

Paper 1 Reflections on Policy Issues

for local authorities and others in the Statutory sector.

The aim of this paper is to provide a commentary on and explanation of some of the issues raised in the Bridge Builders Preston project, in terms of their relevance to policy makers and those who work at senior level within the statutory sector, be it within local authorities, regeneration partnerships, health services or police. It concludes with a number of key recommendations which might improve relationships between the statutory and faith sectors in areas of consultation, partnership building and service level agreements. The paper seeks to remain as firmly as possible within the "realm of the possible" as far as the writer understands the constraints within which the statutory bodies operate, yet even here there are areas which may be contested and need to be resolved through the usual political processes.

At the outset it is important to state two or three areas of principle with which the faith sector representatives who took part in the project appear to be content.

- Firstly there is a general welcome that government has recognised the importance of faith communities in civic and community life and the important role they play in building social capital and providing informal caring and welfare services. The faith sector is thankful that some funding, however limited in amount, and hedged about by regulation, has been made available.
- Secondly people in the faith sector generally accept that they cannot expect to receive funds from the state with no strings attached and that there must be proper and robust mechanisms of accountability for public money. They are as anxious as any good citizen that money is not wasted, and that the services it buys are effectively delivered to the people who need them most.
- Thirdly there are many shared values and agendas across the sectors such as the desire to ensure a cohesive, inclusive, fair, sustainable and

prosperous community and that working together on particular projects can help serve the common good.

Issues Shared with the Secular Voluntary Sector

There were a number of concerns raised by faith sector participants in the project that seem familiar to anyone who is in touch with the contemporary voluntary sector. On these issues secular and religious groups face similar issues.

- **Funding Dominates: Paymasters hold the power.**

Any group operating in the charitable sector or on a voluntary basis is likely to have limited resources, which are liable to be quite small in comparison with statutory bodies. The disparity is likely to be greater in communities which face poverty and multiple deprivation. As a result the services they can provide to people in need will be limited, unless they can attract outside sources of funding. If a group is serious about providing large scale quality services, especially when it involves the costly employment of qualified full time staff, there is a constant round of budget juggling and crisis, bid writing and anxiety about sustaining the organisation. As funds are limited there is much competition which gives the funding body the whip hand in the market place. With this power imbalance and dependency regime, it is inevitably the funders who take decisions, who set criteria, who control budgets, who demand monitoring and accountability, and who set the rules in some detail as to how money can be spent. While statutory bodies pride themselves for having transparent, democratically accountable and fair criteria for making funding decisions, and probably are better in this respect than many charitable trusts and business sponsors, there is a fair degree of cynicism about such claims within the VCFS. There are many suspicions that major funding decisions are made on the basis of political whim, as a result of secret deals and to the benefit of favourite organisations. At the very least groups working at the grass roots on behalf of vulnerable people are likely to have a different set of values and

priorities than councillors seeking re-election, and council officers charged with the effective delivery of policy.

- **Establishing partnerships is just another box to tick; one large player usually takes over**

In the developing partnership culture there appears to be a commitment to wider participation in governance of regeneration funding, at least at the rhetoric level. However, experience suggests that much of this is only skin deep. Voluntary and community sector representatives, even if they can be found, and persuaded to attend frequent and sometimes lengthy and boring meetings, for which they, unlike statutory representatives are unpaid, and even if they are knowledgeable and confident enough to contest difficult issues, find they can be easily outmanoeuvred by statutory bodies who have superior access to relevant information and skills. They can also too easily be tempted, seduced or co-opted by their new status as trusted community leaders, and drift away from the concerns and support of grass roots communities. Such behaviour by the large players does not even have to be conscious or deliberate, it is part of the structure and would be hard to overcome even with a strong political will to do so. It is not surprising therefore if VCFS people suspect "partnership" is just tokenism, game playing, or window dressing, rather than a chance to have transforming influence on policy decisions and resource allocation.

