



# MFC Strategic Plan

2021-2025

Strengthening relationships between faith & civil society

# An overview

## What is the Multi Faith Centre's purpose?

The Multi-Faith Centre helps to build stronger, positive relationships between faith communities and civic society in Derbyshire. It aims to connect those who are able to offer services or help (eg the council, the police, local voluntary groups) with people who may benefit from this help (communities of varying faiths who may feel marginalised or ignored). By facilitating communication, the centre aims to build trust and co-operation to drive forward worthwhile community projects that will ultimately benefit those who are most vulnerable.

## Who does the centre work with?

Faith communities – faith leaders and community volunteers who are motivated by their faith to address local issues, and who want their communities to be consulted in order to shape the kind of civic services they need.

Civic society – local authorities, key agencies (like the police or the NHS), community and voluntary groups who are seeking to engage with the faith sector more effectively to deliver successful services and projects.

## The important role of faith communities

Faith groups are increasingly recognised as a gateway into communities that are hard to reach, where people feel most marginalised. Many faith groups are already doing excellent work with vulnerable people – for example food banks, tackling debt and homelessness - but with limited support to do so. Across many different faith communities these great projects exist, but there is no joined up approach. If we can strengthen links between these faith projects, share best practice and encourage joint communication with civil society, there is huge potential to build infrastructure, networks and capacity to better help those most in need. The Multi Faith Centre is in a unique position to bring all these different groups together.

## Why now is the time for action

The effects of Covid 19 continue to have a huge impact on our society, increasing the need for civil services to deliver even more with ever-dwindling budgets. The crucial work of faith groups within communities during this time has led to a growing awareness from central and local government that there is much to be gained from working together. This is supported by several high-profile reports written in 2020, which acknowledge the need for a community-led approach. Money is available for exactly these kinds of projects, and the Multi Faith Centre is ideally placed to help local services connect with the communities they need to serve.

# About the centre

The Multi-Faith Centre was founded as a registered UK charity in 2001 to build respect between people across different faiths and cultures. It is based on the University of Derby campus in a purpose-built building. Since it opened, the centre has created a strong network of contacts in faith communities and with key public and voluntary organisations, and has developed a range of training and community projects with these partners (see below).

More recently, with the effects of austerity politics and Covid 19 taking hold, the centre has recognised that it can play an important role as a connecting bridge between faith communities struggling to manage voluntary projects, and civil society who has the resources to help them. It is an opportunity for the centre to use its existing network and experience to forge a stronger strategic purpose and have a wider positive impact on local communities.

## Stakeholders and partners

To date, the centre has delivered programmes by working with several different partners who principally include:

- Derby City Council
- Derbyshire County Council
- Faith organisations including Jamia Mosque and Derby Cathedral
- Derbyshire Police & Crime Commissioner
- The wider voluntary and community sector and their infrastructure support agencies
- The University of Derby

# Analysis of current position

## Strengths:

The centre has a trusted reputation and is widely perceived as honest, impartial and willing to support all faiths within the community. Its considerable experience of building strong relationships with both faith groups and civil partners means it's uniquely placed to advocate for communities of faith and ensure their voices are heard.

## Opportunities:

The current climate means there is huge potential for the centre to bring the national agenda to a local level and help drive things forward by acting as a hub and making connections where needed. There's also an opportunity to strengthen links between different faith groups to find common ground, support each other and avoid duplication. This will help civic services work with them more effectively. The centre also sees the benefit of shining a light on the faith projects that currently exist, to promote good news stories about faith communities. This will help inspire faith groups' trust in the MFC as well as help to challenge society's wider perceptions of faith as negative or divisive.

## Weaknesses & Challenges:

The centre has historically lacked continuity of leadership, with an overfocus on specialist projects and a tendency to follow grant money. It is also recognised there is still insufficient engagement within and across faith communities and with wider civil society. Challenges exist when working within the faith sector – faiths are not joined up and there are often dominant players. Wider society perceptions of faith also pose a threat (eg the rise in religious hate crime and Islamophobia). The centre itself faces operational challenges – inadequate funding, staffing and the ongoing Covid restrictions could potentially lead to further loss of momentum and organisational energy.

