

Executive Summary

This submission is made by the [Good Faith Partnership](#), an organisation dedicated to addressing some of society's most urgent challenges by strengthening collaboration across civil society, government, businesses, and faith communities.

In a time of increasing division, one of our key priorities as an organisation is working to build cohesive communities throughout the UK. Specifically, we are exploring the vital role that churches, alongside other faith groups, play in the formation of flourishing and connected communities. Our research indicates that in many neighborhoods, faith groups are a cornerstone for community cohesion, uniting individuals through a range of initiatives and providing a wide range of socio-economic support to those in desperate need.

Through a variety of projects, we are working across Wales, Scotland and England to ensure that the contributions that faith groups make to community cohesion are recognised, strengthened and built upon. These projects include the [Warm Welcome Campaign](#), [Refugee Welcome Hubs](#), [Social Prescribing Research](#) through the [ChurchWorks Commission](#), and the [Virtues of Faith Research](#).

This submission will focus mainly on examples of best practice from our work in Wales and across the UK more generally. We will also touch upon the key issues impacting social cohesion which our work and research has highlighted. We urge the Equality and Social Justice Committee to recognise the transformative potential of these initiatives in building flourishing and cohesive communities and would actively welcome any opportunities for partnership or collaboration.

The Role of Faith-Groups in Social Cohesion

Dedication to social cohesion and building community is needed now more than ever in the UK. The rise of social unrest, as seen by riots on Ely in 2023 and more widely across the UK last summer, the growing prevalence of hatred and divisive rhetoric shared on social media, and the widespread experience of loneliness have all contributed to the fracturing of communities. In such a challenging climate, there is an increasing need for spaces and institutions that foster fellowship, friendship, and a consistent, reliable sense of belonging where people can come together and feel valued.

For centuries, the Church has been a consistent leading force for community cohesion in Wales. Whether through Sunday services, children's groups, village fetes, tea and cake afternoons, prayer meetings or groups for the elderly and vulnerable, the Church has historically been the centre of community life and a vital force for bringing people together. It was also the founding force behind the education system, the health system, hospice care, care homes for the elderly, and many other societal institutions across the UK. Although regular church attendance has declined, these figures do not tell the whole story of the continuing significance of the church's role in society. This is highlighted by the [The House of Good report](#) which estimates that churches collectively contribute a social impact of £55 billion to the UK economy.

Churches continue to be a force for social cohesion for a number of reasons. Firstly, they play a crucial role in addressing socio-economic needs in deprived neighborhoods by providing essential services like food banks, housing assistance, childcare, and mental health support, particularly in areas with limited public resources. Secondly, they also offer a strong sense of community, which is vital in tackling issues like loneliness, one of the biggest public health challenges facing society today. Thirdly, they foster cross-cultural and cross-class interaction, helping to build solidarity, promote understanding, and challenge stereotypes in diverse communities, thereby breaking down social barriers. Ultimately, it is clear that churches carry enormous potential to assist in the formation of healthier, more connected communities on both a local and national scale.

The vital role of churches in fostering social cohesion is part of the broader contribution made by all faith communities to this mission. While diverse in practices, faith communities often share a common commitment to serving their neighbours and promoting the common good within the societies they inhabit. This shared purpose enables them to address the varied needs of diverse networks and, through interfaith collaboration, build community, connection, and mutual acceptance.

The work of the Good Faith Partnership exemplifies and relies on these values, showcasing how faith groups come together to support their communities. This collaboration has been particularly evident during recent crises—such as the COVID-19 pandemic and the ongoing cost-of-living crisis—where faith communities have been among the first to offer support and demonstrate solidarity across traditions.

Examples of Best Practice

At the Good Faith Partnership, we are actively working to improve community cohesion through a variety of projects.

Tackling Social Isolation Through The Warm Welcome Campaign

- Warm Welcome is a UK-wide network of over 5,000 community spaces offering warmth and welcome to those experiencing loneliness or struggling with the cost of fuel. There are just under 250 Warm Welcome Spaces currently signed up in Wales spanning across the country.
- Community spaces can easily register on the Warm Welcome website, enabling individuals to search by postcode and find their nearest welcoming space. Despite the breadth of our existing network of warm spaces, we have developed a 5 year strategy to go further. **Our mission is to ensure that everyone in the UK has access to a Warm Welcome space within 30-minutes from their home.**
- As energy prices have increased, Warm Welcome provides not only physical warmth but also emotional connection, offering spaces where people from diverse backgrounds can gather, share experiences, and build community ties. By supporting those most affected by financial hardship, this initiative helps prevent isolation, an issue exacerbated by economic uncertainty, and strengthens intergenerational and multicultural understanding within communities.
- Faith groups make up almost a third of the Warm Welcome Coalition, but any space across the UK whether a library, cafe, place of worship, pub or other community space can register as a Warm Welcome space and support their local communities.
- Last winter, Warm Welcome Spaces hosted two million visits across 4,000 spaces and on average, Warm Welcome Spaces hosted over 120,000 visitors every week.
- Our research shows that **84% of people who join a Warm Welcome Space say it helps them have a stronger sense of belonging to their community, with 70% saying that since coming to a Warm Welcome Space they now never or rarely feel isolated.** With disconnected communities costing the UK economy almost £32 billion a year, this is clear evidence that Warm Welcome is changing lives and transforming neighbourhoods.
 - Currently, 62.42% of people in the UK live within a 30 minute walk of a Warm Welcome Space. Our new vision over the next five years is to ensure 100% of people have access to a Warm Welcome Space.
 - We ask that the Committee supports us in our 100% pledge mission to create nationwide access to community spaces in Wales, and encourages the Welsh Government to work with us to unlock the resource and establish the connections to ensure everyone has access to a warm welcome space within 30 mins of their home.