- **Funding regimes are short term, always changing, time consuming, have tight deadlines, and difficult to understand.**

The frustration in the VCFS about the regimes and mechanisms of accessing statutory funding should be simple enough to understand, though despite repeated articulation over many years little appears to have improved. Voluntary and community groups in general, and faith groups in particular have a much longer shelf life than most regeneration programmes, local authorities or governments; some churches have served their community for over 1000 years and see their role in the light of eternity! There is usually a range of pots of "funny money" each dedicated to specific policy initiatives,

usually demanding innovation rather than supporting proven services, or offering core funding to ensure organisational sustainability, and each following different rules and application procedures. Forms and guidance notes can be daunting and confusing, even for experienced bid writers, requiring many costly but unremunerated and speculative hours of gathering and supplying detailed information. Regularly deadlines and time scales are so short that bids have to be rushed through without time for proper planning or consultation, Too many bids fall or are not even attempted because of complex matched funding requirements. Even if a major grant is agreed staff can usually only be employed on a short fixed term contract which may mean they start looking for a new job before they have become effective in their current one.

- **Fears about privatization of services on the cheap and being bought off to silence critical “voice”**

The more radical sections of the VCFS, and this seems to include many faith based organisations working in deprived urban settings, has for at least two decades now been fearful that government is only interested in winding down the state provision of welfare. In this light government support for work done by the VCFS is only considered because it cuts costs to the tax payer. People with a social conscience seeing others in need, feel compelled to offer free and voluntary care which subsidises and covers deficiencies in state provision. Only recently has there been any sign of commitment to allow the VCFS to claim full cost recovery for the services they provide. Furthermore people in the VCFS often recognize that accepting money from government changes the nature of their relationship with society. Long accustomed to spotting new and emerging areas of need and adopting innovative solutions to problems, and to marrying this with campaigns for social justice, many in the sector fear that it may not be so easy to offer robust criticism of state policy and practice if it is seen to bite the hand which feeds it.

- **Pushed to become more business like, (output driven) despite being reluctant to lose charitable voluntary ethos**

The VCFS generally recognizes the impact of managerialism on its work, and many staff (as in the public sector) resent the overemphasis on gathering

information, monitoring, and measurable targets. There are divided views on this issue as most people recognize some benefits in being able to identify and improve efficiency, economy and effective performance, and to learn which interventions work well. The senior management of many larger VCFS organisations have often been willing to embrace such management techniques with enthusiasm, and usually believe they can maintain their core values while doing so. Smaller grass roots organisations, and this includes most local faith communities find it more problematical, as they feel their vocation and ministry is about dealing with people holistically, rather than in terms of specific presenting problems, that an informal approach which offers people substantial time commitment is a distinctive feature of their work, and that their charitable ethos demands unconditional giving rather than "means testing" or imposing conditions such as residence within particular post codes, or the legal right of abode in the UK.

- **Lack of capacity (information, knowledge, skills, staff time, volunteers, resources, "leaders" without followers) especially when compared with statutory sector.**

Most smaller, newer and more informally organised groups in the VCFS recognise that they have not got the organisational capacity to deliver services with the professional quality standards that are required by the statutory agencies. In many cases they face a "boot-strapping" problem of being unable to operate at a sophisticated organisational level until they have got the basic structures in place and some stability in terms of staffing and management systems. But they can never get to that point because they don't have the staff time, resources or skills to do the work unaided. Meanwhile they sometimes feel the statutory sector expects them to "pull rabbits out of hats" and makes assumptions they have buildings, systems and volunteers in place to ensure a project can be up and running smoothly in a couple of weeks.

Issues Particular to the Faith Sector

The first set of issues derive from the question "Are All Religions The Same?". The talk of "faith communities" and "the faith sector" makes a

presumption that the answer to the question is "Yes". There is however a fundamental philosophical and social difference between religion conceived in a Western, Protestant Christian or Post enlightenment secular framework, as a matter of personal free choice of beliefs, ritual practices and values exercised by autonomous individuals, and religion conceived in Catholic or Eastern frameworks, where religion is ascribed and birth and is more of a matter of ritual obligation as a member of family, kinship networks and the religious community. While most religious groups and people recognise elements drawn from both frameworks, the dominant view in British society is the former one. Moreover there is a tendency to impose this framework when addressing issues and making assumptions about the nature, structure and role of faith and religion within minority communities.

