Local Government Association

I*nner* C*ities* R*eligious* C*ouncil*

DTLR
TRANSPORT
LOCAL GOVERNMENT
REGIONS

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ACU promotes civil renewal and community cohesion, through encouraging increased voluntary and community involvement and support for strong, active communities.

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The network links over 90 faith community, inter faith and educational bodies. It promotes good relations between the faiths and gives information and advice on inter faith issues.

foreword

The statutory, social and political environment within which local authorities operate has changed significantly over the last decade. There is an onus on councils to develop new roles as community leaders, modernise their internal practices, improve their service provision and develop a better 'citizen-focus' in the way they relate to residents and local communities. Many of these changes impact on the way local authorities interact with local people and partner organisations in the public, private and voluntary and community sectors – including faith communities.

Britain is now home to communities of all the world's great faiths and there is growing understanding of what faith communities can contribute to public life. But work in this field is not without its challenges. Like any area of public life it requires knowledge, skills and experience to reach successful outcomes. The idea for this guide emerged from a conference in Birmingham in June 2000 which was organised by the Inter Faith Network for the UK. We are grateful to the Network for its help in work on preparing this guide. It is intended as a resource for local authorities, other public agencies and faith communities wishing to make progress in effective partnership. It sets out the key issues that have to be considered in creating effective relations between local authorities and faith communities. Its emphasis is on how to achieve practical results.

Most of our towns and cities are places of great diversity - that is one of their strengths. Faith is an element of this diversity. But the benefits of diversity cannot just be taken for granted. This guide points to the fundamental importance of community cohesion, in building a prosperous and fair society where people from diverse backgrounds can flourish. Relations between faith communities - and in turn between faith communities and local government - can make a significant contribution to promoting community cohesion. We commend this guide to local authorities as they seek to engage in their leadership role with the rest of the community.

Sally Keeble, MP
Parliamentary Under Secretary of State, DTLR

Angela Eagle, MP
Parliamentary Under Secretary of State, Home Office

Sir Jeremy Beecham
Chairman
Local Government Association

contents

1 introduction

Purpose of this guide

1.1 The purpose of this publication is to encourage local authorities in all parts of the country to develop good working relationships with the faith groups and inter faith structures in their area. In many contexts now, councils must work with all sections of their local community, including the whole spectrum of the voluntary and community sector. Faith groups are an important part of that spectrum, although this fact has not always been recognised by public authorities, or indeed faith groups themselves.

1.2 In fact there are considerable benefits to be gained from engaging with local faith groups. They have sizeable constituencies, play a significant role within their wider locality and have a long-term sustained commitment to people in their catchment areas. It is therefore important to ensure that they are appropriately consulted in the development of local strategies and services and, where appropriate, can participate in decision-making processes and contribute to the delivery of services.

1.3 In the past, there have sometimes been difficulties and misunderstandings in establishing good relations between local government and local faith communities, for example over the issue of funding faith community projects and over planning applications for places of worship. The present document explores these difficulties and tries to show how they can be overcome to mutual benefit.

1.4 Though written principally with local authorities in mind, it is hoped that this guide will also be useful to faith communities and will offer encouragement to them, for their part, to take the initiative in exploring ways in which they can develop positive relationships with the local authority in their area and can contribute to the well-being of the wider civic community, of which they are an important and influential part. The guidelines should be relevant to local authorities in both urban and rural areas and with varying degrees of diversity in the pattern of their local faith communities.

Religious diversity

1.5 Most local authorities have some experience in the field of race relations and in dealing with equal opportunities issues, but the focus of the present publication is on 'religious identity' rather than 'ethnic identity'. There can be a significant overlap between these aspects of both personal and community identity, although most of Britain's faiths have members drawn from varied ethnic backgrounds.

Background to this initiative

1.6 The initiative for this document stems from the conference held in Birmingham in June 2000 by the Inter Faith Network for the UK, in association with the Inner Cities Religious Council of the (now) Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, with support from the Active Community Unit at the Home Office. This explored the relationship between inter faith initiatives and local and regional government.

1.7 Arising from the conference, it was suggested that it would be helpful to produce a publication which would set out existing good practice in relations between local authorities and faith communities and provide advice and information to help in particular situations where those

relationships have yet to be adequately developed.

Legislative and policy framework

1.8 The legislative and policy framework underpinning the modernisation agenda for local government has important implications for these relationships, for example, in the context of the government's present urban policy and the development of local strategic partnerships. Major emphasis has been placed on seeking ways to address the issues of social exclusion, including in the National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal which is aimed at arresting the decline of deprived neighbourhoods.

1.9 The government will need to legislate before the end of 2003 to give effect to the provisions of the European Directive on Discrimination in Employment and Occupation that prohibits discrimination on a variety of grounds, including religious identity. Already, incorporation into UK law of the European Convention on Human Rights has an important bearing on the policy and practice of public authorities in relation to religious identity. This is in addition to the indirect effect of the Race Relations Act of 1976, as amended in 2000 to add to the duties of public authorities. Details of this legislation, the Local Government Act 2000 and other framework policies are set out in Annex B.

1.10 However, while there are a number of statutory requirements which prescribe what local authorities *must* do, in many instances it simply makes good sense to look at the health of this particular relationship as one of a local authority's many relationships, with its wider community. The document therefore concentrates primarily on this, the *should do*, aspect and offers some case

studies of good practice and of innovative self-help generated within faith communities.

2 the wider voluntary and community sector context

2.1 At the present time, there is much discussion about the contribution that can be made by 'civil society', the 'third sector' of voluntary and community organisations and activity, alongside the state (at national, regional and local levels) and the market or business sector. All three have an important role in ensuring the well-being of society as a whole and in the promotion of the common good. The importance of action to promote community cohesion has been underlined in the reports reviewing the issues raised by disturbances in a number of areas in the north of England during the summer of 2001.

2.2 Faith groups are an important part of the voluntary and community sector, although they do have distinctive characteristics and potential of their own. As sources of values and commitment, and with substantial constituencies, they have a valuable contribution to make, alongside other organisations and individuals, in building a sense of local community and in renewing civil society.

2.3 A strong local community can only be built on an effective coalition of groups and individuals who share and seek to put into practice common values, even though they may look to different sources of authority for these. One of the characteristics of a democratic, plural society is that it should enable the diverse elements within it to come together with a sense of common purpose, while respecting the integrity of the cultural and faith identities of its different component groups.

2.4 Modern local authorities are those in touch with all the people they serve, with an open decision-making structure and service delivery based on the needs of users rather than those of the provider. The best authorities have a long tradition of working in partnership - with the public, private and voluntary and community sectors – but recent legislation to underpin the agenda of modernisation in local government has emphasised the importance of this. Councils must now take on the role of community leader, prepare a community strategy and lead on establishing a local strategic partnership as well as consulting on Best Value and on new political management arrangements. They are urged to develop a Local Compact with the voluntary and community sectors and to play a leading role in joint working with other agencies to address social exclusion.

2.5 The voluntary and community sector is a spectrum stretching from large national charities to the smallest informal community groups. Voluntary organisations - national, regional or local - tend to be concerned primarily with the provision of not-for-profit services, and most are charitable in nature. They are governed by voluntary committees, while their activities tend to be carried out by paid and/or volunteer workers. Community organisations and groups, on the other hand, tend to be membership organisations, bringing together people who have a common problem or concern, a common interest or belief, or who want to pursue a common cause. They are often less structured, with members running the group's activities, making up the management committee, as well as often being the group's primary users.

2.6 This difference in nature between voluntary organisations and community groups is significant because it has implications for the way they are supported, the level and types of funding they need, and the approaches that are necessary to involve them in consultation processes.

2.7 Faith communities are represented in every part of the voluntary and community spectrum. Like other voluntary and community organisations therefore, faith-based groups are extremely diverse in form. In some cases they are large national voluntary organisations, sharing common characteristics with similar secular organisations. Their local branches, while sharing some of the characteristics of their parent national organisation, will also operate to some extent as local community organisations. On the other hand, there are other faith groups operating at local community level whose links beyond their own immediate neighbourhood are not very significant, and which will be very similar in nature to other community groups.

2.8 Minority faith communities often fall into the latter category. They have particular difficulty engaging with existing consultation processes and accessing funds, yet they are likely also to be in particular need of help: they are often concentrated in areas of severe deprivation, they frequently coincide with minority ethnic communities and they may lack the skills required to engage with wider structures.

2.9 It is also significant that while the advancement of their faith and worship will be central activities to most faith-based groups, many will also be engaged in community development, the representation of community interests, the provision of services for the benefit of their own members and the provision of services to benefit the wider public.

2.10 While some local faith groups will have a neighbourhood focus, others will correspond to what are described as 'community of interest' groups, that is to say groups of individuals brought together by a common purpose, concern or belief which draw their members from well beyond the neighbourhood.

