



Faith, Hope and the Charity Sector

Developing a better understanding of the faith sector in Cambridgeshire and Peterborough

Phase 3: Minority Faiths

February 2025

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1 INTRODUCTION

This report covers a third phase of work exploring the nature and community activities of faith-based groups in the combined authority area of Cambridgeshire and Peterborough.

In embarking on this series, commissioners recognised that whilst they enjoyed some links with faith communities, regular engagement and a comprehensive understanding of their needs and practices was limited. For these reasons it was felt faith groups' community work may often be misunderstood or fly 'under the radar'. These reports are an attempt to address these gaps in knowledge and relationships.

Phases 1 and 2 were undertaken between January and April 2024. The first was a desk-based data gathering exercise seeking to comprehensively map faith-based organisations across the county, led and completed by [Dr Hannah Griffin-James](#).

The second phase was delivered through a series of direct, qualitative encounters with a sample of faith groups, seeking deeper insights into their work and the best ways in which to communicate and collaborate with them. This was led by [Gethyn Williams](#), [published in May 2024](#). However, for reasons outlined in full in that report, this phase ultimately focused exclusively on faith groups grounded in Christianity.

This third phase seeks to redress the limitations of phase 2, focusing exclusively on groups beyond the Christian faith – primarily groups and communities in the Islamic, Hindu, Jewish, Sikh and Buddhist communities. For simplicity, this report refers to these communities as 'minority faiths' or 'non-Christian groups' where appropriate.

This series of reports was commissioned by the [Cambridgeshire & Peterborough Integrated Care System](#) and delivered through the Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprises (VCSE) sector body [Support Cambridgeshire](#).

Objectives

Phase 3 seeks **to capture and develop a better understanding of non-Christian faith groups**, better-educating stakeholders on the history and practices of these communities and providing practical insights to further shared understanding and future collaboration. As such, our lines of enquiry are broad and, in many cases, have been led by what these groups and communities feel it is important for partners to know about them. A copy of our interview guide is included within the Appendices.

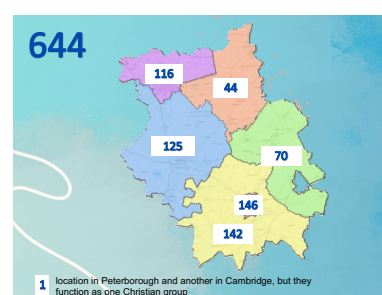
Faith in context

The [2021 census](#) revealed not only a drop in the numbers of those identifying within a faith but also in those classifying themselves as 'Christian'. At the same time there was a rise in those identifying with other key faiths, including Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam and Sikhism. Whilst faith communities may be declining in some places or areas of society, the faith sector is still a significant part of our community, as diverse as any other part of the voluntary, community and social enterprise (VCSE) sector.

Our Phase 1 research identified **644 faith groups across the six distinct areas of the county**. However, we estimate a further 10% without any online presence making a more reliable estimate closer to 700 groups.

Geographic distribution of identified groups

- Peterborough – 18% (116 groups)
- Fenland – 7% (44 groups)
- East Cambridgeshire – 11% (70 groups)
- Cambridge (city) – 23% (146 groups)
- South Cambridgeshire - 22% (142 groups)
- Huntingdonshire – 19% (125 groups)



Distribution of groups by faith

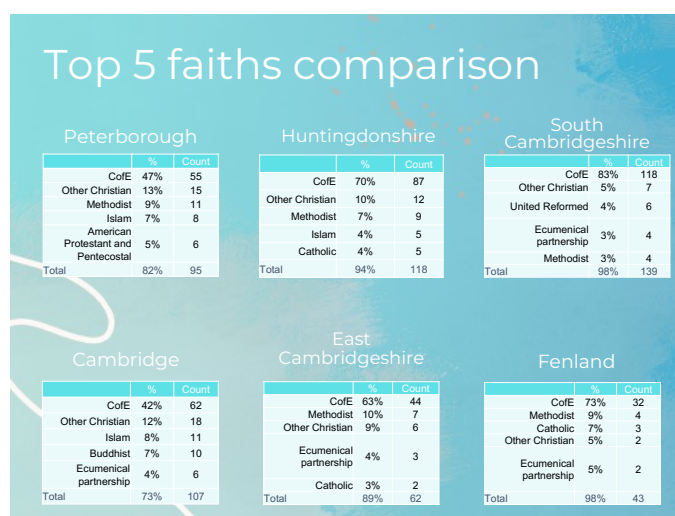
Faith groups grounded in Protestant or mainstream Christianity account for 498 (77%) of those mapped. Elsewhere 4.5% identify as Muslim, 0.2% as Jewish, 0.3% as Sikh, 1.2% as Hindi and 0.5% as Buddhist – a broad ‘non-Christian’ cohort of 6.7% of the population - below the actual numbers of faith groups representing these individuals that we were able to identify (which is closer to 10% of our sample).

Faith	%	Count
Church of England, Other Christian, Methodist	77%	498
Islam	4%	26
Catholic	3%	22
Ecumenical partnership of Methodist with the United Reformed Church, or Methodist with Anglicans, or Christian with Jews	3%	21
United Reformed	2%	15
Buddhist	2%	13
American Protestant and Pentecostal	2%	12
Orthodox	1%	8
Quakers	1%	8
Hindu	1%	6
Jewish	1%	6
Gurdwara (Sikh, Hindu, Punjabi) and Hindi with Malayalam	0.62%	4
Sikh	0.31%	2

Bahá'í Faith	0.31%	2
Hindus, Buddhists, and Jains	0.16%	1

Distribution of faith groups by geographic area

A comparison of the largest numbers of faith groups across the six areas reveals Church of England to be the largest cohort in each - a clear majority in all areas bar Cambridge and Peterborough. Likewise, it is only in the two cities that we find prominent numbers of non-Christian groups.



Phase 3 sampling and approach

As with Phase 2, Phase 3 sought to make direct contact with faith groups and invite them to engage in semi-structured, qualitative encounters. However, as our data offers a much more limited sample size of non-Christian groups, the Phase 2 approach (groups identified by geography and their range of 'open activities', accessible beyond the congregation or faith) proved largely irrelevant for phase 3.

Phase 1 data suggested a total of 56, non-Christian target organisations across the minority faiths. However, it was clear that some were informal networks rather than established organisations or places of worship. Some appeared to have very little online presence, or viable points through which to establish contact. Of our initial 56, 33 contacts were ultimately approached to take part in phase 3, as follows:

Faith	Number of groups / contacts identified	Areas in which they are based
Islam	16	Peterborough (6), Huntingdonshire (2), South Cambridgeshire (1), Cambridge (5), East Cambs (1), All areas (1)
Hindu	4	Peterborough (1), Cambridge (3)
Jewish	3	Peterborough (1), Cambridge (2)
Sikh	2	Peterborough (1), Cambridge (1)
Buddhist	7	Peterborough (2), Cambridge (4), East Cambs (1),
Other	1	A multi-faith network (Peterborough)
Total	33	

Participants and methodology

All 33 contacts received multiple direct invitations to engage, via email, online contact forms and where possible, telephone over an extended period of almost six months. In many cases the most successful approaches were made through intermediaries – single faith and multi-faith networks supporting us to identify the best individuals to approach or brokering introductions for us directly. However, for understandable reasons discussed at various points throughout this report, establishing meaningful contact with grass roots, minority faith organisations proved challenging in many cases.

