

## **Faith Communities Forum**

**12:00 – 13:00pm, Monday 29<sup>th</sup> September 2025 – MS Teams**

### **Attendance**

<b>Name - Organisation</b>
Jane Hutt - Chair; Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice, Trefnydd and Chief Whip
Representatives from:
Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints
Cytun
Christian Faith Evangelical Alliance Wales
Bahá'í Council for Wales
South Wales Jewish Council
Muslim Council of Wales
Free Church Council of Wales
Sikh Council of Wales
Interfaith Council for Wales
Church in Wales
Church in Wales
Ahmadiyya Muslim Association
Catholic Church in England and Wales
Bahá'í Council for Wales
WG (Equality and Human Rights)
WG (Equality and Human Rights)
WG (Race, Faith and Belief and Gypsy and Roma and Traveller Policy Team)
WG (LGBTQ+ Policy Team)
WG (ArWAP Policy Team)
WG (Early Years, Childcare and Play Policy Team)
WG (Cohesive Communities Policy Team)
WG (Strategic Equality and Mainstreaming)
WG (Cabinet Secretary Private Office)

Apologies:

- Hindu Council of Wales
- Wales Humanists

## Meeting notes

### Discussion

#### **1. Welcome and Introductions**

The Chair, Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice, Trefnydd and Chief Whip, welcomed all attendees.

The Chair acknowledged the increasing and polarized public views on contentious issues such as immigration and asylum which is dividing communities and iterated the importance of the Forum as a trusted space for open, and respectful dialogue.

A special welcome was given to new members of the Forum, representing the Church in Wales, the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community, and the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints.

The Chair noted the agenda item on Education and RVE Curriculum was postponed to the next meeting.

Attendees were asked to review the minutes and action log from the previous meeting; no corrections or outstanding actions were reported.

#### **2. Social Cohesion: Welsh Government Policy and Actions**

Welsh Government (WG) representatives provided an update on the rise in anti-migrant rhetoric over the summer, including protests in Newtown, Mold, and outside some hotels used for migrant accommodation. WG also highlighted that the Welsh national flag, Union Jack and England flag was sometimes being used in conjunction with the anti-migrant narratives.

Officials noted that counter-protests often outnumbered the original protests, but tensions remain high. Hate crime statistics are expected to show an increase, particularly in North Wales.

The Chair noted that WG has increased funding for the Community Cohesion Programme and will relaunch the Hate Hurts Wales campaign in October.

WG officials noted that training is being developed for third-sector organisations and local authorities to help navigate and counteract online hate and misinformation. Attendees were encouraged to share details of charities that could be considered for

inclusion in the training rollout.

A media literacy awareness and training package is being developed to help Welsh adults to understand when information may not be as it seems, and to understand misinformation and disinformation.

The Chair and WG invited reflections from Forum members on what is happening in their communities and what support would be most helpful.

### **Item three: Think-Group on Far-Right Ideology**

A representative from the Muslim Council of Wales (MCW), provided an update on a new working group of academics and civil society leaders to research far-right groups and share good practice for counteracting messages of division.

The group aims to meet quarterly and will focus on sharing intelligence about protest activity, how the far-right adapts and changes, and far-right narratives.

Faith group involvement is considered vital.

Members interested in participating were invited to contact MCW who will share the terms of reference for the group with them.

The Welsh Government reaffirmed its commitment to tackling all forms of extremism, including far-right ideology.

### **Discussion and Questions Following Agenda Items 2 & 3**

The Chair invited reflections and questions from the Forum members. The following points were raised:

- **Training on Hate Speech and Misinformation**

A member asked how to access the training discussed during agenda item 2. WG official confirmed that the delivery mechanism is still under consideration but invited members to send details of any organisations that may be interested in learning more about the training.

- **Content and Consultation on Training**

A member asked whether faith communities had been consulted on the content of the training and suggested that faith communities could contribute valuable examples and insights to help develop the training, not just focus on what is wrong but also on what can be done to address issues.

***Action: Welsh Government Cohesive Communities officials to clarify delivery mechanism for hate speech/misinformation training for third-sector organisations and local authorities, and share with Forum members when confirmed.***

***Action: Welsh Government Cohesive Communities officials to consult faith communities on training content.***

***Action: Forum members to provide Welsh Government Cohesive Communities officials with charity/ organisation suggestions for training rollout.***

- Broader Training and Support

The Chair highlighted other ongoing training programmes, such as anti-racist professional learning for schools and local authority staff, and training on the needs of Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller communities.

The Chair emphasised the importance of bringing these strands together and noted the challenges faced by organisations like the Welsh Refugee Council.

- Co-option of Christian Symbols by Far-Right Groups

A member raised deep concerns about the increasing co-option of Christian symbols and language by far-right ideology to form part of their national identity and anti-migrant rhetoric. The member highlighted a recent open letter published on the front page of The Times from senior clergy and church leaders across the UK, highlighting the confusion and challenges this creates for church leaders on the ground.

#### Chair's Response and Next Steps

The Chair agreed that faith communities should be consulted on the hate speech and misinformation training content and suggested following up offline to ensure their input is included.

The Chair also noted the relevance of these points to the Think-Group on Far-Right Ideology, especially regarding the co-option of Christian symbols.