South Meadow Lane Community Project - Gujarat Hindu Society, Preston

The South Meadow Lane Community Centre opened in 1975 after the Gujarat Hindu Society had bought old school premises for £17,500, with the aid of a bank loan, for the purposes of socialising and creating a place of worship. The society is a registered charity established in 1965 and has a membership of 600 Hindu families in the Preston area. The loan was repaid in two years and the centre has continued to expand to accommodate a range of activities.

In 1981 the Prince of Wales opened the Gita Hall, created for the teaching of the Gujarati language.

Other Hindu organisations in the north west co-operated in the organisation of the first Ramayan recital by Pujiya Morari Bapu, a world renowned and revered high priest and a nine-day programme attracted 8000 devotees. £108,000 was raised during the event, held in 1988, for the water relief programme for remote villages in India. Other events have raised £10,000 which has been distributed to local charities.

When unemployment was rising in 1992 an application was made to the Home Office under the Section 11 Ethnic Minority Grant and a new phase of core activities began with the establishment of the Gujarat Training and Resource Centre, providing adult guidance and customised training. This project, with support from the then Lancashire Area West Training and Enterprise Council, has helped many members from the community, from all cultural backgrounds, to obtain employment, receive guidance and support towards further and higher education and to take advantage of enterprise opportunities.

In 1995 a feasibility study was undertaken on redeveloping the whole centre. The management committee had a vision of creating a centre of excellence to promote Hindu culture, provide recreational, leisure and healthy lifestyle facilities and a temple for the Hindu community of Preston and district. Application to the Millennium Commission for a capital grant was successful and £1.64 million was awarded towards the total project costs of £3.28 million. The new complex covers 24,500 square feet and includes a main multi-purpose hall with seating capacity of 800 used for conferences, weddings and other events. There is also an ICT suite with 18 computers and a dedicated PA control room providing sound and media facilities.

The society has a management committee of 15 volunteers, a full-time centre manager, a caretaker and two part-time administrative staff.

Health checks for the Sikh community, Hounslow

Places of worship are an important focus for faith communities. As well as providing a meeting place for formal prayers, they also offer opportunities for the members of a particular 'congregation' or for the wider community to meet for a variety of other purposes, including straightforward socialising.

An initiative by the Sikh community in Hounslow takes advantage of this range of opportunities. Qualified professionals from the Sikh community give their time voluntarily to offer those who come to the temple or Gurdwara for worship on Sundays a series of free checks to monitor their general health and to promote healthy lifestyles. It is also possible to focus on conditions to which statistically members of the Asian community are particularly prone.

Those attending will also take part in the 'langar' - a free communal meal cooked by members of the community. It is worth noting that the langar is open literally to anyone and everyone and is an important expression of the Sikh tradition of service to the wider community. Every gurdwara maintains a regular langar.

3 local faith communities

Why does your authority need to engage with faith communities? What are the benefits?

3.1 The relationship with faith communities needs not only to be placed in the wider context of modernisation of local government but to be considered in terms of the contribution faith communities make to good health, as providers of pastoral care, promoters of citizenship and community development, voices for social justice, and as the locus for gatherings of people in varying economic and social positions, of differing political views, from a range of ethnic backgrounds with shared concerns.

3.2 The faith community sector is also working to improve life for its constituent groups and often others in their neighbourhood or community. Individual groups may have slightly different priorities so that for example some will focus on seeking better access to better services, while others aim to ensure benefits rights are taken up or that their members are able to play their part as residents in decision-making at the local level. Faith groups may be the best means of reaching those in need within their faith community and sometimes those in the wider community also.

3.3 A particularly important aspect of the strategies which local authorities will have to adopt in the new environment of interacting with local people will be reaching the 'hard to reach'. Some individuals in faith communities may come within this description, particularly where faith and ethnic background have a strong link.

3.4 Among the typical resources which faith groups and local inter faith structures can offer as part of the voluntary and community sector are local networks, leadership and management capacity, buildings with potential community use, and volunteers. They may contribute to the whole range of community participation, from membership of strategic bodies to project work at its most small scale, neighbourhood level.

3.5 Not the least of the reasons why a local authority should consider the relationship with its faith communities is the contribution they make to 'active community' initiatives. Research by the Institute for Volunteering Research for example (see Annex C), indicates that members of churches, synagogues and other faith communities are more likely to contribute their free time to helping others. There is a belief that a 'common sense' approach can be taken and that there is a positive relationship between faith and volunteering activity. This source of volunteering may be confined within the faith group or organisation which the volunteer belongs to but that should not detract from the value of this altruistic activity to the volunteering individual or their beneficiaries, or the value to public agencies of self-help generated within the community

3.6 Engagement with local faith communities also needs to be placed in the context of the increasing religious diversity of the UK. Its larger towns and cities are home to significant communities of many of the world's great religions. This can be viewed in two ways. It is sometimes seen as a threat, linked to deep anxiety about migration and immigration and spilling over into overt racism. Hostility to difference of religion is accompanied by unwillingness to accept the status quo or to find common ground in shared citizenship or in values that might be shared.

3.7 On the other hand, religious diversity can be regarded as an element of diversity to be celebrated and encouraged with an emphasis on tolerance and respect. There are strong links to the principle of equal treatment and the development of policies and services which seek properly to reflect the social, ethnic and religious nature of the area.

3.8 The extent of religious diversity varies from area to area within the UK. There is a marked contrast between the situation in, say Leicester or the London Borough of Tower Hamlets on the one hand and rural Cumbria or Norfolk on the other. But there is some degree of diversity everywhere and in all areas faith communities have an important role to play in local society. The relationship with faith communities is therefore not just an issue for large urban authorities or metropolitan areas. In rural and largely rural areas too, there will be much to be gained by considering this relationship.

Lincolnshire Church Tourism Network

Lincolnshire Church Tourism Network brings together the local authorities in the county and the Diocese of Lincoln in a productive partnership for marketing the county using the Christian heritage as the main attraction.

Meeting Hill Baptist Church

Meeting Hill Baptist Church in Norfolk is recognised by several partnership funders as providing a base at which the needs of older people can be addressed. This approach is becoming commonplace throughout rural England because of the 'Rural Churches in Community Service' programme supported by the Millennium Commission.

In settlements with populations under 3000, there are 50 per cent of churches in regular use as community facilities.

3.9 If there is little or no religious diversity a relationship with the main faith community - likely to be the Christian church structure - will still be important. It will key in to a faith community that plays a valuable role as a support and often a focal point for the life of local people. In Mid Bedfordshire for example, church leaders have provided a useful source of community information that has lead to a number of initiatives being explored. A Church of England representative is working with the

community safety team; the Bishop of
Bedford has been engaged in social inclusion
work; the Salvation Army is involved in
community development work; and the
Methodist Church is taking part in an
outreach learning project.

Faith In Lewisham Fund

Lewisham Council has invested considerable time and energy in seeking to develop partnerships with faith groups in order to help deliver and modernise its programme of community services. This initiative, about which vigorous debate took place in the council itself, was developed through an extensive round of visits and discussions with faith group members and leaders, once the legitimacy of their role in community services had been recognised and accepted.

A first *Having Faith in Lewisham* conference took place in March 1999 and was followed by the appointment of a faith and social action officer to support and facilitate the role of faith groups in providing community services. Consultation with faith groups helped to establish their aspirations and needs and as a result, ongoing support was offered on issues such as fundraising and management structures.

The second conference, held in May 2001, was arranged by a steering group made up of representatives of faith groups, councillors and council officers and was advertised through direct mailing; posters and leaflets at places of worship, libraries, and in the Voluntary Action Lewisham mailout; on the authority's electronic noticeboards and by word of mouth. Fifty seven faith groups were represented among 160 participants.

A Faith in Lewisham Fund was established which was allocated funding of £63,000 as a one-year pilot project. Second year funding was £50,000 and this amount has now been included in the base budget so that the faith fund will continue. Activities supported by grants from the fund have ranged from social auditing of the needs of a locality to IT, literacy and numeracy support for people over 50. The initiative has had top level political support.

Contact: Andy Thomas, Faith and Social Action Officer, tel: 020 8305 6815;
e-mail: andy.thomas@lewisham.gov.uk

3.10 A number of reforms have been put in place to achieve modernisation, characterised in the 1998 white paper, *Modern Local Government: In touch with the people* as the need for local authorities to 'reconnect' with local communities. Further, the government has placed major emphasis on seeking ways to address the issues of social exclusion, placing at the centre of the Whitehall machinery a special unit empowered to take some radically different approaches to policy-making in order to try to 'fast track' thinking and action on some of the most intractable problems facing society. Work by the Social Exclusion Unit in the Cabinet Office included establishing 18 policy action teams bringing together residents from deprived neighbourhoods, practitioners, professionals, academics and civil servants.

3.11 Many authorities are currently considering the specific remits of cabinet members under the new management arrangements and this may be an opportunity to make direct provision for political oversight of the authority's relationship with faith communities. Various models are emerging, with community issues, community participation, voluntary and community sector initiatives as some of the frequently set out aspects of the remit. Specific reference to faith communities would help to focus on this particular relationship which impacts across the whole range of council services.

