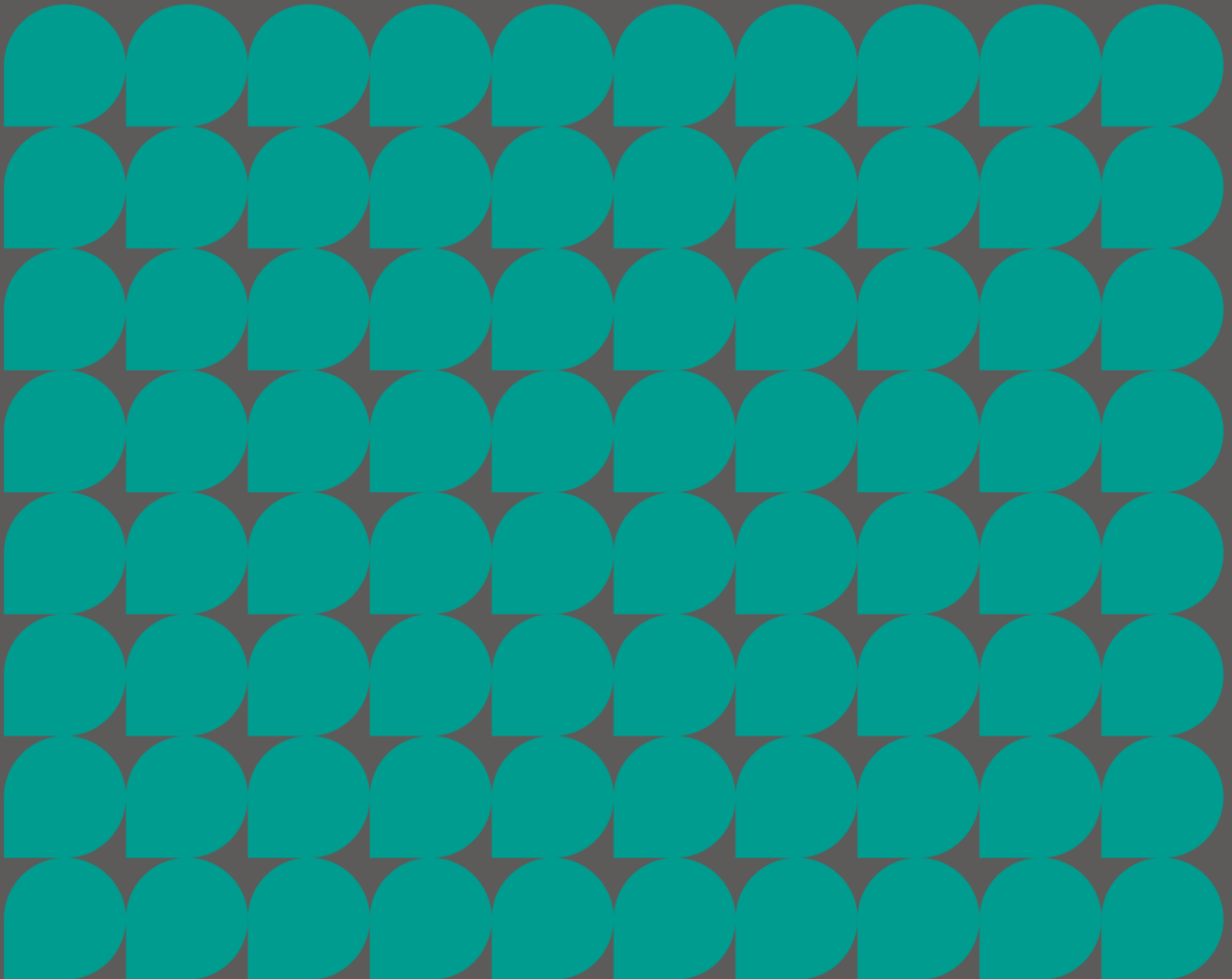


**FAITH &  
BELIEF  
ADVISORY  
PANEL**

**DOING THINGS DIFFERENTLY  
FOR GREATER MANCHESTER**

# Faith and Belief Advisory Panel Annual Report 2024



# 1. Message from the Co-Chairs

The Greater Manchester Faith & Belief Advisory Panel, launched in March 2021, has had a busy and productive year, engaging with other Greater Manchester Equality Panels and groups, and developing the way we contribute to the Greater Manchester Strategy (GMS).

