

Church **Urban Fund**

# Believing

in local action

Successful partnership working between  
the faith sector and local infrastructure organisations

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# Believing in local action

Rt Hon. Hazel Blears MP

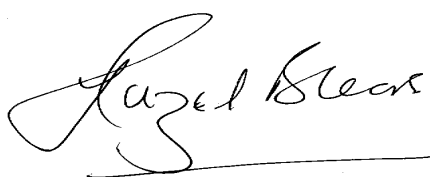
The world's major religions all share a core belief in the value of social action. For as long as there have been different faiths in Britain, there have been organisations providing services, support and practical help to their communities. Today, these range from major international aid organisations, to social enterprises, to charities, to self-help groups.

The Government recognises and welcomes the contributions made by people motivated by their different faiths to the well-being of their communities and to wider society. Faith-based service providers are an important part of the fabric of local life.

This report, *Believing In Local Action*, is an important contribution to the developing relationships between faith-based organisations and local government and agencies. It shows what can be achieved through strong partnerships. It highlights the benefits of good relations across the third sector, including local Councils for Voluntary Service, as it grows in size and importance.

I am keen for local faith groups to develop their social activism, and to work together to provide shared solutions. The Government's inter faith strategy, *Face-to-Face and Side-by-Side: A framework for partnership in our multi faith society*, published alongside this document makes this clear. Inter faith work must be about action as well as dialogue and discussion.

I am grateful to the Church Urban Fund (CUF) and to the National Association for Voluntary and Community Action (NAVCA) for working with my department Communities and Local Government (CLG) to produce this report, which I wholeheartedly recommend to every faith group as well as to policy-makers and local service providers.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Hazel Blears". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal line underneath.

The Rt Hon. Hazel Blears MP  
Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government

## 1. Synopsis

This study aims to identify the benefits of successful partnership working between third sector local infrastructure organisations (LIOs) and local faith communities. It also offers some good practice points, though with the caveat that local circumstances vary and that all good practice advice needs to be adapted to suit these circumstances.

The study identifies three main areas of activity which are necessary for the promotion of partnership working between faith organisations and local infrastructure bodies:

- Activities which build social capital<sup>1</sup> and in particular bridging capital<sup>2</sup> create ways in which faith organisations at grass roots level can be supported to develop their social action programmes in order to bring individuals, groups and communities together.
- Building practical networks and relationships which support those activities and create a cooperative environment of mutual support.
- Supporting and sustaining an infrastructure which enables voluntary, community and faith organisations to work together to shape and influence partnerships with others, and results in beneficial outcomes for communities and neighbourhoods.

The study provides and analyses seven good practice examples from locations across England and recommends seven actions for faith organisations and LIOs to explore further:

- Use of mapping and faith audits
- Finding opportunities for contact and exchanges
- Development of partnerships based on common objectives and activities
- Reciprocal sharing of resources
- Training and learning events including “faith awareness”
- Development of networks and infrastructure organisations
- Multi faceted feedback and communications systems

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1 Social capital consists of the networks, norms, relationships, values and informal sanctions that shape the quantity and cooperative quality of a society’s interactions (<http://www.idea.gov.uk/idk/core/page.do?pageId=1347434>)

2 Bridging capital has been defined as “formed from the connections between people who have less in common, but may have overlapping interests, for example, between neighbours, colleagues or between different groups within a community” (Gilchrist, 2004)

## 2. Background

The launch of “A New Commitment to Neighbourhood Renewal” (SEU, 2001) announced a strategy across government to bring agencies and voluntary and community organisations (including faith bodies) together to tackle social exclusion. The Voluntary and Community Sector Cross Cutting Review identified the need for a “radical programme of public service investment and reform” through the development of a “new partnership” (HM Treasury, 2002) and to build a bridge between communities and the state.

Government policies and programmes have placed increasing importance on partnership working at local level in order to secure better outcomes for local communities. Partnerships support better delivery not only in the specific area of local and neighbourhood services, but also in securing broader strategic aims such as sustainability and cohesion. At both a UK and EU level partnerships are identified as providing a key means of promoting social inclusion<sup>3</sup>. The above reports identify the need to meet the challenge in engaging the diversity of the wider third sector. Substantial government programmes implemented through the Community Development Foundation and ChangeUp, and now Capacitybuilders and Futurebuilders provide a policy context to this study and have resulted in major programmes for third sector capacity building.

Alongside efforts to engage more effectively with the third sector, government has also promoted greater engagement with faith communities. Over the past few years a consensus has emerged, though not without its detractors, that faith communities are best seen as ‘a distinctive part of the voluntary and community sector’ (LGA, 2002; Furbey et al, 2006). The reasoning behind this is that when contributing to public life, especially at the local or neighbourhood level, faith organisations show a commitment to common goals which they share with mainstream community groups (Cairns et al, 2004). It has been argued that the principles which apply to the engagement and inclusion of local third sector organisations apply in the main to faith organisations too, but that a series of challenges must be dealt with in order to enable faith organisations to engage with support providers and services (brap, 2007). The JRF research (Furbey et al, 2006) identifies a series of distinctive features of faith communities. They provide significant reasons at a policy level why engagement with faith organisations is of critical importance for the third sector in particular. These reasons include the scale, span and reach of faith networks, as well as their ability to act strategically at policy level, bridging between the powerful and those experiencing life at the fringes of society (Furbey et al 2006).

In spite of efforts to improve the understanding of both the reasons for, and the benefits of, engaging with faith communities, such as the ‘Faith and Community’ guidance cited above (LGA, 2002), barriers to inclusion remain. The barriers can, in part, reflect the relative isolation of some faith

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<sup>3</sup> National Social Inclusion Plan, DWP, 2006; Action Plan for Community Empowerment, CLG, 2007

communities from third sector infrastructure at the local level. It can lead them to feel excluded from sources of information and resource that would link them more effectively into local networks and enable them to participate more effectively. On the other hand there are certainly examples of local third sector infrastructure organisations feeling discomfort about the inclusion of faith communities in their networks. This can disadvantage faith groups and lead to the loss of their assets from local community capacity building. Equally there are places where LIOs are helping to connect faith communities with the mainstream. The case studies in this report highlight some of these positive examples.

