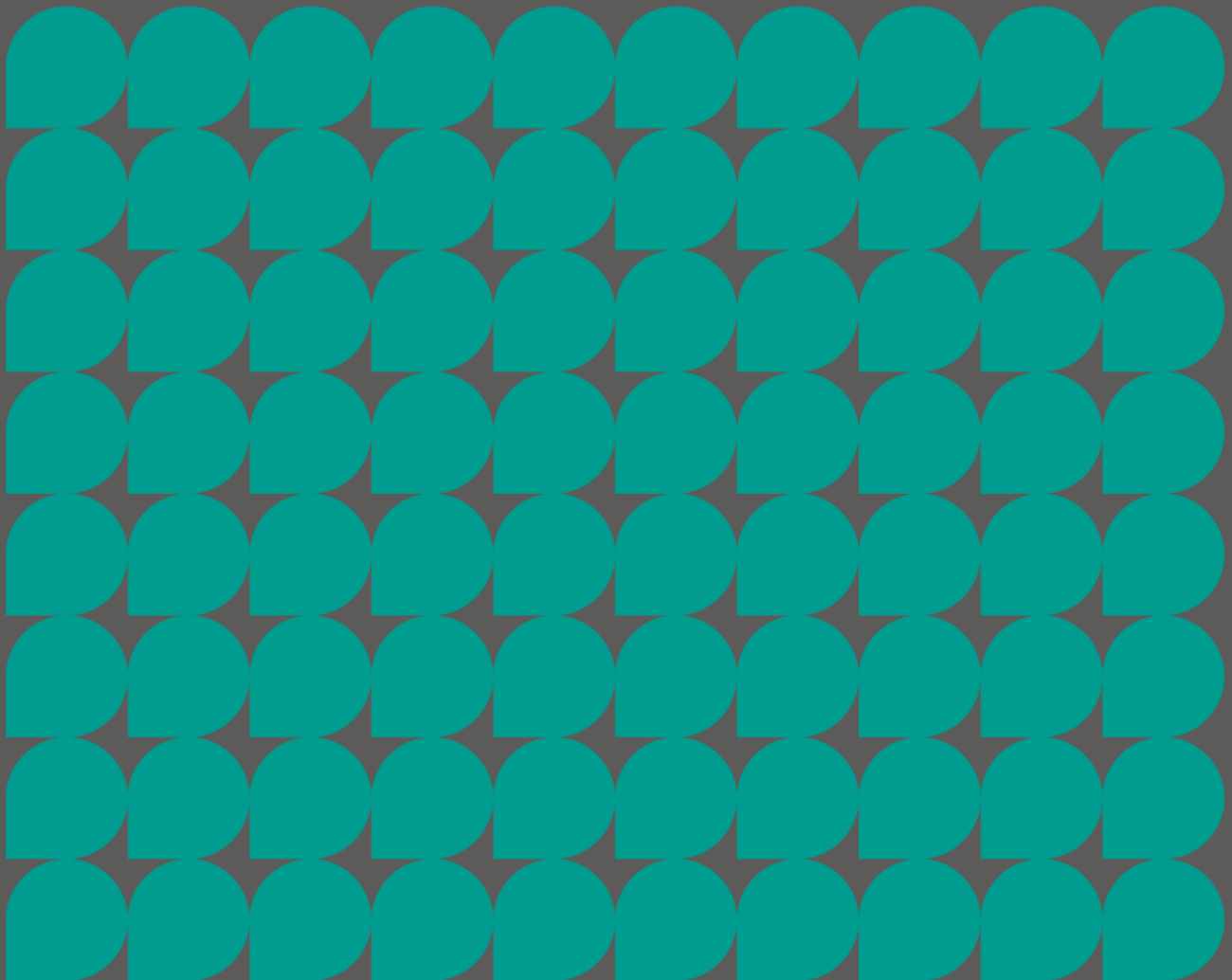


# **FAITH & BELIEF ADVISORY PANEL**

**DOING THINGS DIFFERENTLY  
FOR GREATER MANCHESTER**

## **Greater Manchester Faith and Belief Advisory Panel Annual Report 2024-2025**



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# 1. Message from the Co-Chairs

This has been a busy year for the Greater Manchester Faith and Belief Advisory Panel, and this report shows the huge impact we are making as a network of networks within the Greater Manchester eco-system to bring a sense of hope, connection, and resilience.

Our review of our membership in the last year and our commitment to strengthen our locality interfaith networks has enabled us to make real progress to embed the engagement, collaboration, and delivery set up by the Faith, Belief and Interfaith Covenant which we co-signed with the Mayor of Greater Manchester and Councillor Arooj Shah, the Portfolio Lead for Equalities and Communities representing the ten boroughs.

The unrest and tension last Summer led us to prepare a Mobilisation Plan for Community Cohesion so that we can quickly and effectively make our distinctive contribution to bringing strength and solidarity within our neighbourhoods in future.

Our panel members continue to play key roles in the various action networks, task forces, and partnerships pursuing our collective social justice and climate justice missions and we have been able to ensure that our voice and work is reflected within the development of the Live Well Movement and in the refresh of the Greater Manchester Strategy.