# The current climate

There have been four influential reports recently published that explore the role of faith groups within the community. They show there is increasing self-confidence and experience within faith communities to undertake projects that help those in need, as well as a growing awareness amongst central and local government of the important role faith communities can play. This recognition has been further boosted by the work of faith communities during the Covid-19 pandemic, and as a result of austerity politics.

These reports include:

- The Church and Social Cohesion: Connecting Communities and Serving People (2020). Theos [Read the full report](#)
- Cohesive Societies: Faith & Belief (July 2020). Faith & Belief Forum [Read the full report](#)
- Levelling up our communities: Proposals for a new social covenant (Sept 2020). Danny Kruger MP [Read the full report](#)
- Keeping the Faith: partnerships between faith groups and local authorities during and beyond the pandemic (Nov 2020). All Party Parliamentary Group – Faith & Society [Read the full report](#)

These reports acknowledge the growth of faith-based community projects and the enormous potential they offer for local authorities who are prepared to collaborate with them. The government is beginning to recognise that local communities can and should be much more involved in their own service provision and that there should be funding available to help with this. It is agreed across the board that faith groups are at the heart of community-led partnerships, both because they already have structures in place to reach out to their communities, but also because they're most likely to know what is actually needed to help those who are most vulnerable.

Whilst there has been a lot of dialogue and research nationally, the local picture in Derby and Derbyshire is perhaps not understood or appreciated to the same degree. The Multi Faith Centre can offer a helpful contribution in this regard, enabling further discussion and deeper more honest communication between civil society and the faith sector to provide a local Derbyshire perspective.

# Consultation with local partners

Consultations are ongoing with local partners, and have highlighted various ways in which they can collaborate with the Multi Faith Centre to achieve their goals.

## Derby City Council

The council already have a well-established working relationship with the MFC, but recent conversations have shown enthusiasm to work together more closely, particularly in light of their Covid 19 recovery plan. They have become increasingly aware that good communication with faith groups is a big part of the solution to better connect with local communities, to understand their needs and to address longstanding issues of inequality.

Particular areas of collaboration include the MFC's role as a voice for faith groups and a will for the centre to become more involved in the decision-making process across a huge range of council projects where input from a faith perspective is lacking or non-existent. They are also keen to support the provision of a 'safe space' to unite leaders of different faiths (which currently doesn't happen) to help strengthen inter-faith relationships. This will help to make it easier to encourage dialogue between the council and faith groups as a whole. It's also recognised that training (both of their own staff and community and faith leaders) will better equip everyone to work together.

## Derbyshire County Council

Like Derby City Council, the County Council have a remit to work with local partners and communities because they know they can't tackle complex problems on their own. They recognise that faith groups have a role to play in creating resilient, thriving communities where people feel more in control of their circumstances and take more responsibility for developing the kind of local services they actually need.

In order to move towards this, the council needs to better connect with these faith groups – improving communication, establishing up-to-date databases and gathering more reliable knowledge about the situation on the ground. Currently they don't always think about reaching out for the views of faith communities and need to improve engagement, particularly from non-white faith groups. Covid 19 has shown where the gaps are and there is an opportunity for MFC to become the 'go to' people to help make these connections and encourage dialogue and understanding on both sides.

## Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner (OPCC)

The MFC has developed a strong relationship with the police through the Religious Hate Crime Project, and is already viewed by them as a valued and trusted partner. Currently the centre has contacts with around 35 community groups dealing with religious hate crime issues on the front line, and uses this network to feed information back to the police to help shape their services and improve their ways of working.



The OPCC also see the centre playing a key role in helping to build community trust and confidence in police services. The reporting of crimes is very low in some faith communities, and the police are keen to understand the barriers to crime reporting and what they can do to encourage people to come forward. They want to better understand the different faith communities and have conversations with them, but know that using the MFC as a conduit is more likely to gain trust and give them access to the right people and more accurate information.

## **Community Action Derby, Amber Valley CVS & Derbyshire 3D Network**

These CVS groups (Councils for Voluntary Service) are designed to support voluntary organisations by offering practical help with things like training and funding, but faith has not been considered an 'easy fit' for them, which means their current links with faith projects is very limited. They recognise the importance of supporting faith projects and know change is needed, but do not have enough understanding of what and where these projects are.