3.12 Clearly, an essential first step for a local authority in building positive relations with faith communities in their area is to have a full and accurate picture of them, of their size and their composition. It will be helpful if a particular department or member of staff carries responsibility for keeping this information up-to-date and acting as a

contact point for this, which can be of value, not only internally, but in dealing with outside enquiries. It is even more helpful if a particular department or staff member is given broad responsibility for dealing with relations with local faith communities and for encouraging other departments of the local authority to bear in mind, where relevant, the contribution they can make to policy development and programme implementation. Annex A discusses in more detail the process of making contact with faith communities in a particular local area. Annex C contains details of contacts and resources that may be helpful.

Building bridges through faith communities - Camden

In February 2000 the London Borough of Camden commissioned the Office for Public Management to undertake a project to initiate contact and build bridges with diverse faith communities throughout the borough. The findings were presented in a report along with a set of recommendations and a possible action plan. Among the recommendations was that the council should 'appoint a part-time inter faith liaison officer to continue the consultants' work of opening up a dialogue and winning trust.'

A report recommending that the council continue work in this area, developing and maintaining links with the borough's faith communities, was endorsed by the council's Policy Development Committee in December 2000. This was seen as part of the council's ongoing long-term work meeting its priorities of inclusion, capacity building, community development and its response to the MacPherson Report. A new full time post of senior policy officer (faith communities) was created, funded for two years, to work with faith organisations and the communities they represent, develop links with groups and individuals in the borough, and co-ordinate this approach with initiatives undertaken across the council's departments.

The main objectives of the post are to explore how the major recommendations in the Office for Public Management's report can be taken forward, to provide, in co-ordination with departments, a supporting resource for faith communities, and to build up trust and good working relationships with faith communities to incorporate this sector into the mainstream of civic activity without placing undue pressures on it.

The post holder began work in September 2001. Introductory letters were sent to over 300 organisations in and around Camden, leading to a series of individual meetings as a first step in developing healthy working relations. By the end of 2001, 42 meetings had taken place with representatives of faith communities and a further 22 were planned for early 2002. Other plans were to create a paper and digital directory of faith groups in the borough, organise joint events between council officers and faith groups on issues of common concern, such as drug abuse and homelessness, and to have a series of multi-faith events. In response to the international situation a meeting with representatives of the Muslim community and the leader of the council took place with an attendance of approximately 70 people.

Contact: Nina Rahel, Senior Policy Officer (Faith Communities) – tel: 020 7974 2230; e-mail: nina.rahel@camden.gov.uk

Providing advice and consultancy – Kensington and Chelsea

The Community Relations Section of Kensington and Chelsea is a five strong team with the task of providing management and organisational development support, consultancy advice and information, in a wide range of ways to foster good relations between and amongst all ethnic and faith groups. More than 100 languages are spoken in the Royal Borough.

Part of the section's remit is to give consultancy advice and project management assistance in setting up and developing projects geared towards good race, community and inter faith relations. In the case of the creation of the £10 million Muslim Cultural Heritage Centre, this meant giving support over an eight-year period while the community and the local authority worked closely to meet the needs of a particularly disadvantaged group of people. The project was made possible because of a successful bid for City Challenge funding which provided £500,000 towards the cost of the centre, which is located in North Kensington, an area of multiple deprivation and disadvantage. The local Muslim community has raised nearly £8 million to date.

The authority's community relations adviser was seconded to act as chief project adviser to the project, which has resulted in a centre offering educational, social, economic and religious facilities to local communities.

Publications produced by the Community Relations Section include a regular *Guide to the Ethnic and Faith organisations in Kensington and Chelsea*, enlarged and revamped in recent years to include details of faith groups, in recognition of the fact that communities cut across ethnic lines by organising themselves on the basis of their faith. More than 90 organisations are listed that provide a range of educational, health, cultural and leisure activities, including those targeted at older people, women and the young.

The other publications are: *Making Organisations Work: A Handbook To Good Management*, *A Guide To Fundraising, Ethnic and Faith Community Development,* and *An Introduction to the Community Relations Sections.*

Contact: Rumman Ahmed, Community Relations Adviser tel: 020 7598 4631

4 partnership working

Renewal/regeneration

4.1 Since the introduction of the City Challenge programme in 1991, public policy has increasingly recognised the value both of partnership working and of the involvement of local people in regeneration. Without this involvement regeneration and renewal is unlikely to be successful and sustainable.

4.2 This engagement of the community is more than consultation and requires a local authority or other agency to keep under review its 'map' of local groups and organisations so that relationships can develop and continue to be inclusive.

4.3 When reprinted in 1997 the second edition of (then) DETR's *Involving Communities in Urban and Rural Regeneration: A Guide for Practitioners* contained a new chapter on 'Involving Faith Communities'. This reflected two changes following publication of the first edition: a growing awareness of the potential of faith communities to contribute to regeneration and an increase in the skills available to practitioners in working towards more effective patterns of inclusion. The faith traditions of a locality are significant factors in its diversity.

4.4 A catalyst in the development of policy guidance at the national level was the foundation of the Inner Cities Religious Council in 1992. This government advisory body, chaired by a minister and based in what is now DTLR, provides two-way communication between designers of urban policy and faith communities. Just as the 'Compact' framework (see the following section on partnership working) has parallel national and local dimensions, so national government's commitment to involving faith communities in regeneration by supporting

the ICRC offers a model which can be adapted at the regional and local level.

4.5 Later rounds of the Single Regeneration Budget programme made clear in their guidance that faith communities are valid partners and eligible for SRB funding. Similarly the *New Deal for Communities* guidance encourages the inclusion of faith communities in partnerships and in the delivery of local NDC programmes.

4.6 A study by the Church Urban Fund of church involvement in NDC (*Flourishing Communities*) revealed a low level of involvement of faiths other than the main Christian churches. DTLR will support pilot projects in three NDC partnerships, beginning in mid 2002, designed to develop better understanding of the barriers to faith community involvement and to suggest ways of making progress. This is illustrative of the current situation - the principle that faith communities are valuable partners in regeneration is widely promoted, but the practice of translating this into substantial outcomes is 'work in progress'.

4.7 Local authorities will want to bear this in mind in addressing policy following the publication of the urban and rural white papers and the National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal. Guidance makes clear that faith communities have a part to play in the relevant processes and structures, such as local strategic partnerships and Neighbourhood Management. It should not be assumed however that the necessary skills, knowledge and capacity are present in either all local faith communities or in public agencies. (See the section on Next Steps to practical progress) This guide is intended to contribute to the development of greater competence in these areas.

4.8   Regional development agencies (RDA's) and regional chambers or assemblies are relatively new. It is beyond the scope of this guidance to discuss them in detail. However RDA's have a responsibility for regeneration and their regional strategies do impact on local economies. Faith communities have responded to the regional agenda in a variety of different ways. Mainstream Christian churches have developed a regional network. A more co-ordinated engagement between faith groups and regional structures is beginning to develop.

Muslim Careercare Project – Stamford Hill/Woodberry Down SRB, Hackney

The North London Muslim Community Centre secured £90,600 to establish a careers advice and jobsearch centre.

Muslim Careercare will create an area in the North London Muslim Community Centre where members of Stamford Hill and Woodberry Down's large Asian/Muslim and wider community can take advantage of jobsearch/jobclub facilities and careers/training advice and access. It will be unique in that it will be located next to a mosque, will operate in hours most suitable for Muslims, taking into account prayer times and special periods such as Ramadan, and will respect Islamic rules in the way it operates.

Hackney has a large Muslim population, estimated at 40,000. Through mechanisms such as the Black and Bilingual Forum, which is organised by the local authority and is attended by councillors and the chief executive, more diverse involvement has been enabled. Although the 'bilingual' category is not specific to faith, by association it allows faith based groups to integrate into the mainstream. It is only now that a fluent English speaking generation of Muslims, who are more integrated and better understand 'the system' are participating in local government consultation exercises, and are actually lobbying for change, that things are considered to be changing for the better.

Contact: Ismail Amaan (Director), North London Muslim Community Centre, 66-68 Cazenove Road, Hackney, London N16 6AA
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website: www.nlmcc.org.uk

Churches Link project, Sandwell

The project was set up in 1995 after discussions principally between Sandwell Council and representatives of the Christian churches, with initial funding from the Church Urban Fund. A successful application to SRB Round 2 allowed the project to expand and work in a more integrated way with the local authority.

A full-time officer was appointed, located within the council's Community Development Unit, as part of the Community Links Team. Sandwell's contribution is to give office space and administrative support as well as direct access to the council's regeneration structures.

Activities have included compiling a directory of church facilities; establishing a quarterly newsletter; organising an annual churches conferences which includes the local authority and other regeneration partners; undertaking advisory work with churches on developing their own local response on regeneration issues; and strategic work with partner agencies to develop the role of churches in the processes and programmes of regeneration.