The original insights included in this report are ultimately based on nine encounters, listed in full within the Appendices, where readers will also find details of the method of engagement (online or in person) and the roles and responsibilities of those interviewed. These are covered within **Section 3 – Direct encounters**. These sections were verified with interviewees for accuracy, though the conclusions drawn from them (outlined in **Section 5 – Learning for Partners**) are the author's.

As expected from the geographic distribution of non-Christian faith groups, most encounters took place in the cities of Peterborough and Cambridge and were conducted in person - in some cases as part of wider meetings or open days, offering good opportunity for sustained engagement and learning. Meaningful engagement was secured with representatives from the Jewish, Hindu and particularly the Muslim faith – including a range of individuals and organisations and services beyond Mosques. This is of particular value because Islam is, by some measure, the largest minority faith outside Christianity, within the combined authority area.

As will be evident to readers from the appendices, and as also covered in more detail in sections **3** and **4 (Indirect Insights)**, direct encounters with representatives from all five faiths was not ultimately possible. Regrettably, representatives from Buddhist and Sikh faiths have not contributed to this report in their own words, though we have included relevant insights gleaned from publicly attributable sources where relevant, particularly within **Section 4**.

We are particularly grateful to colleagues at Peterborough Council for Voluntary Services, Peterborough Interfaith Support Group, Interfaith Connection Cambridge and The Gather Movement for their invaluable support in helping us to establishing dialogues with faith groups and their representatives.

2 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The principal findings of this enquiry, seeking to better understand the nature and community practices of minority faith groups across the combined authority area, are summarised below.

A better understanding of minority faiths?

To a good degree, we can conclude that we have achieved our key objective of developing a better understanding of these faiths and their work. Within a limited pool of contacts we have successfully engaged, at meaningful levels, with some of the larger and more established groups within three of our five faiths (Islam, Hinduism, Judaism, collectively account for 6% of faith groups across the area¹).

For the others with whom we did not engage directly (Buddhism and Sikhism, accounting for around 2.5% of groups in the area²) we have nonetheless still gained some valuable insights that can inform practical approaches to future engagement, as described in section 5.

A distinct identity as newer or settler communities

An overarching aspect of the learning and insights gained through this enquiry is the role still played by the 'origin stories' of minority faiths – a diasporic element - especially for Islamic, Hindu and Sikh groups. The detail of how and why they settled and established themselves in Peterborough and Cambridge still resonates and forms a core part of their identity, even for communities arriving as far back as the 1970s. Their history is therefore still very much alive and recognising this is key to understanding them and how best to engage with them.

These stories often revolve around the role played by the cities hosting them, whether Peterborough's as a historically welcoming city for migrants escaping oppression, or Cambridge with its more transient population and international outlook as world-leading centre of education. Such factors have helped to shape the minority faith outlook and community presence, and continue to do so. This theme is explored further within the individual group reports included in Section 3.

The significance of place, in contrast to Christian groups

The role of place for minority faiths however stands in some contrast to that of Christian groups engaged during phase 2, for whom the immediate local area and its needs (the parish, for Church of England at least) provides a grounding framework. For minority faiths the notion of place appears wider in outlook (smaller congregational numbers mean they draw members from miles around, in some

¹ See table on page 4 for details

² *ibid*

cases even beyond the combined authority area) but perhaps less influential in shaping their local, day-to-day activities.

Minority groups and ‘open activities’

A key characteristic of Christian groups engaged in phase 2, ‘open activities’ refer to those opportunities or services offered by faith groups that extend beyond their congregations to the wider public, regardless of faith and often built around outcomes connected to wellbeing or welfare. Whilst minority faith groups offer multiple examples of such activities for their own members, programmes consciously aiming beyond their congregations³ appear to be less central to their missions.

This is not to suggest that minority faiths somehow take a more insular approach to their pastoral work; their internal focus appears to be connected to their lived experience as minorities and an ongoing need to strengthen and stabilise as a community. The presence of established, collaborative networks spanning both Sunni and Shi’a Mosques in Peterborough, despite distinct theological differences, may be one reflection of this reality. Another might be the importance attached to their buildings; efforts to secure a building, or expand, renovate or safeguard existing ones were notable features of the stories told by Islamic, Hindu, Jewish and Sikh communities.

That said, we did also record compelling examples of how minority faith groups are reaching out to play a wider social role, be that Peterborough’s Mosques in welcoming or hosting other groups and faiths serving the city, Hindus extending invitations to celebrate Diwali to the whole city of Peterborough or Cambridge’s Beth Shalom Reform Synagogue actively supporting the city’s homeless.

Beyond these general observations it is worth noting that Buddhist community activities perhaps require a quite different category altogether. As described in Section 4, as a non-theistic religion with less emphasis on prayer, almost everything they do – classes, visits, retreats and study around the practice of mindfulness - might be described as an open activity, with much less visible emphasis on serving a purely Buddhist community of ‘believers’.

To what extent are minority faith groups ‘under the radar’ ?

To conclude, we return to one of the central themes driving all three phases of this work to date. To be or be perceived as ‘under the radar’ is a common theme within the Voluntary and Community Sector. A recent report by NAVCA⁴ characterises this as groups who are typically ‘grassroots’ (a synonym for small and local) and ‘not counted in official figures’.

³ Notable exceptions to this include Peterborough icare, described on pages 12 and 29

⁴ [Unseen but Essential \(NAVCA, 2025\)](#)

And though these characteristics might well be associated with minority faith groups, in other ways such groups *are* active and visible within their communities and wider cities, are generally known to wider stakeholders and whose congregations and their faiths are acknowledged within official demographic data.

What we really mean by under the radar is perhaps closer to ‘not on our radar’, or at least not perceived as regular or active participants in the networks or cycles of activity typically found within the statutory or VCSE sectors. We suggest a number of reasons for this throughout section 5, but briefly we might conclude:

- That minority faith groups **do not require the same kinds of support that might be provided by the infrastructure or membership functions more common in the VCSE sector**. As examples of a diaspora, most have strong connections to religious infrastructure internationally. Even in more generic areas of potential support, such as training or advice and guidance, they appear more likely to learn from each other than seek external help;
- Secondly that, though requests for help with fundraising did come up, generally **minority faith groups appeared to be financially independent to a large degree**, generating the bulk of their income from within their members and therefore less likely to seek grant or capital funding from more common sources, or to deliver statutory services or contracts;
- Thirdly that the **compelling role played by faith as a binding agent for communities of identity such as these**, means they may be less exposed to challenges more common to secular charities, such as addressing a shortage of volunteers;
- and finally connected to this, that **regular prayer also bonds these communities in a particular way**. Direct (and often daily) engagement with each other means they are less likely to organise around desk-based activity, office environments, email and the other rhythms of activity more common to statutory and VCSE ways of working.