Failure to engage faith communities can undermine efforts to strengthen local cohesion. It may also compound exclusion for some groups – for instance in the BME sector – for whom there are significant connections between faith and culture. It also works against enabling the third sector as a whole to understand better the full diversity of faiths, both within and across different faith traditions. Thus it can reinforce a picture of the faith sector as uniform and devoid of internal diversity.

The “Strong and Prosperous Communities” white paper (CLG, 2006) has encouraged third sector organisations to consider how they organise themselves to improve representation in public life. “Principles of Representation” (CLG and NAVCA, 2007) stems directly from the white paper providing a framework for the third sector to consider how to achieve a collective voice and some of the ways in which the principles<sup>4</sup> identified might work in practice. Communities and Local Government (CLG) have been working with National Association for Voluntary and Community Action (NAVCA) and the Church Urban Fund (CUF) to produce this publication of case studies and good practice guidance for partnership working between local infrastructure organisations and local faith communities. Although it has wider application, it is particularly relevant to the development of a national inter faith framework which began with the publication by CLG of “Face-to-Face and Side-by-Side” in December 2007.

This study has therefore been developed as a resource linked to this framework for inter faith dialogue and social action. It is designed to support the local implementation of this strategy. In particular it focuses on beneficial outcomes for local communities.

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<sup>4</sup> Accountability, equality, leadership, openness, purpose, sustainability, values (CLG and NAVCA, 2007)

### 3. Methodology

This document summarises the results of a small qualitative action research study.

The study began with a search of current literature and drew on the expertise of CLG, CUF and NAVCA to identify a long list of possible examples of good practice. An initial series of interviews enabled the number of case studies to be reduced to seven. In each of the seven areas telephone interviews were conducted with members of faith and inter faith organisations and senior staff working for infrastructure organisations. A focus group meeting was also held with a small group of interviewees to test out interim findings. Interviews were also held with individuals with relevant knowledge and expertise at regional and national levels. Drafts were circulated for feedback from all involved. The study draws on material from all the above sources. It has been important to reflect a range of urban and rural settings, as well as the experience of working within differing types of networks and structures. All the organisations in the case studies worked with groups and organisations from a range of faith backgrounds, although some areas had larger or longer established multi faith communities than others.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> In addition to case studies from Birmingham, Burnley, Devon, Hull, Newham, Stoke and Warrington, material was drawn on and included from Lewisham and Merseyside.



## 4. Policy and research context

The publication of “Faith in the City” (Archbishops’ Commission, 1985) signified a turning point in the visibility of faith organisations in social action. Its significance can be seen in the setting up of CUF, the burgeoning of faith-based activity and the ensuing research into faith organisations and their activities.

The Urban White Paper (CLG, 2000) and A New Commitment to Neighbourhood Renewal (SEU, 2001) call for the development of the third sector and faith organisations reflected well the mood evoked by DEMOS in calling for a covenant between government and communities (Brickell, 2000).

Since that time several key regional studies have highlighted and increased the visibility of the social action and services delivered by faith organisations.<sup>6</sup> It can be argued that the change in the perception to faith organisations by agencies at national, regional and local level is related to a changed understanding of the role and potential they have in civil society (Furbey et al, 2006).

In parallel to the exploration of faith-based social action, there has been a concern to understand how to develop support for the third sector as a whole through local infrastructure organisations.<sup>7</sup>

HM Treasury and the Office of the Third Sector have highlighted the valuable role of faith organisations in developing social capital (2007) while the “Review of the Evidence Base on Faith Communities” identified the significance of the socio, economic and demographic characteristics of religious communities (ODPM 2006). The Third Sector Review placed this in a wider context stressing the need for local authorities to not only build third sector partnerships, but to embed third sector representation and to support capacity building in the sector (HM Treasury and Cabinet Office, 2007).

Twenty years after the publication of “Faith in the City” (1985), the report of the Church of England’s Commission on Urban Life and Faith, entitled “Faithful Cities (2006), reflected on “what makes a good city?”. It identified key themes of social justice and social cohesion, but also underpinning requirements of network development and partnership working. In particular, it noted a growth in faith and inter faith networks, raised questions about ways to develop “religious literacy” and went on to consider the levels of faith-based social action at local level as “faithful capital”.

The Commission on Integration and Cohesion (COIC) identified ways to improve the integration and cohesion of civil society, referring in particular to the relationships between people of different faiths

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6 Reports include: Regenerating London, 2002; Faith in England’s North West, 2003; Faithfully Serving Rural Communities, 2004; Faith in the North East, 2004; Faith in Derbyshire, 2006.

7 Building Blocks, 2007; Building Effective Local VCS Infrastructure, 2007; Principles of Representation, 2007

and beliefs. It recommended religious literacy training as a specific means of improving mutual cooperation between public, private and third sector organisations and identified both faith-based social action and the development of faith networks as able to play key roles in promoting integration and cohesion (COIC, 2007). “Our shared future” recognised the contribution that faith groups can make to integration and cohesion, and also highlighted the importance of building good inter faith relations as part of working for integration and cohesion.

The question of how faith organisations could work in partnership with local infrastructure organisations is addressed in two main contexts in this report:

- How they can build their strengths and capacity for social action. Recent studies commissioned by the National Council for Voluntary Organisations reinforce the message that the voluntary sector needs to increase its support for faith bodies (Jochum et al, ed. 2007). The recent JRF study “Faith as Social Capital” described faith organisations as possessing the scope for “bridging and linking capital” (Furbey et al, 2006) in their relationships with other organisations and groups in civil society. On the other hand local studies highlight the support needs of faith organisations in order to make these links (Bates and Collishaw, 2006; Cradock et al, 2005; Farnell et al. 2007).
- How they can influence partners and in doing so release the full potential of their resources for wider public benefit. “Faith in Local Strategic Partnerships” (Escott and Logan, 2006) illustrated one of the pivotal issues for faith organisations – who should they be talking to? If interviewees for this study agreed that Local Area Agreements were the key focus in this respect, then faith organisations may tend to favour dialogue with statutory agencies.

