

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

8 Feb 2023

Title: Working with Faith Communities in Barking and Dagenham	
Report of the Director of Community Participation & Prevention	
Open Report	For Information
Wards Affected: All	Key Decision: No
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Accountable Director: Rhodri Rowlands, Director of Community Participation and Prevention	
Accountable Strategic Leadership Director: Fiona Taylor, Acting Chief Executive	
Summary	
<p>The Barking and Dagenham Together; Borough Manifesto indicated that residents want “a friendly and welcoming Borough with strong community spirit” and to become “a place people are proud of and want to live, work, study and stay.</p>	
<p>One of the characteristics of the borough is its vibrant and rich diversity of faiths and beliefs and the positive contribution those faith communities make locally. People of faith make up a significant and growing part of our community, and as the community changes so are our faith communities. Faith communities provide a vital positive role supporting people most in need, strengthening resilience, reinforcing local identity and helping to connect communities.</p>	
<p>For example, faith-based organisations have played a significant part in reducing and mitigating the impact of the Covid pandemic on residents, including as part of community led BDCAN response alongside other community organisations. They are now providing vital early help and support of residents navigating the cost-of-living crisis and there are models of national best practice in the borough, including one of the UK’s first ever Beacon Mosques which partnered with the Council in opening a community Hub and acting as one of the Cost of Living Locality partners.</p>	
<p>Faith organisations are regularly and increasingly working outside of their “traditional” functions, becoming real hubs for community activity, social action, delivering essential services to the most vulnerable people in our communities. In addition to the usual pastoral and spiritual support, faith organisations have through a range of actions expanded and enhanced their offer, branching into the provision of things such as food support, counselling, warm spaces, befriending or relief from loneliness, sports and social clubs, debt and budget management, early years provision, youth programmes and refugee/asylum seeker support.</p>	
<p>The Faith Builds Community policy, launched in 2019, recognised the need to reinforce the contribution of faith communities, build and strengthen the existing relationships and networks in our borough as well as provide a basis for collective action to address the challenges we face.</p>	

The policy set a vision shaped by the firm belief that we all have a part to play in achieving 'a better connected, faith-friendly borough, where people of all backgrounds feel safe, celebrated and included'.

The Policy and the core themes and priorities within it, have provided the basis for the council's approach to working with faith communities. In this report we look back at what has been achieved and set out some initial steps on how we can continue to work with and alongside our faith communities.

In doing so, it is important to recognise that while much positive progress has been achieved, there remain key challenges to address. We know that some of the tensions in our communities continue to be focused around some of our growing faith communities and places of religious worship, alongside other issues. These include the accessible use of spaces and buildings for worship, perceived differences and tensions around issues such as parking and noise, concerns centred around cultural and religious practises, safeguarding within our communities and addressing the wider context of health and health inequalities.

The borough has a strong history of community engagement and our faith-based organisations, small and large, play vital roles in this. However, it remains the case that not all faith organisations wish to engage with the Council (or statutory partners), or through the current structures and forums in place through which organisations may otherwise be engaged and involved.

Concerted, consistent and coordinated effort is needed to ensure that statutory partners and services are on hand to offer advice and guidance, support and opportunities to faith organisations to keep them involved and current, and that we use all available means of doing this. This has been provided in many forms from the Council, with many faith organisations now benefiting from stronger relationships with Public Health, Community Safety, Safeguarding, Events, Community Solutions and Participation & Engagement to name a few departments. However, it is important that we use this review to explore what more, and how best, the Council can continue to build its relationships, and establish trust and reach with faith leaders.

The demographic of the borough has changed significantly over the course of just one generation, and this is reflected in our faith communities. Although we are still a majority Christian borough, there has been a significant shift in religion and denominations within some religions.

There is still a long way to go and much to do in terms of how we can best work together with faith communities and in making sure we maintain the momentum gained over the past few years. Faith organisations can continue to play a key strategic role in helping the council to achieve its ambitions for residents and we need to consider how this can continue to evolve in the future.

Recommendation(s)

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee is recommended to:

- (i) Note the changes in the religious make-up of the borough over the last 10 years
- (ii) Note high-level progress from the Faith Builds Community Policy
- (iii) Consider and comment on the steps proposed on how the council continues to work alongside faith communities in future, and in particular, to comment on the priority themes and suggest any other opportunities or steps that could be taken

- (iv) Invite faith leader representatives from across our faith communities to an engagement discussion with Committee members to hear their feedback on what is working well, issues and challenges and how these can best be addressed

1. Introduction and Background

- 1.1 Barking & Dagenham is a diverse and multi-cultured, multi-faith borough. A myriad of different communities call the borough home and faith organisations play a huge part in helping to provide the sense that the borough is a “friendly and welcoming borough with strong community spirit”, the vision set out in our Borough Manifesto for 2037¹. In the last 10 years the borough has accelerated its pace and scale of change. The population has changed significantly over the course of one generation. In the 2001 census, the boroughs population was 163,944 people and this had jumped to 185,911 in 2011 and by 2021 (census day), the population was estimated to have grown to 218,900 residents². This is the 3rd overall highest growth in England & Wales and the 2nd highest growth in London.