Nevertheless, despite such differences we also observed a number of strong commonalities on which readers may seek to build deeper relationships with such groups. Most of those engaged were registered, independent charities and deeply invested in tackling many of the same social issues as more mainstream organisations. For these reasons alone, we hope readers can take much from sections 3, 4 and 5 as they seek to recalibrate their own radars and foster meaningful new relationships.

3 DIRECT ENCOUNTERS

Here we provide an overview of our encounters with representatives of Muslim, Hindu and Jewish groups, providing insight into their history, main interests and current areas of activity. Key messages and other information relevant to statutory and VCSE partners is introduced, with practical implications for closer working relationships explored in greater detail in Section 5.

Commonalities across Muslim, Hindi and Jewish communities

Though we must be careful not to generalise, there are common some attributes shared by these communities relevant to stakeholders' intentions to develop a deeper understanding of them:

- **Many faith groups are registered charities:** the majority of groups engaged had registered charity status in England and Wales, or were part of the governance structures of a larger body who held this status;
- **No uniform approach - a wide spectrum of theological belief and practice within faiths:** within the combined authority area we find a range of approaches to faith within faiths - spectrums ranging from traditional to more modern, reform or 'progressive' practices, especially within Islamic and Jewish communities;
- **Congregational intelligence is key to understanding community need:** much as was true for many Christian groups engaged in phase 2, groups engaged here tended to pick up on community needs through interactions with their congregations. However, the regularity of prayer (especially for Muslim and Jewish communities) offers multiple, regular opportunity for contact between the congregation and leaders/elders;
- **A tendency to seek out statutory engagement on their own terms:** unlike many Christian groups, those engaged here did not generally report regular approaches from statutory partners wishing to engage congregations in consultations, public health drives or similar. Rather, groups tended to assess their own needs and rely on professionals within their congregations who worked in or with statutory bodies to broker engagement where desirable (the local Council, health and care partners or the police were cited);
- **Common origin stories, with strong attachments to Peterborough:** one of the more remarkable findings of this report concerns the common origins of Shi'a Muslims and Hindu community in Peterborough, many of whom came in the early 1970s having been forcibly expelled by the Ugandan government of Idi Amin. As well as fostering a deep attachment to the city, some of the original migrants still play leading faith-based and more pastoral roles in their community. Their experiences, though often traumatic, have clearly positively shaped their relationship to Peterborough, their concepts of community outreach

and ‘giving back’ and (in the case of Shi’a Muslims and Hindus) a strong focus on education as a path to betterment.

Muslim communities in Peterborough and Cambridge

The two cities host the largest Muslim communities across the combined authority area, both in population terms and in numbers of centres of worship, in Peterborough especially. Consequently, most of our engagement with Islamic groups took place in Peterborough, though some significant networks were also explored in Cambridge.

There are nine Mosques in **Peterborough**, six of which serve Sunni Muslims and three of which serve the Shi’a Muslim community. This is loosely reflective of the global proportions of Sunni and Shi’a Muslims, which number approximately 85% and 15% respectively⁵. Sunnis and Shi’as differ mainly through their theological beliefs regarding the circumstances following the death of the Prophet Muhammad, though there are also observable differences in their practices of prayer.

Six of the nine Peterborough Mosques come together regularly through the Joint Mosques Council⁶, which exists ‘*to promote co-operation and unity amongst Muslims in Peterborough and surrounding areas,*’ seeking to come together ‘*despite our differences*’. The JMC includes five Sunni and one Shi’a Mosque and, through this structure, statutory engagement with Muslims in the city is not uncommon. Agendas are usually led by current events, with one recent meeting discussing the rise of far-right gatherings in the city.

In contrast, **Cambridge** has one ‘flagship’ Mosque, the Cambridge Central Mosque, built about five years ago to accommodate the growing Muslim community in the city. In addition to being the central place of worship it also acts as a vehicle for increased community engagement, the delivery of public health initiatives, generates income (through a café and hosting weddings and other events) and enjoys cultural outreach (such as popular volunteering programme in its community garden, which attracts volunteers beyond the Muslim faith).

Masjid Khadija Mosque⁷, Peterborough

Masjid Khadija is a Mosque formed of two converted residential terraced houses in the city. ‘Masjid’ means ‘place of prayer’, from which the anglicised word ‘Mosque’ is derived. Masjid Khadija is not a registered charity in its own right, but is affiliated to UK Islamic Mission^[2].

⁵ [Sunnis and Shi’as in Islam \(Wikipedia\)](#)

⁶ [Peterborough Joint Mosques Council \(Facebook page\)](#)

⁷ [Masjid Khadija Mosque](#)

The Mosque was founded in 1986 and serves about 50 Muslims in daily prayer and around 10 times that number on weekends. Their congregation is of diverse heritage, mainly with Asian but also including individuals with African and European backgrounds. The Mosque has a strong focus on inclusivity.

Another aspect of their identity is their proactive approach to community outreach and delivery of positive activities for their congregation. Our meeting with them took place during an open day - 'Faith, food and friends' – which was covered by local BBC news⁸.

As well as developing a deeper understanding of a history of the Mosque and its mission, this was an opportunity to learn more about their community networks, in particular the work of iCare Peterborough⁹ (a foodbank/hub model, with additional activities and based at the Mosque) and Family Voice Peterborough (a parent carer network supporting families with children with special educational needs and disabilities).

For icare, the Mosque provides valuable infrastructure and a base from which to reach out into the wider community. For FVP, the Mosque serves a valuable function in creating a currency of trust within which they could find sensitive ways to reach and support Muslim families in areas of need that can be culturally sensitive. Readers can find further insights and implications on this in section 5.

Beyond these partners attending, the Mosque also regularly engages in health initiatives such as diabetes awareness programmes, cancer screening and support networks, often through engagement co-ordinated by the Joint Mosques Council of Peterborough, local networks such as the Mosques Health Champions Network Peterborough¹⁰ and national organisations like the British Islamic Medical Association¹¹.

Husaini Islamic Centre, Peterborough

"This is our country, but we still understand our roots."

The 'Burton Street Mosque'¹² is one of three Shi'a Mosques in the city and the one Shi'a Mosque represented on the Joint Mosques Council, for cultural reasons – HIC hosts Friday prayers for all three Shi'a Mosques in order to foster community strength and Shi'a beliefs, and so represents the others on the JMC.

Starting with just 40 families, today they include up to 2,000 individuals in their congregation and, like others in the city, the building functions as both a place of worship and community centre.

⁸ [Mosque 'honoured' by community support on open day \(BBC News, 18 Nov 24\)](#)

⁹ One of a network of 40+ charities across country, connected through UK Islamic Mission.