Supporting Refugees Through Welcome Hubs

- The Welcome Hubs initiative, developed in light of the UK Government's Homes for Ukraine scheme, created local networks to support Ukrainian refugees and their hosts. The hubs have now broadened to welcome all new arrivals, in particular asylum seeking families back in city centre IA hotels.

- These hubs continue to serve as inclusive spaces for fostering community connections through activities such as language classes, community meals, and support groups. Efforts are made to recruit local volunteers to be empowered and envisioned to be part of the welcome and aid the process of assimilation. Large community meals ('Peace Feasts') offer opportunities for local communities the chance to meet their new neighbours.
- In Bristol, for example, 15 hubs were established in collaboration with churches and the city council, with overwhelmingly positive feedback from participants.
- **We are currently working to test and expand the Welcome Hub model and hope to share and codify learnings, best practice and useful tools with other Local Authorities and the wider sector.**
 - We ask that the Committee recognises the value and importance of Welcome Hubs in helping refugees better integrate into society and encourages the Welsh Government to support the development of these spaces in Wales as part of their commitment to ensuring Wales is a Nation of Sanctuary.

Connecting Individuals With Community Groups Through Social Prescribing

- In order to think about how faith groups can best support the wellbeing of communities across the country, we have been conducting research into the creation of a neighbourhood health system through [Social Prescribing](#)
- Currently, one in five patients reportedly have a problem that is not clinical but social, and the demand for GP appointments is at an all time high. There is a critical need for alternative methods of support.
- Social prescribing is a means for trusted individuals (Social Prescribing Link Workers - SPLW) in clinical and community settings to identify people without medical or health-related social needs, and to subsequently connect them to non-clinical support and services within their community by co-producing a social prescription: a non-medical prescription to improve health and wellbeing, and to strengthen community connections.
- Our research shows that faith-centres, and churches in particular, are particularly well-placed to offer wellbeing initiatives that people with a social prescription can attend whether they have a personal faith or not.
- Data collected shows that **over 6000 churches (1 in 6) are currently engaged in wellbeing initiatives across the UK and 2,042,000 people are positively supported by church wellbeing initiatives every year.** These services include mental health courses, one-to-one support, wellbeing activities, drop-in hubs, well-being activities and clinical support.
 - We believe that social prescribing, and engaging with faith-spaces through social prescribing initiatives, not only has the potential to better meet the needs of individuals, but also leads to strengthened and more interconnected

neighbourhoods. We ask that the Committee recognises the potential of social prescribing as a tool for improved community cohesion, and works with us to ensure that this strategy is rolled out nationwide.

Bridging Divides Through Virtues of Faith

- The [Virtues of Faith](#) initiative developed by the Good Faith Partnership in collaboration with the University of Birmingham's Jubilee Centre for Character and Virtues, explores the shared and differing moral priorities among faith communities and non-religious groups in the UK. It is funded by the Templeton Religion Trust.
- By **surveying over 3,000 individuals, the study highlights common values such as honesty, devotion, and justice, which are highly regarded across diverse religious and non-religious traditions.** These findings underscore the potential of shared virtues to enhance mutual understanding and community cohesion. Where there are similarities and differences can indicate how religions influence faith communities to behave the way they do, covering themes such as neighbourliness, charity, civic engagement and education in the UK. The report can be found [here](#).
- Virtues of Faith is now moving into its second phase, examining in greater detail, what is truly meant by these virtues in each faith tradition, and how these values are lived out by members of faith communities. The research also provides the opportunity to navigate differences across faith communities' behaviour through a lens of positivity (virtues).
- The research emphasises the role of virtues in fostering social trust and collective action, creating a foundation for stronger community connections. It provides a framework for bridging differences and promoting cooperation across belief systems, offering insights for policymakers and community leaders seeking to strengthen societal bonds.
 - We believe that the findings from this project have enormous potential to bridge divides within communities, and would deeply appreciate the opportunity to share our findings with the Committee in more detail so that they can be used to further the Committee's aims.

Conclusion

As highlighted above, we are implementing a range of effective and impactful initiatives at both local and national levels to foster community cohesion through working with and alongside faith groups. We see significant potential to further scale these efforts, which could greatly contribute to strengthening communities in Wales. To achieve this, we believe there is an important opportunity to collaborate with local and national government authorities. By



sharing our best practices, we hope to help inform and enhance collective efforts to build stronger, more cohesive communities nationwide.