## 5. Case studies

*“The role of faith is a fundamental role. It helps people define their values and commit to courses of good work.”*

Abdul Hamid Qureshi, Coordinator, Building Bridges in Burnley

The seven case studies which follow provide snapshots of how some faith organisations and local infrastructure bodies have developed productive working relationships. Each study highlights one or two key messages for faith organisations and local infrastructure organisations, which are considered in more detail in section 6. The case studies include examples in urban and rural settings, five different regions and several areas where different large faith groups co-exist.

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### Birmingham

#### Stronger infrastructure through shared objectives

*“Flourishing Neighbourhoods” made people aware of a wide range of faith-based social action at community level across Birmingham”.*

Fred Rattley, Director for Community Regeneration, Diocese of Birmingham

The “Flourishing Neighbourhoods” (2005) report was published by the Diocese of Birmingham and presented to the Birmingham Strategic Partnership (BSP). It resulted from a study commissioned by a wide group of individuals from faith, community, private, voluntary and statutory organisations across the city. Interviewees described it as presenting a strategic picture of activities across the city, and of partnership working.

Brian Carr, CEO of Birmingham Voluntary Service Council, summarised the critical factors and the process of partnership development in terms of people with a wide range of perspectives being able to work together because they had been able to identify common objectives which they could work towards. This had created common ground and enabled relationships to develop, in particular between the voluntary sector and faith organisations such as the Diocese of Birmingham.[1]

However, many of these networks were in the early stages of development:

*“Birmingham Council of Faiths was a grass roots organisation until it got a grant last year. It has been financed by membership fees. There are a large number of similar groups [in the region].”*

Brian Cooper, Member of Birmingham Council of Faiths

Meanwhile, the “Faithful Regeneration” study of churches involved in social action described their activities as a “responsive church” (2004) and Fred Rattley observed that the development of the faith organisations’ infrastructure differed from that of other third sector organisations, since the latter worked in relation to compacts and contracts.

Brian Carr described the process of building networks and forums in the West Midlands as *“work to support a community infrastructure and enable faith-based organisations to keep in touch and strengthen each other mutually.”* In particular he cited the key role of Regional Action West Midlands (RAWM) in the development of the West Midlands Faiths Forum (WMFF) in 2003. Faith organisations have been included in the subsequent development of structures and systems. WMFF has developed a faith group engagement strategy (brap, 2007) and provided a signposting, information and enquiry desk to match faith groups with support and resource providers.

*“There is a clear role at regional level for the faiths forum to act as a hub and particularly as a referral point to match faith-based organisations with appropriate sources of infrastructure support.”*

Jane Gallagher, Development Manager, West Midlands Faith Forum

The linkage between voluntary sector infrastructure organisations and faith organisations has been enhanced by the continuity provided by strategic individuals [2] such as Brian Carr, as a board member of both BSP and RAWM, active in the Flourishing Neighbourhoods Group and leading the development of the Voluntary Sector Chief Executives’ Forum and the Third Sector Assembly. He has encouraged the development of themed groups within the Third Sector Assembly, involving a wider span of organisations and has articulated the importance of including faith organisations in third sector strategy development.

**Key messages:**

[1] Common action with shared objectives provides a means to develop closer working between faith organisations and local infrastructure bodies

[2] Strategic individuals in key roles in faith networks and LIOs can find ways to span the spectrum between faith-based community groups and formal third sector structures

## Burnley, Lancashire

### Creating common space

*“The voluntary, community and faith sector is overtly recognised in Lancashire.”*

Terry Hephrun, Chief Officer, Burnley, Pendle and Rossendale Council for Voluntary Service

Burnley has a good range of infrastructure organisations, which are well networked and where the visibility of faith and faith-based organisations is accepted and high:

- **Burnley CVS** supports voluntary organisations and provides linkage between voluntary, community and faith (VCF) sector organisations and with statutory agencies. It is the accountable body for the local Community Empowerment Network.
- **Burnley Community Network (BCN)**, the Community Empowerment Network, has a focus on creating a dialogue and network, especially for smaller organisations, which enables the election of VCF sector representatives to the Local Strategic Partnership. The network also supports this involvement with briefing and training.
- **Building Bridges in Burnley (BBB)** is an inter faith organisation with faith and secular links at local level and beyond. It was set up after the 2001 disturbances to support community cohesion and community development.

BCN regularly holds showcase days for local organisations to talk about their work. It runs an active website and recently had a week of broadcasting on a community radio restricted service licence where local groups were provided with training to facilitate almost 100 hours of broadcasting. It also runs a small grants scheme geared to community organisations, which has been a good route for initial funding for Muslim and other faith groups which would not apply for funding sourced from gambling. These mechanisms have been widely used by faith organisations. BCN has thereby increased the number of member faith organisations and their involvement in the third sector in Burnley. [1] The coordinator, Adha Bond, estimates that there are 70–80 faith organisations in Burnley and community members linked to faith organisations. This enables BCN member organisations to elect three faith representatives, who have a constituency beyond the clergy, to both the BCN Management Committee and the Local Strategic Partnership.

Burnley, Pendle and Rossendale CVS was involved, through its Chief Officer, Terry Hephrun, in setting up Building Bridges. Terry describes the four inter community feasts, organised by Building Bridges, as strong examples of activities which enabled communities that had been very separate to visit each other’s territory. Since that point BBB has developed regular programmes of discussions, meetings and visits between places of worship and communities, as well as a range of children’s and

youth activities run through a sister project called “The Bridge”. Burnley CVS was also involved in setting up a faith centre in the sixth form college as a common space for all groups and ages. [2]

From all three organisations there is an emphasis on finding common space to open dialogue, creating meeting points and networking. They are mutually complementary. Shahida Iqbal from Lancashire Forum of Faiths observes that this shared approach was a change of perceptions developed after the 2001 disturbances, when local infrastructure and faith organisation leaders sought out common ground. [2]

#### Key messages:

[1] The development and inclusion of faith organisations can be supported by LIOs through accessible resources, training and support.

[2] Sharing of resources and creation of common space by faith bodies can be mechanisms for infrastructure development as well as community cohesion.