¹⁰ [Mosques Health Champions Network Peterborough \(Facebook page\)](#)

¹¹ [British Islamic Medical Association](#)

¹² [Husaini Islamic Centre Peterborough](#)

Peterborough's Shi'a community came from East Africa in the early 1970s, following their exile from Uganda by Idi Amin. This origin story defines them their community to a large degree, as evident from their podcast (capturing the stories of the elders who migrated in this period, for posterity and education). It also has implications for how they worship - the shrines of their Imams (Shi'as believe that their 12 Imams are the spiritual and political successors to the Islamic Prophet Muhammad) are included in the key features of the Mosque.

Upon arriving in Peterborough, opening a Mosque was the community's top priority. With everything taken from them by force in Uganda, the community had to start again from scratch, initially living in Army barracks and working in local factories. Together they saved enough to purchase land for a building, somewhere for the community to worship and talk about the atrocities they experienced, what we might describe today as processing trauma.

"If you suddenly have to pack and leave you realise they can take everything - but not your education"

Such early efforts are part of what HIC describe as a 'proud, independent tradition' that fuels both a sense of public reserve around self-promotion (perhaps contributing to stakeholder perceptions of faith groups as 'under the radar') but also a strong focus on education and a felt obligation to give back and 'do something' for the city that took them in. Their interpretations of Islamic guidance on giving are that this includes both money and time, and that it is better to give locally first, to the town in which you live, nurturing your local area.

The HIC has a clear governance structure¹³ and, like Masjid Khadija, exhibit progressive or modern tendencies, including in their case preaching in English and a high status for women in their community, reflected by the size of their women's meeting hall, which is bigger than the men's.

They host an extensive range of activities for their congregation including football (men's and women's), lads and dads' group and intergenerational initiatives. Their experience is that different ages require different 'hooks' – sport for younger people, food for those around midlife, companionship and spiritual sustenance for elders. Events are sometimes separated by gender, with those involving both men and women tend to have an educative focus.

One final aspect of HIC's work worth noting is its investment in interfaith activities. Their overarching humanitarian focus, perhaps inspired by the Shi'a belief that 'the Prophet Muhammad came for all' means they play an active role in the city's

¹³ [Husaini Islamic Centre - governance](#)

interfaith network and have a close and active working relationship with Peterborough Cathedral (who hosted a Council of European Mosques meeting in recent years, and recently brought a group of Christian pilgrims to visit HIC).

Cambridge Muslim College, Cambridge Crescent, Cambridge Central Mosque

Though the population of Muslims in Cambridge is lower than Peterborough, it was possible to identify a network of affiliated organisations serving complementary purposes but actively collaborating. As such they offer us a view into Islamic networks in the city, through and beyond faith and worship alone.

Cambridge Muslim College¹⁴ is a registered charity whose independence is an important aspect of their work – their mission to develop Muslim thought leadership through education, training and research means they do not affiliate to any particular Islamic sect or institution.

From their building in central Cambridge, CMC support scholars to contextualise Islam in modern British Society, with many students going on to become Imams or similar, though many students on the Diploma for Contextual Islamic Studies are already trained Imams. The programme includes modules on counselling, British religious history, interfaith and practical interfaith programmes. Most students are from underprivileged backgrounds and need financial assistance, which is a limiting factor on enrolment and the College itself, which relies fully on donations.

Graduates return typically return to their communities able to offer more impactful community service. Some may go onto further studies at university or go into teaching. A greater number of international visitors to Cambridge and its high student population means CMC's student cohort is quite transient, which in turn drives some of their engagement with the Cambridge Central Mosque.

Cambridge Crescent¹⁵ is a volunteer-run community organisation, independent of CMC, whose purpose is to counter loneliness and isolation to build community and connection. CMC have supported the Crescent for around a decade, offering use of their building and facilities free of charge. This allows the Crescent to hold monthly coffee mornings, workshops and weekend classes helping newcomers to the faith to focus on their needs, as individuals and as a group.

The Crescent is often a first port of call for Muslims feeling isolated, finding the Crescent online or through the Cambridge Central Mosque. Last year the Mosque

¹⁴ [Cambridge Muslim College](#)

¹⁵ [Cambridge Crescent](#)

registered over 200 people who chose to enter Islam, and the Cambridge Crescent can be a complementary port of call for such individuals.

The Crescent endeavours to build the foundations of a local community in Cambridgeshire which promotes and honours the cultural heritage and diverse ethnicities of all members, enriching the wider Muslim community, countering cultural and ethnic prejudices and enhancing cultural harmony by designing and delivering educational programmes in person and via mixed-media resources.

It also focuses on supporting the spiritual and intellectual pursuits of members through classes and courses, in collaboration with local institutions, scholars, imams, mentors and trained volunteers. This is achieved through regular in-person community events, courses, retreats and services supporting emotional, intellectual and spiritual well-being relevant to the identity as British Muslims. Cambridge Crescent is a registered charity and relies entirely on charitable donations.

In turn the Crescent also supports CMC, in particular its Student Welfare services, in helping to identify issues facing individuals and to respond to those needs. The Mosque also fulfils this function to a degree, referring individuals in need of support to the Crescent. The Crescent does not offer any active support to the CMC - that is a separate role and responsibility. But the CMC's Welfare Officer is also the founder and facilitator of the Cambridge Crescent.

Completed approximately five years, the **Cambridge Central Mosque**¹⁶ is an impressive, architecturally striking modern building, built with ecological considerations in mind, to accommodate the city's expanding Muslim population. Though primarily a centre of worship it attracts both Muslims and non-Muslims as volunteers in its impressive community garden, which has been featured on BBC Gardener's World¹⁷. The Mosque occupies a natural, central role as an obvious point of connection for Muslims in the city, or those exploring conversion.

Though still more in a reactive than proactive place when it comes to serving community needs beyond faith, today the Mosque is starting to develop its own community programme and outreach initiatives, such as a health hub, run by two practicing GPs on a voluntary basis, a series of regular workshops with guest speakers¹⁸ and curated writings¹⁹ reflecting the Mosque's contemporary vision.

The Mosque also opens its doors to wider visitors, an aspect of its work that it is keen to encourage. Tours are offered regularly to a variety of groups, that has included statutory teams and agencies from health, police and even local planning

¹⁶ [Cambridge Central Mosque](#)

¹⁷ [BBC Gardeners' World \(August 2022\)](#)

¹⁸ [Islamiques Book Launch - Diana Darke \(CCM YouTube, Jan 2025\)](#)

¹⁹ [Cambridge Central Mosque - curated writings](#)

departments. Tours are run by volunteers (one of which works for CMC) and interested parties are encouraged to make enquiries²⁰.

Taken together, the CMC, Crescent and Mosque form an important local nexus of organisations serving a variety of needs amongst both the city's established and more transient Muslim communities, as well as Muslims from across the combined authority area. This package of support includes education, health, welfare, faith and above all, creating connection and relief of isolation - the overarching themes of their common community outreach.