There was no brief to work with faith communities other than the Christian churches but it has become increasingly evident that different faith communities share many common needs and concerns, especially in the way they seek to relate to civic authorities. Sandwell is consulting on the possibility of establishing an inter faith structure.

Contact: Jon Gurling, Sandwell Churches Link Officer
tel: 0121 569 4638

Local Compacts

4.9 The compact between government and the voluntary and community sector was launched in November 1998. The compact provides a framework that sets out the principles and undertakings that should underpin the relationship between the sector and government. It is aimed at creating a new approach to partnership.

4.10 Part of the compact's implementation is to move beyond a broad framework and concentrate on getting its application right nationally, regionally and locally. To assist in this, the compact is backed up by individual Codes of Good Practice on Funding; Consultation and Policy Appraisal; black and minority ethnic voluntary and community organisations; and volunteering. A code on community groups is in preparation and should be published in the first half of 2002. It will make explicit reference to the place of local faith groups within the community sector and identify particular issues that affect them.

4.11 Government is keen that the compact should become embedded in local government as well as central government. For this reason, Local Compact guidelines were launched in July 2000 and nearly three quarters of the authorities in England and Wales have now developed or are developing a compact with their local voluntary and community sector.

4.12 Experience shows that the process of producing a compact is as important and influential as the final document itself. It involves councillors and officials, local groups and organisations working together to clarify roles and functions as well as expectations and ways of working. Through this, understanding and trust can develop, as can

a recognition of shared objectives but also areas of difference, of complementary roles alongside independent ones.

4.13 A local compact as a dynamic mechanism for an evolving relationship should be a valuable tool for both the voluntary and community sector and local authorities in the context of new policies. As such, it can be an integral part of implementing Best Value, in developing community strategies and in setting up local strategic partnerships.

4.14 Local authorities will want to ensure that faith communities, as social partners, are fully included in the compact process and feel that their voice has been both heard and reflected in the partnership statement that results in the form of a local compact.

Education

4.15 Religious education, with local syllabuses required by law to be of a multi-faith character, has an important role to play in promoting understanding of different faith communities and their traditions**.**

4.16 Local education authorities will be familiar with SACREs - standing advisory councils on religious education – which must be maintained as a statutory requirement under the Education Acts. The SACRE is serviced by the local authority and it has responsibilities for both collective worship and for religious education in community schools. The local authority determines the membership and there are separate panels for the Church of England, other faith groups and other Christian churches, teachers and the authority. Most SACREs, even in less religiously diverse areas, have representatives on them from a variety of faith communities. The SACRE for West

Sussex, for example, includes the Church of England, Muslim, Hindu and Sikh community representatives and a co-optee represents the Baha'i community.

4.17 Many local authorities find the SACRE invaluable as a link with the faith communities in the area. When asked to provide good practice examples for this publication, several referred to the benefits that came from working together through this mechanism – greater understanding about the various faiths, gaining knowledge about other cultures, learning and appreciating the values of minority communities. In some measure it was also felt that faith groups were given the confidence to take the initiative on issues rather than taking only a reactive role.

4.18 However, it is important to recognise that, while faith community representatives on SACREs make an important contribution to their work, their experience will not necessarily be of the kind to make them the most appropriate contacts for other purposes going beyond their particular interest in education.

4.19 During the preparation of this guidance the government issued for consultation the education white paper *Schools - achieving success* which noted the significant history of faith schools as part of this country's education system and commented on the role which they might play in the future. Since the white paper's publication, there has been considerable debate about the place of single faith schools and their relationship to the state education sector and this is still the subject of discussion.

5 funding issues

Funding for faith groups

5.1 A frequent source of misunderstanding between local authorities and faith communities has been uncertainty about whether public funding can appropriately be made available for faith group activities. On the one hand, there is general agreement that public funding should not be used to support the worship activities of faith groups or the propagation of a particular faith. On the other hand, both central government and many local authorities now accept the validity and value of funding services and activities run by faith groups. Some will argue that this is justified only if the services and activities are open to all, regardless of their faith. Others will argue that a service or activity, even if targeted at those within a faith community, can nevertheless be assessed in terms of its public or community benefit and a case for public funding therefore be made.

5.2 There is an aspect of funding for faith communities on which there is no clear consensus - that is the public funding of capacity building or the development of structures within individual faith communities. In this situation, authorities need to judge the potential benefits against the possible risks. Support for the strengthening of structures within a faith community could have major benefits in terms of community participation, the co-ordination of community services, civic renewal, and the improvement of public services. At the same time, there may be a risk of involving central and/or local government in sectional politics within faith communities or an unacceptable alignment with a particular faith group over others.

5.3 It is not uncommon for funders, including local authorities, to insist on faith groups establishing separate legal entities or semi-independent structures in order to be eligible for funding for service delivery or project activity. Although some faith-based organisations may find this helpful, it should not be rigidly imposed, where it may artificially disrupt the integrity of the organisation. Decisions on whether to fund a particular organisation should be made in terms of the nature of the case the organisation is making, rather than on whether it has a religious or secular culture.

5.4 Many faith communities also report that local authority officers seem unwilling to engage with them due to a misunderstanding of their motivation and purposes. This might arise from unclear application documents and processes, or from a perception that faith communities are well resourced and do not need public funding. In Lewisham (see case study) the authority helps faith groups to see how they fit the criteria for grants or how they can adapt to qualify.

5.5 A number of faiths prohibit their member groups from applying for funding from the National Lottery Boards because the money is derived from gambling. Since the Community Fund in particular is seen as a major alternative source of funding for voluntary and community sector groups by both central and local government, a case can be made for funding applications from such groups being treated more sympathetically by other public bodies.

5.6 In a report on faith-based community development sponsored by The Shaftesbury Society and DTLR, *Faith Makes Communities Work,* the messages from faith based community work projects are markedly similar to those usually expressed across the voluntary and community sector. Faith organisations too would like to see:

- simpler and less paper dominated application procedures and more technical assistance with completing them; consistent and transparent criteria for funding and monitoring outputs;

- an increase in funds designated for capacity building and community development; and

- funding that empowers local people to participate in community development initiatives by providing technical assistance.

Rate relief

5.7 Churches, chapels and other places of worship are exempt from business rates, as is made clear in a new guide from DTLR, set out for the ratepayer in accessible question and answer format, published in December 2001 and available on the department's website. The guide also sets out that other premises may qualify for relief or exemption, such as church halls, chapel halls and similar buildings or ancillary administrative premises, even if the organisation is not a charity. In general it is the detailed provisions of Schedule 5 paragraph 11 of the Local Government Finance Act 1988 (as amended) that set out exemption from rates and the local valuation office should be able to assist with detailed enquiries.

5.8 Local authorities may not have a blanket policy on whether to grant relief where they have the discretion to do so and must treat each application on its merits. Guidance from the Institute of Revenue and Rating Valuation suggests a number of issues that could be considered by local authorities in making decisions. The case might be made that a number of these issues apply to faith communities, for example that the criteria for deciding on discretionary relief might include organisations that provide training or education for their members.

"Are there schemes for particular groups to develop their skills (for example, young people, the disabled, retired people)? An organisation providing such facilities might deserve more support than one which did not." [para 3.5.2.1;G:Mandatory and Discretionary Relief - NDDR Practice Notes, March 2001]

5.9 Many faith groups provide facilities for specific groups within their members – older people, women and for young people for example – which might qualify. They are also very likely to qualify on two other suggested criteria – that the facilities have been provided by self-help; and that the membership is drawn from people mainly resident within the authority's boundary.

Listed Places of Worship Grants Scheme

5.10 Where faith groups are seeking help in improving their premises it might be worth ensuring they are aware of the interim grants scheme introduced in the March 2001 budget. This means the return in grant aid of the difference between five per cent and the actual amount spent on VAT on eligible repairs and maintenance and applies to listed places of worship of all religions throughout the UK, including those owned by or vested in a number of specified organisations which look after redundant churches. Details of the scheme, with a note of 'frequently asked questions' and application forms, are available on the website at www.lpwscheme.org.uk/msg1.htm or from Listed Places of Worship Grant Scheme, PO Box 609, Newport, South Wales NP10 8QD (tel 0845 601 5945).

6 planning issues

6.1 People from all kinds of backgrounds find the planning regulations difficult to come to terms with. Outside of the local government world there is frequently little understanding of how decisions are made and that they are based on a complex set of rules. For faith groups it may be a particular concern that they are not able to make their own decisions about their premises without first seeking approval from the local authority.

6.2 Places of worship and church halls fall within the 'DI' use class of the Town and Country Planning (Use Classes Order) 1987. Non-residential education places such as madrassas fall within the same use class. Any new developments of places of worship or changes of use will require planning permission unless, for example, they involve an existing building in that use class such as a school, training centre, library or public hall. Extensions will need consent.