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## Devon

### Promoting joint social action

*“The Devon Consortium has recognised faith communities and their role. There has been a bit of suspicion, but on the whole they are welcomed.”*

Martyn Goss, Director Church and Society, Diocese of Exeter

*“The Devon Consortium is a group of ‘infrastructure’ organisations from the Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) which supports front line VCS organisations to work more effectively. It was set up under the government’s ‘ChangeUp’ initiative to improve front line services by providing high quality support from infrastructure organisations.”*

Newsletter Spring 08

The Devon Faiths Forum is linked to the Devon Consortium through the diversity sub-sector. Martyn Goss is the representative from the forum. This set of relationships is also reflected at a local level, for example the Torbay Inter Faith Forum is funded through ChangeUp and links into the Torbay Consortium. In Exeter a new Faiths Forum is also developing links along the same lines. At a county level the Devon Consortium has an increasingly strong relationship to the Devon Local Strategic Partnership (LSP). [1]

Interviewees identified the value of creating a good infrastructure and networks in order to develop the activities of local groups and promote joint projects. Projects included:

- The role of clergy and congregations supporting farmers during the 2001 **Foot and Mouth outbreak**. Churches were seen as a “piece of the jigsaw” by Martyn Goss.
- The **Devon Pound** project – A community banking partnership across the county, where the LSP has encouraged the consortium to get involved and faith organisations have become reconnected through the voluntary sector.
- The **Community Chaplaincy Programme** – This extension of the prison chaplaincy works on the assumption that on release prisoners are likely to re-offend, and enables them to move from a “community of crime” to a “community of support”. Offenders develop pre release relationships with communities of faith. Buddhists, Sikhs, Muslims and Christians are involved in the programme. It promotes community safety and adds to the range of voluntary sector services. [2]

Exeter Council of Voluntary Service provided the secretariat and back office services to support the development of both the Devon Consortium and the Devon Association of CVS.[3] Ed Moffatt, Assistant Diocesan Secretary, has served as a faith representative on the LSP partnership board and worked on sub theme groups relating to equality and to “Stronger, Inclusive Communities”. His role has provided practical and networking mechanisms to link back to projects. The cost of Ed’s role on the Devon LSP (notionally half a day a week) had been borne by the Diocese (through the Diocesan Board of Finance). This meant he was operating on an equal footing with other voluntary and community sector representatives for whom working within the Strategic Partnership was part of their professional practice. [2]

#### Key messages:

- [1] If there is good two-way linkage between development of LIOs and faith networks, it creates mechanisms for communications and strategic working together.
- [2] Faith organisations may be well placed or have resources to initiate social action in the third sector and have ways to support involvement of faith representatives.
- [3] Support services from LIOs should create strategic networks which include faith representatives

## Hull

### Breaking down barriers

*“There was ... a need for a community development organisation to help community groups get on board and the faith groups were not engaging”.*

Mel Meesam, Development Worker SEARCH<sup>8</sup>

*“The creation of SEARCH has supported the needs of churches and enabled them to have an input into the local community”.*

Dave Rogers, Chief Executive of Hull Community and Voluntary Services

Interviewees observed that, until four to five years ago, Hull could be experienced as mono cultural. With the arrival of refugees and asylum seekers changes began not only in the nature of churches, but in the growth of other places of worship. Relationships between churches and the voluntary sector have been strong for a number of years. Volunteers from faith communities, including Dave Rogers, became involved in the LIO and became trustees. [1]

Dave Rogers sees this linkage between roles as crucial to the success for partnership working between organisations in the voluntary, community and faith sector:

*“This provided linkage, created networks and avoided duplication”.*

He explains that, in Hull, these organisations have tried to achieve:

*“A networked approach to representation, which manages to convey the importance of widespread inclusion and representation without having “sector reps”.*

The success in creating a climate of co-operation enabled Hull CVS to support the setting up of SEARCH as an ecumenical faith infrastructure organisation in 1998<sup>9</sup>. [1]

*“The development of SEARCH had the benefit of putting the faith groups on an equal footing with the rest of the voluntary and community sector.”*

Mel Meesam

Mel Meesam notes the importance of developing trust by meeting people over a coffee, the need for networking and for finding allies:

*“They learn that faith groups don’t have three heads”.*

<sup>8</sup> Social and Economic Action Resource of Churches in Hull

<sup>9</sup> SEARCH was set up following research funded by Church Urban Fund and carried out through the Diocesan Council for Social Responsibility to provide community development support to faith groups.



SEARCH has had a particular focus on training, which it has provided for faith and non faith organisations, within the VCF sector and with statutory agencies too. [2] For example:

- **Mental Health First Aid Training** – a partnership with the Red Cross, the LIO and the North Hull Mental Health Trust. The training is a response to problems faced by Community Psychiatric Nurses working with hard to reach groups, and to a wish by voluntary, community and faith sector groups to understand more about work on mental health issues. There have been 200 free training places for the VCF sector, largely taken up by faith groups. The project has been part of a national study and training has been accredited by the National Institute of Mental Health in England and the Department of Health.
- **Faith Awareness Training** – a partnership with Hull City Council Equalities Unit, where a third of places have been made available to the wider community. The training has been important in breaking down barriers and improving understanding of faith organisations. This was reinforced by the setting up of a Voluntary Sector Equalities Network through the LIO and the Community Empowerment Network.

*“Although SEARCH is a Christian organisation it works across the faiths”. Mel Meesam went on to cite the example of current work with a Muslim Women’s group who “value the confidence and recognition of a faith-based ethos which enables them to engage.”*

Key messages:

[1] LIOs can create links between faith and non faith organisations through formal roles

[2] Joint training initiated by faith bodies provides shared learning and breaks down barriers

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## London Borough of Newham

Faith workers

*“The Faith Conference organised by Newham Voluntary Sector Consortium attracted over 400 people. It drew on common concerns and developed projects on those themes”.*

Rev Ann Easter, Director of Renewal Programme

*“The result [of the Faith Conference] was a Faith Action Plan. The database and partnerships were the lasting outcomes of the work”.*

Sarah Ruiz, Director of Newham Voluntary Sector Consortium

Newham is one of the most diverse communities in the country. Interviewees stated that it was important to recognise the value of the work of different faith communities, including those who provide valuable caring services for the older and younger community. This was seen in the context of the demise of lunch clubs and care networks for older people.