Ethnicity

- 1.2 The ethnic makeup of the communities who live in Barking & Dagenham has also changed dramatically. In 1991, the borough was 93.19% white British, but by 2011 this had dropped to 58.3% and is now 30.9% according to the 2021 Census, although the majority of MSOA’s (Middle Layer Super Output Area) in the borough still have White British as the largest ethnic group. At the same time, the boroughs faith communities have changed, with the former majority Christian population (69% in 2001) declining to 45.5% in 2021, with an emerging multi-cultural, multi-ethnicity and multi-faith population growing since.
- 1.3 In the same period between 2001-2021, the Muslim population grew from 4.4% to 24.4%, which in real terms is a population increase from around 7,477 people in 2001 to 53,411 people in 2021 (over 700% increase). The makeup of these communities has also changed, they are larger and more diverse than ever before, with new faith groups emerging almost constantly as they seek to address the needs of the community.
- 1.4 The first table below shows the latest census data alongside data from 2001, 2011 and a religious survey of London faiths taken by the Mayor’s Office in 2018. Whilst some of the increases/decreases seem drastic, it should be said that this is growth measured over the course of 20 years.
- 1.5 However, when looking particularly at the growth of the number of Muslim residents, this is the fastest growth of any London borough. The borough also has a high level of population churn, which is the rate at which people leave and are replaced by incoming residents. In B&D, the average churn rate (produced for the 2020 mid-year population estimates) is 15.7%, which sees around 18,000 new people arriving in the borough with around 19,000 people leaving in the same period. This is a significant factor when considering the cohesion implications, where it is more difficult to build relationships with neighbours and there are shifts in the community make-up within neighbourhoods.

Religion

¹ [Borough Manifesto | London Borough of Barking and Dagenham \(lbbd.gov.uk\)](https://www.lbbd.gov.uk/manifesto)

² [Population and demographics | London Borough of Barking and Dagenham \(lbbd.gov.uk\)](https://www.lbbd.gov.uk/population)

1.6 The second table below shows the make-up of faith communities by MSOA (Middle Layer Super Output Area), showing the most prominent religion highlighted in each area. In all but two MSOA's, those identifying as Christian, are still the most prominent religious group. In the Barking East and Longbridge & Barking Park areas, the most prominent religious group is those identifying as Muslims. In ten areas, the second highest group is those who identify as having No religion. The highest numbers of those identifying as Hindu, are in the MSOA areas of Barking Central and Becontree Heath. Larger amounts of Sikhs are also found in the MSOA's of Barking East and Chadwell Heath East.

Religion	2001 (Census)	2011 (Census)	2018 (London Religious Survey)	2021 (Census)	Increase/Decrease since 2011	Increase/Decrease since 2001
Christian	69%	56%	54%	45.40%	10.6% decrease	23.6% decrease
Muslim	4.40%	13.70%	22%	24.40%	10.7% increase	20% increase
Hindu	1.10%	2.40%	3%	3%	0.60% increase	1.9% increase
Sikh	1.10%	1.60%	1.50%	2%	0.40% increase	0.90% increase
Jewish	0.30%	0.20%	0.30%	0.10%	0.10% decrease	0.20% decrease
Buddhist	0.20%	0.50%	0.20%	0.40%	0.10% decrease	0.20% increase
Other religions	0.20%	0.30%	3%	0.40%	0.10% increase	0.20% increase
No religion	15.30%	18.90%	15%	18.80%	0.10% decrease	3.5% increase
None stated	8.40%	6.40%	n/a	5.50%	1.2% increase	2.9% decrease

Religion per MSOA

	Christian	Buddhist	Hindu	Jewish	Muslim	Sikh	Other religion	No religion	Not answered
Barking Central	37.8%	0.3%	8.7%	0.0%	33.9%	1.8%	0.5%	11.5%	5.4%
Barking East	34.4%	0.4%	4.7%	0.1%	41.9%	4.5%	0.2%	7.9%	5.9%
Becontree East	47.2%	0.3%	1.6%	0.1%	18.7%	1.0%	0.3%	25.4%	5.4%
Becontree Heath	41.4%	0.4%	6.7%	0.2%	21.5%	3.7%	0.7%	19.9%	5.5%
Becontree North	40.4%	0.3%	4.2%	0.1%	26.1%	3.5%	0.6%	18.9%	5.8%
Becontree South	49.4%	0.5%	1.1%	0.1%	18.4%	0.6%	0.3%	24.2%	5.4%
Becontree West	46.5%	0.3%	2.9%	0.1%	23.5%	1.8%	0.9%	18.4%	5.6%
Central Park & Frizlands Lane	50.3%	0.3%	1.9%	0.0%	16.3%	0.4%	0.5%	25.1%	5.2%
Chadwell Heath East	43.0%	0.3%	4.9%	0.2%	26.6%	5.8%	0.5%	13.7%	5.1%
Creekmouth & Barking Riverside	42.8%	0.8%	3.2%	0.1%	30.3%	2.7%	0.2%	14.8%	5.0%
Dagenham Central	51.5%	0.4%	1.4%	0.2%	14.3%	0.2%	0.4%	25.6%	6.0%
Dagenham Eastbrook	52.8%	0.3%	1.8%	0.2%	19.2%	1.2%	0.4%	17.7%	6.5%
Dagenham North	51.6%	0.2%	1.5%	0.1%	15.2%	0.5%	0.6%	24.7%	5.6%
Eastbrookend	52.0%	0.5%	2.5%	0.2%	12.5%	1.6%	0.3%	25.2%	5.3%
Gascoigne Estate & Roding Riverside	41.6%	0.4%	2.7%	0.2%	35.5%	1.0%	0.4%	12.8%	5.5%
Goresbrook & Scrattons Farm	50.4%	0.4%	1.5%	0.1%	17.7%	0.4%	0.3%	23.9%	5.3%
Longbridge & Barking Park	26.5%	0.4%	3.6%	0.1%	51.4%	3.8%	0.3%	8.9%	5.1%
Marks Gate	47.1%	0.3%	3.2%	0.4%	19.4%	2.1%	0.4%	21.9%	5.1%
Mayesbrook Park & Rippleside	49.3%	0.3%	1.3%	0.2%	20.0%	1.1%	0.4%	21.7%	5.7%
Old Dagenham Park & Village	52.1%	0.4%	1.5%	0.1%	16.1%	0.6%	0.8%	22.7%	5.8%
Rylands Estate & Dagenham Dock	55.5%	0.4%	1.5%	0.1%	19.5%	1.8%	0.4%	15.7%	5.2%
Thames View	46.7%	0.1%	1.4%	0.1%	28.4%	0.8%	0.4%	16.6%	5.6%
Barking & Dagenham	45.4%	0.4%	3.0%	0.1%	24.4%	2.0%	0.4%	18.8%	5.5%