6.3 Development plans or local plans may include statutory policies relating to places of worship and may include the criteria by which proposals are considered, eg it may preclude the use of terraced houses. The planning issues involved usually relate to:

• traffic generation;

• design issues which are particularly relevant where the property is in a residential frontage; and

• the potential of the development to cause loss of amenity to adjoining property (eg through noise, disturbance or traffic).

Particularly important is whether the proposal is a local facility or whether it has a wider catchment area. The latter usually means more traffic as it may for instance result in frequent use for events attracting a larger number of people such as weddings and other celebrations.

6.4 The challenge for local authority officers familiar with the terminology and the requirements of planning legislation will be to translate this into a format which is both appropriate and sensitive. Consideration could be given to a plain language guide, perhaps set out in a question and answer format. A checklist could also be a helpful way to deal with such a complex issue, perhaps including information such as an indication of the length of time which various parts of the process might take and arrangements for any public consideration of the application, say at planning committee. There would be benefits in involving local faith groups and communities in drafting such guidance, perhaps through an inter faith forum or council if one exists, so that advantage can be gained from any experiences they may have had.

7 local inter faith structures

Local inter faith co-operation

7.1 There is an increasing awareness of the importance of ensuring that there are positive links between different parts of a local community. An important dimension of this is the fostering of constructive links between different faith communities. The promotion of inter faith co-operation can encourage the development of greater mutual trust and understanding and can play a valuable role in enhancing social cohesion within the local community.

7.2 Many of a local authority's dealings with local faith communities will be on a community by community, or even congregation by congregation, basis on specific issues. But there are advantages, particularly in areas of significant religious diversity, in bringing different faith communities together within a multi-faith forum or council of faiths for discussion of issues of common concern. An umbrella structure of this kind can be of great help to a local authority in providing a structured point of connection with the faith communities in their area. It can have the added advantage of encouraging the development of positive relationships between the different faiths.

7.3 Many towns and cities are now working to ensure that any civic ceremonies with a religious dimension take into account the different faiths in their area. Increasingly, local inter faith councils and groups are being asked for advice on these.

7.4 Most inter faith co-operation shares three broad aims. Those involved wish to see:

- key figures in each faith community coming to know each other and to develop relationships of mutual trust and support;

- promotion of friendships across traditions at all levels and not just between faith leaders; and

- members of different faiths coming together to work to improve local civic life and promote inter religious co-operation with integrity on matters of common concern.

7.5 There are around 100 inter faith initiatives across the UK, including some, like those in Birmingham, Leeds and Wolverhampton, which have been in existence for over 25 years. Others are just beginning. The kind of inter faith co-operation that already exists will vary greatly from area to area. Each council or group will have come into being out of different local circumstances and there will have been a range of different motivations for launching them.

Inter faith group, Wolverhampton

The Wolverhampton Inter Faith Group was established in 1974 and is one of the UK's oldest inter faith groups. It is run by an Executive Committee made up of representatives and individuals of the area's faith communities. Its range of activities includes:

- work with the local authority and other public bodies such as the police service and New Cross Hospital;

- running an inter faith centre. The centre acts as an advice and resource centre for the faith communities of the area;

- the group has produced a directory of faith communities in Wolverhampton, which is widely used by the local authority and public services. The Centre was refurbished thanks to a grant from Wolverhampton City Council;

- *Education* The group produces a resource pack about different faiths for use in schools. It also helps to arrange visits for schools to places of worship and can provide speakers to visit schools. It provides input to the Wolverhampton Standing Advisory Council on Religious Education (SACRE). The group is hoping to establish a new RE resource centre, which is part of a regeneration bid to the New Deal for Communities;

- *Photographic exhibition* The group has prepared an exhibition showing the range of worshipping communities in Wolverhampton. The exhibition has been on display at various events and is available for use by other groups; and

- *Annual Peace Service* The group organises an annual civic service in St Peter's Church, which has an inter faith element.

7.6 As well as multi-faith initiatives there will also be groups that work with two or three different faiths, such as local branches of the Council for Christians and Jews and of the Three Faiths Forum. There are also organisations based in one faith, but which work with many faiths such as the Christians Aware Inter Faith Programme and the Westminster Inter Faith Programme (an inter faith initiative of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Westminster).

7.7 The range of activities of a particular group or council of faiths will reflect the nature and aims of that group. It may be helpful to think of the types of groups on a spectrum of inter faith initiatives. At one end there are informal groups based on individual membership and at the other end fully representative councils of faiths to which faith community organisations nominate representatives. Both types play an important role in building good inter faith relationships. In some areas, for example in Loughborough, there are two local inter faith structures with overlapping involvement, one a more informal group, one a more structured and representative council. In

some cases, for example the Wolverhampton Inter Faith Group described in the case study above, a single inter faith initiative spans a broad range of activities, which embrace both kinds of role.

Informal inter faith groups

7.8 At the informal end of the spectrum, the inter faith group can be a group of people of different faiths meeting in each other's homes to learn about their respective faiths and discuss issues of common interest. There may be no fixed structure or even group name. Such groups usually have discussions and special events as their focus and welcome anyone who wishes to come along. Members may be drawn from across a city or town or be mainly from one neighbourhood. Some groups like to remain informal while others may decide to adopt a constitution and charge a membership fee, to cover expenses such as postage and hiring of venues for meetings.

Representative councils of faiths

7.9 The term 'council of faiths' or inter faith council is usually used to identify an initiative which has a public role and is structured to include members of each major faith represented in the area. Representative councils of this kind are likely to involve the leadership of the local faith communities (as well as other faith community members). Some also have organisational member bodies as well as individual members. The value of more formal structures of this kind in multi-faith cities and towns is becoming increasingly apparent. The constitution of a council of faiths is usually designed to ensure that its management committee adequately reflects the faith make-up of the area. The most successful groups regularly check that these representatives are, in the view of their

faith communities, the most appropriate people for the committee. But there can be difficult issues to be resolved in deciding which faith groups should be represented on a council and how they should be represented, particularly where effective linking structures within the different faiths are themselves only beginning to emerge and the nominating mechanisms are, in some cases, in the early stages of development.

What do councils of faiths do?

7.10 Representative councils of faiths often play a formal role in advising local authorities and other public bodies in the area and making representations to them. Their work is also likely to include meetings with representatives of local government, the local health authority and similar public authorities. Issues on which councils of faith commonly provide input include:

- work with their local hospitals and hospices to ensure that these can meet the needs of patients of different faiths; helping to find a list of clergy and lay people of the various faiths to be involved in chaplaincy and visiting; advising on dietary issues; discussing matters such as requirements for single sex wards;

- advice on facilities for local burials or cremations which meet the requirements of different faiths;

- advice to police forces who are increasingly concerned to consult with all the different faith as well as ethnic minority communities in their area in working for better community relations;

- input to planning and regeneration consultations giving the views of local places of worship and faith community groups; and

- work with local education authorities and SACREs (Standing Advisory Committee on Religious Education) (See chapter on Partnership working - Education).

Local authority support for local inter faith work

7.11 Naturally a local authority will need to satisfy itself carefully that any existing inter faith structure is sufficiently broadly based and representative to provide a satisfactory link for it to use for its own purposes. Local authorities will also want to consider whether they should take steps to encourage the strengthening, or initiating, of a local inter faith link in their area as a valuable way of enhancing the relationships between its different faith communities.

7.12 As was said earlier, in view of the value to the wider community of good relations between different faiths locally, local authorities may want to help in developing and strengthening these relationships. It will be important for a local authority to be seen to be helping the capacity building of local social infrastructure, rather than intervening to distort the work of faith communities through co-opting them to the authority's own agenda. But to have such a structure in place can be of great advantage as a framework for relations between the local authority and local communities, as well as being an important resource if there are, at times, tensions in community relationships. It can also provide a useful point of consultation for other public bodies and services in the area.

7.13 In areas where there is no effective local inter faith structure but where the local authority can see that one could play a valuable role, it may wish to initiate conversations with leading members of the different faith communities about the possibility of forming one. While the issues arising in this process need to be tackled in the light of the particular local context, the Inter Faith Network can provide useful advice and help, drawing on local experience in many parts of the country. Its publication produced in association with the Inner Cities Religious Council, *The Local Inter Faith Guide*, is a valuable tool for local authorities as well as for local faith groups.

7.14 There are examples of local authorities helping to initiate local inter faith structures and of supporting them financially. The prospect of being able to engage in constructive dialogue on a joint basis with the local authority and other public bodies in the area, will be a real incentive for the faith communities to establish an inter faith structure of this kind. The provision of a 'civic umbrella' for early stages of an initiative of this kind can be very valuable in providing a neutral meeting place, grounded in concern for the wellbeing of the local community as a whole, even if it is important for the local inter faith structure as this emerges to be an independent body run by the faith communities themselves. Authorities giving financial support to local inter faith work include Blackburn with Darwen, Leicester and Luton.

Support for local inter faith work – Blackburn with Darwen

After becoming a unitary authority in April 1998 Blackburn with Darwen Borough Council made a decision to improve the ways that faith communities and the local authority could work together to improve the lives of people living within the borough.

