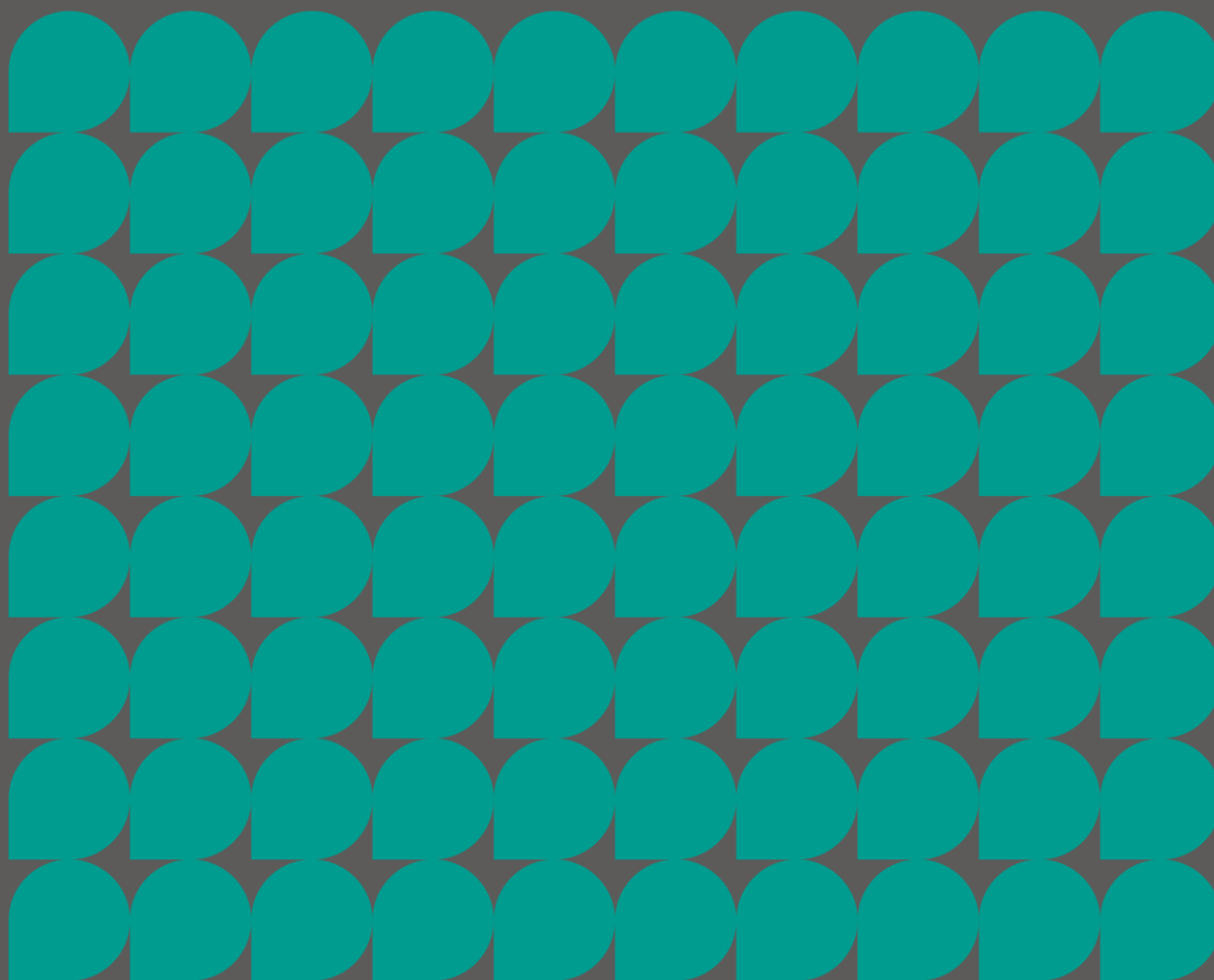


**FAITH &  
BELIEF  
ADVISORY  
PANEL**

**DOING THINGS DIFFERENTLY  
FOR GREATER MANCHESTER**

# Annual Report 2023



# 1. Message from the Co-Chairs

The Greater Manchester Faith & Belief Advisory Panel, launched in March 2021, has continued to develop in the way we operate, the way we engage with other groups and the way we contribute to the Greater Manchester Strategy.