Top religion highlighted per MSOA

Source: 2021 Census

Barking & Dagenham

one borough; one community; no one left behind

1.7 The latest census data tells us much about the make-up of our religious communities, with over 75% of respondents indicating that they follow one particular faith. Faith is fundamental to many peoples' lives in Barking & Dagenham, and for many, is the cornerstone on which they build their lives. This also extends into their decision making and influences where people turn to for support in a crisis, which is why our faith leaders are

vitaly important to delivering the council's aims and objectives. In many cases, faith leaders and faith communities are the first point of contact for residents when they have issues. The Imam, Sheikh, Pastor, Reverend, Priest, or Spiritual Leader are spoken to before engaging with statutory services.

Local faith communities

- 1.8 Although the borough remains strong majority-Christian, the makeup of the Christian community has changed in this time, with the amount of what are generally termed 'black-majority'³ churches (BMC's) growing significantly. Coupled with a steady decline in worshipper numbers⁴ across the UK in more traditional and established denominational churches (Anglican, Catholic and Protestant), from 10.6 million in 1930 to 5.5 million in 2010, or from 30% of the population to 11.2%, alongside a growth in membership of Orthodox, Pentecostal and Evangelical churches at the same time, indicates that the make-up of the Christian population in the borough has also experienced rapid change. This change is mainly made up of new Christian organisations springing up in the borough, in particular an increase in BMC's. Networks do exist within these church groups, with a particularly prominent network (Christian Voice) consisting of over 30 pastors, who work together in mutual interest e.g. on projects combatting serious youth violence for example, or Barking Churches Unite, which brings together a number of churches in Barking to address issues around food poverty, homelessness and isolation.
- 1.9 In Barking & Dagenham, the latest data⁵ we have access to indicates that there are a large majority of broadly Christian organisations in the borough, with 115 groups currently on our database. There are currently 24 Mosques on our database (although we also know of over 30 Madrassah's that operate in the borough), two Buddhist groups (that we know of) meeting regularly, one Jain temple, a Sikh gurdwara and one Baha'i group. However, the actual number of organisations is higher, because new organisations are formed on a regular basis and some close or move location. Anecdotal information suggests there are over 200 Christian organisations in Dagenham alone⁶.

Faith Groups/Meetings	Number
Baha'i	1
Buddhist	2
Christian	115
Islam	24
Jain	1
Jehovah's Witnesses	1
Multi - Faith	1
Sikh	1

- 1.10 We know that the facilities used by these organisations vary tremendously. Outside the purpose-built established Christian denominations e.g. Anglican, Baptist, Methodist and Catholic Churches, there is one purpose-built Mosque and now one brand new purpose-built Sikh Gurdwara. Almost all other organisations use converted former residential, commercial, or industrial facilities, rent/hire community spaces or use other faith spaces when the organisation is not meeting. In some cases, multiple groups are compelled

³ BMC's is an umbrella term, used to describe churches with majority congregations usually from Caribbean or sub-Saharan African descent.

⁴ [No15 UK Christianity 2005-2015.wpd \(faithsurvey.co.uk\)](#)

⁵ [Faith Policy Appendix 1.pdf \(lbbd.gov.uk\)](#)

⁶ Faith leader estimates based on contacts held – provided by Barking Churches Together

(through a lack of available options) to share community spaces, but we know anecdotally that groups do not want to use what are termed “multi-faith spaces”, although they are happy to hire space in generic community spaces in the first instance. It is also useful to note that although some organisations are deeply rooted in their community and serve a very specific geographic location, others see themselves as operating entirely across borough lines, being visited by scores of people from outside the borough.

- 1.11 All this change means that there are communities of people brought together as part of organisations, which are inadvertently competing for space, facilities and funding, and also attempting to grow their influence locally. This is what makes the response to the pandemic and the current cost of living crisis even more remarkable. Organisations that would not traditionally have worked together, have come together in innovative and symbiotic ways, working feverishly to support their communities while putting aside any individual needs. Post-pandemic, levels of what we term “organisational cohesion” are at an all-time high, with many anecdotal examples available of voluntary, community and faith sector organisations working together to drive change and manage the worst impacts of the cost-of-living crisis.
- 1.12 It is also important to note that there are spaces and themes which have the potential to cause considerable tension and issues between faith groups and the local authority. In isolated cases, we have seen friction between the local authority and faith groups on subjects ranging from; use of buildings, safeguarding policy, physical chastisement, radicalisation and extremism to issues caused by complex theological and societal clashes e.g., debates around LGBTQI+ inclusivity and attitudes about how this conflicts with religious observance. There is also, in some areas, an underlying suspicion of the work of statutory authorities, which played out in the mistrust of information supplied about the covid-19 vaccines and contributed towards an overall lower uptake of vaccines compared to the London average.