The formal relationship between State and the established Churches in England and Scotland suggests that we do not live in a secular state in the same way as France or the USA. However, mainstream British culture generally treats religion as a private and personal matter and seems embarrassed when faith is expressed in the public realm. There are some strong exponents of secularism concentrated in the educated "Guardian reading" classes from among whom public sector managers are likely to be drawn, though for the most part there is tolerance of all religions as personal lifestyle choice. Within the Bridge Builders Preston Project it was significant that one issue raised at an early stage was whether it was legitimate to discuss with Council Officers issues about their personal faith commitments, as though this might bring into question the boundary between the personal and the professional and political spheres.

Within this context some of the key issues raised by participants in the workshops included, the following. While it is the case that most of these were more strongly articulated by the more evangelical sectors of the Christian churches, (which we should note are now probably the majority, and the most vibrant and vital sector of Christianity), they sometimes resonate with the experience of people from minority faiths, (especially Muslims).

- **Government seems to prefer multi-faith or inter-faith work. It feels like they want to make us all the same in what we believe and do.**

While there is widespread agreement across faith groups that all people share a common citizenship, that we should live together in peace and that there are some areas in which people of all faiths and none can usefully work together, it is not always the case that there is agreement on priorities or the limits of such work. In a context where government seems to be stressing the need for inter-faith work for the sake of social cohesion, there is some suspicion that assimilation is on the agenda, and that Government does not recognize significant, indeed crucial, differences of faith and practice. For faiths that reject plural ways of salvation and syncretism, such as Christianity and Islam, forced blurring of distinctives is opposed. This has most clearly been advanced by the Faithworks organization in seeking to build its distinctive Faiths Coalition. Such issues underlie the following two questions raised in our workshops and interviews.

- **Should a church (or mosque or temple) be expected to make rooms available for another faith to worship in..?**
- **Some faith groups see their beliefs as contrary to those of other groups.. e.g. some Christians won't allow yoga classes.**

Faith groups are likely to wish to draw clear boundaries around such issues as these as a matter of deep belief or conscience, or even of their charitable purpose to advance their religion, or of a constitution which may set out doctrinal standards. (Of course it may not be easy to define them that clearly in practice). However they are uncertain whether such exclusions in public lettings of their buildings are permissible under anti-discrimination law, which is how they might well be seen by statutory agencies. If a place of worship has been supported or funded by public money the situation becomes even more complex. Can or should the funder really insist that the group welcomes bookings for purposes that are seen as abhorrent. One suspects that were the case in point an openly fascist association the answer from the statutory sector might be different than if it were a gay and lesbian support group, while some religious groups might have equal difficulty with both.

- **Even within a single faith there are often different cherished identities and long established divisions which can be very “raw” in places**

Religious groups are no strangers to conflict and schism, and there are many churches and mosques which have seen recent secessions, splits or acrimonious change of leadership. If the statutory world is unaware of these issues it is likely to be insensitive if suggesting inappropriate partnerships with other groups it perceives as essentially the same.

- **A faith based definition of community may include people who are excluded from official or popular definitions of the local community.. Eg. excluded groups like homeless, ex-offenders, sex workers, addicts, students or be based more on communities of interest from a wider catchment area.**

Because local statutory bodies operate on strict territorial principles, although boundaries often seem arbitrary and overlap in irrational ways with those of other agencies, they find it difficult to understand other forms of community. Faith communities (other than the few Christian denominations who use a parish system) define community differently. The community of believers is often gathered from a wider area, and may have stronger or weaker structures of formal membership, and the expectations that go with it. Gathered communities tend by nature to be self selecting and bring together people of like minds, social backgrounds and similar interests even within the boundaries of a shared faith. Segregation by ethnicity, gender, age or social class, is often at its greatest when people worship together, despite the egalitarian teachings of many of the world religions. For some Christians there is a special affinity to the community of the poor and the marginalised, which welcomes the very people whom the mainstream community, and sometimes the public authorities would like simply to go away.

- **Christians may not like the competitive spirit behind bidding for funds..**

This point may be a political rather than a theological one but it does appear that there is a contradiction between a public policy affirmation of the

partnership culture and the prevalence of competitive market (or quasi-market) mechanisms in resource allocation in the public sector. Christians in particular may feel guilty if they feel that their own successful funding bid has precluded worthy projects at the church, community centre or temple down the street from receiving adequate funding.

B). The Power of Faith : Is God at Work?

A second group of issues surrounds the inability of the public sector to appreciate or deal with the world of the spiritual or supernatural which is taken for granted by people of faith. While the public sector feels the need to measure, and quantify everything, those who move in the world of the spirit understand life in a different dimension, which cannot be measured or valued using standard scientific techniques. It presents a conundrum for both sides.