We look forward to meeting with the Mayor, the Deputy Mayor, and the Leaders and Senior Officers of the ten boroughs over the next year to further the aims of the panel and we will faithfully represent the panel on the Greater Manchester Tackling Inequalities Board.

We are grateful to our panel members for all the work they do in their localities and across Greater Manchester.

Strength to you!

**Co-Chairs, Rev. Ian Rutherford and Manjari Patel**

## 2. About the panel

The Faith and Belief Advisory Panel acts as a 'network of networks' bringing together representatives from the ten Greater Manchester borough Interfaith bodies with key individuals from single and mixed Faith and Belief networks. Following a comprehensive review the Panel currently has over 35 committed members representing more than 30 different networks from across Greater Manchester and aims to reflect the city-region's diverse faiths and beliefs. Gender balance is important to the Panel, and each network is encouraged to nominate a male and female representative.

The Panel aims to strengthen the partnership between public services, Faith and Belief organisations and wider society, through collaboration on shared missions, unlocking assets and resources in Greater Manchester communities and the powers available through devolution.

#### **Faith and Belief Advisory Panel – Aims**

- Optimise the Faith and Belief contribution to The Greater Manchester Strategy
- Ensure that the role of Faith and Belief in society is recognised and valued
- Foster good relations and dialogue between people of Faith and Belief (who share a protected characteristic) and people who do not share it
- Advance equality of opportunity and eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment, victimisation (and any other conduct prohibited by the Equality Act 2010 and the Public Sector Equality Duty) between people who share a protected characteristic and people who do not

## **3. Highlights of the last year**

### **3.1 GM Faith, Belief and Interfaith Covenant**

The new **Covenant** builds on the **Faith & Belief in GM Contribution Statement** developed in the previous year by setting out how the contribution of faith and belief communities can be utilised to achieve our shared ambitions for Greater Manchester. The Covenant outlines a set of principles and commitments that guide engagement, collaboration and delivery, and was signed by the Mayor of Greater

Manchester, Andy Burnham; Councillor Arooj Shah, GMCA Portfolio Lead for Equalities and Communities, and the Panel Co-Chairs in November 2024.

**Mayor of Greater Manchester, Andy Burnham, said:** "Today's Faith, Belief and Interfaith Covenant signing recognises the invaluable contribution that our diverse Faith and Belief communities make across our city-region. Greater Manchester prides itself on the cohesion between our different communities – we are our strongest when we work together. The commitment we signed today is not just words on a page but outlines how we plan to go forward. Greater Manchester is a place where everyone belongs; there is no room for discrimination anywhere. The joint signing sends the clearest of messages throughout our ten boroughs that this is what our city-region is about."

## **3.2 Local Interfaith Networks**

Since its adoption, the Covenant has helped to drive forward various initiatives across Greater Manchester, most notably support for the development of local interfaith networks in each of the 10 boroughs. This has included establishment of a new Trafford Faith Action Network linked to the delivery of Trafford Council's Corporate Plan, establishment of the Wigan Interfaith Network which is undertaking a local mapping exercise, and relaunch of the Salford Interfaith Forum.

Strengthening these networks will help to ensure that Faith and Belief communities in every borough of Greater Manchester can work together with public services, improving social and community cohesion, and helping to support all communities in times of need.

## **3.3 VCFSE Leadership Group**

The panel is now represented on the Greater Manchester Voluntary, Community, Faith, and Social Enterprise (VCFSE) Leadership Group contributing towards important developments and policy decisions impacting on the VCFSE sector and ensuring that the 'F' in VCFSE and the contribution that Faith and Belief makes is firmly embedded in these developments.

## **3.4 Contribution to Greater Manchester priorities**

Panel members continued their important work in the Greater Manchester Action Networks and Task Forces helping to support and tackle important issues such as homelessness; food security; climate change; digital inclusion; hate crime; paying the Real Living Wage; and work in supporting the Greater Manchester VCFSE Accord.

All of these come under the banner of GM Networks Connect and will be supported further over the coming year. The panel contributed towards a range of important policy developments providing advice on issues such as migration and homelessness; Live Well; the new Manchester Baccalaureate (MBacc), Housing First and Green City Region.

The panel was visited by Portfolio Leads, including the Equalities and Communities Portfolio Chief Executive Lead for Greater Manchester, Lynne Ridsdale, who was able to hear first-hand the views of Panel members, which will feed into a refresh of the Greater Manchester Strategy (GMS).

Panel members were also able to engage in wider policy developments at the city-region level providing advice on areas such as the Transport for Greater Manchester Local Transport Plan; School Travel Strategy; Campaign on Inclusion of Neurodivergent People Within Churches; and support for people to apply for Pension Credits.

### **3.5 Community Cohesion Mobilisation Plan**

A key development in recent months has been the creation by the panel of a new Community Cohesion and Resilience Mobilisation Plan. Developed following unrest after the events in Southport last year the plan sets out how Faith and Belief communities can mobilise in the event of future unrest or a major emergency, and how one unified message of solidarity can be given out to each Faith centre in Greater Manchester simultaneously.