Bharat Hindu Samaj, Peterborough

"Hinduism is not a religion but a way of life. Religion is only one part of what we do"

Bharat Hindu Samaj²¹ is a registered charity and temple of worship around which a community has evolved serving the Hindu community in Peterborough. Just as towns spring up around Cathedrals, in India towns were built around Hindu temples and their distinctive spires. Bharat Hindu Samaj is located in a converted former school, without the traditional spire but encompassing a series of connected and extended buildings on a long-term lease to the community since the early 1980s.

The nature of the centre as community-focused, with additional space for worship, gives it opportunity to serve those beyond the Hindu faith alone. In addition to a social calendar built around religious festivals, a vast range of community activities are offered – cultural, educational, sporting, creative – all run by volunteers. The temple has just one member of paid staff (a Priest).

Bharat Hindu Samaj is the only Hindu temple in the combined authority area, meaning Hindus travel in from miles around. The nearest other temple is in Leicester, and for many years this meant local Hindus had to travel there for their Diwali celebrations – the highlight of their religious calendar. Like other faith groups engaged in this enquiry, Bharat Hindu Samaj assess needs in their community through regular interaction with their congregation and wider membership. The nature of these needs also has much in common with other faiths – mental health, loneliness and isolation are the key overarching themes of their work.

This history of Hindus in Peterborough shares some similarities with the Shi'a Muslims described above. Though many are of Indian origin, some arrived from Uganda in the early 1970s (around 25 families initially), at a similar time as some Muslims were fleeing the regime of Idi Amin.

²⁰ [Booking a tour at the Cambridge Central Mosque](#)

²¹ [Bharat Hindu Samaj](#)

In another similarity with Shi'a Muslims, the Hindu community place a lot of cultural value in education. England is considered a natural home for them, with its strong educational tradition, and many Hindu families send their children to England for this reason. In alignment with this, many Bharat Hindu Samaj members are often well-educated, in senior professional roles (or retired), meaning the community doesn't require much help to integrate or access statutory services (in the way, for example, that East European immigrants might require support to register for GP services).

This adds to the community's perceptions of themselves as being quite self-contained, consistent with the more general 'peace loving, non-confrontational' aspects of Hindu culture, which they also feel might even count against them in terms of the visibility of their needs in the city, and the sympathies of statutory agencies and elected officials.

The community enjoyed a supportive relationship with the local Council for many years. Though they are financially independent (they do not receive core or project statutory funding, resourcing their activities through membership and donations) they have benefitted from a peppercorn rent on their premises since occupying the building. However, this relationship is currently under considerable pressure, leaving the charity at a particularly vulnerable and potentially critical juncture.

Over the years the community has grown to the point where the building can no longer accommodate their community during major festivals. Hinduism has a pantheon of Gods and around 30 festivals are celebrated across the year. As the building is leased, Bharat Hindu Samaj has little ability to renovate or extend – it would need to own the building. Hence for over a decade the charity has been in discussions with the Council over assuming legal ownership, allowing for much needed expansion and renovation. The Council remains the land and building owner, and these discussions have already outlived several different political administrations.

A Heads of Terms agreement was reached in 2017 regarding an asset transfer of ownership (rather than a commercial sale), but changes in administration and key personnel prevented completion. At the time of writing, the current political administration wishes to sell the land/building at a price the charity could not afford, and in the resulting impasse the Council has, in the opinion of the charity, effectively withdrawn from further discussions. The current future of the building, and by consequence the Hindu community in Peterborough and the surrounding area, is therefore quite uncertain.

Beth Shalom Reform Synagogue, Cambridge

Beth Shalom is a progressive and inclusive Reform Jewish community²² with a mission '*...to provide religious services, education and a community hub for Jews in Cambridge....*' In describing what 'Reform' means to them we might note that services are conducted in both Hebrew and English and the prayerbook used is that of the Movement for Reform Judaism. Additionally, their website talks of '*...striving to accommodate the needs and wishes of our members while maintaining the sanctity of Jewish tradition.*' They are a registered charity and financially independent.

Beth Shalom was started in 1978 and has grown steadily ever since. It became a member of the Reform Movement in 1981. A piece of land was purchased in 2009 and after extensive fund raising, a new Synagogue was built in 2014/15. Most of those who attend live within Cambridge or close to it. Some travel from further afield – a community around Kings Lynn for example, and an increasingly large group from Huntingdon. There are about 100 Israeli families in Cambridge (including a small orthodox community).

Beth Shalom serves around 200 families, with 'membership' open to all who are Jewish by parental descent, or who have undergone a recognised conversion. Some members have non-Jewish partners (who are also welcome and can apply for associate membership). The student population in Cambridge is also welcome to attend services and events. Men and women enjoy equal religious rights.

With only around 40 Jewish households in Peterborough, the majority of this community (across the combined authority area) are located in and around the city of Cambridge. As such, Beth Shalom's membership has a large geographic footprint – more or less the whole of east Anglia. The wider liberal UK Jewish community is itself relatively small, just over quarter of a million people. Together the Reform and Liberal strands of the faith account for around 30% of the UK Jewish population.

Like other faith groups engaged here, Beth Shalom has a vibrant social and community calendar of activities, including a lunch club, choir, drama group, book club and friends in gardening group – alongside faith-based activities such as a Torah reading class, Hebrew study groups and a women's spiritual group. Also like wider faith groups, needs and activities are identified through regular member / congregation engagement. The Welfare Group, for example, attempts to look after any Jewish person in or close to Cambridge who needs help, whether or not they are a member of the Synagogue itself. Beth Shalom also has links with Addenbrookes Hospital, who do not have their own Jewish chaplaincy.

²² [Beth Shalom Reform Synagogue](#)

The Synagogue also has a history of serving the wider community, particularly men experiencing homelessness, through their historic engagement in a programme²³ which opened up their building for men to sleep there one night a week, supported by volunteers. This took place from around 2016 until it was forced to end during the Covid-19 lockdowns, at which point other arrangements were made, which volunteers from Beth Shalom continued to support. Similar ambitions – to provide support and shelter for vulnerable communities – were taken forward in 2022 when the Synagogue collaborated with others to provide housing for Ukrainian refugees.

Though the Synagogue has had regular contact with statutory agencies (including the city's Local Authority) over the years they would welcome more strategic engagement. There has been little engagement with health agencies, although like other faith groups the presence of doctors within the congregation helps the Synagogue to reach such services if required.

In terms of wider faith communities, Beth Shalom initiated interfaith services in March 2023. Interfaith activities are now coordinated by the Woolf Institute²⁴. Recently there has been good collaboration with the Cambridge Muslim community resulting in some joint community activities.