- **Most faith groups have a strong belief in a higher power and the role of prayer which gives an extra dynamic.**

The issue here is whether it is legitimate for a faith group, especially if it has been in receipt of public funding to call on or make reference to this additional dimension in the context of its community work. Is a group allowed to say a prayer before a meal it serves in its lunch club or langar kitchen? Can a faith based drugs project offer to say prayers for or with a client in the hope that this will improve her chances of staying "clean"?

- **They often want to talk about this to outsiders, and persuade them to draw on this power, or even to convert and recruit them**

The issue becomes even sharper when a religious group believe that their faith has something unique to offer and have a sense of mission in which they wish to persuade and recruit outsiders to their cause. Most religious groups would reject the idea that their practical service to outsiders is dependent upon them accepting the group's beliefs, they inevitably see such work as a witness to their faith, and hope it would play some part in drawing people towards their God and into their community. Obviously no one would wish to use a large amount of public money to pay salaries which subsidise the worship life, or recruitment drive of a local mosque or church. The

difficulty though is how much verbalisation, dialogue or persuasion is allowed in the context of a social action programme. Are posters, or artefacts depicting sacred texts or symbols permissible in the building? Can a community worker employed through a public sector grant speak about his faith based motivation for the work? May a children's play scheme use stories or songs drawn from the faith tradition when the children and their parents are actually quite enthusiastic about this aspect of the club?

- **Beliefs, theologies, cultures and value systems often make it impossible to separate the social from the spiritual**

The issue is particularly important where the religious group has a strong holistic theology. Evangelical Christians in particular in the last few decades have retrieved a holistic theology which recognizes the bridging of the divine and the human in the person of Christ, and seeks to minister to whole persons in community rather than to merely save souls. Other faith communities rooted in non-western cultures and world views such as Islam and Hinduism have never had a strict division between the sacred and secular worlds.

- **But this is what statutory funding regimes demand, though it is not always very clear or consistent.**

The usual line from statutory funders is that "we can fund religious organisations but not religious activities". Local practice as revealed in the course of the project is generally to promote a strict separation of secular and religious activity. Many groups have been advised to set up a separate body or legal entity with a distinct management group in order to receive public funding and deliver community services. The SRB funding of capital projects in faith based organisations has shown several variations on this theme. The Salvation Army in Preston for example has constructed a building which as far as possible is in two halves, one funded entirely from religious sources reserved for worship activity, and a community centre facility funded in part by public money where only community and social service activities should take place. In practice some blurring of the boundaries is accepted as inevitable. The St. Augustines New Avenham Centre has chosen to take a different approach in that while the RC Church remains a major stakeholder in the project, the operations and activities in

the centre are purely secular. There is no dedicated worship space and the parish congregation continues to meet in the school and Parish House.

- **Would we get on better if we disguised the faith element.. Eg. Take the C out of the YMCA (Young Men's Christian Association) or the M out of PMF (Preston Muslim Forum)?**

In the course of the Project there were several discussions as to whether the statutory world would find things easier to fund and support if explicit references to faith were removed from organisations and projects. Maybe but no faith based group would be likely to want to rebrand itself in this way when the terms denote key values and ethos, and often are a positive marketing point in contact with the public. This leads on to the final point in this group.

- **We make agreements but using language differently. Some of the output definitions and calculations are unclear and can be spun in various ways. For example can we count Christian worship a cultural event? Is a mosque better defined as a community centre mainly serving ethnic minorities?**

Overall the concern of faith communities seems to be for less hesitancy about the place of faith in partnerships with the state, and for more openness, transparency and clarity in the negotiation of agreements and funding packages.

Issues around Statutory Agencies Practice

On the positive side our project discovered there does appear to be a growing commitment from the statutory sector (PCC, LCC, PCT and the Lancashire Constabulary) to build better relationships and partnerships with faith groups. There is an awareness at senior level of the need to learn and listen more to faith groups, and some good models of

engagement, There is growing awareness of the potential of the faith sector to be useful partners in serving the community, and gradual learning about how best to improve its capacity to deliver. There are mechanisms of support, funding and purchase of services in which faith based groups are seen as a significant part of the voluntary sector.

