

## Faith Communities Forum

Thursday, 26<sup>th</sup> February 2026 at 10:30am – 12:00pm,

Yr Hafod, Welsh Government Office, Cathays Park and via Teams

### Attendance

<b>Name - Organisation</b>
Jane Hutt - Chair; Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice, Trefnydd and Chief Whip
Representatives from:
Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints
Cytun
Christian Faith Evangelical Alliance Wales
Bahá'í Council for Wales
South Wales Jewish Council
Muslim Council of Wales
Free Church Council of Wales
Sikh Council of Wales
Interfaith Council for Wales
Church in Wales
Ahmadiyya Muslim Association
Catholic Church in England and Wales
Wales Humanists
One Accord – black led churches network
WG (Equality and Human Rights)
WG (Race, Faith and Belief and Gypsy and Roma and Traveller Policy Team)
WG (Safeguarding Policy Team)
WG (ArWAP Policy Team)
WG (Education and RVE Curriculum Team)
WG (Cohesive Communities Policy Team)
WG (Strategic Equality and Mainstreaming)
WG (Cabinet Secretary Private Office)

### **Meeting notes**

#### **Discussion**

##### **1. Item one: Welcome and opening remarks**

The Cabinet Secretary welcomed all attendees to the first meeting of 2026 and noted the value of meeting members **in person as well as online**. She emphasised the Forum's role as a **trusted space** for respectful and open dialogue, especially in a climate of increasing polarisation.

The Cabinet Secretary confirmed that the **minutes and action log from the previous meeting** had been circulated and that **no outstanding actions** remained.

## **2. Item two: Social Cohesion: Welsh Government policy and actions**

Welsh Government (WG) representatives provided an update on:

The work of the **Expert Group on Social Cohesion**, established following the Equality and Social Justice Committee inquiry.

Newly published **Cohesion Principles**, developed to improve shared understanding of community cohesion across Wales. These will be embedded across programmes and shared with Forum members.

Recent communications activity through the **Hate Hurts Wales** campaign, including increased targeted advertising around **places of worship**, responding to a rise in religiously motivated hate crime.

Work on **misinformation and disinformation**, including training for councillors and LA officers, and a new guide for third sector organisations on protecting themselves from harassment.

### **Discussion**

Members raised:

- Challenges in ensuring messaging reaches **grassroots communities** and not only organisational leaders.
- The need for a **narrative of hope**, not solely anti-hate messaging.
- Concerns about the pace of **technological and social media change**, and how this undermines trusted communication.

The Cabinet Secretary affirmed the importance of community-rooted engagement and acknowledged the work of the Chair of the Expert Group.

## **3. Item three: Community Cohesion Programme – Discussion**

WG representatives provided an overview of the Community Cohesion Programme, including:

- Its role in fostering **good relations** between people, working to advance equality of opportunity and seeking to eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation.
- Annual **work plans** for LA-based cohesion teams.
- A request for Forum input on issues affecting faith and belief groups.

### **Key Points Raised:**

- Some members had **not received engagement** from local cohesion officers over many years. WG agreed to:

- Share contact details of all eight regional cohesion teams.
- Raise proactive engagement expectations with those teams.
- One representative suggested a **working group** to strengthen two-way communication between faith communities and cohesion officers.
- WG noted the tight period before pre-election restrictions begin (8 April) and committed to instead share the contact details and send a written request for feedback from Forum members.

**Action: Share contact details for all regional Community Cohesion Teams with Forum members - WG Community Cohesion Team**

**Action: WG Cohesion team to send written request for feedback on cohesion and faith engagement - WG Cohesion Team / Faith Communities Forum**

**Action: Provide Forum with Cohesion Principles document - WG Community Cohesion Team**

#### **4. Item four: Education and RVE (Religion, Values & Ethics) Curriculum**

WG representatives provided an update on:

- The **Curriculum for Wales** and the role of RVE as a statutory, pluralistic subject.
- The removal of **parental right to withdraw** from RVE.
- Requirements for RVE teaching to be **objective and impartial**, covering both religious and non-religious worldviews.
- The role of **Standing Advisory Councils (SACs)**.

**Concerns raised by members:**

- Significant **decline in GCSE and A-level RS uptake**.
- A reduction in the number of individuals training as specialist RVE/RE teachers. Risk that non-specialist teachers are delivering RVE without adequate support.
- Inconsistent inspection of RVE delivery at secondary level.
- Fewer school visits to places of worship, reducing experiential learning.
- Need to improve factual accuracy and ensure AI-generated misinformation does not enter classroom materials.