### **3.6 Good Employment Charter**

An important panel action over the last year was to engage in Good Employment Week 2024 which had a theme of Fair Work is Good Work. This included the panel leading and facilitating a workshop event between Faith and Belief leaders and businesses to share experiences and to explore good employment practices in

relation to Faith and Belief in the workplace and to identify key priorities. The panel then engaged in an intersectional event with the other Equality Panels resulting in recommendations which will now be taken forward as part of the Good Employment Charter.

### 3.7 Pledge to End Conversion Therapy

The panel also worked closely with the LGBTQ+ Equality Panel during the year in support of a pledge to end Conversion Therapy. The panel made a statement committing to the pledge and encouraging dialogue towards greater understanding and has continued to work closely with the LGBTQ+ Equality Panel.

#### **2024/25 Impacts**

Increased representation and contribution of Faith and Belief in Greater Manchester including embedding the F in VCFSE

Strengthened networks including a developing local interfaith networks infrastructure in GM

Closer working with GM policymakers through the Covenant Delivery Plan and providing advice on GM priorities

Embedding of GM Networks Connect and contribution towards community power and in tackling issues affecting GM communities

Increased ability to respond to key emergencies and helping to build resilience and support community cohesion through the new Mobilisation Plan

## 4. Planning for the year ahead

## **4.1 Implementing the Covenant Delivery Plan**

The Covenant aims to build mutually beneficial relationships which will support the shared ambitions for Greater Manchester. Whilst in the first instance the Covenant has been adopted by GMCA, it is planned that Councils and local Faith, Belief and Interfaith organisations will use the Covenant to help strengthen their relationships, ensuring they reflect the different challenges being faced by public services and communities, and exploring the positive impact investment of support and resources can achieve. The next year will see the continued implementation of the Covenant Delivery Plan and joint working with the ten Greater Manchester councils to raise awareness and help embed and align the Covenant with local strategies.

## **4.2 Local Interfaith Networks Infrastructure**

A key aim in the Covenant Delivery Plan is to help strengthen local Interfaith networks in each of the ten boroughs and the impact this can have especially in terms of community cohesion and resilience. The panel will engage in a rolling programme of meetings with Council leaders and key local stakeholders in each of the boroughs to move forward with the Covenant at a locality level; share information about the Mobilisation Plan; strengthen local networks as part of an overall Greater Manchester Interfaith network infrastructure linked to the panel; and to explore how the panel can assist in supporting faith and belief communities in their locality.

An important piece of work is a Faith and Belief Mapping exercise being undertaken by the Gather Movement which has been commissioned by GMCA. This will create for the first time a comprehensive database about what exists in the faith and belief sector in the city-region. Supported by the panel this links with the developing infrastructure and Mobilisation Plan and all of this may lead to a combined celebration event.

## **4.3 GM Networks Connect and Greater Manchester Priorities**



The panel will continue to meet with Greater Manchester leaders and policy leads to provide advice on priorities. This includes the refresh of the Greater Manchester Strategy (GMS).

Panel members will also continue their involvement in the Greater Manchester Action Networks and Task Forces. GM Networks Connect brings all these networks together through a digital platform and a Community of Practice to increase impact.

## **4.4 Supporting Live Well**

In the Mayor of Greater Manchester's Manifesto, the goal is for everyone in every community to have daily access to support and advice to improve their physical and mental health and socio-economic status. Live Well will be the front door for prevention and enhanced support, bringing together the best of public services and community support when needed, and includes the development of Live Well centres, spaces, and offers.

Our Faith centres and buildings are essentially 'live well' spaces, and this will provide many opportunities where the Faith and Belief sector can help. The panel will engage fully with these developments over the next year and will provide advice to help maximise these opportunities.

## **4.6 Communicating the Mobilisation Plan**

The Community Cohesion and Resilience Mobilisation Plan will be communicated across key stakeholders to raise awareness and ensure connections are made at the right levels.

This will also link to a new project being developed with funding received from the Cooperative Councils Innovation Network (CCIN) which will explore the relationship between faith, resilience and young people. This pilot project includes partners from Oldham, Trafford, Wigan and Bury and a key outcome will be to look at how young people can take a leading role in resilience and crisis response. The project provides opportunities to test and strengthen the Covenant and aligns with the new Mobilisation Plan.

## **4.7 Migration and Preventing Homelessness**

The panel will lead work around the role of Faith groups and communities in preventing and tackling migrant homelessness which has huge potential. This will include supporting integration and wellbeing within Faith community/settings including

- 'welcome', signposting (knowing who's who), community support, cohesion, and challenging stigma
- a humanitarian response, e.g. making donations of clothing and goods; and culturally appropriate food.
- mobilising a homelessness and housing response, e.g. being informed and sharing resources, accommodation, private landlords, fostering, and hosting.

## 5. How to get involved

For more information about the Greater Manchester Faith & Belief Advisory Panel please visit the [\*\*GMCA website\*\*](#).

Or to find out how you can get involved or provide support please contact the Facilitating Organisation by getting in touch with Chris Hart, Pulse Regeneration – [\*\*chris@pulseregeneration.co.uk\*\*](mailto:chris@pulseregeneration.co.uk)