At the same time we discovered in the statutory sector some frustration about how hard it is to get feedback and participation and about the perceived lack of understanding of statutory roles and funding on the part of faith groups. Some officer felt there were some unrealistic expectations about funding and support coming from people in the faith sector. People don't always understand that all funding is constrained by funding limits and the regulations set up for each scheme (which is often beyond local councils' control).

There are two main areas where statutory policy and practice could be usefully reviewed in the light of growing interaction with the faith sector. They are equalities and diversity policies and the guidelines for officers about their roles.

a) Equalities and diversity policies

- **Despite training and policies, some staff from the majority community remain ignorant, prejudiced and make stereotyped assumptions about faith groups.**

Officers who took part in our project, who were for the most part thoroughly committed to these policies or working in areas where they were especially significant, expressed some frustration, or sense of shame that many of their colleagues had little appropriate understanding for working in a multicultural, multi-faith society. In a place like Preston where many council staff commute in from suburban or rural areas where they have little or no experience of living amidst diversity this may not be surprising but it is hardly acceptable. There are training opportunities, and requirements for all statutory staff, but these may well be in need of review and improvement.

- **Some feel unable to talk openly about the issues for fear of being called not PC.**

It was reported to us, and resonates with general experience in this area that some (white majority) officers of statutory agencies seemed to feel personally threatened when issues of equality and diversity are raised, and are ill at ease during and after training in these issues. They may hesitate to say anything about their own feelings or experiences in these areas, at least when in mixed company or in the presence of managers for fear that they may be labelled "racist" or accused of being politically incorrect. Increasingly the terms in which these issues are couched include religious difference, which in some ways is supplanting earlier talk based on race or ethnicity terminology. It is important to understand the general context in which these things are taking place.

Judging from recent articles and letters in the Lancashire evening post, and from casual conversations that have been overheard in Christian circles, issues such as the celebration of Christmas have great cultural, symbolic and emotional weight. Ironically many highly committed Christians are less than happy with the consumerist and hedonistic form which now typifies the British Christmas and removes much of its religious meaning. Many white people seem to feel that although Muslim and Hindu festivals are publicly promoted and celebrated "our" religious celebrations are devalued or even about to be banned. These ideas are probably the creation of a right wing populist tabloid press and almost certainly do not represent public policy, yet they are powerful myths which allow the majority community to perceive itself as a persecuted minority. In this climate Christian churches may see themselves as losing status, power and influence in the state, and feel that funding decisions are biased against them, and that their freedom to worship and evangelise is being lost. It was significant that the recent legislation to outlaw incitement to religious hatred was strongly opposed by many Christian groups, not simply because it was imperfectly drafted, but in the belief that it would lead to Christians being jailed for preaching the gospel.

Such tensions and misunderstandings between religions and the secular world are of course set in a difficult global context where many people Muslims and Christians alike interpret the "war on terror" as a war on Islam,

or at least as a clash of western and Islamic civilisations. The world dominance of the USA under its current "Christian" president, and the simplification of issues by media which are heavily influenced by North American culture do not help here. It becomes too easy for ignorant white people to perceive every Muslim as a potential suicide bomber, and to slip into stereotypical attitudes and offensive behaviour. At the same time Muslims are quite reasonably angry about levels of deprivation and discrimination they face in the UK, about Islamophobia and religious hate crime and about events in Iraq and Palestine. They can be tempted either to withdraw into their own faith community, or to adopt mirror image stereotyped views about Western, Christian or Jewish people. It is undoubtedly the case that many Muslims for example make unwarranted generalisations about Christians and Christianity that do not take into account internal diversity, the original Scriptural texts, or the current testimonies of Christian believers, in exactly the same way as many Christians stereotype Muslims.

On top of this Christian - Muslim tension the historically based communal tensions between Muslims, Hindus and Sikhs in the context of South Asia may also be a significant factor underlying lack of trust and community cohesion. For example in a competitive environment a funding decision in favour of one group may be taken as a rebuff by another faith community.

To overcome some of these problems requires opportunities and willingness to learn and open and mature, and possibly painful, debate in forums which feel safe for all participants. As one of the workshop groups summarised these three principles for engagement across the sectors and faith communities.