As part of the community planning process, both the Anglican Diocese of Blackburn and the Lancashire Council of Mosques were invited to join the community plan working group, which led on to the development of a 2020 vision for the borough. The resulting community plan has seven themes, two of which are particularly relevant - Building More Involved Communities: and Enhancing Cultural Harmony.

At the same time, building on the experience of other local authorities such as Wolverhampton, Birmingham and Leicester, an Interfaith Council was established involving residents and representatives of the following faiths - Christianity, Islam, Judaism, Hinduism, Sikhism and Zoroastrianism. The Interfaith Council aims to overcome ignorance, fear and misunderstanding and promote the positive role faith communities can play in society. It receives an annual allocation of approximately £40,000 to fund the work of a development officer, to promote inter faith activity and support faith organisations to contribute to the social, economic and environmental well-being of the local communities.

The Interfaith Development Officer works to the Interfaith Committee, but is based within the Regeneration, Housing and Neighbourhood Services Department within the local authority. The officer has been instrumental in:

- raising awareness, understanding and recognition of faith issues and the contribution that faith groups can make;

- providing a single initial point of contact both for local authority officers and for faith organisations; and

- building trust and bringing faith organisations and the local authority together to work in partnership.

The positive impact of all the above has been considerable. For example, faith led community projects promoting social inclusion, such as Churches Action and THOMAS (Those on the Margins of Society – a faith based organisation that helps socially excluded people), have been able to access regeneration funding, an inter faith approach has been introduced to key events (eg National Holocaust Memorial Day), local authority consultation processes with faith groups have been improved and faith organisations have representatives on local boards (eg for Sure Start).

Contact: Fawad Bhatti, Interfaith Development Officer
tel: 01254 585624
e-mail: fawad.bhatti@blackburn.gov.uk

7.15 In some areas the practice has been established of bringing together each year, in a meeting with the local mayor, the leaders of different faiths to demonstrate publicly their willingness to meet and to work together for the common good. The value of media coverage of events of this kind or for a civic 'launch' of a new local structure for inter faith co-operation should not be underestimated.

Inter faith evening - Bury

In Bury an arrangement that began as a breakfast meeting at the Town Hall, hosted by the mayor, has become a regular inter faith evening arranged in conjunction with the Bury Inter Faith Council. A theme is chosen for the evening and representatives from the faiths involved - Christian, Jewish, Muslim, Hindu and Buddhist - speak and form a panel for questions. Topics to date have included the sanctity of marriage, attitudes to death and the afterlife, the teaching of children, faith in the twenty-first century and living together in harmony.

Contact: The Mayor's Office, Bury MBC
tel: 0161 253 5117

Inter faith developments – Waltham Forest

When Councillor Mohammed Nasim, himself a Muslim, was installed as mayor of this London Borough for 2000-01 he celebrated his civic ceremony as part of a multi-faith programme. There were speakers from the three main faiths in the area – Jewish, Muslim and Christian. The initiative has led to longer term benefits in improved inter faith working. A Faith Forum has been set up which brings together representatives of the major faiths in the borough and is chaired by the authority's chief executive. A recent development has been the agreement to use Neighbourhood Renewal Fund money to employ three part-time workers to engage faith communities in the local strategic partnership.

Contact: Shaheen Westcombe
tel: 020 8496 5283

7.16 Inevitably, encouraging the development of constructive co-operation between faith communities will not be straightforward. There will be difficulties in deciding how faith communities can best be represented and in maintaining their active participation. A good deal of patience and understanding on all sides is required. Good inter faith relationships and structures to underpin these take time to develop on a deep and lasting basis. But they are an important dimension of building a harmonious and purposeful local community and it is important to initiate the process, in a sensitive way, in situations where bridges between the different communities have yet to be built.

Merseyside Council of Faiths

An inter faith group has existed in Merseyside for many years with the purpose of allowing its members to explore each other's faith in a spirit of understanding and friendship. It was thought that a more formal arrangement was needed and in 1999 moves began towards forming a representative council.

There was no direct pressure from any public sector bodies to do this, but faith community leaders were aware of the increasing number of requests for participation of the faith communities in a variety of projects and concerns. Detailed discussions between the representative bodies of the faith communities in the area took place, with the particular aim of providing a formal channel of consultation between the faith communities themselves and between the faith communities and statutory and voluntary agencies.

Approaches to Liverpool City Council for the use of the town hall for the launch were met with an enthusiastic response and Merseyside Council of Faiths came into being on 9 May 2001 at an event attended by over 350 people.

8 next steps to practical progress

8.1 An essential first step for a local authority in building positive relations with faith communities in their area is to have a full and accurate picture of them, of their size and their composition. Begin by doing some mapping. Take some time to find out:

- where the places of worship are; and

- who the faith community leaders are.

  Useful resources include *Religions in the UK: A Multi Faith Directory 2001-2003,* local racial equality councils, the Inter Faith Network and the Inner Cities Religious Council.

  It will be helpful if a particular department or member of staff carries responsibility for keeping this information up-to-date, acting as a contact point for dealing with relations with local faith communities and for encouraging other departments of the local authority to bear in mind, where relevant, the contribution they can make to policy development and programme implementation.

8.2 Many authorities are currently considering the specific remits of cabinet members under the new management arrangements and this may be an opportunity to make direct provision for political oversight of the authority's relationship with faith communities. Various models are emerging, with community issues, community participation, voluntary and community sector initiatives some of the frequently set out aspects of the remit. Specific reference to faith communities would help to focus on this particular relationship which impacts across the whole range of council services.

8.3 Consider holding a few small, informal meetings to discuss ways forward. This will help you get to know any relevant people and organisations. Some of the key points you will want to know are:

- is there any existing faith-based organisation or activity? and

- are there any equality or diversity issues, such as the representation of young people, women or marginalised groups?

  When planning meetings with faith community representatives avoid fixing them for dates of major religious festivals or days/times of the week that would be problematic. *The Shap Calendar of Religious Festivals* is a key resource [see details in Annex C].

8.4 Work towards a consensus about the purpose of the relationship between your authority and faith groups based on local circumstances.

8.5 Remember potential capacity issues:

- faith communities may not know much about the local authority's agenda;

- local authorities and other agencies may know very little about faith communities;

- allow time for learning for all parties; and

- consider how your authority can help ensure all faith communities have an equal opportunity to participate – some faith groups, particularly some of the Christian churches, are likely to be much better resourced to participate in informal discussions and formal structures, than others.

8.6 Discuss how the process might fit with other community consultation/participation activity and structures. In almost all local authorities a great deal is happening in these areas.

8.7 As confidence grows you may wish to constitute a more formal steering group to take decisions about how to make the process more public.

8.8 Some questions for a steering group might be:

• how can faith communities best take part in structures such as LSPs?

• how can faith communities contribute to projects of benefit to the community? and

• would it be a good idea to work towards a local conference?

8.9 In areas where there is no existing effective local inter faith structure but where the local authority can see that one could play a valuable role, it may wish to initiate conversations with leading members of the different faith communities about the possibility of forming one.

8.10 The compact process offers a very valuable opportunity for dialogue with faith communities and inter faith bodies. Local authorities will want to ensure that faith communities, as social partners, are fully included in the compact process and feel that their voice has been both heard and reflected in the partnership statement that results in the form of a Local Compact.

Annex A:
making contact with faith communities in your area - helpful maps and signposts

While there may be a need on practical grounds for a local authority to focus its consultations and other dealings with faith communities on the larger ones, it is important for it not to overlook those smaller groups whose views also need to be taken into account in any general consultation with the local community as a whole.

It is important that in building up a picture of local faith communities a local authority is aware of the diversity within different traditions. As is well known, there is a wide range of Christian denominations. Similarly within most other large faith communities there are distinct groupings. It would be beyond the scope of this short guide to offer a detailed survey of these. However, in broad terms, different groupings may be based on particular interpretations of the religious tradition in question; on ethnic or linguistic differences; or on countries of origin.

While within the major Christian churches a 'hierarchical' organisational structure is to be found (for example, within the Church of England dioceses are divided into deaneries which group individual parishes), in many other cases religious communities do *not* have any hierarchical framework and are often made up of a series of independent congregations. There are, however, national organisations which seek to provide a linking framework, for example, Churches Together in England, the Muslim Council of Britain or the National Council of Hindu Temples, but they do not in any sense have oversight of local centres and places of worship. Some places of worship and faith centres within part of a faith community may be grouped together within a particular national association, for example, the United Synagogue or the UK Islamic Mission.

There may also be organisational structures which bring together some, or all, of the different strands of a faith tradition within a particular area, for example a local Churches Together ecumenical body, local councils of mosques or of gurdwaras. In some metropolitan areas, Jewish representative organisations link together the Orthodox and Progressive communities.

