

**Faith Communities Forum  
Minutes of the Meeting on 3 April 2017  
Events Room, Cathays Park**

**Present:**

First Minister	Chairperson
Cabinet Secretary for Communities and Children	Deputy
Chairperson	
Aled Edwards	Churches Together in Wales
Gethin Rhys	Churches Together in Wales
Philip Manghan	(Representative) Archbishop of Cardiff
Jim Stewart	Evangelical Alliance Wales
Elfed Godding	Evangelical Alliance Wales
Nordzin Pamo	Buddhist Council of Wales
Naran Patel	Hindu Council of Wales
Nirmala Pisavadia	Hindu Council of Wales
Stanley Soffa	South Wales Jewish Representative Council
Lisa Gerson	South Wales Jewish Representative Council
Viv Bartlett	Bahá'í Council for Wales
Carol Wardman	Church in Wales

**Apologies:**

Ahmed Darwish	Muslim Council for Wales
Peter Richards	Free Church Council of Wales
Surinder Channa	Sikh Cultural Association for Wales
Christine Abbas	Bahá'í Council for Wales
Saleem Kidwai	Muslim Council for Wales

**Secretariat :**

Andrea Adams	Equality and Prosperity Division
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**Officials:**

Maureen Howell	Equality and Prosperity Division
Paul Dear	Equality and Prosperity Division
Emma Small	Equality and Prosperity Division
Isabel Mortimer	Equality and Prosperity Division

**Welcome and Introductions**

The First Minister welcomed everyone to the meeting.

**Minutes of Previous Meeting**

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**

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**

### **1. Unrepresented Faiths**

Aled explained that the Interfaith Council is considering a way in which the views of unrepresented faiths could be heard and served at Forum meetings through the Interfaith Council. The Interfaith Council will report their decision with a name put forward for the First Minister to consider before the next meeting. The First Minister welcomed this approach.

### **2. Report on Hate Crime Awareness Week 2016**

The First Minister said officials collated information from the four Police Forces and the offices of the Police and Crime Commissioners detailing the wide range of activities that took place across Wales during the week, along with the impact they had. Welsh and English versions of the report will be published shortly and copies will be issued to the Forum.

## **Agenda Item 1 – Migration Issues – Paul Dear**

Paul said that migration issues continue to be high profile, in a constantly changing global context. In response, the Welsh Government's Task Force and Operations Board, which previously focused on the Syrian Resettlement Programme, have both widened their remit to include refugees and asylum seekers regardless of the route they took to arrive in Wales.

In recent months there has been a particular focus on children, including the recent contentious decision by the UK Government to close the 'Dubs' programme sooner than expected. The First Minister has written to the Prime Minister about this and the Cabinet Secretary has agreed to provide an additional £200k funding for child refugees arriving under the scheme before the end of the year.

The latest Home Office statistics show that Welsh local authorities have made rapid progress to provide a welcome for refugees. 103 refugees were resettled under the Syrian Resettlement Programme in the last quarter of 2016, bringing the total to nearly 400 by the end of the year. More have arrived in the first months of 2017 and every local authority in Wales is now participating in the programme.

The Welsh Government will invest approximately £1m over the next three years in a new support service for refugees and asylum seekers led by the Welsh Refugee Council, in partnership with EYST, BAWSO, Asylum Justice, Tros Gynnal Plant, Displaced People in Action and City of Sanctuary. The project will provide advice and support, including legal advice and specific advice for asylum seekers, including unaccompanied children. The practical help that can be provided is severely constrained by UK Government regulations, which restrict asylum seekers' access to public funds

The project will also support women at risk of gender based violence, FGM or modern day slavery, as well as supporting an asylum advocacy forum in Swansea. Refugees and asylum seekers will be recruited as trainers and advocates to influence access to public services and media portrayal.

The National Assembly Equality, Local Government and Communities Committee has completed an inquiry on support for refugees and asylum seekers and the report will be issued shortly.

Paul said that there was growing interest in Wales in the UK Government's Community Sponsorship programme for refugees, which may be of particular interest to faith groups. Cohesion within and between communities is an essential component of people's well-being and identity. One of the actions in our new Community Cohesion National Delivery plan 2017-2020 will be to work with communities to understand and address fears about migration and the impact of Brexit.