As a result, they welcome the insight the MFC can give them on the faith communities themselves and the projects currently out there that would benefit from their support. They also hope the MFC can encourage a change of mindset within faith groups on the benefits of working with partners beyond their own members and congregations.

## **Derby Cathedral**

The Church of England recognises that the demographics of the country are changing and it needs to do more to work in partnership with other faith groups. There is an awareness that although faith communities in Derby and Derbyshire are currently very disconnected, there is a lot of overlap in the good work they do, and much to be gained from working together.

As the most established faith group in the city, the Cathedral acknowledges that it should be at the heart of projects to bring faith leaders together around a shared sense of purpose. The new Dean wants to see the Cathedral turning 'reflection into social action' and 'connecting with other faiths to work together effectively and shape the common good'. The MFC's position as a hub for all faiths means it is ideally placed to help the Cathedral encourage this connectivity and facilitate the introductions and conversations that will be necessary to achieve this goal.

## **Derby's diverse Faith communities**

Currently many separate faith communities exist, particularly within the city, but these groups are not necessarily interacting with each other.

In May 2021, MFC convened an online Keeping the Faith conference for the city's faith communities. The event identified a willingness from all faith communities to move their pandemic response models from providing emergency support to becoming active partners in the region's recovery and beyond. However, faith communities need support, resources, facilitation and organisation, networks, and infrastructure if they are to organise and achieve their potential as partners.

## University of Derby

The MFC already has very strong links with the university, not least because of its physical location on their campus. The university sees the MFC playing a key role in helping it to become a 'Civic University', which means better catering for the needs of the local community to help people in Derby and Derbyshire to prosper. In order to do this, they must fully understand what these needs and priorities actually are - something the MFC can help them with.

The university also sees the MFC as a helpful partner in its research work on faith and diversity. It is keen to support joint projects with the centre to learn more about how faiths can work with each other and civil society, and how to help equip faith and community leaders of the future. They would also like the MFC to continue its relationship with the Chaplaincy team, to support diversity and inclusion for staff and students on the campus and contribute to training in religious literacy.

## Conclusion of consultation

The faith groups who were consulted acknowledge the need to work together more effectively to strengthen their own position and provide a united front when communicating with civil society. There are many connections to be made, not just between different faiths, but between different groups of the same faith. They see that the MFC is ideally placed to help with this.

The civil partners approached were all aware of the positive opportunities to work alongside faith groups to better reach the communities they want to help. They realise the need to support and celebrate the good work that faith groups are currently doing and recognise the benefits of working through the MFC rather than alone, to approach these groups sensitively and begin conversations to gain their trust.

# The way forward

## What we plan to do

It is clear there are significant opportunities to use the existing networks and experience of the Multi Faith Centre to help achieve many of the current objectives of local government and civil society, which will ultimately benefit our communities. The centre is in a unique position to bring together a wide range of groups across the faith sector and within civil services, in order to facilitate better working relationships and help get new projects off the ground.

In response to both the changing climate and the consultation with stakeholders, the MFC has refreshed its vision and strategic purpose as follows:

## Our vision

Our vision is a society where the diversity, expertise and richness of faith communities actively contributes to the building of safe, healthy and cohesive communities throughout Derbyshire.

## Our mission

The Multi Faith Centre encourages and facilitates dialogue, co-operation, mutual respect and understanding between people from different faith communities and civil society, who by coming together aim to improve the wellbeing of vulnerable people living in Derbyshire.

## How we plan to do it

Part of the process of building these bridges is to better understand what the faith sector actually needs, and also to unite leaders of different faiths so that civil services can engage with the faith sector more easily. With this in mind, MFC will focus on four key objectives:

1. **CREATE AN INFRASTRUCTURE** Produce a platform for the faith sector to come together to act strategically and maximise their impact
2. **FACILITATE COMMUNICATION** Create safe spaces for faith groups to hold conversations on social and community issues common to everyone
3. **NURTURE COLLABORATION** Encourage faith groups to join together and then create partnerships with local authorities and key agencies
4. **PROMOTE CELEBRATION** Shine a light on good news stories around the positive contribution faith communities make to our society