An invaluable source of listings of local faith community organisations and places of worship is the directory *Religions in the UK: A Directory 2001-2003* published by the University of Derby and the Inter Faith Network for the UK. This contains national, regional and local contact details for the nine faith communities linked by the network: Baha'i, Buddhist, Christian, Hindu, Jain, Jewish, Muslim, Sikh and Zoroastrian as well a some other religious groups. Local Christian churches are too numerous to be listed in the directory but it does provide contact points for the main churches at both national and regional level together with contact points for national and regional ecumenical bodies linking the churches together. A fuller guide to Christian churches and organisations, including black majority churches, can be found in the *UK Christian Handbook.*

In some cases, local authorities may wish to encourage the development of capacity building structures of this kind, particularly in the more disadvantaged communities, for example, in their role of helping to co-ordinate social programmes within a particular community. But there needs to be great sensitivity in doing so to ensure that the local authority is not seen as becoming involved in the internal 'politics' of the community.

National organisations within different faith communities can often provide helpful information on local groups and contacts for them, as can the Inter Faith Network.

If there is a local inter faith group or council of faiths in an area, this should also be able to offer useful contacts in the different faith communities as well as being an important contact in its own right. (See Chapter 7) Local racial equality councils can also be a source of useful information.

In addition to the mainstream religious communities, there are also groups which have some historical or doctrinal relationship with a major tradition but which are not accepted by the majority of the followers of tradition as being orthodox members. There will therefore inevitably be some sensitivities in the relationships between the two. Questions may also arise about so-called 'new religious movements', which are likely to have relatively limited numbers of members but of which a wide variety may be active in a particular area. Annex C contains details of contacts and resources which may be helpful.

Annex B:
relevant policy initiatives and legislation

Best value in service provision

The Local Government Act 1999 imposes a duty on local authorities to:

"make arrangements to secure continuous improvement in the way in which its functions are exercised, having regard to a combination of economy, efficiency and effectiveness" [Section 3(1)].

This general duty is underpinned by a duty to consult local domestic and business rate taxpayers, service users and,

"representatives of persons appearing to the authority to have an interest in any area within which the authority carries out functions." [Section 3(2)(d)].

Best Value proposes an approach to continuous improvement based on the need to ensure that modern public services are responsive to the needs of citizens, not the convenience of service providers. Therefore the need for authorities to reach all sections of the community when conducting the Best Value review process is crucial. The statutory guidance on implementing Best Value is quite clear about authorities' responsibilities in this respect, if they are to discharge the duty of Best Value. Authorities are reminded to:

*"**engage with users and potential users of services.** A customer focus to reviews is essential. It is important that authorities seek out the views of all potential users, especially those who have traditionally been under-represented. Those that fail to engage local people fully from the outset – including hard-to-reach groups – will carry little conviction when it comes to explaining decisions on service targets and selected providers, and invariably overlook real*

opportunities to bring about lasting change". [DTLR circular 10/99, 14 December 1999, para 17]

From the perspective of the faith community, there is therefore the opportunity to express any specific views it may have on the needs of the area, the services needed and the nature and quality of those services provided by their local council.

The faith community is also not unlike the voluntary sector insofar as it is involved in service delivery. Faith communities need to demonstrate that they deliver Best Value if they want to gain or retain funding from local authorities. They also should see best value as an opportunity to develop closer working relations with local authorities and greater mutual understanding.

In this, as in other areas of consultation, the onus is on the local authority to take the initiative to find appropriate ways of communicating with its customers/service users or residents. If relationships already exist, both with individual faith groups and with formal inter faith structures, this will increase the opportunities for faith community involvement in Best Value reviews.

Community leadership

Government sees the key role of 'modern' councils to be not so much providing the services for which councils still have statutory responsibility - but about providing leadership in their localities. Much of the recent local government legislation is designed to support greater emphasis on this role.

"Community leadership is at the heart of the role of modern local government. Councils

are the organisations best placed to take a comprehensive overview of the needs and priorities of their local areas and communities and lead the work to meet those needs and priorities in the round." [*Modern Local Government: In touch with the people.* DTLR July 1998].

Community strategies - a vision for the area

The first step in this leadership process is to develop a longer term 'vision' or sense of direction for the area – key local priorities and how they are to be progressed.

The Local Government Act therefore places a new statutory duty on councils to prepare what is called a 'community strategy' for:

"… promoting or improving the economic, social and environmental well-being of their area …" [Section 4(1)].

Government guidance to councils (*Preparing Community Strategies: Government guidance to local authorities,* DTLR, December 2000) sets out the importance of involving local people the Government guidance:

"… Authorities will need to consider the various methods by which they can involve communities in the preparation of community strategies… and devise techniques that are most appropriate to local circumstances… Particular measures may be needed to encourage the involvement of communities of interest which can be marginalised in these processes."

The clear intention is that community strategies should be a powerful new tool for working with local people in order to develop a vision for the way the area needs

to develop; for agreeing the priorities to be tackled in the short term; and for 'joining-up' the planning and provision of local services across all relevant agencies, not just local government.

All this provides considerable opportunities for the faith communities to get involved. They will have a specific contribution to make to the development of a long-term vision for the area and will want to ensure they make an active contribution during the consultation process on the development of the community strategy.

As well as a new duty to prepare community strategies the Local Government Act 2000 also gives councils a new wide-ranging discretionary power to support their community leadership role. Up until now councils have only been able to do things that legislation specifically authorises them to. Councils have found that this can limit their ability to innovate and respond effectively to local needs. The Act therefore gives councils a new power 'to do anything' to support the economic, social or environmental 'well-being' of their area.

The new power to promote well-being should help free-up councils to work more effectively and in new and innovative ways with local partnerships (including the voluntary and faith communities) to promote the well-being of their areas. Community-based organisations may want to propose new projects that are now made possible by the new well-being power.

Local strategic partnerships - implementing the vision

Councils have a duty to prepare the community strategy - and in doing so they must consult local people and groups - and the local organisations in their locality that have a contribution to make to the 'well-being' of the area. The strategy is meant to reflect local priorities.

In order to co-ordinate on-going work between local partners it is envisaged that the council will convene what is called a local strategic partnership (LSP). LSPs are intended to be cross-sectoral, cross-agency, umbrella partnerships that are focused on and committed to improving the quality of life in a particular locality. They will need to bring together all the bodies that provide local services, work with local communities and whose actions affect people's everyday lives. They will be the mechanism through which local action is co-ordinated.

Government guidance about how they should operate, published in March 2001, indicates that LSPs should:

"… ensure that community and voluntary organisations and local people more widely are in a position to play a full and equal part in multi- agency partnerships on the same basis with statutory authorities and better resourced partners" [Para 12. Annex C].

The guidance recognises that there are two quite different ways in which local people working in community and voluntary sector groups might be involved in LSPs - firstly in relation to their role as service providers and secondly in relation to their role in 'speaking for' local people.

Although the government has not set a timetable for the establishment of LSPs (because it recognises that this will be quite a difficult and time-consuming process) the Urban white paper carries an expectation that LSPs will be established in key towns and cities by Summer 2001.

Local authorities are expected to take the lead in developing the LSP but they do not 'own' the partnership. They are still in a strong position however to encourage voluntary sector consortia members of the LSP to bear in mind faith communities in bids for funds.

More specific government guidance relating particularly to the most disadvantaged areas recommends the establishment of community networks - bringing together *"the full range of community and voluntary organisations in an area - and particularly those which represent or work in deprived neighbourhoods and marginalised communities"*. An effective network will need to reflect the diversity of the local population, including the range of local faith groups. Where the community network is also administering funding, such as the Community Empowerment Fund, it will be important that the needs of faith groups are recognised alongside others.

Political management arrangements - leading the council

The Local Government Act (Part 2) also requires councils to introduce new political management arrangements designed to support this new community leadership role. Put simply the argument is that the traditional council and committee structure which councils have operated for the last 100 years or so may have been well suited to the delivery of a range of local services

but does not support councils' prime role in providing local leadership.

As a result the Act requires councils to review their decision-making arrangements and introduce one of three new forms of political management arrangement. A fourth option is available for shire districts with a population under 85,000.

The Act places a duty on every council to engage its communities (residents, businesses, voluntary groups, and others), in discussions about the most appropriate form of executive arrangements for their area. Whilst it does not say how councils should do this, it does require councils to consult local people on all the options available. Councils must engage in this process before they draw up their proposals for submission to the secretary of state.

Where a council's proposals involve a directly elected mayor then the council must hold a local referendum. If the public support the proposal in the referendum then the council *must* introduce that arrangement.

The Act also provides for local people to mount a petition to the council asking it to hold a referendum to introduce a directly elected mayor. On receipt of a valid petition the council will be legally required to hold a referendum whether or not the council itself supports the idea. Five per cent of the electors in the area must sign the petition before the council has to act upon it.

Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000

The amendment to the Race Relations Act 1976 imposes a positive duty on all major public bodies to promote equality of opportunity and good race relations. The

specific duties include preparing and publishing a 'Race Equality Scheme'; ensuring access to information and services for ethnic minorities; and making arrangements for staff training.