The past year has shown a worrying trend towards increasingly negative media coverage and a spike in hate crime since the vote to leave the European Union. There have, however, also been positive stories regarding the warm welcome many refugees have received since moving to Wales.

In the discussion that followed, Aled said he had met with Mr Miah, who was removed from a plane and stopped from entering the USA. Mr Miah has received an answer from US Authorities to say they have no record of the incident or the application for a visa, although Mr Miah can produce the relevant documents. The First Minister wrote to the Foreign Secretary about the incident and asked for an explanation.

**Action:** The FM said he would be happy to write again, to ask for an explanation, given this further information. He said it was strange, if no visa had been issued, that Mr Miah had been allowed on a plane in the first place.

## **Agenda Item 2 – Community Cohesion**

The Welsh Government has had a Community Cohesion Delivery Plan since 2009. Since 2012 the Welsh Government has established a network of eight Community Cohesion Coordinators who work across all 22 Local Authorities to foster good relations between groups, monitor tensions, work with marginalised groups, and support Local Authorities in work relating to hate crime, modern day slavery, Gypsy and Traveller communities, Prevent, and Refugees and Asylum Seekers. The Cohesion Coordinators work flexibly to engage with local and regional structures in each area as appropriate. The Cabinet Secretary agreed in November 2016 to extend the funding of the eight regional coordinators to March 2018.

We are now drafting the 2017-2020 Community Cohesion Plan and are seeking input from stakeholders. The Faith Communities Forum is the first of our stakeholder groups to be engaged in this process. Others will include organisations funded under the Equality and Inclusion Programme 2017-2020, Wales Local Government Association, the third sector, and the four Police forces.

The Welsh Government's programme for the next five years, *Taking Wales Forward*, and the Well being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 task us to work differently in future to maximise the impact we have. We are reflecting this in the new plan in three ways:

*Prevention and long-term thinking.* As well as providing good support for victims, we are focusing more on strengthening cohesion, and preventing hate crime, radicalisation and extremism. This means a greater emphasis on

equalities, on positive communications, and on ensuring that we reduce barriers to inclusion for marginalised groups.

*Collaboration and integration:* We recognise that many other organisations in the public and third sectors play a vital role in fostering good relations, encouraging mixing between groups, and responding when tensions arise. In the 2017-20 plan we are looking to work in partnership with the police forces, third sector, Local Authorities and others. For example we hope to undertake collaborative work to communicate positive counter-narratives, and to monitor community pressures.

*Involvement:* At the December meeting of the Wales Race Forum the Cabinet Secretary for Communities and Children gave direction to gather evidence through personal stories and hearing first hand from people who are affected by barriers to inclusion, marginalisation or hate crime. All the Public Service Boards have just completed their Well-being reports and there are strong messages in them about the importance of cohesion for well being and a sense of identity. We have actions in the draft plan to ensure that the voices of marginalised groups are heard and listened to.

The First Minister said the issue is that we do not want what we now consider to be extremism to become usual in the future. It is hugely important that, if people behave badly, they should face the full force of the law. Unemployment is low at the moment but this is not the whole story; people in employment may not be high earners and may not have pensions or other securities. To maintain cohesion we need to help people who feel they have been left behind. The Taskforce will help people to achieve their skills aspirations to attract businesses and jobs to Wales.

In discussion the following points were made:

- One of the initiatives from the faith community is the Nation of Sanctuary
- Faith communities have a particular role in working for social cohesion and want to work with Welsh Government towards this.

**Action:** Forum members to send any comments on the draft plan to the Secretariat

### **Agenda Item 3 - Valleys Taskforce**

The First Minister invited Maureen Howell to provide an update on the Valleys Taskforce. The first meeting of the taskforce took place in September 2016. The Minister for Lifelong Learning and Welsh Language chairs the taskforce. The taskforce will advise Welsh Government about new ways of working to develop policy solutions for the future. Its aim is ambitious – how can we bring wealth to the valleys? How can we improve health and education for the people who live in the valleys? It's not about new money, it's about how we use the money we have differently.

In particular, calls were made for a more engaged and integrated approach to the way we create access to employment and provide better jobs, how we increase skills and how we support the delivery of integrated public services which are fully engaged with people living in the valleys.