2. Working with faith communities - coordination and approach

- 2.1. The faith sector is not a “sector” in the same sense as the Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise sector, or VCSE. It is a collective term, which encompasses a myriad of organisations from different faiths and faith make-ups, who are also in a lot of cases independent charities. While we can speak about the Voluntary and Community “Sector” and be confident of the existence of a loosely connected fabric of organisations, the faith “sector” is in fact much more detached and in some cases more isolated when compared to the VCSE.
- 2.2. Social infrastructure support for the VCSE in the borough, is delivered through a strategic partnership of VCSE organisations who make up what is known as the BD_Collective. This group of organisations facilitate a “network of networks” that come together in a variety of ways to address challenges in the borough. Working on a range of priorities and themes ranging across cost of living, health inequalities, food poverty and health systems, to ensuring that people are more connected in their neighbourhoods.
- 2.3. Within this context, there are highly skilled, highly involved faith leaders, who strategically work alongside the VCSE and the council, to ensure that there are routes and reach into faith communities locally. Many diverse and typically “hard to reach” communities, with varying needs, are supported locally by faith organisations to access services.

- 2.4. However, this means that engagement can be highly dependent on growing and establishing trusted relationships with individual faith communities, based in large parts more on trust elements than through a single, consistent forum or platform. Working in this way can itself present challenges. The approach takes constant evaluation, a level of consistency (of personnel and of maintaining contact) and establishing new relationships with faith leaders (or those who work with faith communities) occurs almost on a monthly basis. Through the Participation & Engagement team and work with officers across the council, the council has sought to establish a network of relationships from across the faith sector and use these as the platform to better organise and coordinate cross-cutting work with faith communities.
- 2.5. In 2019, recognising the need to help embed the borough manifesto targets into a growing and dynamic emerging relationship with the faith sector locally, the council launched a “first of its kind” policy titled “[Faith Builds Community](#)”. The new policy was also a continuation of our commitment to faith communities from the strategic places report done by CAG consultants in 2017, which recommended that the council look to engage more extensively with faith leaders around faith-based needs in the borough.
- 2.6. Faith Builds Community sought to address the need to grow the connections, shared priorities and relationships between faith organisations, the council and wider community in Barking & Dagenham. Sitting within the Participation and Engagement agenda within the council’s overarching approach and model of local government, the policy works in tandem with our [Cohesion and Integration strategy](#) and [VCSE strategy](#), the policies all seek to meet the targets of the [Borough Manifesto](#), which sets out our 20 year vision to make Barking & Dagenham a place where every resident can succeed and the borough can grow.
- 2.7. Faith engagement activity is regularly considered through the Community Engagement and Leadership portfolio, with executive oversight through Corporate Performance Group, to ensure it is aligned with corporate plan aims and objectives. All work in the faith engagement space is scrutinised by a variety of different mechanisms, from portfolio reports, which highlight best practice examples, national and local policy and strategy work e.g. the APPG work to define Islamophobia, which the council adopted in 2019, and to ensure that the council are doing what we can to support faith based social action locally.
- 2.8. Events and initiatives are coordinated by a combination of officers from across the council, who are supported and advised by the Participation and Engagement team, who use their influence to connect the faith sector with other council departments. Working in this way we have been able to improve the ability of council to work with and alongside the faith sector. One area to note would be the way in which Public Health work with faith communities. During the pandemic we needed to support and communicate with faith communities around vaccine issues and safety (covid awareness and readiness), which relied on trust and building relationships. Recently, faith providers helped deliver the £480k Community Vaccine Champions programme and were key in embedding the vaccine uptake messaging locally, utilising their local reach into communities to improve trust in the processes. From the final report, Public Health reported:
- “Seeing the new relationships and partnerships formed through this project and to know that the borough is in a better place with firm foundations regarding public health is promising”*
- 2.9. In 2021, the council commissioned Faith Action (a national interfaith charity) to provide specific capacity building support to the Barking & Dagenham Faith Forum (BDFF). This recognised that the forum had changed significantly since pre-pandemic. Membership had decreased, and the trustee board had reduced in size from around fifteen active members to eight. The reach and ability of the BDFF to remain active in the borough and work on

shared themes was also affected by faith leaders working solely on supporting communities through the pandemic. Faith Action worked with BDFP, aiming to:

- Establish a strong, independent, robust local faith forum.
- Make the Faith Forum sustainable and secure.
- Enhance and develop the forum, including to develop skills from within the trustee board that helped extend the life of the contract post-funding.
- Ensure that the forum could engage and connect with a wide range of groups and individuals in the borough.
- Provide an additional piece of work, that would help us gain a snapshot of the needs of the much-changed faith communities on Thames/Riverside.

2.10. Whilst Faith Action have worked closely with the BDFP, seeking to improve their capacity and have supported them in a range of ways to continue engagement with the wider faith sector, much more is needed. We are repurposing the remaining contract period to reflect the changing needs of faith communities, with a new lens on the effects of the cost-of-living crisis and a recognition that there remains more to do in terms of engagement. More information on this is provide in the *Cost-of-Living* section below from point 3.2.

National policy context

2.11 Nationally, the policy picture is not as clear cut. Although significant work has been undertaken to show the benefits that faith groups can offer across the country, it is clear that the government in particular is in an early staging phase in terms of its commitment to working directly with faith groups rather than through local authorities. The APPG group on faith and society, released a report titled “keeping the faith”⁷ in 2020, which recommended:

- That the government encouraged the nationwide widespread adoption of the APPG faith covenant
- That a toolkit should be developed and distributed to each local authority in the UK, which sets out how they should look to work with faith organisations locally.
- That the government should support the establishment of a faith’s advisory council, for liaison between faith groups and central government.