*“Without faith communities these people would be incredibly isolated.”*

Sarah Ruiz

*“NVSC was set up as a CEN with a directive from Government to include faith groups. This was fully embraced and kept faith on the agenda. Newham didn’t have a CVS and still doesn’t. NVSC started from zero and over time developed a database of over 1400 VCF organisations growing from a void. Previous paper based directories were quickly out of date and the Aston Mansfield Faith Directory was developed as a database held on the NVSC website. It enabled the VCF sector to initiate separate forums. Each forum had very different needs. The Faith Forum was slow to start but a Faith Sector Worker was employed.”*

Sarah Ruiz, NVSC

The faith forum, the database and many of the partnerships were facilitated by NVSC’s faith worker, a post funded through the Faith Communities Capacity Building Fund<sup>10</sup>. [1]

*“Success was due to the energies of the worker and the fact that she was a woman of no faith; which enabled her to balance the politics of the borough. She pounded the streets and she was there for whoever she met. Although there have been other faith specific networks operating NVSC were able to show a different way of getting there, which doesn’t exclude people.”*

Sarah Ruiz

Ann Easter viewed the support of NVSC and the faith worker’s role as critical to Renewal Programme’s own development in terms of finding funding and resources, and to the creation of an infrastructure to support activities and build relationships.

The key steps which have facilitated the development of organisations such as ‘Renewal Programme’<sup>11</sup> have been the funding of a paid post of ‘faith worker’; the development of a computer held faith directory; the faith conference and development of faith forums. Interviewees were clear that the underpinning features which have helped this approach to succeed were:

<sup>10</sup> Faith Communities Capacity Building Fund is administered by the Community Development Foundation

<sup>11</sup> “Renewal Programme” was started as a response to racist incidents and one of the first projects was a multi cultural youth club. It now has six direct projects and is well known not only with Anglican churches but across religious organisations

- A Faith Worker “of no faith” was able to show an impartiality, which all faiths respected.
- The faith conference was pivotal in stimulating faith organisations to develop projects.

The faith worker post’s funding has now ceased and, although NVSC have tried to maintain the work, the infrastructure support has been weaker because staff time is now too stretched to maintain the network which was so successfully extended by the faith worker. [2]

#### Key messages:

[1] A faith worker post is one way for LIOs to develop faith-based social action and networks

[2] Stable and secure resources are needed to maintain and develop infrastructure support

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## Stoke on Trent, Staffordshire

### Making faith visible through partnerships

*“The involvement of faith leaders in non faith networks enables peer to peer working – it models good practice”.*

Lloyd Cooke, Director of Saltbox

*“Colleagues have stopped fighting each other for the same pots of money. The focus is involvement and participation rather than gate-keeping”.*

Sajid Hashmi, Chief Executive of VAST<sup>12</sup>

Saltbox was founded as a Christian charity. It has developed social responsibility work with funding from the Local Strategic Partnership, Neighbourhood Renewal Fund and Local Area Agreements. It employs 11 people full- and part-time. Since creating a Christian network, it has been developing wider faith networks, including a dialogue with faith leaders through the City Faith Link group.

Saltbox has just published its second Faith Action Audit Report (Stoke on Trent, 2006; Staffordshire, 2008). There has been a database of information to share. The impact has been an increase in effective support to groups. Lloyd Cooke comments:

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<sup>12</sup> Voluntary Action Stoke on Trent (VAST) is the Council of Voluntary Service for Stoke on Trent. It aims to serve the full range of voluntary and community organisations by the methods described in the case study.

*“Faith people are not aware of the impact of their activity. Faith audits have value in themselves, but they are also a jumping off point for a wider engagement of the faith sector. It’s about working across denominations and also multi faith working...they create visibility and credibility. For example, Age Concern had 14/15 groups for the elderly, but faith groups had a further 40 groups or more.” [1]*

VAST and Saltbox are both local infrastructure organisations but this has been a reason for working together rather than a source of conflict.

*“Saltbox is the only faith-based infrastructure organisation. There are over 1500 Voluntary and Community Sector groups. Faith Groups are signposted to Saltbox. Black Minority Ethnic groups are supported by the Racial Equality Council”.*

Sajid Hashmi

Sajid Hashmi went on to describe the examples of how the three organisations work together as a “three way mirror image” including [2]:

- Coordination of attendance at meetings of Staffordshire Consortium for Infrastructure Organisations and taking feedback for each other.
- VAST has initiated the Voluntary Sector Chief Officers’ Group, which meets six-weekly and aims to avoid duplication. Lloyd Cooke is vice chair.
- The three organisations have each employed a Development Worker (through the Neighbourhood Renewal Fund) to pilot closer working together.

Peer to peer working has been one clear outcome of this cooperation. Interviewees also identified that funding was attracted, volunteers were recruited, there was an increase in the number of groups supported and their diversity, and resources and costs were shared, with only one newsletter being produced and one good practice guide. Each organisation gives the same message to groups seeking funding.

#### Key messages:

[1] Faith networks can improve the visibility of faith organisations through audits

[2] LIOs can create and maintain links between third sector networks which include faith organisations and networks

## Warrington

### Sharing resources and working together

*“The CVS has undertaken to maintain a database of faith group contacts. Greater numbers of faith representatives have signed up to VCFS events.”*

Nigel Bacon, Chief Executive of Warrington Council for Voluntary Service

Warrington Council for Voluntary Service is the main infrastructure organisation in Warrington. It has a mailing list of over 1400 organisations and individuals including many from the faith sector, and facilitates the Voluntary Sector Network hub where about 20 sub-sectors have been identified, one of these being the faith sector,

Warrington Borough Ministry is a Methodist Ministry, which *“is a reference point for faith enquiries, concerns, information from secular institutions”*. Stephen Kingsnorth

Warrington Council of Faiths (WCF) was formed following 9/11 and has three representatives of each faith with a resident Warrington community (Christian, Hindu, Muslim and Sikh). Rev Stephen Kingsnorth is its secretary. He is also, through the nomination of WCF, Faith Advisor to Warrington Borough Council. In his capacity as Borough Liaison Officer of Churches Together in Warrington, Stephen Kingsnorth serves as Secretary to WCF and issues regular news bulletins. He is also Vice Chair of Warrington CVS, whilst its Chief Executive, Nigel Bacon, is a member of the Friends of Warrington Borough Ministry panel.