The taskforce will build on previous policies and programmes aimed at regenerating the valleys, but will place particular emphasis on public engagement and ensuring that new initiatives such as the Metro and city deals achieve maximum benefits for valleys communities. Not to be seen as just tourist destinations. The best way out of poverty is to create sustainable, quality employment.

Intensive community engagement is underway, using various different channels and methods of communication. To date nine engagement events have been held with over 400 people including businesses, teachers and learners, parents, housing tenants and other members of the community. #TalkValleys has been established offering a telephone number, email address and social media platforms for people to leave input, comments and questions. An online survey and focus groups will take place in April and a people's panel is being established. Consideration is being given to the use of Cynefin Centre methodology to engage local communities.

The taskforce has identified three key priorities, informed by the public engagement to date:

*Jobs and Skills:* A focus on jobs, and the skills people need to access those jobs, has been identified as an early priority for action. Work is underway in ESNR to develop this part of the valleys plan to deliver 10,000 new good quality jobs in the valleys, supported by innovative ways to develop skills which align with identified shortages and build in new opportunities for growth sectors.

*Integrated and Improved Public Services:* A focus on exploring new ways of joining up key public services through three valleys pilots. A senior civil servant will be deployed to work with three existing community projects to identify the barriers to improved integration and strengthened delivery.

*Community and Personal Wellbeing:* A focus on the wider range of factors which affect people's quality of life including active lifestyles and access to the environment. This will include joint working with city deal partnerships to improve the quality of housing and the impact of regeneration efforts. The taskforce wants to boost the tourism potential of the region.

The Welsh Government recognises that faith communities have a strong heritage in the valleys and want to engage with people to hear ideas about how we can work better. The Valleys Taskforce delivery plan will be published in July 2017.

In discussion the following points were made:

- Forum members offered to help to join up the taskforce with charity groups involved with street pastors and food banks.
- Forum members will help the taskforce to join with volunteers within the faith communities. Welsh speaking churches have a huge energy for supporting the refugee resettlement programme and food banks.
- There is a common narrative about the valleys that it is self destructive. How can we work together to change this narrative?

- It is difficult for diverse communities in the valleys because of the fewer numbers of BAME people than in cities.
- Focus groups are exploring the reasons for the leave vote in the referendum and want to join the Welsh Government in exploring these issues.
- It is important that young people are empowered and develop a positive self image to develop a spirit of harmony and serving communities.

**Action:** Secretariat to issue the link to the taskforce survey to forum members.

#### **Agenda Item 4 - Budget Engagement**

The Cabinet Secretary said that engagement with stakeholders plays an important and very necessary part in consideration of the impacts of budget decisions. He reminded the Forum that in recent years, the Budget Advisory Group for Equalities (BAGE) has played a valuable role in the budget-making process, helping to improve our evidence base around equalities and our understanding of what matters most to people with Protected Characteristics.

The Welsh Government continuously looks at ways we can improve the Impact Assessment of our budget proposals, including how we work with our stakeholders. The future role of the Advisory Group and links with other equality groups will be an important part of that consideration.

Isabel reminded the Forum that BAGE was established in December 2012, following a commitment in the Equality Impact Assessment of the Draft Budget 2013-14. The aim was that BAGE would provide advice about equality considerations which would inform spending plans at the strategic level. It has provided a forum for sharing and discussing the nature of inequalities in Wales and was intended to comprise a valuable source of expertise and a key channel for engagement.

The previous Ministers for Finance and Communities and Tackling Poverty co-chaired the Group and BAGE last met on 24 February 2016 when its future was discussed. BAGE did add some value to the focus, style and format of the Impact Assessment of the Budget. However, the discussion also highlighted that there was duplication of membership with other equality groups, for example the Disability Equality Advisory Group; the Human Rights Stakeholder Group; the Strategic Equality Plan (SEP) Board; and the Wales Race Forum.

BAGE members have expressed the wish to see how all these groups interlink and want to avoid duplicating the work they do through representation on various groups. The Cabinet Secretaries for Finance and Local Government and for Communities and Children have recently agreed to scope other potential methods whereby a wider range of stakeholder organisations could contribute to the budget making process. A meeting of BAGE will be arranged in the spring to consider this new approach.

**Action:** Secretariat will keep forum members about progress.

#### **Agenda Item 5 - Any Other Business**

There were no items raised under any other business.

**Date of next meeting**

The date of the next meeting will be issued shortly.