2.12 The report provided a snapshot of evidence measured against the start of the pandemic, showing that 67% of local authorities surveyed had seen an increase in partnership working with faith groups, with 91% reporting that their experience of working in partnership was “Positive”. More diverse areas were more likely to see their faith communities as open and inclusive as opposed to closed or “conditional”.

2.13 The report also recommended that the government appoint an independent Faith Commissioner, to promote and champions faith groups collaborations with local authorities. So far, it is not clear if any of these recommendations have been acted upon by central government, except for the promotion of the APPG faith covenant, which has been led locally by Faith Action in their capacity as advisors to the APPG.

2.14 More best practice examples of faith work in the UK, are available in Appendix 1.

3. Looking back - what we have done

⁷ [appg-keeping-the-faith-2.pdf](#)

3.1. All faith engagement work is done under the headings and within the themes of the Faith Builds Community policy. High level progress can be seen in the table below, which sets out some of the accomplishments in the broader work between the councils and faith communities.

Theme	High Level Progress
<p>Celebrating Faith Based Social Action</p>	<p>More than just receiving about recognising and celebrating the accomplishments of local organisations, this theme was about ensuring that we recognise the contribution that faith-based organisations make in the borough. We have moved this forward over the past few years, with faith organisations now playing a key part in delivering some essential services. We recognise and seek to amplify the impact of faith-based social action, by ensuring that it is a core part of delivery planning for services, such as with the cost-of-living work or BDCAN.</p> <p>Some key accomplishments include: The borough has recently had two faith organisations receive the Queens Award for voluntary Service, the highest award for VCSE and faith organisations in the UK. The Faith Forum held their inaugural Faith & Community awards in 2020, repeating this during the lockdown in 2021. Although the capacity has not been there to repeat the awards in 2022, there are still many awards that faith organisations are eligible and encouraged to apply for, such as the Women’s Empowerment awards. Al Madina have recently won “Most Innovative Service” at the 2022 Beacon Mosque Awards.</p>
<p>Responding to hate crime and prejudice</p>	<p>The council continues to work alongside the police and its other providers and statutory partners, to address the issue of hate crime and prejudice in the borough. We now have more faith organisations than ever before as members of the Tension Monitoring Group and local connections with leaders and this, alongside a programme of hate crime training delivered over the course of 2 years, means that leaders are more informed than ever about what constitutes a hate crime and when/where to report it. The links we have fostered with programmes like the MOPAC Shared Endeavor Fund, the governments Places of Worship (POW) Security Funding Scheme and focus on National Hate Crime Awareness week, have enabled organisations in the borough to highlight and share local hate crime work.</p>
<p>Faiths working together</p>	<p>Faith organisations have worked together in significantly new and exciting ways since the launch of the faith policy. Spurred on by the reaction to the pandemic, organisations are now exploring new relationships and some are working together in entirely new ways with organisations that they would never have worked with previously. Recognising the necessity to work together and share resources, expertise and funding, but also there is a deep desire to ensure that organisations are fit for purpose and can expand</p>

	<p>services to the wider community. Faith organisations have continued to promote interfaith dialogue, through the work of the faith forum, but also independently initiating faith-based social action. The council has supported this through a range of programmes, from specific pieces of work done to map and piece together the impact of CV-19 on faith organisations, to our continued support of Interfaith Week, flag raising events, religious celebrations and promoting the work of the SACRE (Standing Advisory Council for Religious Education).</p> <p>Other examples include Food Hub Partnerships between faith groups, like the one established between Al Madina and Kingsley Hall Church, which means that produce can be shared across different organisations. Al Madina have also sought to integrate themselves further to the wider community, by establishing a unique Community Hub, which will host council staff to work alongside volunteers and offer the best advice and guidance to residents in the heart of the community. As an organisation like Al Madina has traffic of over 15,000 residents per week, this is a unique opportunity to work with residents directly.</p>
<p>Accessing space and buildings</p>	<p>The council has actively encouraged the use of all available space in the borough for religious worship, however access to appropriate space remains a constant issue. As communities grow, so do their needs and many organisations are finding it difficult to manage and maintain enough space for their congregations. However, there has been some progress, with some new developments now actively considering faith needs in their planning stages (e.g. Hepworth Gardens) and officers now regularly being asked for input into planning applications referencing faith needs. Alongside this, preliminary engagement opportunities, such as the Thames/Riverside work by Faith Action, has provided a snapshot of the views of the communities to discover changing needs. These will provide important pieces of evidence, to inform and guide our decision making and future direction of travel with regards to policy making.</p> <p>Practically leased community halls, some schools and community hubs across the borough are hired by predominantly Christian and Muslim organisations for religious worship on a weekly basis.</p> <p>Through a concerted effort by the council to engage and establish relationships with faith communities, there is now an emphasis on ensuring that planners take on the views of faith communities when significant development is taking. Hepworth Gardens is an example of this, where the community need has significantly changed over the past 10 years, and the response of the community has driven the need for a dedicated faith/community space.</p> <p>Recently, the Warm Spaces grants have showcased the ability of faith groups to utilise space for purposes other than for what is committed to</p>