# Implementation

Objective	Activity	Output	Outcome
1. Provide infrastructure support and a platform for the faith sector to come together, act strategically, collaborate effectively and maximise their impact.	Complete MFC strategic plan in consultation with stakeholders and faith communities	Final plan distributed to stakeholders	Clear and agreed partnership role and service offer for MFC
	Create a database of faith organisations and those interested in working with faith communities in Derby & Derbyshire	Derby & Derbyshire Faith database commissioned	Increased awareness and understanding of faith sector assets, networks and contributions
	Identify, strengthen and rebuild relationships with local networks and partnerships	Key individuals, forums, networks and partnerships mapped	Increased awareness and understanding of faith sector assets, networks and contributions
	Research to map faith contributions and sector development needs	Undertake research with faith sector to understand sector development needs	Increased understanding of faith sector development needs
	Provide relevant faith infrastructure perspective to local authorities and other civil society partners	Faith outreach workers employed to build networks and connectivity of faith communities in Derby & Derbyshire	Stronger voice for all faiths
	Work with partners and stakeholders to establish Faith Alliance / Forums in the city and county	Network(s) established, and Terms of Reference agreed	Faith communities are involved in local decisionmaking structures
	Work with faith partners and stakeholders to review and update 'faith covenants /	Faith covenants adopted in Derby and Derbyshire	Faith communities are consulted and better able to respond

	interfaith charter' in the city and county		
	Consult with key stakeholders about institutional training to enable better engagement with faith communities	Training programmes developed and launched	Sharing of best practice and knowledge
	Identify skills and training requirements for faith leaders, organisations, staff and volunteers so that they can engage more effectively with civil society	Training programmes developed and launched	Sharing of best practice and knowledge
2. Provide safe spaces for dialogue and hold conversations on social & community issues of fundamental concern to all faith communities.	Create mechanisms to facilitate discussion and decision making within the faith sector and to coordinate representation.		
	Create engagement and events programmes to stimulate and dialogue and collaboration in the faith and civic society space.	Annual engagement plan created	
	Foster closer ties, trust and collaboration within and across faith communities and key agencies	Co-produce projects	
	Ensure all faith communities can identify matters of local concern and are engaged in	Outreach and community development	

	local partnerships, networks and co-producing solutions in an environment where they are valued by local authorities and agencies.		
3. Encourage and cultivate increased inter and intra-faith collaboration and partnership with local authorities and key agencies.	Deliver the Race & Religious Hate Crime Project and develop an Integrated Service Delivery Model with partners.	Project Manager recruited. Funding for Integrated Service secured. Develop the Hate Crime knowledge hub. Host 6 network meetings per year.	Improved reporting and communication of religious hate crime in Derbyshire. Better access to victim services, community relations and safer communities.
	Work with commissioning bodies, partners and faith communities to co-produce and fund new projects that deliver community cohesion, health and / or other outcomes.	Two new projects developed and / or implemented per annum.	Support community led action that helps faith organisations become better connected, and able to identify and meet local need. Improved community cohesion, health and other outcomes.
	Develop the fledgling Young Muslim Leadership group with the skills and confidence to address LGBT tolerance, female representation etc in those communities.		
	Identify and work with faith groups and communities that are currently not engaged		
4. Amplify the contributions that faith communities make to civil and civil society	Initiate evidence-based practice and research to encourage new ideas, learning and innovation to transform policy and	One research project commissioned per year.	Co-ordinated, priority led evidence-base developed and shared.

	practice.		
	Rebrand MFC website to articulate a refreshed strategic purpose, service offer and impact.	New website	Enhanced profile and awareness of faith contributions to civil society.
	Co-create public engagement, marketing campaigns or events to raise the profile and celebrate faith contributions to civil society.	Proposal and plan developed with partners.	Interfaith collaboration, dialogue and understanding. Enhanced profile and awareness of faith contributions to civil society.
	Implement communications plan that includes regular profile-raising highlights, case studies, best practice, blogs, discussion papers.	Communications support employed. Comms plan developed and implemented.	Enhanced profile and awareness of faith contributions to civil society.
	Partner with the University and other external partners to co-produce an annual events programme which includes faith contributions from the wider community.	Events plan produced and implemented.	Inter-faith collaboration, dialogue and understanding.



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