We were both re-elected as Co-Chairs by our colleagues on the Panel and have ensured, along with our Facilitator, Chris Hart of Pulse Regeneration, that we continue to work effectively to achieve the Panel's aims and objectives. These include representing the voice of Faith and Belief communities at a Greater Manchester level, in the work of Greater Manchester Combined Authority and within the Greater Manchester Strategy.

This includes ensuring that the concerns and key issues for people of faith and their communities are communicated to Greater Manchester leaders and structures and on a local borough level too. We have liaised and met with GMCA officers and the VCSE Leadership Group to ensure that the contribution of faith communities is also recognised and that our voice is heard at all levels.

Along with our bimonthly meetings, some Panel members are involved in the Action Networks, the Tackling Inequalities Board and the Equality Panel Chairs meetings, among others. There are regular reports at our meetings on the work of these Action Networks and groups.

It has been another exciting year and we believe we have made important steps in realising the vision for the Panel. The work of Panel members and their support in a variety of areas demonstrates the importance of the Faith & Belief Advisory Panel.

We have had our first in-person Panel meeting in January this year (all others have been online) and are strengthening our engagement with the Mayor of Greater Manchester, Andy Burnham, who will also be joining a Panel meeting in person.

Our faith communities and members continue to play such a significant role in the life of our city region and we commit to develop the connections further and to ensure a true partnership in the way we live, work and share together.

**Co-Chairs, Rabbi Warren Elf MBE and Dr Jill Brennan**

## 2. About the Panel

The Faith and Belief Advisory Panel acts as a 'network of networks' bringing together representatives from the 10 Greater Manchester borough Interfaith bodies with key individuals from single and mixed faith networks. The Panel currently has 42 members representing 33 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 The Important Work of the Panel**

The Panel meets bimonthly and has considered a range of important topics including Tackling Poverty and the Cost of Living crisis in Greater Manchester; Contribution of the Faith and Belief sector to the Greater Manchester Mental Wellbeing Offer; and Role of Faith and Belief Places in Developing Age-Friendly Communities.

The Panel Co-Chairs have continued to be very active throughout the last year attending the Tackling Inequalities Board and the Equality Panel Chairs meetings. Co-Chair Warren Elf was also part of a Delegation of Greater Manchester Faith and Civic Leaders to meet with Pope Francis in Rome to discuss tackling climate change.

The Panel has contributed to key events including the GM Resilience Forum Conference; Our Faith, Our Planet Conference; Power of Staff Network Conference; and activities and promotions during Interfaith Week in November.

### **3.2 The Role and Contribution of Faith and Belief**

A Panel subgroup progressed actions about the contribution Faith and Belief provides to the Greater Manchester Strategy. This included developing a joint Action Plan with GM VCSE Leadership Group to increase recognition and support delivery of the VCSE Accord. The subgroup has developed a Faith and Belief Contribution Statement which received GMCA (Mayor of Greater Manchester and Greater Manchester Portfolio Holders) Endorsement.

### **3.3 Local Interfaith Networks Research**

Funding has been secured through the VCSE Accord Ecosystem for research into developing Interfaith Networks in the Greater Manchester boroughs. The Panel believes this can have a significant impact locally. Research has included engaging with the GM Local Infrastructure Organisations (LIOs) for the 10 boroughs to undertake a baseline exercise and discussions with Panel Interfaith Representatives to identify gaps, opportunities, and actions for future investment and support.

### 3.4 Action Networks/ Summit Event

The Panel continued to support priorities within the Greater Manchester Strategy and VCSE Accord through the Panel’s work in the Action Networks and Taskforces.

These include the Greater Manchester Food Security Action Network (GMFSAN); GM Homeless Action Network (GMHAN); GM Climate Interfaith Action Network; Real Living Wage City-Region; GM VCSE Accord Delivery Group; Preventing Hate Crime in GM; and GM Digital Inclusion Taskforce.

Panel members have increasingly been engaged in these networks culminating in a Summit Event “Connecting our Social Justice and Climate Justice Missions Across GM” in June which brought all of the Action Networks together to join up their areas of work. The Summit included conversations about connecting climate action, a keynote speech from the Mayor of Greater Manchester, Andy Burnham, and a call to action to build a GM network of networks with support from the Mayor.