	<p>worship. Of the fifteen organisations that received funding, eight of them were faith spaces, which indicates that faith organisations have again recognised the need to continue to expand the offer of their spaces beyond the usual worship and community (realistically congregational) use.</p>
<p>Promoting diverse voices</p>	<p>Linked to the Councils ambition to listen more to the needs of the wider community, we continue to work closely with faith partners to not only promote and offer unique and diverse events, but to ensure we are meeting the needs of those communities in wider service delivery. This includes more community voices actively engaged in consultations, design of services/projects, involved in delivering programmes of work in partnership with the council and other statutory partners and given the confidence and skills to enable organisations to diversify their work.</p> <p>Stand out examples of events that are now run annually include the Eid@Eastbury festival, which was initially run so successfully in 2019 and will now (after an enforced hiatus during covid) form part of councils “Summer of Festivals” programming. Similarly, Eid prayers in the park are now run by more organisations across the borough, and other religious festivals. The cultural partnership now also includes members from the borough faith organisations, who have input into how cultural programming will continue to reflect the diverse communities in the borough. More than this though, through the council committing to working with faith organisations in a more intimate and trustworthy way, through building strategic relationships with faith leaders and utilising the skills and unique pathways provided to us through faith-based networks, we are now reaching more of the people who were before hidden or difficult to reach. This results in services being delivered in a more effective and agile way, which in turn ensures that we are engaging more effectively.</p>
<p>Safeguarding Vulnerable People</p>	<p>Faith organisations have a clear duty of care to those who use their spaces. Not only are they spaces where relationships of trust are built, but also spaces where activity takes place involving more at-risk or vulnerable individuals. We have taken steps to ensure that faith-based organisations have access to good quality training and guidance around safeguarding policy and practice. In 2021, the Council launched a new safeguarding template policy, which was communicated to all faith groups in the borough, alongside a new self-assessment process which can be done alongside the adoption of the new policy. Groups have been encouraged to seek advice and guidance from the council safeguarding team, and engagement has taken place to help groups to ensure best quality practice. The council has also delivered targeted work through community safety programmes, working alongside faith communities to focus on reducing serious youth violence and reducing the impact of gangs, crime and the reach of county lines in the borough.</p> <p>Faith groups have also continuously worked with the council to ensure that vulnerable people are supported. A key example of this is where groups</p>

	<p>have come together in a network to support Ukrainian refugees, working with each other to share resources, connect and support those refugees and refugee sponsors in their local area. Coordinated through triage in Community Solutions, Lifeline Church have also worked with the council to establish a refugee's support network.</p>
<p>Respecting Different Faiths</p>	<p>A key part of this theme was to ensure that the council connected, engaged with and supported the BD Faith Forum. Through the subsequent commencement of, and development, the capacity building contract, the council has shown that it is committed to supporting interfaith connectivity work in the borough. We have continued, where possible, to connect faith leaders and ensure that we celebrate together and encourage messages of support to be shared across different faiths during significant events/religious occasions. There are some landmark points that have been reached, throughout the pandemic faith organisations worked tirelessly to support their communities and this led to partnerships forming between faith organisations. Kingsley Hall and Al Madina Mosque for example, now have a fledgling working relationship, sharing intelligence and resources with each other where they may not have done so in the past.</p> <p>Residents survey data has also indicated a significant upturn in community cohesion in the borough. In answer to a question about people agreeing whether Barking & Dagenham is a place where people from different backgrounds get on well together, 82% of respondents agreed that it was (2021 residents survey). This is up from 73% in 2016 and indicates that there is an upward trend in this space, and further indicates growing respect and tolerance between residents in the borough.</p>

Looking back – What we have done - Cost of Living

- 3.2. Following the commencement of the delivery of the contract for 'Capacity Building Support for the Barking & Dagenham Faith Forum', circumstances mean the council is thinking differently about how we utilise resources across the organisation. The cost-of-living crisis looms large for many residents, and we are asking our service providers and partners to think differently with us as we look to support people through the hard times ahead.
- 3.3. With this in mind, we requested that Faith Action refocus resources and the aims of the Capacity Building Support contract, delivering objectives that reflect the support that faith communities will need more widely with the cost-of-living crisis. This has also required us to change the focus of the contract, with Faith Action working "alongside" the Faith Forum and our faith communities more broadly. The purpose of the council's current cost-of-living support offer is to help individuals through crisis points, via referral pathways provided by locality lead partner organisations, made up of partners from the voluntary, community and faith sector (VCFSE). These locality leads are embedded within the local communities and spread across six geographic areas within the borough, responsible for coordinating the support offer across their locality. Many organisations within the VCFSE, will be linked in through the locality leads, creating a support net that will hopefully resolve issues residents will face during the cost-of-living crisis.