We were both re-elected for our third year as Co-Chairs by our colleagues on the Panel and have continued to work together, along with our Facilitator, Chris Hart of Pulse Regeneration, and Adrian Bates of Greater Manchester Combined Authority (GMCA), ensuring that we have continued 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 GMCA and within the GMS.

As a Panel we have ensured that the concerns and key issues for people of faith and belief and their communities are communicated to Greater Manchester leaders and structures and at 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. As a result, it has been re-named the VCFSE Leadership Group to acknowledge the vital contribution of communities of Faith and Belief in this sector.

Along with our bimonthly meetings, we and other Panel members have continued to be 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 can be proud of our achievements as a Panel. The work of Panel members and their support in a variety of areas demonstrates the importance of the Faith & Belief Advisory Panel.

The acceptance and adoption of a Faith, Belief and Interfaith Covenant by GMCA has been one success; the proposal for a Model of a Good Local Interfaith Network is another. There is still work to do on the delivery of the Covenant and the development of the local model and we are keen to continue this work together.

The adoption of a Faith and Belief Advisory Panel Ending Conversion Therapy Pledge, in liaison with the LGBTQ+ Panel has been another positive development this year.

We have had more in-person Panel meetings this year (most have been online) and continue to strengthen our engagement with the Mayor of Greater Manchester, Andy Burnham, who occasionally joins a Panel meeting in person.

Our faith and belief 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.

We are indebted to the hard work of many Panel members and other members of our faith and belief communities and we know that this important work will be in good hands in the coming year as we hand over to the new co-chairs, Revd Ian Rutherford and Manjari Patel.

It has been a pleasure and privilege to help ensure that this Panel has started well and developed into a significant player for Greater Manchester. There is still much to do.

**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 45 members representing 40 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 Faith & Belief Contribution Statement

The Faith and Belief in Greater Manchester contribution statement was developed by the Panel to affirm the significant role of Faith and Belief in society and the support faith organisations provide, often to the most disadvantaged, both in terms of spiritual wellbeing and practical services. The statement was signed by the Panel Co-Chairs and Mayor of Greater Manchester, Andy Burnham, in July 2023.

### 3.2 Faith, Belief and Interfaith Covenant

The Panel has developed a Faith, Belief and Interfaith Covenant which builds on the Contribution statement by setting out how this can be maximised through

working in partnership, empowered through a joint commitment between Faith and Belief communities and Greater Manchester Combined Authority (GMCA) to a set of principles and commitments that guide engagement, collaboration and delivery.

### **3.3 Local Interfaith Networks**

The Panel undertook research into Greater Manchester local interfaith networks as part of a GM VCSE Accord Ecosystem Investment Fund project supported by Voluntary Sector North West. This included mapping existing networks and support, and engagement with a wide range of local stakeholders including Local Infrastructure Organisations (LIOs), Panel Interfaith Representatives, and GM borough local authority officers. The research identified gaps and included development of a Model of a Good Local Interfaith Network which can be used to help discussions locally, including developing and forming new interfaith networks.

### **3.4 Action Networks and GMNetworksConnect**

The Panel continued to support priorities within the Greater Manchester Strategy and GM 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; GM Digital Inclusion Taskforce, and support for the GM Standing Advisory Councils on Religious Education (SACREs).

Panel members have increased their engagement and contribution to these networks, including a follow up event to the Connecting our Social Justice and Climate Justice Missions Across GM Summit and creation of GMNetworksConnect which will bring all of the networks together through a digital platform and Community of Practice to increase impact.

### **3.4 GM Women of Faith and Belief Group**

The GM Women of Faith & Belief Group was established to help promote different ways of working and improve gender balance on the Panel. The Group has provided

an opportunity to come together, discuss barriers, increase the voice of women in male structures, and develop partnerships. The Group now provides a mechanism for engagement in relevant issues, for example joint working with the Women and Girls Equality Panel.

### 3.5 Religious Spaces Supporting Older People

The Panel has collaborated with the University of Manchester to support an 18-month study into how faith spaces in Greater Manchester support different groups of older people, mapping out their existing and potential contributions to the World Health Organization's framework of Age-Friendly Cities and Communities. The **report** recommends more strategic involvement of faith-based groups in public health and age-friendly agendas and longer term funding is now being sought.

