

**Faith Communities Forum**  
**Seminar Rooms 1&2, Pierhead Building, Cardiff Bay**  
**11:00-12:00 on 22 May 2019**

**Minutes**

**Present:**

Mark Drakeford AM, First Minister	Chair
Jane Hutt AM, Deputy Minister & Chief Whip	Deputy Chair
Aled Edwards	Churches Together in Wales
Gethin Rhys	Churches Together in Wales
Rheinallt Thomas	Free Church Council of Wales
Viv Bartlett	Bahá'í Council for Wales
Christine Abbas	Bahá'í Council for Wales
Naran Patel	Hindu Council of Wales
Radhika Kadaba	Hindu Council of Wales
Nor'dzin Pamo	Buddhist Council of Wales
Taikya David Morgan	Buddhist Council of Wales & Chair of the Interfaith Council
Lawrence Kahn	South Wales Jewish Representative Council
Melody Odey	South Wales Jewish Representative Council
Saleem Kidwai	Muslim Council of Wales
Joga Singh	Sikh Council of Wales
Gurmit Singh Randhawa	Sikh Council of Wales

**Apologies:**

John Davies	Archbishop of Wales (Church in Wales)
Philip Manghan	Representing Archbishop of Cardiff
Sam Pritchard	Evangelical Alliance Wales
Sian Rees	Evangelical Alliance Wales
Dr Meraj Hasan	Muslim Council of Wales

**Welsh Government Officials:**

Alyson Francis, Deputy Director, Communities Division  
Uzo Iwobi, Special Advisor for Strategic Comms.  
Paul Dear, Head of Equality Team  
John Davies, Equality and Prosperity Division  
Bal Gill, Equality and Prosperity Division  
Lloyd Hopkin, Education and Public Services  
Kerry Davies, Education and Public Services

**Welcome and introductions**

The First Minister (FM) welcomed everyone to the first Faith Forum meeting of 2019, his own and the Deputy Minister and Chief Whip's (DMCW) first Faith Forum

meeting in their new roles. The FM also welcomed new member: Meraj Hasan from Muslim Council of Wales. Saleem Kidwai conveyed Meraj's apologies as he is a doctor and currently on call so unable to attend.

### **Minutes of Last meeting and Action Points from 5 November**

Minutes of the previous meeting and action points were circulated to members in advance of the meeting. They were both agreed for accuracy.

### **Matters arising**

**Faith Walk 2018** – the previous Leader of the House & Chief Whip, Julie James AM, provided funding for the interfaith event, 'Walking Alongside our Communities'. Forum members shared that the Faith Walk, which took place during Interfaith Week 2018, was very successful and marked Interfaith Week in a positive way.

**Human Rights in Wales** – Interfaith Council to invite Dr Simon Hoffman to their next meeting to have further discussions on working together.

**The Nation of Sanctuary Plan for Refugees and Asylum Seekers** – John Davies (Welsh Government) provided an update in relation to the Plan. Key points were:

- The Nation of Sanctuary Plan has been published.
- The Deputy Minister & Chief Whip made a statement in relation to the Plan on 29<sup>th</sup> January 2019
- The Plan contains specific actions for Welsh Government and partner organisations
- The Plan also contains generic commitments as well as specific actions
- Welsh Government want to work with faith communities to identify and align key areas that Welsh Government are proposing to take forward

Aled Edwards added that it was pleasing to see that when the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of devolution was marked NBC news picked this story up as well as highlighting the National of Sanctuary Plan. This is very encouraging though there is more to do.

The DMCW referred to the Darlith Gethin Abraham-Williams lecture delivered by Aled Edwards on 20<sup>th</sup> May in the Senedd which also touched upon these issues. The DMCW wants to ensure a cross party response to the plan and has written to Ministers as well as local authorities and health boards to ask what action is being taken.

The DMCW will be providing an update in Plenary during Refugee Week 2019 (17 – 23<sup>rd</sup> June) on Tuesday 18<sup>th</sup> June.