Panel member Rev. Ian Rutherford introducing Andy Burnham on stage



Panel member, and member of Faith Network for Manchester, Sukhbir Singh, taking part in a Live Theatre Performance with GM Jokers

### 3.4 Engaging with Women of Faith & Belief

Co-Chair Jill Brennan held a first meeting to establish a Women of Faith & Belief Group for the Panel. This will help promote different ways of working and improve the gender balance on the Panel. The first meeting enabled experiences to be

shared and explored developing a formal connection, including the opportunities and barriers. The group will reach out to additional people who would like to be involved and are keen to keep cross gender dialogue and to use this as a space to empower themselves to have those conversations and find ways of having their voices heard.

### **3.5 Supporting the GM SACREs**

The Panel has established joint meetings with the Greater Manchester Standing Advisory Council on Religious Education (SACRE's) Chairs and Coordinators which take place 6 monthly. Each of the 10 GM boroughs has a SACRE which brings together members of local faith communities, teachers, and the local authority to decide on what is appropriate for pupils to learn in religious education.

The meetings enable best practice to be shared and support to be provided. This includes the Panel helping to develop a diverse faith representation on the SACREs. Key actions have included developing an outreach offer into schools to develop understanding about different faiths and beliefs, and how to develop quality and consistency across the SACRE's.

#### **Second Year Impacts**

Increased recognition of the role and contribution of Faith and Belief in Greater Manchester

Integration of Faith and Belief into the VCSE sector and greater representation of the voice of Faith and Belief in our communities

Increased Faith and Belief engagement in the Action Networks and helping to connect Social Justice and Climate Justice Missions

Increased involvement and voice of Women of Faith & Belief

Increased connections with other GM Equality Panels

## 4. Planning for the Year Ahead

The Panel now has a comprehensive Action Plan 2023 set against the Panel's aims. Some of the key action areas for the next year are provided below.

### 4.1 Optimising the Role and Contribution of Faith & Belief

GMCA Endorsement of the Faith & Belief Sector Contribution Statement recognises the active contribution provided by the Panel to some of the city-regions most pressing issues. These include tackling food poverty, homelessness, and climate change. The Panel is able to showcase the positive impact of collaboration between public services and Faith and Belief organisations, and how this can deliver for the most disadvantaged in our communities. The Statement also reinforces the message that Faith and Belief provides more than just services. The spiritual comfort and hope that has helped Greater Manchester residents and communities through their toughest times, and their happiest times, must also be recognised and valued.

Over the next year the Statement will be used to develop a stronger partnership with Faith and Belief in a range of work areas and places. This will include an in person Panel meeting with the Mayor of Greater Manchester, Andy Burnham, and other faith and civic leaders which will focus on optimising the contribution of Faith and Belief.

### 4.2 Developing Support for Interfaith Networks in the GM Boroughs

The Faith & Belief Sector Contribution Statement will especially support conversations with the leaders in the 10 Greater Manchester boroughs about future support and investment in local Interfaith Networks. Panel Interfaith Representatives will be involved in these local conversations about how models of good practice can be replicated and infrastructure developed where there are gaps.

An ambition of the Panel is to develop a Faith Covenant which will provide a joint commitment between faith communities and local authorities to a set of principles

that guide engagement to promote open, practical working on all levels. This would commit the borough Councils to welcoming the involvement of faith groups in the delivery of services and social action on an equal basis with other groups, and faith based organisations committing to working actively with the Councils in the design and delivery of public services.

### **4.3 Engaging Across Equality Panels**

The Panel is conscious about the importance of intersectionality. People of Faith and Belief can also have other protected characteristics, e.g. disability; race; age; or sexual orientation. The Panel is keen to engage with other Greater Manchester Equality Panels on key issues of mutual concern, so these can be joined up and addressed together.

Priorities for the coming year will include actions to increase engagement with young people through the Youth Combined Authority, and the LGBTQ+ Equality Panel to discuss sexual orientation and religion. The Panel is also committed to exploring the findings of the Big Disability Survey and how faith communities can implement these.

### **4.4 Supporting Research and Development**

The Panel will continue to support important research and development projects which enhance the role and contribution Faith and Belief in Greater Manchester and the impact the Panel can have. This will include supporting the University of Manchester Impact Accelerator research about how religious spaces can support older people in urban neighbourhoods.

## **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)