WG committed to feeding concerns to the Cabinet Secretary for Education and to revisiting RVE in future meetings

*Action: Feed RVE concerns to the Cabinet Secretary for Education; revisit RVE at next Forum - WG Education Officials*

#### **5. Item five: Safeguarding in Faith Settings**

WG representatives presented on:

- The work of the Welsh Government **Safeguarding and Advocacy Branch**.
- A forthcoming **10-year Child Sexual Abuse Strategy**
- The need for improved engagement with **faith and belief communities**, who often act as early eyes and ears within local communities.
- Revising the **Code of Safeguarding Practice** and inviting feedback from faith and belief organisations.

Members welcomed the proposal to establish a **dedicated safeguarding engagement group** for faith and belief communities and highlighted the need for specialist training for volunteers.

*Action: Share revised Code of Safeguarding Practice for feedback from faith and belief communities - WG Safeguarding Team*

*Action: Establish a safeguarding engagement group for faith and belief organisations (post-election) - WG Safeguarding Team*

#### **6. Item six: Equality and Inclusion Grant Scheme – Update**

WG representatives provided an update on the new grant scheme launched in September 2025:

- Over **250 applications** were received.
- Funding announcements will be made soon.
- Applicants may request feedback to strengthen future submissions.
- Subject to ministerial decision, the scheme can be built upon to deliver future rounds of funding to support equality and inclusion.

#### **7. Item seven: Faith Communities Forum – Terms of Reference**

WG representatives outlined final amendments to the updated ToR, following member feedback:

- ToR to be signed off by the Cabinet Secretary.
- **Summarised, anonymised notes** will be published on GOV.WALES; full internal minutes with names will continue to be circulated to members only.

No further comments were raised.

## 8. Item eight: AOB

### **UK Wedding Law Reform**

WG advised members of the UK Government's intention to reform wedding law. WG will circulate the consultation link once published.

*Action: Circulate Wedding Law Reform consultation link when published - WG Faith & Belief Team*

### **Research on Far-Right Groups**

**Representative from Muslim Council for Wales provided an update on:**

- Update on a new working group involving academics and civil society.
- Focus on far-right narratives, impacts on congregations, and information sharing.
- Open invitation for Forum members to participate.

### **UKG Listed Places of Worship Scheme – Closure**

WG confirmed:

- The UK Government has closed the **Listed Places of Worship Grant Scheme**.
- Concerns noted regarding impact on Welsh faith buildings.
- The Cabinet Secretary offered to write to the UK Government noting concerns raised at the Forum.

*Action: Listed Places of Worship Scheme to be substantive agenda item at next Forum meeting - WG Faith & Belief Team*

*Action: Cabinet Secretary to write to UK Government regarding the Forum's concerns on the recent changes to Listed Places of Worship Scheme and make representations on behalf of faith communities in Wales - Cabinet Secretary*

## **Reflections and Closing Remarks**

The Cabinet Secretary expressed gratitude to Forum members as this would be her **final meeting** before retirement. Members offered warm thanks for her long-standing support to the Forum and to interfaith work in Wales.

### Summary of Actions

No.	Action	Owner
1	Share contact details for <b>all regional Community Cohesion Teams</b> with Forum members.	WG Community Cohesion Team
2	Consider establishing a <b>working group</b> to support cohesion engagement and feedback loops.	WG Cohesion Team / Faith Communities Forum
3	Provide Forum with <b>Cohesion Principles</b> document.	WG Community Cohesion Team
4	Feed RVE concerns to the <b>Cabinet Secretary for Education</b> ; revisit RVE at next Forum.	WG Education Officials
5	Share <b>revised Code of Safeguarding Practice</b> for feedback from faith and belief communities.	WG Safeguarding Team
6	Establish a <b>safeguarding engagement group</b> for faith and belief organisations (post-election).	WG Safeguarding Team
7	Circulate <b>Wedding Law Reform</b> consultation link when published.	WG Faith & Belief Team
8	<b>Listed Places of Worship Scheme</b> to be substantive agenda item at next Forum meeting	WG Faith & Belief Team
9	Cabinet Secretary to write to UK Government regarding the forum's concerns on the recent changes to Listed Places of Worship Scheme and make representations on behalf of faith communities in Wales.	Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice, Trefnydd and Chief Whip