This is in addition to it being unlawful for public bodies to discriminate while carrying out any of their functions. The new legislation applies to jobs, training, housing, education and the provision of goods, services and facilities, with many local government enforcement functions - such as environmental health and trading standards - being, for the first time, subject to race discrimination legislation. The Commission for Racial Equality is working with government to draw up a code of practice for use by all public authorities and the duties will need to be complied with by May 2002. The CRE will have powers to bring legal challenge against any authority deemed to be failing in the new duty.

Human Rights Act 1998/European Convention on Human Rights

The Articles of the European Convention on Human Rights have effect for the purposes of the Human Rights Act. Two in particular should be referred to in the context of working with faith communities.

Article 9 sets out the right of everyone to freedom of thought, conscience and religion and for a person alone or with others to manifest their religion or belief in worship, teaching, practice and observance, while Article 14 covers the prohibition of discrimination on the grounds of religion (or sex, race, colour, language, political or other opinion etc). Article 14 also has the effect of enshrining the right to enjoy any of the other Convention rights and freedoms without discrimination. The open ended

range of grounds for discrimination will significantly extend people's rights to equality, beyond protections against discrimination which are set out in existing UK law.

European Directive on Discrimination in Employment and Occupation

As stated in the introduction, the government will need to legislate to give effect to the provisions of this directive but it will be important for local authorities to ensure their own employment practices meet these new requirements and that they are sensitive to the needs and concerns of people from different faiths. Local authorities could set a good example to other employers in their area - and local faith communities can help in the development of appropriate policies and practices.

Annex C:
references and publications

Key references in relevant documents:

1. *Urban white paper* (November 2000): paragraphs 3:45-3:47
   www.regeneration.dtlr.gov.uk/policies/ourtowns/cm4911/index.htm

2. *Rural white paper* (November 2000): Chapter 3 (3.2.4)
   www.defra.gov.uk/erdp/erdpfrm.htm

3. *Preparing Community Strategies* (December 2000): paragraph 48
   www.local-regions.dtlr.gov.uk/pcs/guidance/index.htm

4. *Compact Codes*
   www.ncvo.vol.org.uk/main/gateway/compact.htm   or
   www.homeoffice.gov.uk/acu/compact.htm

   i) *Code of Good Practice on Funding* (May 2000): paragraphs 7:1 and 8:1

   ii) *Black and Minority Ethnic Voluntary and Community Organisations* (February 2001): paragraphs 5:1, 5:6 and 6:8

5. *Guidance for Local Strategic Partnerships* (March 2001): paragraphs 1:20 and Annex C 19 and 20
   www.neighbourhood.dtlr.gov.uk/partnerships/index.htm

6. Faith community involvement is a common strand of *Neighbourhood Renewal*:

i) Policy Action Team 4: *Neighbourhood Management* (April 2000): Recommendation 17

ii) Policy Action Team 7: *Unpopular Housing*: paragraphs 4:46 and 4:47; Recommendation 13

iii) Policy Action Team 9: *Community Self Help* (September 1999): paragraphs 4:17-20; Recommendation 25

For Policy Action Team (PAT) Reports see: www.neighbourhood.dtlr.gov.uk/management/pat/index.htm

iv) *A New Commitment to Neighbourhood Renewal - National Strategy Action Plan* (January 2001): Chapter 5 (5:10 and 31); Commitment 91
www.neighbourhood.dtlr.gov./actionplan.index.htm

v) *Guidance for Neighbourhood Management* (March 2001): paragraph 4:7
www.neighbourhood.dtlr.gov.uk/management/index.htm

vi) *Guidance for Community Empowerment Fund* (July 2001): paragraphs 4:7 and 5:15
www.neighbourhood.dtlr.gov.uk/guidance/index.htm

vii) Guidance for Community Chests (October 2001): paragraphs 2:21 and 2:20
www.neighbourhood.dtlr.gov.uk

viii) Guidance for New Deal for Communities (November 1999): Annex B paragraph 2
www.neighbourhood.dtlr.gov.uk/ newdeal/ndc/phase1guide/index.htm

7. *Faith, voluntary action and social policy: a review of research - in Volunteering: A Global Force for Change* (Vol 3 Number 1 Winter 2000 edition of the Journal of the Institute for Volunteering Research)

8. A number of reports have been published on community cohesion following disturbances in several towns and cities during the summer of 2001, including:

    Building Cohesive Communities – Report of Ministerial Group on Public Order and Community Cohesion – chaired by the Right Hon John Denham MP, Minister of State for the Home Office.
    www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rev.pocc

    Community Cohesion: A report of the Independent Review Team chaired by Ted Cantle
    www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rev/community cohesion.pdf

    LGA briefing – The g*overnment reports on community cohesion*, covers the recommendations of the Denham and Cantle reports.
    www.lga.gov.uk

9. Also of note is the Greater London Authority Act 1999 (PART II General Functions and Procedure): paragraphs 30 and 32
    www.hmso.gov.uk/acts/acts1999/ 19990029.htm

Useful publications/contact details

From LGA:

Local Government Association
Local Government House
Smith Square
London SW1P 3HZ
Tel: 020 7664 3000
Fax: 020 7664 3030
e-mail: info@lga.gov.uk
website: www.lga.gov.uk

The following is a sample of the documents available on the LGA website at: www.lga.gov.uk/lga.blg/compact.

- *Community Leadership: what is it?*

- *A New Commitment to Neighbourhood Renewal: National Strategy Action Plan and Local Strategic Partnerships – Frequently Asked Questions*

  This briefing pulls together some frequently asked questions relating to the Social Exclusion Unit's *A New Commitment to Neighbourhood Renewal: National Strategy Action Plan*

- *Community Strategies*

- *Effective local strategic partnerships - LGA advice note for working with the community and voluntary sectors*

- Power to promote or improve economic, social or environmental well-being

- LGA response to DTLR Draft Guidance

- LGA summary of the DTLR Draft Guidance on Community Strategies. July 2000 (28k PDF)

- *Take your partners: report of the LGA Urban Commission hearings into partnership working*. November 1999 (134k PDF).

From DTLR:

Inner Cities Religious Council
Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions
Floor 4/J10, Eland House
Bressenden Place
London SW1E 5DU
Tel: 020 7944 3702/3703/3704
Fax: 020 7944 3729
e-mail: icrc@dtlr.gov.uk
website: www.dtlr.gov.uk

Involving Communities in Urban and Rural Regeneration - A Guide for Practitioners - contains a section dedicated to involving faith communities (available on line at the ICRC website (see above).

www.regen.net for information on urban regeneration. It is an interactive website run by the Planning Exchange, funded by DTLR. Government briefings relating to urban regeneration can be found on the DTLR website which is linked to regen.net. Both have no access charge.

Active Community Unit
Home Office
Horseferry House
Dean Ryle Street
London SW1P 2AW
Tel: 020 7217 8400
Fax: 020 7217 8500

website: www.homeoffice.gov.uk/acu/acu.htm

From the Inter Faith Network:

The Inter Faith Network for the UK
5-7 Tavistock Place
London WC1H 9SN
Tel: **020 7388 0008**
Fax: **020 7388 7124**
e-mail: ifnet@interfaith.org.uk
website: www.interfaith.org.uk

www.interfaith.org.uk is the website of the Inter Faith Network for the UK which carries information about the work of the Network and its publications.

Inter Faith Update Newsletter of the Inter Faith Network published three times a year. For details of subscribing contact the Inter Faith Network.

Inter Faith Co-operation, Local Government and the Regions: Councils of Faiths as a Resource for the 21st Century - report of a conference in Birmingham, June 2000.

The Local Inter Faith Guide: Faith Community Co-operation in Action. A handbook for setting up and running local inter faith initiatives. Inter Faith Network in association with the Inner Cities Religious Council, 1999.

Building Good Relations with People of Different Faiths and Beliefs A short set of guidelines for inter faith encounter, developed by the member organisations of the Inter Faith Network.

Directories

Religions in the UK: Directory 2001-03, ed Paul Weller, University of Derby in association with the Inter Faith Network, third edition, 2001. A comprehensive publication containing chapters about the main faith communities of the UK; the religious landscape of the UK, inter faith activity in the UK; and listings of national and local faith community bodies and national and local inter faith organisations.

UK Christian Handbook 2002-03. Christian Research Association 2001.

Other useful sources

INFORM:

An academic resource with detailed knowledge of religious movements.

Information Network Focus on Religious Movements
LSE
Houghton Street
London WC2A 2AE
Tel: 020 7955 7654
Fax: 020 7955 7679
e-mail: inform@lse.ac.uk

The Shap Calendar of Religious Festivals

A calendar providing details of the important days of observance and/or celebration for the major faiths. Obtainable from:

The Shap Working Party on World Religions in Education
C/o the National Society's RE Centre
36 Causton Street
London SW1P 4AU
Tel: 020 7932 1194
Fax: 020 7932 1199
e-mail: nsrec@dial.pipex.com