

# Richmond Faith and Belief Forum - Terms of Reference

Adopted 29 May 2024

## TITLE

The Forum is known as Richmond Faith and Belief Forum ('the Forum').

## OBJECTIVES

The Forum will contribute to social cohesion in and around the Borough of Richmond upon Thames ('the Borough') by:

1. Celebrating and supporting communities in Richmond
2. Promoting understanding and cooperation between people of differing religious, and non-religious, beliefs
3. Acting as a forum for communication between local religion and belief groups, and the Council of London Borough of Richmond upon Thames ("the Council"), as well as associated organisations – including charities – on issues of mutual interest, including those pertaining to Council policies and the "Religion or Belief" Protected Characteristic<sup>1</sup>.

## MEMBERSHIP

The Forum will welcome and promote membership from all religion and belief groups within the Borough, and those from surrounding areas with significant membership in the Borough. Each local religion or belief organisation will be encouraged to appoint up to two representatives to the Forum to act as "voting members". The Forum is free to welcome others to become part of the Forum.

The list and contact details of members will be maintained by an appropriate Council Community and Partnership Team member (or equivalent).

## CHAIRING

A Chair and Vice Chair/s will be elected annually by members. The Chair and Vice Chair/s will set the agenda, chair meetings, and suggest discussion topics.

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<sup>1</sup> The Equality Act <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2010/15/section/10> defines "Religion or belief" as: "(1) Religion means any religion and a reference to religion includes a reference to a lack of religion. (2) Belief means any religious or philosophical belief and a reference to belief includes a reference to a lack of belief." The Equality and Human Rights Commission adds the clarification that "Generally, a belief should affect your life choices or the way you live for it to be included in the definition." <https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/en/equality-act/protected-characteristics>

## **FORUM COORDINATION**

Working closely with the Chair and Vice Chair/s, coordination will be supported by the appropriate Council Community and Partnership Team member (or equivalent) who will keep and circulate notes and actions.

## **MEETINGS**

### **Meeting locations**

Forum meetings will be held at least three times a year at venues throughout the Borough, or nearby. Other events and social gatherings may take place at other venues, including places of worship.

### **Alternates and exceptional invitations to meetings**

- Where a topic is of particular interest to individuals or groups in Richmond, members are welcome to invite exceptional attendees. The members should be notified in advance of any exceptional attendees.
- If a member is unable to attend a meeting, they may invite an alternate to attend on their behalf.

## **CODE OF PRACTICE**

Members of the Forum agree to act in line with the appended Code of Practice, based on the Inter Faith Network for the UK's 2017 best practice guidance "Building Good Relations with People of Different Faiths and Beliefs"<sup>2</sup> (see Appendix), and to take into account its "Faiths Working Together Toolkit"<sup>3</sup>.

In the exceptional case of a voting member or other attendee significantly breaching the Code of Practice, or otherwise acting in breach of these Terms of Reference, the Chair may propose to the voting members to exclude that person from the Forum. Their decision will be final.

## **RESOURCES**

Funding for events will be arranged or agreed on an ad hoc basis with Richmond Council, or other sources.

## **AMENDING THE TERMS OF REFERENCE**

Changes to these Terms of Reference must be agreed by a majority of voting members.

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<sup>2</sup> [https://www.interfaith.org.uk/uploads/IFN\\_Code\\_2017.pdf](https://www.interfaith.org.uk/uploads/IFN_Code_2017.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> [https://www.interfaith.org.uk/uploads/Faiths\\_Working\\_Together\\_\\_\\_Toolkit%2Brev.pdf](https://www.interfaith.org.uk/uploads/Faiths_Working_Together___Toolkit%2Brev.pdf)

## **APPENDIX - CODE OF PRACTICE**

Adapted from Inter Faith Network for the UK “**Building Good Relations with People of Different Faiths and Beliefs**” (2017)

In Britain today, people of many different faiths and beliefs live side by side. The opportunity lies before us to work together to build a society rooted in the values we treasure. But this society can only be built on a sure foundation of mutual respect, openness and trust. This means finding ways to live our lives of faith or belief with integrity, and allowing others to do so too. Our different religious traditions and beliefs offer us many resources for this and teach us the importance of good relationships characterised by honesty, compassion and generosity of spirit. The Inter Faith Network offers the following code of conduct for encouraging and strengthening these relationships.

As members of the human family, we should show each other respect and courtesy. In our dealings with people of other faiths and beliefs this means exercising good will and:

- Respecting other people’s freedom within the law to express their faith and beliefs and convictions
- Learning to understand what others actually believe and value, and letting them express this in their own terms
- Respecting the convictions of others about food, dress and social etiquette and not behaving in ways which cause needless offence
- Recognising that all of us at times fall short of the ideals of our own traditions and never comparing our own ideals with other people’s practices
- Working to prevent disagreement from leading to conflict
- Always seeking to avoid violence in our relationships.

When we talk about matters of faith or belief with one another, we need to do so with sensitivity, honesty and straightforwardness. This means:

- Recognising that listening as well as speaking is necessary for a genuine conversation
- Being honest about our beliefs and religious allegiances

- Not misrepresenting or disparaging other people's faith or beliefs and practices
- Correcting misunderstanding or misrepresentations not only of our own but also of other faiths and beliefs whenever we come across them
- Being straightforward about our intentions
- Accepting that in formal inter faith and belief meetings there is a particular responsibility to ensure that the religious and belief commitment of all those who are present will be respected

All of us want others to understand and respect our views. Some people will also want to persuade others to join their faith or belief system. In a multi faith and multi belief society where this is permitted, the attempt should always be characterised by self-restraint and a concern for the other's freedom and dignity. This means:

- Respecting another person's expressed wish to be left alone
- Avoiding imposing ourselves and our views on individuals or communities who are in vulnerable situations in ways which exploit these
- Being sensitive and courteous
- Avoiding violent action or language, threats, manipulation, improper inducements, or the misuse of any kind of power
- Respecting the right of others to disagree with us.

Living and working together is not always easy. Religion and belief harnesses deep emotions which can sometimes take destructive forms. Where this happens, we must draw on our faith and belief to bring about reconciliation and understanding. The truest fruits of religion and belief are healing and positive. We have a great deal to learn from one another which can enrich us without undermining our own identities. Together, listening and responding with openness and respect, we can move forward to work in ways that acknowledge genuine differences but build on shared hopes and values.