²³ Other groups and agencies involved included [CCHP](#) (Cambridge Churches Homeless Project) and [ITAC](#) (It takes a City)

²⁴ [The Woolf Institute](#)

4 INDIRECT INSIGHTS

Though we were unable to arrange direct encounters with Buddhist or Sikh groups as part of this exercise, in this section we aim to shine a light on these religions and the work and activities of their centres and places of worship in the combined authority area. This information is drawn largely from publicly available sources and wider partner insights.

Details of our attempts to directly engage Buddhist and Sikh groups, and hypotheses as to why these were unsuccessful, are included below. In some cases, a reluctance to participate may in itself tell us something useful about the nature of these groups. Some of this is explored further within the *nature of Buddhism* and *introduction to the Sikh faith* sections below.

Buddhist groups in the combined authority area

Our Phase 1 data reveals thirteen Buddhist groups across Cambridgeshire and Peterborough - two in Peterborough, ten in Cambridge and one in East Cambridgeshire. They range from informal meditation groups (with a Facebook page, or no discernible online presence at all) to established centres of practice.

Of these we reached out to the six most established – those with a clear public presence and point of contact. Dialogue was achieved with three, however all ultimately declined to take part. Perhaps the most established, the Drolma Centre in Peterborough, initially accepted our invitation but following an internal discussion around who was best placed to participate, they decided to withdraw.

Buddhism in relation to community work and engagement

Buddhism stands out from many other religions in several key aspects, including:

- **worship and ritual:** though Buddhists honour a variety of figures it is a largely non-theistic religion. There is a strong emphasis on following teachings and meditation over the importance of prayer. The absence of a ‘temple’ of centre of worship may impact on how they organise and engage;
- Building on this, the Buddhist **focus on mindfulness and awareness**, rather than ceremonial rituals, provides fewer opportunities to share their faith or collaborate culturally, such as those afforded (for example) by the more open and public Diwali celebrations in Hinduism;
- Nevertheless, Buddhism’s **core values** (such as compassion and loving-kindness) **influence its community work**. Centres and monasteries often engage in local and global service projects, including disaster relief, mental health support and education. Buddhism teaches that everything is interconnected, and though this leads to a strong emphasis on collective well-

being, the liberation of one is seen as interconnected with the liberation of others, which may drive its main focus on empowering personal practice - **empowerment through teaching** is a key component of Buddhist community work, focused on living a life free from suffering through practical teachings on ethics, meditation, and wisdom;

- Finally, Buddhism's **inclusive and non-hierarchical communities**, with an emphasis on equality among members, personal development and shared learning, mean there is an absence of a strict clergy or leadership structure – clear points of contact for enquiries like these – compared to other faiths.

Through these insights we might conclude that, for a variety of good reasons, a Buddhist community may not feel as well-placed as other faith groups to engage with a project of this nature. We can elaborate on this in the following section, to inform any future approaches readers may wish to make.

An introduction to the Drolma Centre, Peterborough

The Drolma Kadampa Buddhist centre²⁵ is a registered charity describing itself as *‘..a modern Buddhist school which presents all the ancient wisdom of Buddha in a way which is perfectly suited to the modern world. The emphasis of [their] teachings is that Buddhism can be of practical benefit to everyone, no matter their way of life.*

Drolma serves Cambridgeshire, Peterborough and Lincolnshire and all are welcome, regardless of their background or belief system; ‘faith’ (in a non-theistic religion) is less of a consideration. They have a resident teacher and offer classes, retreats, study and membership (discounted rates for regular practitioners).

The titles of some of their classes reveal the practical intention of their teachings – *Start the week stress free, Meditate to Overcome Anxiety* and *Transform your life*. Classes are held at their dedicated centre in Peterborough but also around the wider area, including Stamford, Godmanchester and Graffam Water.

Their community outreach also includes school visits (guided tours on premises or in schools themselves – fees are charged for this), educational outreach programmes (delivered in similar ways, with costs available on enquiry) and volunteering opportunities (including gardening, DIY, cleaning, publicity and helping with classes, courses and events).

²⁵ [The Drolma Centre Peterborough](#)

An introduction to the Cambridge Buddhist Centre

The Cambridge Buddhist Centre²⁶ is dedicated to making meditation and Buddhist teachings accessible to all, with an ethos grounded in generosity, operating on a "dana" (donation) economy where classes are offered freely, and participants are encouraged to contribute what they can. CBC is a registered charity and part of the wider Triratna Buddhist Community, incorporating many Buddhist centres and groups²⁷ throughout UK. The centre's formal charity name is Triratna Cambridge.

In many ways the centre shares strong similarities with the Drolma centre: activities and services include meditation classes, mindfulness courses, bodywork classes (incorporating wider practices such as Tai Chi, Yoga and Pilates), peer support and development opportunities for practitioners. Their educational outreach work, like the Drolma Centre, focuses mainly on engagement with local schools and has a modest charging structure. Visits and tours for other organisations seeking education and wider experiences that introduce teachings and meditation practices are also offered.

An introduction to the Sikh faith

Guru Nanak Dev Ji, the founder of the Sikh faith, established the core principles of Sikhism in the late 15th and early 16th centuries. Born in Nankana Sahib, India in 1469, Guru Nanak emphasized the importance of reciting God's name, living an honest life, and sharing wealth with those in need. Sikhism teaches the equality of all people, regardless of race, religion, or gender, and advocates for the moral responsibility of individuals to live ethically and serve others. Sikhs believe in one God, the creator, and the importance of religious freedom, where every person is free to pursue their own spiritual path without judgment or coercion.

The Sikh faith has flourished through the teachings of ten successive Gurus, with the Guru Granth Sahib Ji, the holy scripture, serving as the current spiritual guide. Sikhism is the fifth-largest religion in the world, with over 25 million followers. Sikhs have a long history of advocating for justice and equality, and they made significant contributions to both world wars, with many awarded the Victoria Cross.

Sikh groups in the combined authority area

Our Phase 1 data revealed fewer Sikh organisations than Buddhist groups – only three in total, Gurdwara Baba Bundha Sahib Ji²⁸ in Peterborough and the Cambridge University Sikh Society²⁹ and Cambridge Gurudwara³⁰.

²⁶ [www.CambridgeBuddhistCentre](http://www.CambridgeBuddhistCentre.org)

²⁷ [The Triratna Buddhist Community in the UK](http://TheTriratnaBuddhistCommunityintheUK.org)

²⁸ [Gurdwara Baba Bundha Sahib Ji, Peterborough](http://GurdwaraBabaBundhaSahibJi.org)

²⁹ [Cambridge Sikh Society](http://CambridgeSikhSociety.org)

³⁰ [Cambridge Gurudwara](http://CambridgeGurudwara.org)

In Peterborough

Gurdwara Baba Budha Sahib Ji was the first place of worship for the Sikh Community in Peterborough, opened in 1974. The eponymous Baba Jaswant Singh Ji, a decedent of Braham Gyani Baba Budha Sahib Ji from India, visited the Peterborough Sikh Bhat Community in 1972 and, on finding that there no dedicated Gurdwara (a Sikh temple) in the city, advised them to establish a 'Gurdwara Sahib'.