The FM shared that, from the Welsh Governments point of view, a very important statement has been made with the publication of the Plan. It is very encouraging that the Plan reflects equal opportunities for all and showcases Wales as a place where people can live and prosper. He asked members of the Forum to provide their support in delivering the Plan.

## **Item 1 - New Curriculum - Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE)**

Lloyd Hopkin provided an update in relation to the new curriculum, which has been out for consultation since end of April 2019.

***Successful Futures***, Professor Donaldson's independent review of curriculum and assessment arrangements in Wales, was published in February 2015 and the 68 recommendations accepted in full.

A pioneer network of schools was then established and is at the heart of developing the new curriculum. These schools have been drawn from across Wales, including settings that are rural and urban; bilingual, English-medium and Welsh-medium; primary, secondary, special schools, schools with a religious character and a range of school sizes.

These schools are working with key partners such as the regional consortia, Estyn, the further education sector, curriculum design and subject-specific experts to develop the new curriculum for Wales.

At the heart of the new curriculum are its four purposes i.e. to support learners to develop as:

- ambitious, capable learners, ready to learn throughout their lives
- enterprising, creative contributors, ready to play a full part in life and work
- ethical, informed citizens of Wales and the world
- healthy, confident individuals, ready to lead fulfilling lives as valued members of society.

The four purposes are the starting point for all decisions regarding the design of the new curriculum for Wales. The new curriculum will be organised according to 6 Areas of Learning and Experience (AOLEs):

- Expressive Arts
- Health and Well-being
- Humanities
- Languages, Literacy and Communication
- Mathematics and Numeracy
- Science and Technology

The Welsh Government recognises there are sensitivities in relation to SRE for a range of different communities and the Minister for Education is committed to a dialogue to explore these issues openly and constructively.

It is intended that this process will be one of co construction and involvement. A number of consultation events will be taking place across Wales. One event has been coordinated for representatives from faiths groups. This is due to take place on **Tuesday 25th June.**

- Lloyd asked if forum members were happy for their contact details to be forwarded onto Education colleagues for further information to be distributed. Form members were happy with this approach.

**ACTION:** Bal Gill to forward forum member contact details onto Lloyd Hopkin

Feedback is invited until 19th July and the final curriculum and assessments arrangements will be made available in January 2020.

The first teaching of all year groups from primary school to Year 7 will begin in September 2022 and the new curriculum will roll out year-on-year from this point.

The FM reinforced this message by stating that there are a series of opportunities to engage with Welsh Government in relation to the consultation and the Education Minister is very keen to create a dialogue with a broad range of communities.

Members had the opportunity to ask questions/ provide comments. These included:

- There was concern in relation to the consistency in delivering this curriculum across schools and the impact that could potentially have on performance in examinations. It was crucial that any gaps identified were addressed to allow equal opportunities during examinations.
- Teacher training was a very important aspect in relation to the new curriculum and there was a want for the approach to teaching this specific area to be educational rather than emotional.
- There was a concern that this approach could be overwhelming for teachers. That is, going from 'no freedom' in terms of what is taught to 'total freedom' – this would need to be addressed. Training was again brought up as an essential tool for teachers and students.
- Reflecting on current demonstrations in Birmingham, a member asked whether there were differences between Welsh and English schools and what would be taught.

Lloyd offered the following responses:

- Consistency is a crucial part of the new curriculum and there is statutory guidance that teachers need to have regard for. Good reasons need to be given if this does not take place.
- In relation to accountability and support for professionals – Welsh Government is working with Qualification Wales to develop qualifications that will build on this.
- Professional learning is very important – a number of schools are working with Welsh Government in relation to providing evidence based research looking specifically at implications.

- RSE – this isn't as specific as England. A very detailed list of what to teach is provided in England whereas in Wales the overarching principles are outlined and detailed at a fundamental level. Specific topics are not detailed; rather it is for professionals to use their judgement regarding the context in which these topics are taught.
- The UNESCO Technical Guidance on RSE has been referred to when developing the guidance and Education officials are keen to further explore this approach at the event on 25th June.