In 2007 Warrington CVS was commissioned by the Borough Council to undertake a mapping exercise and research into the level of engagement between the faith sector and the statutory services. Following a 35% response rate, Warrington CVS held a conference attended by 30 faith representatives to consider the findings.

Both interviewees agreed that research and events had the following positive outcomes: [1]

- A database about faith organisations which Warrington CVS will maintain.
- They have improved the *“understanding and awareness of what each other [faith and non faith organisations] is trying to do.. and willingness to enter into dialogue”*. Nigel Bacon
- An annual event for faith organisation members of Warrington CVS.
- Increased faith sector attendance at VCF sector events, due to a decrease in mistrust following the mapping exercise and faith event.

One particular example of improved working together was cited as a recent “Welcome and Information Day” for Polish migrant workers, which Warrington CVS and the Borough organised through contacts with the local Catholic Churches.

The fact that two key officers provide links between a series of faith and non faith networks and LIOs was seen to be key to the increased faith involvement in the third sector. Respect for belief and shared values, but also a willingness to look at smarter ways of working, were factors seen to play an important part in establishing good working relationships.

A reciprocal interface can be discerned in the way that these two officers worked. They described the relationship between faith bodies and LIOs as being built on:

*“A shared understanding of community well-being and a mutual recognition that limited resources have to be well stewarded”.*

Nigel Bacon [2]

**Key messages:**

- [1] LIOs can encourage the participation of faith organisations by faith audits or mapping and events for faith organisations.
- [2] Shared commitment to community well being and concern for good stewarding of resources can promote joint working between faith bodies and LIOs.

## 6. Good practice working between faith organisations, LIOs and key agencies

This study has explored how faith organisations and third sector infrastructure organisations can promote and develop good practice in their working relationships with positive outcomes for local communities. This section examines initial perceptions and how they changed as well as how relationships were built up and what helps change to take place. The findings have identified:

- a) Actions which enable and encourage faith organisations to lead change.
- b) Circumstances which encourage third sector infrastructure organisations to lead change.
- c) Factors which encourage cooperation and partnership working for both.
- d) Ways for local authorities, LSPs and other key agencies to support these actions.

### a) Faith organisations leading change

Interviewees shared a perception that roles, attributes and the status of people of faith active in the third sector were seen as essentially positive. This recognition ranged from a perception that faith communities in general were “people rich” and having a strong sense of social responsibility, to direct experience of faith leaders carrying out a leadership or a representative role on behalf of the wider third sector and having a brokerage role. Interviewees saw this visibility as critical to increasing the awareness across the sectors of the scope of faith groups for social action. In the focus group it was observed that faith organisations were keen to promote cooperation and mutuality. This was seen as a requirement of a faith value base and therefore:

- faith groups engaged in social action for the benefit of others
- they did not seek recognition or visibility for their actions
- they often worked “under the radar”.

The focus group reflected that transparency, good communications and cooperation to forge mutual benefits were all factors which created a positive environment between faith organisations and LIOs.<sup>13</sup> Where this positive view existed, it helped to give faith organisations a legitimacy and level of acceptance in the third sector, but also reinforced the sense that faith organisations were rich in human resources. Interviewees identified a sense of continuity and consistency as key factors surrounding those resources. The perceptions of legitimacy, continuity and having resources meant that faith organisations were seen by others in the third sector and by statutory agencies as valuable partners. The Devon Community Chaplaincy programme is a good example of a faith-led social action initiative by local faith communities, which has been welcomed across the sectors.

<sup>13</sup> These factors create an “iterative cycle” (Doreen Finneron, Executive Director of Faith Based Regeneration Network) – a process which promotes further cycles of success

Acceptance and recognition has enabled faith infrastructure bodies to lead change in the third sector, as in Hull where SEARCH has developed a portfolio of training which has had a creative and positive impact across the sectors.

Several recent studies and publications note the importance of developing religious literacy as a way for non faith organisations to develop understanding of faith organisations (Lowndes and Smith, 2006; brap, 2007). Faith awareness training identified in this study was led by a faith organisation (SEARCH in Hull), but was supported by the local authority. Warrington CVS, working in cooperation with faith groups, initiated a regular faith organisations' event for the third sector and statutory agencies, indicating the scope for LIOs to take a lead.

The recent increase in the development of both faith networks and inter faith working have strengthened the opportunities for individual faith organisations to become actively involved in the third sector<sup>14</sup>. This network development has been supported by recent funding streams such as the Faith Communities Capacity Building Fund but also by Regional Development Agencies, for example in the North West. It has led to two significant developments:

- A growth in a faith-based local infrastructure and regional faith organisations
- A growth in social action in areas where these networks are strong

CUF has also added to the resources for network development through CUF Xchange.<sup>15</sup>

One of the key drivers for the development of good practice and change initiated by faith communities has been the faith action audit or research to establish the extent of faith organisations involvement in social action. Audits have frequently been funded by the Neighbourhood Renewal Fund and by the Faith Communities Capacity Building Fund. Mapping and audits have increased both the visibility of faith organisations and the recognition of the value of their activities. This visibility has increased interest in their activities, commitment to resource faith-based social action and the level of activity itself. The iterative cycle described in the examples from this report provides an approach which faith groups and LIOs can start in other areas.

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<sup>14</sup> The Inter Faith Network for the UK plays a key role in this respect. It provides resources and information including an annual directory of inter faith organisations and work <http://www.interfaith.org.uk/publications/index.htm>

<sup>15</sup> [www.cufx.org.uk](http://www.cufx.org.uk) is a network to encourage links between groups engaged in faith-based social action



## b) Third sector infrastructure organisations leading change

In some cases, people in leading roles in the third sector also happened to be “people of faith”, a factor which some interviewees saw as significant because it made them more likely to engage with faith bodies and to understand how to approach faith organisations.