- **There needs to be honest discussion with everything on the table from the start**
- **Disagreement can lead to dialogue which then brings greater understanding, so don't be afraid of robust but respectful disagreements.**
- **Co-operation always requires "love" ... willingness to relate and be engaged with other people and groups**

The Bridge Builders Project offered one such forum and to the extent that it was successful showed that there is a positive environment for this to

happen locally, at least among a core group of faith based community activists and statutory agencies.

- **Officers who are enthusiastic about, or have responsibilities for, equal opportunities sometimes have difficulties with faith and cultural groups who they perceive as (or may actually be) sexist or homophobic, or exclusive to their own faith.**

Religion as a whole and Christianity and Islam in particular have acquired a reputation for behaviour and practices which tend to be repressive, exclusionary and discriminatory. While Muslim and Christian believers and scholars would probably argue that such behaviours were not any part of the intention of the founders of the faiths, and are not sanctioned in the holy texts, they would probably have to admit that the cultures that have arisen under the influence of these faiths have been guilty in these respects.

The problems that arise for statutory bodies are quite complex and not always straightforward in terms of legislation. Laws and policies which can be clearly applied in the public sector do not always transfer easily to voluntary or faith based partners which retain organisational autonomy. Can a public body support the work of a faith group where for example:

- women are expected to take part in gender segregated activities and not represented on the management committee
- sexually active or "out" gay and lesbian people are excluded from membership or office
- staff are expected to share the faith and values of the organisation and take part in prayer or worship activities.

However

- **In the real world everyone knows that a strict equal opps policy (with no "wriggle room") cannot be imposed on faith based groups. Service users tend to vote with their feet to take up service based in their own faith community.**

There are issues here about targets and monitoring of service users. When statutory services are provided at arms length by a VCFS group there is often a requirement to monitor the ethnicity (and perhaps religious affiliation) of users. The unspoken assumption is that these figures will be

checked and a group may be penalised if it fails to attract users from across all sections of the community in proportions roughly in line with the sub groups within it. Usually this does not happen with much rigour, for it is difficult to specify the appropriate targets, given the uncertainty about the boundaries of catchment areas, the problems in recording comprehensive data and the effort that would be involved. There is also a de-facto recognition by the public sector that Hindus are most likely to access a service provide by the temple and that non-Muslims rarely go to a mosque. The concern in reality is a broader one to ensure that as well as generic service culturally appropriate and targeted provision is accessible to all sections of the community on the basis of as fair a distribution of resources is possible.

b) Statutory sector workers (and Councillors) are also community members, many with an active faith

The issue of individuals working in the statutory sector who bring with them to their professional role personal faith and community commitments is one which has to my knowledge not been previously discussed. Yet it becomes highly significant in the context of statutory engagement with faith groups, especially in a relatively small city such as Preston where social networks are relatively compact.

- **Most understand and make efforts to ensure that such commitments do not bias their professional judgements, and separate the personal faith from the professional and political**

There are of course well established rules in the public sector to cover situations where there are conflicts of interest, and from the evidence of interviews in the project there is no reason to suggest that officers are anything other than scrupulous or professional in their approach.

- **Yet at the same time many fundamental values and commitments to particular areas of work arise from, or are shaped by, their religious beliefs and cultures.**

For example a person may chose to train as a social worker out of a Christian sense of vocation to serve people in need as Jesus did, or as a community

based advice worker out of a sense of solidarity with Muslim brothers locally and around the world. The way they treat people in the work context, conscientiously fulfil their duties, or pray about the situations they find themselves in may have a profound impact on their working life and that of their colleagues or clients.

- **In areas of work such as liaising with the Voluntary, Community and Faith sector an insider knowledge of or community connections with one or more local faith community is an asset to the statutory sector, though rarely formally recognised**

Specifically knowledge, networks and skills relevant to community engagement which have been acquired outside the workplace may bring benefits to the statutory body that transcend the job specification. One can easily appreciate the value of a Muslim employed as a community police officer, or teaching assistant in a Muslim dominated neighbourhood such as Deepdale. It can also be the case that being a committed believer in any religion can give an advantage over a non-believer in terms of empathy. For example committed Christians and Muslims usually respect each other and understand the role of religion and faith in their respective lives. This may make negotiations with faith based organisations easier. The example of good and growing friendships and productive partnership working between faith leaders drawn together by the Preston Faith Forum is a positive example of such processes.