- 3.4. This is a key time for faith communities, who often look to their leaders for guidance, who in turn will need a coordinated approach to standing up the many avenues of support that remain available locally. Whilst the council have promoted initiatives like the Warm Spaces Grants and various support offers that are available through BDMoney and other partner support, there is still a question mark over how we ensure that faith leaders have the knowledge they need to be able to signpost effectively and use their resources effectively.
- 3.5. We have worked with Faith Action to agree an approach that focuses on the following:
- **Support the council and its partners to reach faith leaders in the borough:** Support the council and the strategically placed locality leads, to reach, engage with and draw support from faith leadership in the borough, working alongside the council to develop relationships.
 - **Knowledge and expertise:** To use their knowledge and expertise, to ensure that all faith groups views are represented, allowing solutions to be developed to the Cost-of-Living Crisis that are suitable and sensitive to faith needs, across the breadth and depth of faith communities locally.
 - **Convening power:** Use the power of their existing relationships to bring together faith leadership, examining the impact of the cost-of-living crisis on faith communities and exploring solutions to combat it using the identified resources.
 - **Amplifying the support:** To amplify the support that faith organisations are already offering and helping them to do it better, utilising their networks to ensure that we are capturing the stories and anecdotal evidence.
- 3.6. Faith Action have already held the first of these events, a “Cost of Living – Faith Summit”, but have been asked to roadmap the next steps and provide support leading into some of the creative thinking mentioned above. It is proposed that the mechanism to encourage and deliver some of this “lateral” thinking, should be the formation of a “Closed Collective” made up of faith leaders from across a range of different faiths and backgrounds in the borough.
- 3.7. The “Closed Collective” concept is not a new one and derives from types of participatory grant making, where a collection of people have autonomous decision making over how and where to spend a pot of funding. In this case, the funding pot comes from the aforementioned ringfenced funding left over from a completed MHCLG programme and will mean there is £40k of funding for the collective of faith leaders to look at a range of options to address any perceived gaps.
- 3.8. Barking & Dagenham Faith Forum are an independent organisation and as such, although we can encourage and attempt to steer them towards specific objectives, the organisation governs their own activities and direction as any registered charity would. However, what is apparent is that we need to continue to support and encourage the Faith Forum to achieve our overall ambition for a fully engaged faith network in the borough. Although we are changing the nature of the Capacity Building Contract, we will continue to work alongside the Faith Forum to support them as required.
- 3.9. More examples of faith work across Barking & Dagenham are included in Appendix 2.

4. Issues and challenges

- 4.1. There are also significant challenges as well as opportunities within the faith sector.
- 4.2. We know that some of the tensions in our communities continue to be focused around some of our growing faith communities and places of religious worship. These include the accessible use of spaces and buildings for worship, perceived differences, and tensions

around issues such as planning, parking and noise, concerns centred around cultural and religious practises, safeguarding within our communities and addressing the wider context of health and health inequalities.

- 4.3. Faith organisations and the wider faith communities are not immune to experiencing tension and where people of faith tend to identify with their faith on a wider scale, with diaspora communities spread all over the globe, this means that events that happen internationally can have a profound effect on faith communities in the borough.
- 4.4. Over the course of the last few years, this has been demonstrated in many different ways, including; hate preachers (most recently, Sadvhi Ritambhura, Anjem Choudary), war (Palestinian/Israeli conflict), acts of terrorism or extremism (Christchurch massacre), violent disorder or protests in other countries (in Hong Kong, or the Sikh Farmers protest). These are just a few examples of events that can cause disturbances in our community.
- 4.5. Friction can exist in individual cases on subjects like planning, the promotion of equality and diversity, safeguarding, multi-faith worship space and other multi-faceted sensitive issues. Faith-based extremism and radicalisation remains a threat across the UK, with the emergence of far-right and conspiracy theorist ideologies also posing a new dynamic in terms of threats to children and vulnerable people in the borough. Incidents of conspiracy theorist linked ideological attacks have increased across the globe, as has the threat from the far-right, with recent attacks in Australia, the USA and closer to home with the Dover migrant centre attack.
- 4.6. Also, there is still the risk that individuals will use faith organisations as a platform to promote discrimination and examples of this have been seen in the borough e.g. street preachers propagating anti-LGBTQI+ rhetoric outside Barking station. Also, faith organisations are spaces where confidential and deeply personal conversations take place, with information shared on the basis of trust. There is inherent risk in this and although all faith organisations/leaders share a moral construct that ensures the retention of (in the vast majority of cases) overall privacy and confidentiality, there is a risk that this trust is extended to individuals who are not as scrupulous and could seek to exploit vulnerable individuals. Most faith organisations are aware of their duty to safeguard vulnerable people, and their links to national structures e.g. the Church of England, Catholic Church, or the Charity Commission, means they must retain appropriate safeguarding policies. However, the risk remains and there needs to be a concerted effort by the faith sector, statutory partners and the council to ensure the wellbeing of all individuals who visit the spaces.
- 4.7. Many organisations in the borough have addressed these issues head on choosing to lead where others may follow, and there are overwhelmingly positive examples. Al Madina for example, have delivered a programme of work informing frontline workers about the drivers of extremism and how to spot the signs of radicalisation. Afruca⁸ have worked with churches in the area in the past, to address complex issues in safeguarding children, including addressing cultural differences in approaches to physical chastisement. And Faith Associates⁹ worked closely with the boroughs Madrassahs to engage with them on safeguarding policy and practice.

⁸ [AFRUCASafeguarding Children](#)

⁹ [Faith Associates | Building Standards Across The Globe](#)

- 4.8. However, in some communities there is still an underlying suspicion of the work of statutory authorities, which, for example, contributes to overall health inequalities through the mistrust of information. Faith organisations have, for their part, sought to engage and advise the council of the best way forward in this space. In the past, we have relied heavily on our strategic relationships with faith leaders, for their advice and guidance e.g. with the low uptake of winter flu vaccine in Muslim children, where we worked closely with four different Muslim organisations to produce bespoke guidance for parents.
- 4.9. As previously mentioned, the changing nature of our faith communities is a significant factor in the ability of officers to continuously engage with specific contacts, with new organisations, leaders, management staff and volunteers shifting constantly across the faith organisations landscape.
- 4.10. While much has been achieved, there is much more to be done, with the emerging faith communities changing daily in the borough the need for wider faith engagement work will never diminish.
- 4.11. The issues and challenges require a collective effort, both on the part of the council and its various departments, but also in those engaged faith organisations and individuals, to inspire and encourage participation from a much wider pool within the sector.
- 4.12. This is something we cannot do alone, or from a position of paternalism and without a current collective engagement vehicle, we must focus on nurturing and supporting the development of existing relationships. We must also ensure that we are supporting new and innovative faith-based social action and provide the mechanisms and spaces to connect leaders and most of all, by working alongside and with faith communities rather than “doing to”.