*“One factor in this area has been the commitment of “big Catholics”, people who had a wider interest in the community and were not afraid to acknowledge their faith”.*

Terry Hephrun, Burnley CVS

In other circumstances, as in the London Borough of Newham, the very lack of faith was seen as enabling the faith worker to access faith organisations.

Whilst Sarah Ruiz commented that the very lack of faith gave faith organisations an assurance of impartiality, in Burnley Shahida Iqbal described why, after the 2001 disturbances, being visible in one’s faith was both important and acceptable for leaders across the sectors: *“They needed to change perceptions and show qualities of leadership.”*

Adha Bond, working for the Burnley CEN, stressed the importance of a transparent process both for local third sector representation and for funding, citing impartiality and equality as key messages which faith and secular organisations wanted to hear and see put into practice by LIOs.

The common ground shared in both cases seemed to be both an understanding of the contribution which faith organisations could make to the wider community, a transparency of approach and a willingness to find ways to work together.

NVSC took the lead in seeking out faith organisations by employing a faith worker. They came to this decision from awareness that whilst services for youth and older people were under pressure, there were groups such as “Renewal Programme” within faith communities running activities for those age groups. The faith worker found many more, provided support and signposting where appropriate, and created a network through the faith event.

In Burnley the CEN has created both training courses and Community Grant funding which have enabled faith organisations to develop their activities and capacity.

Exeter Council for Voluntary Service and Birmingham Voluntary Service Council have supported infrastructure development at city and sub-regional levels through provision of secretariat, back office services and representation on new bodies to provide continuity and take a lead. This has enabled the growth of faith networks, which in turn have supported faith-based social action.

One notable feature of places where there had been a high level of activity from faith organisations and faith network development with the support of LIOs was the emergence of faith infrastructure organisations.<sup>16</sup>

Significant points have emerged from the study relating to the capacity of third sector infrastructure organisations to support the growth and development of faith organisations. These are related to the changing nature of the third sector. For example, one interviewee described a gap between their own experience in developing faith organisations or networks and the increasing professionalisation of the voluntary sector:

*“There are three worlds: the city council and political world, the paid voluntary sector and the grass roots organisations such as Birmingham Forum of Faiths.”*

Brian Cooper, Member of Birmingham Forum of Faiths

This was reinforced in the focus group meeting, when Lloyd Cooke from Saltbox described faith organisations as the “new community sector”.

The organisational world has been described as a series of inter-linking circles, ranging from the world of associations, through the formal voluntary sector, to the public and private spheres (Billis, 1984). In this model the world of informal associations corresponds to informal community groups, with key steps to formalisation being taken with the adoption of written constitutions, formal organisational status and the employment of paid staff. One of the reasons for the lack of visibility and distance of many faith groups from the rest of the third sector was that they operated informally, under the wing of their place of worship. Moreover, as interviewees in Warrington commented, “faith organisations operate 24/7”. This reinforces the findings in recent research (Cairns et al, 2004; Furbey et al, 2006; Lowndes and Smith 2006) that the motivation for faith-based social action is a practical response to values rather than a drive for recognition and visibility of the organisation and its aims.

In those places where third sector infrastructure organisations seem to have been most proactive faith organisations had either a faith worker, an LIO with a specific focus on the community sector (Burnley and Newham) or a faith infrastructure network working in tandem as in Stoke and Hull. Interviewees mentioned that they could consciously reach out to faith organisations and emphasised the value of signposting faith groups to the most appropriate organisation for support.

Hull CVS had been instrumental in the setting up of SEARCH as a faith-based LIO. Dave Rogers saw this as a critical way for an LIO to support faith organisations. This was reflected in different ways and to varying degrees in each case study, and reinforces recent studies, which stress

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<sup>16</sup> Examples cited by interviewees included Renewal Programme, Saltbox, SEARCH

the importance of bridging and linking capital in third sector development (Lowndes and Smith 2006; Furbey et al, 2006).

In Birmingham, Brian Carr supported the development of WMFF in his capacity as a board member of RAWM. The creation of both a faith based and third sector regional network reflects the description of faith organisations as being a “distinctive part of the third sector” (LGA, 2002, Furbey et al, 2006), a view reinforced throughout the interviews. Birmingham CVS has also supported the development of a Third Sector Assembly, where faith organisations were able to engage either through generic activity themes or through the diversity and equality agenda. This flexibility of approach is an important recognition that a faith group may engage because of a specific social action or concern, or in relation to an inter faith or community cohesion agenda.

### c) Working in partnership

Several interviewees and the focus group participants commented that partnership working could be both time-consuming and a precarious activity with uncertain outcomes for all third sector organisations. These comments are important because they help to determine an overall climate which either discourages or promotes partnership working. In Devon the development of Local Area Agreements (LAAs), whilst complex, was seen as a potential way to resource faith sector activities if they were able to deliver on LAA targets.

In Warrington interviewees felt that partnership working was encouraged by the fact that resources were finite and required good stewardship. Examples focused on sharing of resources to plan events which would improve mutual understanding and working.

In Stoke key personnel in the third sector LIOs including Saltbox had developed a transparent system of working between their organisations, so that advice criteria for those seeking grant funding were the same for each organisation and allocations were coordinated. They also produced a joint newsletter and good practice guide and used a shared database. There was a consistent system of representation, approaches to gathering views on issues, decision making and to feedback in wider fora, using email, telephone consultations and meetings to make best use of time.

Where partnership working went well, there was frequently an initial response that this was due to personalities. Further exploration has revealed some of the key ways of working which all partners have used to develop partnerships. Focus group participants were keen to talk about cooperation rather than collaboration. Both here and in the interviews the importance of developing common concerns and a purposeful way of working was emphasised. In Burnley this had been supported by the creation and sharing of common space, whereas in Stoke there had been a development of “peer to peer working”. Colleagues in Stoke, Birmingham and Warrington articulated the mutual

benefits of establishing transparent working relationships with faith networks and infrastructure organisations, with connection between lead roles. Equally in Stoke and Devon the links between the two sets of structures provided two-way communications, creating a feedback and checking back loop which strengthened trust, accountability and partnership working.