- **At the same time some officers from minority faith communities feel they are seen as experts on all things to do with their faith, but that this is mere tokenism.**

This problem arises because the minority community staff obviously know more about their own community than staff from the mainstream majority community and are usually willing to offer explanations to colleagues. However, they are conscious that they may not have complete or authoritative information, and that it is not in their job description or work schedule to spend time on such issues. They may feel opportunities for career progression as a generic officer may be blocked by settling in to a specialist "minorities" niche.

RECOMMENDATIONS

These ideas were suggested by participants in the second workshop and are presented as ideas which should at least be reviewed and reflected on by local, regional and national policy makers working on the terms of engagement with the faith sector;

On relationships between the statutory sector and faith based groups

- **Any policy on relationships with the faith sector must be a live policy, understood and used in every department and by all staff (not just sit on a shelf).**
- **Policy must reflect a genuine commitment to work in partnership with the faith sector and must overcome the “tick box / tokenism” mentality that still exists in the statutory sector.**
- **Policy should be consistent, timely and accountable within a long term time frame.**
- **Policy should recognize the importance of “spirituality” in the way that faith based groups operate, and should not preclude the possibility of (voluntary) prayer or worship activity in the programme of service delivery. If a faith based organisation believes this ethos adds value it should be invited to demonstrate this with evidence.**
- **Clear and transparent guidelines about what can and cannot be done with public money in terms of religious activity should be written into any contracts, service level agreements, or offers of funding.**
- **Policies must take account of diversity within the sector, of local contexts, and of the culture, beliefs, practices and sensitivities of the different faith communities**

- Rather than a blanket one size fits all policy on equal opportunities policy needs to be more flexible in recognising differences between/ within different cultural and faith groups and on different issues, respecting individuals' right to believe and behave as they see fit.
- Policies should ensure an appropriate environment and range of services are available through a range of providers (to members of all faith communities and none) which are responsive to the choice of individuals
- In public and civic events and activities, ensure wide representation and that both common values and distinctive traits of various faith groups are recognised and honoured.. eg. around dietary provision, times of meetings.
- Faith communities should be consulted more effectively and involved in shaping decisions when policy is constructed which affects their members, neighbourhoods, public services and funding regimes.
- Build active and ongoing engagement from strategic to operational level with local faith forums, and provide support and resources for these forums to develop and involve a wider range of local faith groups.
- In the context of community cohesion work there is a need for monitoring the effectiveness and impact of interfaith activities

On funding and capacity issues : Policies of relevance to the wider VCFS.

- Offer long term strategic funding for the core activities of VCFS organisations (which run projects or services) not just short term funding, for innovative projects.

- Recognise that FBOs in particular do need to have professional management structures in place, though many need help to get there, and improved capacity building services are called for.
- It's reasonable to expect (funded VCFS organisations) should meet quality standards, but may need help to implement them
- All departments should be aware of and use "Compact" documents in service delivery plans. The Faith sector should be included in "Compact" agreements.
- As far as possible the funding application process and paperwork required for both bids and monitoring, should be simplified and standardised across the whole of the public sector (including major trust funders) so that the waste of time and effort, especially for unsuccessful bids is minimized. There is much to be said for larger funding requests to be handled through a two stage process where an initial expression of interest is evaluated for eligibility and viability before detailed and costed applications are submitted.
- Partnership and collaborative work rather than competitiveness should be rewarded by the funding process.

On Public sector staffing issues:

- All staff should receive religious literacy training appropriate to their role and in keeping with the local context, including information about the beliefs, cultures and organizations of all faiths (including Christianity), the diversity within them and the policy and legal issues around anti discrimination, equalities and diversity policies.
- Such training must be delivered in respectful interactive ways which are sensitive to where people are, and allow them to openly express their deep feelings, beliefs and values, including their ignorance and prejudices without feeling belittled or threatened.

- Where a post, or a staff member filling it, has a job description or person specification involving contact with religious groups in the local community the specialist skills and knowledge required should be recognized in workplans and remuneration. (This could be done either at recruitment, or by adjustments following appraisal processes). Insider knowledge of one or more faith groups should be counted as an asset for this sort of work. At the same time clear professional guidelines should be drawn up to deal with potential conflicts of interest, and to prevent the possibility of bias towards or against particular faith communities.