5. Looking ahead and what next

- 5.1. Our aim is to continue to work with our changing faith communities in line with the approach and principles set out within Faith Builds Community Policy.
- 5.2. The following set out some suggested next steps that we propose the council, with faith organisations seek to take in further strengthening how we best work together:
 - Work with faith organisations to review and refresh the Faith Builds Community Policy – this should seek to further consolidate and strengthen its principles, extend its reach through more pledges to follow it, continue to demonstrate how its influence makes a significant and meaningful impact and update the shared actions and commitments that underpin it
 - Re-focus and prioritise how we work together on a small number of themes and facilitate wide engagement to inform the development of actions to deliver these. We propose emerging priorities to include:
 - Responding to the cost of living crisis – doing all we can together to provide help and support to residents through the crisis
 - Strengthening community safeguarding – keeping people safe and promoting their wellbeing and welfare in our communities

- Tackling health inequalities – explore opportunities to enable and empower faith communities to further contribute to improving health and tackling health inequalities
 - Place-shaping – explore the opportunities and practical approaches to strengthen faith engagement in respect of place-shaping and development of inclusive growth aims
- Explore at pace, the opportunity in line with the above priorities, to develop new and creative faith-led forms of engagement that encourage and facilitate wider reach and connection across faith communities
 - Ensure within the Council’s Corporate Plan, key supporting strategies and service plans, that working with faith communities is embedded as a priority and that all services are aware of, and able to, connect and engage with faith groups to understand and enhance their contribution to achieving priorities
 - Invite faith groups to give awareness training to LBBB staff to help promote inclusion
 - Progress the development of specific guidance and principles on how faith groups access and use appropriate spaces that recognises the differences between and within faith groups – doing so in collaboration with faith organisations and drawing on good practice and examples where these exist
 - Consider the opportunities that the above may present, for the development or commissioning of a vehicle to manage the coordination of engagement across faith organisations and ensure that they can continue to support residents within their communities and maintain regular and strong links with statutory partners – this should include considering the potential of including faith as part of the wider infrastructure support to the VCSE currently via BD_Collective

Overview and Scrutiny Committee are asked to consider the proposed next steps and in particular the proposed priority themes and also to suggest other opportunities and ideas on how we work together.

6. Consultation

This report is informed by ongoing engagement with Faith Communities and partners. More specifically, in developing our future approach to engagement and working with faith communities, we will seek to engage widely across faith leaders, organisations and communities and to facilitate a space where this can be coordinated.

7. Financial Implications

Implications completed by: No comments received

Budgets mentioned have been used from existing ringfenced funding.

8. Legal Implications

Implications completed by: Dr Paul Field Principal Governance & Standards Solicitor

- 8.1. In carrying out the Council's functions it must pay due regard to its Public-Sector Equality Duty (PSED), as set out in Section 149 of the Equalities Act 2010. The PSED provides that a public authority must, in the exercise of its functions, have due regard to the need to: (a) eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under the Act; (b) advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it; (c) foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.
- 8.2. The policies, strategies, measures, and activities outlined in this report positively advance the Council's equality obligations as described above.

9. Other Implications

None

- 9.1. **Risk Management** - None
- 9.2. **Contractual Issues** - None
- 9.3. **Staffing Issues** - None
- 9.4. **Corporate Policy and Equality Impact** – As part of the original launch of the Faith Builds Community Policy, an EIA was completed that explained the Equality Impact alongside a policies and strategies table. Copies of these have been included with this report.
- 9.5. **Safeguarding Adults and Children** – Faith organisations have a duty to ensure that all users, and in particular vulnerable users are safeguarded against potential harm. Those that are charities will need to ensure that they adhere to the regulations set out by the charity commission, and we will work closely with all organisations to ensure they are up to date with their safeguarding policies and practice.
- 9.6. **Health Issues** –

The role that faith communities have to play in preserving public health and wellbeing has grown in significance over the past few years. Now more than ever, the wealth and depth of knowledge held by faith leaders and faith institutions is useful in determining a community approach to solving issues including: health inequalities, public health programming placement, vaccine hesitancy and overall access to health and wellbeing support. Many faith organisations are now working proactively in this space, connecting in with local initiatives and health drives, and delivering alongside healthcare professionals. The Public Health team at the council have also worked closely with several faith organisations, using their reach to amplify projects and commissioning several of them to run health projects, including the latest covid vaccine uptake work.
- 9.7. **Crime and Disorder Issues** - None
- 9.8. **Property / Asset Issues** - None

Public Background Papers Used in the Preparation of the Report:

List of appendices:

- Appendix 1. Best Practice – Examples in other spaces
- Appendix 2. Other Faith Based Work – In Barking & Dagenham
- Appendix 3. Faith Builds Community Policy – [Information Leaflet](#)
- Appendix 4. Faith Builds Community Policy – Equalities Impact Assessment
- Appendix 5. Faith Builds Community Policy – Policies and Strategies Table
- Appendix 6. Census Data Pack

The latest Census data is also available here: [How life has changed in Barking and Dagenham: Census 2021 \(ons.gov.uk\)](#)

<https://lbbd.sharepoint.com/sites/inttp/MyJob/Pages/Staff-Information.aspx>