#### d) The role of government agencies and local strategic partnerships

Messages from the study reinforced recent reports at all levels. The Treasury and Cabinet Office report (2007) emphasises the need to nurture the independence of the voluntary and community sector. “Face-to-Face and Side-by-Side” (CLG, 2007) has been part of a cross-government emphasis on the positive role faith organisations and LIOs could play in developing social action and community cohesion by working together.

Interviewees acknowledged the role of local authorities, LSPs, RDAs and funding bodies where they had supported:

- The creation of organisational infrastructure
- Strategic planning
- Faith audits and mapping
- Training
- Specialist roles
- Studies such as “Flourishing Neighbourhoods” (2005)

Programmes such as ChangeUp, “Improving Reach” (Capacitybuilders) and the support of Regional Development Agencies were all cited as having a positive impact. Interviewees and focus group members reinforced the need for consistent approaches both to funding and to maintaining continuity of systems.

Both “Faith in LSPs” (2006) and “Faith in Derbyshire” (2006) emphasised the need to support local infrastructure organisations in order that they could help those faith organisations who want to grow to do so (Cairns et al, 2004). Several interviewees reinforced the point that since LSPs were the key mechanism for partners to reach agreement on LAAs, and since the LAA then formed the basis for priority setting and distribution of resources, then faith organisations needed to be part of this process and to work in cooperation with LIOs and others in the third sector. The study revealed some different examples of how LSP representation had been developed (Burnley, Hull), but this is an area where further development is needed to include a wide range of voluntary, community and faith organisations. “Principles of Representation” (CLG and NAVCA, 2007) has offered the basis of a joint process of development, which faith and secular LIOs could work on in cooperation, drawing on approaches used in this document.

## 7. Seven actions for faith organisations and LIOs to develop partnership working

### Action 1

**To find out about faith-based social action in the locality.** Faith audits and mapping exercises such as those undertaken in Newham and Stoke are good ways for faith networks and LIOs to find out what exists. The resulting information has made faith groups' activities more visible and strengthened their position in obtaining additional resources, through community grants schemes, ChangeUp or Capacitybuilders. For local faith groups responding to audits or seeking out assistance, LIOs can provide much needed support in terms of advice and access to resources and networks. The impact of faith audits would also be increased substantially if a consistent approach was adopted by those embarking on new audits.

### Action 2

**To create or identify opportunities to come together.** Events like the Burnley showcase day, which is open to all types of organisations, or the Warrington faith conference, can be organised by secular or faith organisations in consultation with each other. Organisations can find out more about each other, exchange contacts and begin to build trust. It is another way for faith-based social action to become more visible.

### Action 3

**To identify common objectives.** The joint work to produce the 'Flourishing Neighbourhoods' report has enabled partnerships to develop in Birmingham. It was based on a shared vision for the city and has led to a shared approach to the recommendations. The focus group for this report emphasised the importance of identifying mutuality between organisations and individuals which could lead to the development of shared objectives.

### Action 4

**To share resources.** This becomes more realistic when based on a sound knowledge of each others' strengths and needs, rather than perceptions. Faith groups may have buildings to make available, they may not always have ready volunteers, and they may need signposting, advice, support and resources to make best use of their existing facilities. LIOs may have resources which faith groups are unaware of. Often in this study, as in Hull and Devon, faith groups will start by contacting local faith networks, but equally it was reported that when they contacted LIOs in Newham and Warrington they were pleasantly surprised at the welcome and support. Sharing of people as a resource has also been a critical part of this step: there are examples in Hull, Burnley, Devon and Warrington of people of faith taking leading roles in secular LIOs. Equally, in Birmingham and Stoke, senior personnel in LIOs have created links which support the development of faith networks.

### Action 5

**To learn from each other and train together.** These are good ways to break down barriers, as in Hull where the Faith Awareness Training has benefited understanding of faith communities. Moreover, the Mental Health First Aid Training has not only benefited faith groups, but organisations across the board and has increased respect for faith-based LIOs.

### Action 6

**To develop networks and infrastructure organisations.** This approach has been supported from national and regional level by Capacitybuilders and Regional Development Agencies, and takes place at local, city, county, sub-regional and regional levels. However, network and infrastructure require the support of faith organisations, LIOs and statutory agencies. Each of the case studies in this report has engaged in this action, having followed different paths and styles of networks. They have built on existing approaches and used the key actions described here.

### Action 7

**To create communications systems which are transparent and clear.** This is a strong message from all the case studies. Good relationships between faith organisations and LIOs stem not only from holding common objectives and mutual benefits, but a fair system is also essential. This fairness includes accountability of personnel to their constituency and to colleagues on networks or representative bodies, as in Warrington, Hull and Stoke where staff from faith organisations and LIOs play multiple roles and provide links between networks.

## 8. Abbreviations

BBB	Building Bridges in Burnley
BCN	Burnley Community Network
BME	Black and Minority Ethnic
BSP	Birmingham Strategic Partnership
CEN	Community Empowerment Network
CLG	Communities and Local Government
CUF	Church Urban Fund
CVS	Council for Voluntary Service
DWP	Department of Work and Pensions
EU	European Union
JRF	Joseph Rowntree Foundation
LAA	Local Area Agreement
LGA	Local Government Association
LIO	Local Infrastructure Organisation
LSP	Local Strategic Partnership
NAVCA	National Association for Voluntary and Community Action
NCVO	National Council of Voluntary Organisations
NVSC	Newham Voluntary Sector Consortium
ODPM	Office of the Deputy Prime Minister
RAWM	Regional Action West Midlands
RDA	Regional Development Agency
SEARCH	Social and Economic Action Resource of Churches in Hull
SEU	Social Exclusion Unit
VAST	Voluntary Action Stoke on Trent
VCF	Voluntary Community and Faith
VCS	Voluntary and Community Sector
WCF	Warrington Council of Faiths
WMFF	West Midlands Faith Forum

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