The FM said that the consultation provides the opportunity for questions to be asked but also to seek the views of parents as well as teaching professionals in relation to the best approach in taking the new curriculum forward.

Members shared that there was a need to look at how to hold a constructive dialogue about these issues. This could reflect on the spirit of partnership working as is demonstrated within the Forum. Members could look at how they could support each other in having these meaningful conversations. It would be very sad if people felt compelled to 'opt out' of certain aspects of the system because these conversations hadn't taken place. Therefore more thought needs to be given into how members can offer that support to each other.

## **Item 2 - Tackling Hate Crime relating to Faith**

The FM shared that both he and the DMCW have visited mosques and shared messages of solidarity with Muslim communities following on from the attacks earlier this year in Christchurch. He provided updates on a number of related topics:

### ***i. Tackling Antisemitism***

Welsh Government officials spoke with the Holocaust Memorial Trust on 9 April regarding Holocaust Memorial Day, particularly plans for the 75th anniversary next year. The Welsh Government continues to fund the Holocaust Education Trust 'Lessons from Auschwitz' project where school students and Welsh Government officials travel to Poland to learn about the atrocity and its consequences.

Welsh Government are providing an additional £360k over the next two years to increase the capacity of its National Hate Crime Report and Support Centre in light of concerns that we may see another spike in hate crimes as we leave the EU.

Welsh Government also has close links with Cardiff University's Social Science Data Lab, who have developed a cutting edge "dashboard" that can monitor online hate speech. This is now being piloted in the UK National Hate Crime Hub, and includes detection of antisemitic hate speech.

There has been a presentation by senior police officers at a recent Cabinet meeting where it was highlighted that a terrorism threat from the Far Right was the biggest current threat in Wales.

## ***ii. First Minister's meeting with Board of Deputies of British Jews***

The FM met representatives from the Board of Deputies of British Jews on 21 March. During this meeting he confirmed the Welsh Government's absolute opposition to antisemitism and its commitment to protecting freedom of religion and to working closely with people of all faiths. The FM agreed to sponsor an exhibition at the Senedd in 2020 on being Jewish in the UK; this is being taken forward. A statement about the Welsh Government's approach to separate criticism of the Government of Israel and the State of Israel was also discussed.

## ***iii. Adopting a Definition of Islamophobia***

The FM shared that a non-legally binding working definition of Islamophobia has been rejected by the UK Government, but has been adopted by the Labour party, the Liberal Democrats and Scottish Conservative Party.

Welsh Government is currently in conversation with Scottish Government in relation to how this could be adopted jointly.

## ***iv. Update on meeting with Jo Cox Foundation***

The FM, DMCW and the Minister for Housing and Local Government met with Kim Leadbetter and Jonathan Harty from the Jo Cox Foundation recently to discuss the work of the *Great Get Together* in Wales.

Ministers were encouraged with how enthusiastically communities in Wales responded to the challenge last year and officials will keep in touch with the organisation to see how Welsh Government can help the movement develop in the near future.

Kim was able to share positive stories of people from different faith communities coming together through sport and street parties. The guiding message of the *Great Get Together*, that we have 'More in Common', ties in with the work of the Faith Communities Forum. The First Minister shared that Welsh Government would be pleased to support involvement by the communities represented within the Forum.

Forum members shared that Jo Cox's song is due to be performed by the Interfaith Choir during Interfaith Week 2019.

A discussion also took place in relation to hate crime reporting, looking specifically at Islamophobia. Members of Sikh Council of Wales shared that reporting of hate crime by members of the Sikh community has been problematic as the police are recording these incidents as being Islamophobia. Here it was felt that there is clearly a need to for training and understanding of the differences between these faith groups.

The FM shared that he meets with the Welsh Police & Crime Commissioners and Chief Constables twice a year – he will use the next meeting as an opportunity to feed this back to them. The DMCW said she would also share this with the Hate Crime Criminal Justice Board.

One forum member suggested that the problem isn't specifically Islamophobia but 'Religiophobia'.

