

Item No	Classification Open	Date 29.7.03	Executive
Report Title		<i>Faith in Local Government Pledge Card</i>	
Ward (s) or groups affected		All wards – members of faith communities	
From		Assistant Chief Executive (Performance & Strategy)	

1. RECOMMENDATIONS

1.1 The Executive welcomes the Council's partnership with the faith communities and the contribution they make to the well-being of the borough.

1.2 The Executive welcomes the opportunity to sign up to the Faith in Local Government Pledge Card.

2. BACKGROUND

2.1 The Council has a longstanding partnership with the faith communities in the borough. The 2001 census shows that 61% of residents identify with the Christian faith, 7% with the Muslim faith, and the Buddhist, Hindu, Sikh and Jewish religions have a small number of members. 28% of residents identified with no faith or did not complete the return.

2.2 In 2002 the faith groups in Southwark came together to create the Southwark Multi-faith Forum. The Forum brings the Christian denominations represented through the Ecumenical Borough Deans Group together with the mosques, and other local faith bodies. The Forum is supported by a part-time worker, funded through Neighbourhood Renewal Fund. As the request of the faith groups, the post is based with the Council, attached to the Community Involvement and Development Unit.

2.3 Nationally, the faith communities have come together to promote and co-ordinate their relationships with local government. Sponsored by the ODPM, the Muslim Council of Britain, Faithworks (Christian), Interlink Foundation (Jewish), Hindu Council, and Sikh Nari Manch have developed a '**Faith in Local Government Pledge Card**'.

2.4 Southwark Council is being asked by the Southwark Multi-faith Forum to sign up to the Pledge Card. The Multi-faith Forum has a major conference scheduled for 3rd September 2003, where they would hope to launch the Pledge.

3. FACTORS FOR CONSIDERATION

3.1 The 'Faith in Local Government Pledge Card' sets out eight commitments that a local authority will make in respect of working with and supporting their local faith community. The full text of the Pledge and guidance is attached in the Appendix. The core elements are:

- A formal commitment to build good relationships with faith organisations and to recognise the strength of religious diversity
- A commitment to work together around mutual goals and to ensure faith groups are informed and consulted about local authority priorities and activity
- A commitment that faith organisations can access sources of funding on the same basis as voluntary and other non-religious organisations, and can contribute to partnership planning
- A commitment to ensure staff across the local authority are aware of the Pledge and understand what it means for their work
- A commitment to practice a high level of awareness, understanding and sensitivity towards dates of faith community festivals and holy days.

3.2 The commitments in the Pledge are very much in line with practice across the Council. Through the Multi-faith Forum and other bodies, faith groups are impacting on partnership working, particularly around children and young people, vulnerable adults and in respect of community cohesion. The Council has close working relationships with both Diocesan Boards on the delivery of education services.

3.3 Faith organisations are able to access funding where the activities they seek to deliver meet the Council's funding priorities. Funded faith based groups include some playgroups, youth clubs, community centres, and social care providers. It is recognised that the Pledge does not require local authorities to fund the directly religious /worship aspect of a faith groups activity. It does mean that the Council accepts that there may be a spiritual aspect to the delivery of a service and that the beneficiaries may mainly although not necessarily exclusively be those who identify with that faith.

3.4 In terms of employment practice, the Council is working to implement the EU directive on religious discrimination that comes into force in December 2003. Currently managers have discretion to agree time off for religious observance, and workplaces seek wherever practicable to have some quiet provision where people can pray in accord with their faith requirements. As part of the Corporate Equalities Action Plan, further guidance on the EU Directive will be issued to staff.

4. RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

4.1 There are no specific resource implications in this report.

5. CONSULTATION

5.1 The request to sign the Pledge has come from the Southwark Multi-faith Forum and supported by the Ecumenical Borough Deans.

6. LEGAL ADVICE

6.1 There are no legal implications in this report in respect of the EU Directive on religious discrimination (Council Directive 2000/78/EC), and the Draft Employment Equality (Religion or Belief) Regulations 2003.

REASONS FOR LATENESS AND URGENCY.

It was not possible to complete this report before the statutory deadline. The formal request for the Council to sign up to the Pledge Card was made by the Borough Deans at the quarterly Leaders meeting held on 18th July. The matter is urgent because the aim is for the Council to have adopted the Pledge prior to the Multi-faith

Forum on 3rd September, and 29th July is the last Executive scheduled before the recess.

BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

Background papers	Held At	Contact
Pledge Card background information pack	Social Policy Unit, West House, Town Hall, SE5 8UB	Jules O'Mahoney Tel 020 7525 7491

APPENDIX A Audit Trail

Lead Officer	<i>Nathalie Hadjifotiou, Head of Social Inclusion</i>	
Report Author	<i>Nathalie Hadjifotiou</i>	
Version	<i>Draft (18.7.03)</i>	
Dated	<i>18.7.03</i>	
Key Decision	<i>No</i>	
CONSULTATION WITH OTHER OFFICERS/DIRECTORATES/EXECUTIVE MEMBER		
Officer Title	Comments sought	Comments included
Borough Solicitor & Secretary	Yes	
Chief Finance Officer	No	