#### 2023/24 Impacts

Embedding and further increasing the recognition of the role and contribution of Faith and Belief in Greater Manchester

Development of shared principles/ commitments for partnership working between GMCA and Faith and Belief communities

Increased Faith and Belief engagement in the Action Networks and increased impact through collaboration

Increased involvement and voice of Women of Faith & Belief

Increased connections with the other GM Equality Panels

## 4. Planning for the Year Ahead

The Panel has developed a comprehensive Action Plan 2024/25 set against the Panel's aims. The overall strategic direction for the Panel is to stay focused and go

deeper with its existing actions, and to further develop its partnerships and representation and support for Action Networks, Task Forces and Local Interfaith Networks. Some of the key action areas for the next year are provided below.

## **4.1 Faith, Belief & Interfaith Covenant Delivery Plan**

The Covenant was approved by GMCA in March 2024 and will enable mutually beneficial relationships to thrive, achieving our shared ambitions for Greater Manchester. Whilst in the first instance the Covenant will be adopted by GMCA, it is envisaged that Councils and local Faith, Belief and Interfaith organisations will use the Covenant to 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 could achieve. The next year will see the development and implementation of a Covenant Delivery Plan and formation of a Working Group of local authority officers to foster joint working to help ensure the Covenant is aligned with GM borough Council's local strategies.

## **4.2 Inclusion of the 'F' in VCFSE**

The Panel has been working jointly with representatives of the GM VCSE Leadership Group including progressing a 9 point Action Plan to ensure integration with the GM VCSE Accord and greater recognition of the role and contribution that faith and belief makes as part of the wider voluntary sector. An update has been presented to the GM VCSE Leadership Group which has now officially included the 'F' within its acronym and has invited one of our new Panel Co-Chairs, Revd Ian Rutherford, as an additional Panel representative onto the Group. The next year will see progress in fully engaging with the Panel and faith and belief communities within what is now known as the GM VCFSE Accord to strengthen the role of faith and belief within this.

## **4.3 Developing Local Interfaith Networks**

As part of developing the Covenant, the Panel recognises that Local Interfaith Networks in the GM boroughs is where a great deal of impact can be made especially in terms of social cohesion and the Panel would like to see a consistent

model of well resourced networks developed across all 10 boroughs. A key priority will be to use the Covenant commitments and Delivery Plan as a 'driver' to support the development and investment into these networks with the GM boroughs to help maximise their local impact.

## **4.4 GMNetworksConnect and Action Networks**

The Panel will continue to increase its involvement and contribution, and of those within Panel member's faith and belief networks, in the Action Networks and Task Forces. The GMNetworksConnect digital platform and a Community of Practice will be progressed following the approval of its branding, the extension of its connections, and obtaining a mayoral commitment to provide resources.

A key area to explore over the next year will be the Panel's role in supporting health and wellbeing and helping all people in our communities to Live Well.

## **4.5 Engaging Across Equality Panels**

The Panel will continue its partnership working with the other Greater Manchester Equality Panels, including with the LGBTQ+ Equality Panel following development and approval by the Panel of a Faith and Belief Advisory Panel, Ending Conversion Therapy Pledge. The Panel will use this over the next year as the basis for developing longer term relationships and exploring wider issues and attitudes between our two communities.

The Panel will continue to develop its relationships with the other Equality Panels including the Youth Combined Authority to take forward youth engagement and interfaith working, and with the Disabled Peoples Panel to consider issues and priorities relating to disabled people.

## **4.5 Good Employment Week**

The Panel will support **Good Employment Week** in October as part of the Greater Manchester **Good Employment Charter** which aims to raise employment standards. The Panel will organise an event between faith leaders and employers to



explore issues in employing people of faith and belief, share their experiences, and discuss good practice.

The aim will be for the Panel to identify its top three issues for sharing at a wider Greater Manchester event planned for the end of the week with businesses and the other Equality Panels, which can then be considered as part of the Good Employment Charter.

## 4.6 Supporting Research and Development

The University of Manchester will be looking to build on the learning from the Religious Places Supporting Older People research and the panel will continue to work in partnership to embed the research recommendations.

# 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)