Aled Edwards shared that this year's Urdd message is of peace and goodwill.

There will also be a focus on hate crime and knife crime – the launch of this initiative took place in the East side of London, an area that has the highest knife crime levels. Representatives from the initiative will be visiting the Urdd next Wednesday (29th) to share a message of solidarity.

One forum member shared that we need to look at where the seeds of prejudice and hate are planted. She referred to Joan Smith's book, *'Home Grown: How Domestic Violence Turns Men Into Terrorists'* which explores the notion that people who commit acts of terror have often been abusers within the home. There is a need to explore this and look at what we can do as a society to make sure this isn't hidden.

The FM shared that he and the DMCW attended a Muslim Council of Wales dinner earlier in the year attended by people from different faiths. A speaker from Jordan actually observed that this was very unusual as bringing people from different faiths together under one roof would near be impossible in other places.

#### ***v. Home Office Places of Worship scheme***

The FM shared that Welsh Government officials have been in regular contact with the Welsh police forces regarding increased patrols around places of worship and to monitor any increases in Hate Crime.

Also, that officials have circulated information from the Home Office about making applications to the Places of Worship Protective Security Scheme.

The First Minister encouraged Forum members to share this with their networks. Welsh Government is very keen for information about this scheme to be shared far and wide.

### **Item 3 – Coordinated Positive Messaging from Faith Groups around Brexit**

Aled shared that 3 meetings have taken place so far with Welsh Government and members of faith groups. The purpose being that in the unfortunate event of a tragedy taking place there is a mechanism for pulling together key messages quickly.

Aled expressed his thanks to Paul and his team for pulling this together.

Paul noted that the shared view of the group was that anything done would be more effective if it could be done in the name of the Faith Communities Forum. Members agreed to support this approach.

## **AOB**

### **The Community Facilities Programme (CFP)**

Paul Dear informed members that the Welsh Government's Community Facilities Programme (CFP) is open to applications from faith groups to develop premises as community facilities. He said that many churches and chapels have been supported by the Fund over many years, but far fewer applications have been received from other faiths. The DMCW, who has portfolio responsibility for the Fund, is keen to encourage applications from other faiths.

The programme offers grants at two levels: up to £25,000 for small projects and up to £250,000 for larger projects. All applicants to CFP must provide evidence that their local community has been involved in the development of the proposals.

The CFP is open to community and voluntary sector groups who own or operate a facility which is needed and well used by the community it serves. Faith groups are welcome to apply as long as their facilities are open to the wider community outside of their own membership.

The CFP operates on a rolling programme which means applications can be submitted at any time. The programme has a budget until the end of the current Assembly term, i.e. until March 2021.

Further information and application forms can be found at:

<https://gov.wales/community-facilities-programme>

### **Interfaith Week events**

Following the success of the Interfaith Week event last year with the lantern-lit walk through Cardiff, evening event and meal, similar plans are being made for this November.

The Interfaith Council has enquired about funding and that officials are happy to consider requests when more specific details are available.

### **Future Meetings**

The FM asked Members if they were happy to put an hour and a half aside for future meetings rather than an hour as this would provide an opportunity for all members to contribute and listen to the contributions of others.

Members welcomed and agreed with this request.

Close



## ACTIONS

ACTION	TO BE COMPLETED BY:
<b>New Curriculum</b> – Forum Members contact details to be shared with Lloyd Hopkin re: faith specific curriculum consultation event on 25th June 2019	Secretariat
<b>Recording of Hate Crime</b> – misreporting of Hate Crimes to be shared at All Wales Police & Crime Commissioner & Chief Constable meeting and All Wales Hate Crime Criminal Justice Board	HCCJB secretariat
Further information re: <b>Joan Smith’s ‘Home Grown’</b> book to be shared with Forum members	Secretariat
Distribute information in relation to access funding via the <b>Home Office Places of Worship Fund</b>	Secretariat
Distribute further information to Forum members re: <b>Community Facilities Programme</b>	Secretariat
Future meetings to be extended to an hour and a half	Secretariat