Funded through donations, their converted domestic building expanded in the 1980s and was extensively refurbished in the 1990s. However continued community growth led to the purchase of a new, larger and more fit-for-purpose building in 2004.

In Peterborough, Sikhs have been an integral part of the community since the post-World War II era, with their population growing from 1,100 in 2011 to around 2,000 today. The local Sikh community has made valuable contributions to the local economy, with Sikhs excelling in business, medicine, law, and education.

Unlike many other Gurdwaras around the country, Baba Budha Sahib Ji does not appear to be a registered charity and, though we understand they are still very active, they do not regularly update their online presence. Direct attempts to make contact, as well as through intermediaries, were ultimately unsuccessful.

In Cambridge

In contrast, the Gurdwara in Cambridge appears to have a clearer and more recognisable governance structure³¹. The Gurdwara opened in 2013, evolving from the Cambridge Sikh Society, a registered charity since 1982. Often Sikhs arrive in Cambridge to work for the University or in the surrounding area, with the Sikh Society providing space for local Sangat (congregation). Like in Peterborough, the Cambridge Gurdwara do not seem to maintain a regular online presence.

The University's Sikh Society (dating from 2019) notes the long-established presence of Sikh scholars in the city, dating from the 1890s: in 1907 Sant Teja Singh, while studying at Cambridge University, fought for (and won) the right to wear his dastaar (turban) and, after graduating, he set up the Khalsa Jatha British Isles, establishing the first Gurdwara in Europe. Other celebrated Sikh students included Manmohan Singh, a future Prime Minister of India (reading Economics at St John's College and winning the Adam Smith Prize in 1956).

Today the University Society runs events covering religious, social and educational areas for a network of Sikh students (and alumni) from both Cambridge and Anglia Ruskin Universities, and though they would appear to be active there is little evidence of wider community engagement beyond their members. Their last published newsletter dates from 2023.

³¹ [Cambridge Gurdwara - governance](#)

5 LEARNING FOR PARTNERS

This closing section provides a summary of key insights and points of learning from across our direct and indirect encounters, grouped and themed in ways designed to support stakeholders to further develop their understanding of these communities, their needs and motivations, and where desirable to identify the most effective ways to reach out and engage them.

Comparisons with the Christian Faith

Like many of the groups grounded in Christianity (engaged during phase 2), many of those cited in this report also have charitable status and **a strong degree of financial independence**, built largely from within their own congregations.

Other features minority faith groups appear to share with Christian groups include **good levels of volunteer engagement** (with no particular shortage of volunteers) and a strong **correlation between the key social issues** they are addressing; *tackling loneliness and isolation within their communities, relating to wider issues in physical and mental health*, were as common here as witnessed during phase 2.

In contrast, some of the key differences between the five minority faiths and Christian groups appear to stem from the sizes and concentrations of these communities across. In serving smaller numbers overall, we naturally find greater numbers in the two cities of Cambridge and Peterborough. Often built around early migrant communities, these concentrations serve to provide some unity and stability as they establish and grow.

A general conclusion therefore might be that minority faith groups place **less of an emphasis on place** in dictating their community work – serving the immediate local area appears to be a higher priority for Christian groups (though this focus may of course be heavily influenced by the statutory duty of the Church of England to provide a worshipful presence in their parishes).

This is not to say that place is not important for minority faiths. The **role of the city in welcoming and incubating** newer faiths – Peterborough especially – was a notable feature of several encounters. A desire to give back to the city as a whole was often a visible and important part of their ethos, and in some cases, elders spoke compellingly about the role key statutory officials and elected members had played in their histories, dating well back into the 1970s.

Finally, we note that minority faiths based in cities may also make the **presence of interfaith networks** more likely – notable examples of such networks were found in both Peterborough and Cambridge, and several supported our ability to engage groups on the ground in this enquiry.

PERCEPTIONS OF STATUTORY PARTNERS

“Well contact you when we need you”

This was a perceived behavioural characteristic of statutory agencies for some faith communities. Covid-era engagement was cited as an example, where some groups felt they were very active compared to other parts of the community, though perhaps not as valued or courted. Early, meaningful engagement with faith groups was seen as essential to help avoid adversarial relations in more challenging times, where engagement would be required at pace.

“We’ve been here before. The penny has not dropped, £s are being wasted”

A similar perception suggested that that better/more regular engagement would save statutory services time and resources – particularly in preventative health and care measures to avoid additional costs further on. One example offered was of a failure to engage and support the East Timor community at an early stage, despite the prevalence of tuberculosis being well-known issue.

Senior level leadership and engagement is vital – and well-remembered

A relatively recent example of what was seen as good engagement occurred in Peterborough, where senior Council officials played a vital role liaising with the UK Government’s Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) during the Allied forces’ withdrawal from Afghanistan. These efforts supported the successful extraction of Afghani families with links to Muslims already living in Peterborough.

The quality of engagement with faith groups during times of stress casts a long shadow. It was notable how several encounters in Peterborough referenced the respected efforts of several civic and civil leaders, whose interventions were seen as crucial to the fortunes of minority faith groups, even long after the event. These included:

- Cllr Charles Swift – perceived as instrumental in securing early housing solutions for Shi’a Muslims in the 1970s;
- Rev’d Richard Payton, working through the Peterborough Council for Community Relations, supporting Hindu families on arriving in the city in 1972; and more recently
- Former Chief Executive of Peterborough City Council Gillian Beasley, who held a regular, senior level dialogue with faith groups in the city.

ENGAGEMENT INSIGHTS

Engaging on religions / cultural grounds

Approaching faith groups via interfaith networks in both cities

Such networks could be a useful starting point for organisations or agencies seeking to establish new relationships. As well as promoting dialogue and mutual understanding, these networks could also be a good place to engage in more practical shared interests, such as provisions for burial³² – an issue of interest for Jewish and Islamic in particular.

Meeting faith groups on their own terms

Partners might do well to recognise the vital importance of festivals and celebrations (such as Diwali for Hindus) to the identity of minority faiths and as a gateway to better engagement. Likewise, something simple such as booking a tour at the Cambridge Central Mosque (something several charities and statutory teams have already done) could be a great way to increase understanding and open up a better dialogue.

Be conscious the opportunities offered by regular prayer and celebration

Those wishing to engage with minority faiths for consultation or engagement purposes might note the opportunities provided by regular prayer (often a daily, physical presence) or festivals common in minority faiths – particularly in Islamic, Jewish and Hindu communities. Readers may also wish to note that for engagement planned via Mosques, men and women largely take separate approaches to prayer and may therefore require different approaches when engaged. Efforts seeking to reach both men and women together may be easier where there is an educational focus – mixed gender participation is more common in such areas.