The Chair encouraged continued engagement and sharing of perspectives, and reiterated the importance of a rounded, collaborative approach.

#### **Item four: LGBTQ+ Action Plan – Action 32: Supporting Dialogue**

WG official introduced the LGBTQ+ Action Plan, one action of which is to support an open dialogue between faith groups and LGBTQ+ people (action 32).

The plan recognises the intersecting needs and challenges faced by individuals with multiple protected characteristics.

The LGBTQ+ Action Plan is intended to be used alongside other Welsh Government initiatives (for example the Anti-racist Wales Action Plan, Framework for Action on Disability, and the Gender Equality Plan).

Faith communities were invited and encouraged to engage further with the LGBTQ+ Action Plan Team to foster mutual understanding and inclusion.

***Action: WG Secretariat to email a link to the LGBTQ+ Action plan to Forum members.***

#### **Item five: New Equality and Inclusion Grant Scheme**

WG officials presented the new grant programme, which supports innovative approaches to equality and inclusion.

The scheme includes two strands: innovation (for larger projects) and awareness/engagement (for smaller or grassroots initiatives).

Faith groups are eligible to apply for projects tackling inequality and promoting inclusion, but not for the promotion of religious activity.

The application window is open until 16 November 2025.

The scheme aims to align funding with policy priorities, improve accessibility and transparency, and ensure a wide range of organisations can use their experience and creativity to support the Welsh Government's National Equality Objectives.

***Action: WG Secretariat to circulate equality and inclusion grant scheme information and power point presentation to forum members by end of w/c 29/09/25.***

#### **Item six: Update to Faith Communities Forum Terms of Reference**

WG officials outlined the proposed changes to the Forum's terms of reference, including:

- Formalising Wales Humanists as associate members of the Forum.
- Adding two new faith communities to the Forum (Church of Jesus Christ of

Latter-Day Saints, Ahmadiyya Muslim Community), whose applications to join have been approved by the Chair.

- Rationalising seat allocation so each organisation has one seat, to provide equity across all organisations. There may be times when members want a colleague to attend alongside them which is permissible.
- Clarifying that applications to join can be made directly to the Chair.
- Members will continue to receive full minutes, it is proposed that only summarised minutes will be published online (and will not include individual attendee's names) to protect safety and encourage open discussion.
- Expanding expectations of conduct and introducing a complaints procedure.

Members were reminded that they were emailed the draft terms of reference on 25/09/25, and a copy was attached to the calendar invite.

Members were invited to provide any feedback by 13 October 2025, after which the finalised terms of reference will be adopted.

***Action: Faith Forum Members to provide feedback to secretariat on draft Terms of Reference by 13<sup>th</sup> October.***

### **Item seven: Any Other Business**

#### **Consultation on Childcare Registration**

WG provided an update on the public consultation regarding changes to childcare registration that was introduced at the last meeting.

The first part of the consultation considers changes proposed to circumstances where childcare providers are not required to register with Care Inspectorate Wales as a childminder or day care provider

The second part of the consultation proposes the development of a Voluntary Approval Scheme for Childcare, Playwork and Activity providers who are exempt from CIW registration.

The changes being consulted on may impact faith-based organisations that provide childcare, especially regarding changes to exemptions and new thresholds for registration.

Faith communities were encouraged to respond to the consultation before it closes on 3 November 2025 to ensure that any impact on faith communities who undertake activities, play or day care of children can be considered.

***Action: WG Secretariat to circulate a link to the consultation on proposed changes to childcare registration to forum members by end of w/c 29/09/25.***

**Action: Forum members to cascade the link for the consultation on proposed changes to childcare registration to their own faith organisations and networks.**

#### Interfaith Week Plans

Announcement of events for Interfaith Week in November, including an annual celebration on 20 November and choir workshops.

All communities are encouraged to participate and share positive initiatives.

Interfaith Week is seen as an opportunity to celebrate diversity, foster mutual understanding, and showcase the contributions of faith and belief communities.

**Action: Forum members liaise with Interfaith Council for Wales to promote and participate in Interfaith Week events.**

#### Next Meeting

The next meeting of the Faith Communities Forum will be held in February/March 2026. A date will be circulated in due course.

### Summary of Actions

	Action Item	Owner	Deadline / Status
1	Provide feedback on draft Terms of Reference	Faith Forum Members	By 13 October 2025
2	Circulate childcare registration consultation info	WG Secretariat	w/c 29/09/25
3	Cascade childcare consultation to faith organisations	Faith Forum Members	Consultation closes 3 November 2025
4	Share Equalities and Inclusion Grant Scheme info (slides + link)	WG Secretariat	w/c 29/09/25
5	Promote and participate in Interfaith Week events	Faith Forum Members	Ongoing
6	Clarify delivery mechanism for hate speech/misinformation training for third-sector organisations and local authorities	Welsh Government Cohesive Communities	When decided
7	Send to WG charity/organisation suggestions for hate speech/misinformation training rollout	Faith Forum Members	Ongoing
8	Consult faith communities on hate speech/misinformation training content	Welsh Government	Pending

		Cohesive Communities	
9	Share LGBTQ+ Action Plan link with Forum members	WG Secretariat	w/c 29/09/25