are approximately 1,700 prisoners in HMPS in Wales of whom approximately 1000 stated they had a faith. Chaplains conduct around 170 visits during the week. Chaplains of different faiths can be the duty chaplain for a day and as such will visit prisoners of any faith or no faith. Prisoners can be involved in services and religious festivals from different faiths. The Chaplain team is a positive example of inter-faith working. The Chaplaincy service is available to prisoners 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. The Chaplaincy service in prisons wants to work more closely with members of the Faith Communities Forum and with leaders of different faith communities. Mark said he welcomes more representation from different faiths in the HMPS chaplaincy service. Naran Patel explained the

Hindu Council of Wales want to support the service by introducing a Hindu Chaplain from the Hindu community in Cardiff.

Agenda Item 4: Any Other Business

VE Day Celebrations

40. The First Minister reminded the Forum 8 May marks the 70th anniversary of VE Day. To mark the occasion, a weekend of commemorations and celebrations are being planned across the UK from 8-10 May. The First Minister said he hoped the Forum will share the information previously circulated about planned events in Wales with the faith communities so that they can get involved in the commemorations and celebrations.

Statement about the recent tragedies in the Mediterranean

41. Aled Edwards suggested that the Faith Communities Forum issued a statement expressing the Forum's sympathies with the victims and thanks for the work of agencies who were supporting the survivors. The First Minister agreed. **(Action: Faith Communities Forum)**

The unveiling of the Mahatma Gandhi statue

42. Hindu Council of Wales announced the official unveiling of the Mahatma Gandhi statue will take place on 2 October at Cardiff Bay. It is expected that a ceremony will take place on 2 October every year thereafter. Members of the Faith Communities Forum will be invited to attend.

Joint letter of support by Evangelical Alliance Wales and Muslim Council of Wales

43. A joint statement on the right of the individual to change their religion is currently under consideration by the Evangelical Alliance Wales and the Muslim Council of Wales.

Launch of the Consultation on the Equality Objectives on 20 April.

44. The Minister for Communities and Tackling Poverty will write to Forum members about today's launch and how they can get involved.
(Action – Secretariat)