Be sensitive in approaches to statutory engagement

The traumatic origin stories of some minority faiths in the area, particularly those of Shi'a Muslims, highlight how such experiences might still translate into a general distrust of government and authority figures more widely. This may lead to some communities being less likely to reach out for support at times of genuine need. Likewise, some experiences (such as disability) can carry a cultural stigma for certain faiths, presenting additional barriers for engagement, so building consciousness of such issues is advised.

Combatting far right extremism

The importance of the role of the host city in the fortunes of minority groups was raised in several conversations. In Cambridge for example, Muslim groups noted that within a diverse and transient population with a largely international outlook, far right extremism doesn't seed well in the city. However, with misunderstanding and

³² Stakeholders referenced a 'Joint Burial Society' active in Essex as a useful model.

misinformation around Islam so common, groups still encouraged partners to reach out for a 'real human dialogue'. Many were concerned about current levels of Islamophobia, with implications for their feeling for the UK as their home.

Engaging on thematic or place-based issues

Tackling loneliness and isolation

As already noted, this issue was found to be common in the interests of minority faith groups, particularly in reaching those already in their community, congregation or membership. Much effort goes into providing regular activities and support services for these individuals, especially the elderly, those isolated or with disabilities or health conditions. Sometimes isolation is also experienced in cultural or religious spheres, especially for those exploring conversion and 'leaving' their older communities behind.

Accessing statutory services

Perhaps surprisingly, few groups engaged in this exercise appeared to want or need help to access local statutory services. Though some efforts were evident (such as the community health hub initiative being established at Cambridge Central Mosque) most groups reported high numbers of professionals within their congregations, often in health, police or other statutory services, which meant they already felt well connected to services, should they need them.

Awareness of local networks

The example of collaboration between the Muslim College, Crescent and Mosque in Cambridge illustrate the role faith groups themselves can play in helping individuals to navigate and signpost. Tapping into existing relationships on the ground could be helpful to statutory agencies and VCSE networks, likely to find 'no wrong front door' through such approaches.

Particulars of engaging Sikh and Buddhist communities

Though we should be cautious about drawing firm conclusions due to limited direct evidence, we might here begin to note some pertinent factors readers may wish to bear in mind:

- The **similarities between Sikh Gurdwaras in Peterborough and Cambridge** – particularly the lack of a regular online presence, suggest limited appetite for external engagement generally. Successful approaches may be more likely through trusted intermediaries – perhaps interfaith networks (although on this project, such approaches did not succeed);
- For Buddhist communities the individual nature and focus of their approaches (personal empowerment as a route to community empowerment) mean there is a **less tangible 'congregation'** through which to seek engagement. Collective

activity is more likely to be experienced through a 'membership' prism and, where based around classes, is more akin to a leisure services model than worship;

- The non-hierarchical, non-theistic approach of Buddhism may also make it harder to identify a clear point of engagement, or individual who feels they have the mandate to represent a wider community. Though we did not hear this directly, we suspect it was one factor in their lack of engagement in this project.

Suggestions for statutory partners

Whilst this report does not make formal recommendations, faith groups expressed some clear suggestions for statutory partners and VCSE networks to consider, summarised as follows:

Establish regular relationships at senior levels – Assistant Director or above, within local authorities

Without these, groups felt that well-meaning initiatives often got stuck at managerial levels, relying on their motivation or ability to influence others around them and being quickly dropped when managers move on. An Assistant Director (or higher) would, it was perceived, more intuitively understand the importance of (for example) preventative health agendas, and/or be better placed to exert corporate influence.

Undertake Quarterly Business Reviews on faith engagement

Some suggested Councils should establish a QBR process as opportunity for face-to-face engagement with faith groups on areas of shared interest - distribution of the Household Support Fund was one example cited.

In person, avoiding email

Several elders expressed a strong preference for in person activities as a medium for engagement and a general desire to avoid email where possible, which felt of less use as a day-to-day business tool for such groups. For example, one elder engaging with us requested information via WhatsApp, as an easier way to share information more easily with his committee.

EXAMPLES OF COLLABORATION

Illustrations of existing collaborations between minority faith groups and statutory agencies or VCSE networks may provide additional inspiration or insight for those seeking to develop such relationships in the future. Some notable examples cited through this exercise are summarised below.

Employability support

The Husaini Islamic centre has worked with employers to help them adapt their practices for Islamic communities. Last year they hosted a mixed gender recruitment fair in which 120 employers participated.

Food hubs and beyond

The collaborative foodbank model, in which many Christian groups play a leading or supportive role, was also evident amongst monitor faiths, most notably in Peterborough. The **Masjid Khadija Mosque hosts the local branch of icare**, one of a network of around 40 such organisations across the country.

Peterborough icare's model goes beyond many however in that it builds on the standard food hub/bank approach to include wider networks and activities – youth teams, litter picks and monthly meals distributed directly to people's homes or even in the street, collaborating with local homelessness groups such as The Lighthouse Project. Another area where culture meets civic duty is grave cleaning - maintaining a conscious connection to death is a cultural aspect of Islam.

Icare Peterborough is very conscious of its social impact, tracking outcomes in ways comparable to larger charities. It reported supporting tens of thousands of beneficiaries since its creation, with around 85% of non-Muslim heritage. Statutory and VCSE partners are well aware of icare, regularly signposting or referring into them.

Wider Statutory and VCSE engagement

Both Bharat Hindu Samaj in Peterborough and the Beth Shalom Reform Synagogue in Cambridge offered multiple examples of engagement and collaboration with statutory agencies and wider networks in the Voluntary and Community Sector.

In Peterborough, the Hindu community have developed relationships with statutory partners over the last 11 years in order to stage their annual Diwali celebrations in the city centre, attracting around 5,000. Before this development Hindus in the city had to travel to Leicester – the next nearest temple – for such celebrations. Bharat Hindu Samaj also share a site with a soup kitchen (in a neighbouring unit) and periodically co-operate with them on initiatives to feed the homeless. And in Cambridge, Beth Shalom maintains a list of wider support groups and networks³³ for signposting purposes

³³ [Beth Shalom - community links](#)

Case study: an Islamic Mental Health Chaplaincy

In what appears to be the first role of its kind in the combined authority area, the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough ICS³⁴ fund a (part time) chaplaincy post dedicated to mental health support for Muslims in acute care settings (hospitals). The post is held by an Imam who fulfils a similar role for Hospital Trusts in Bedfordshire.

Development of the role

Prior to the establishment of this role arrangements had periodically been made for visiting Imams in hospitals, but these voluntary arrangements had sometimes led to a clash of priorities, making it difficult to fulfil the expectations of a formal service.

This led the ICS to 'dip their toe in the water' with a small role starting at 7.5 hours a week, but as demand soon rose this was increased to the current level of provision - 3 days a week. The incumbent suggests services such as these tend to be population-led, based on numbers of particular communities whom the Trust wants to better serve. He speculates that there are probably fewer than 10 Islamic Chaplains in the UK. He is confident, for example, that none exist in Norfolk, where his chaplaincy team provide informal support to Trusts there.

Focus of the service

In both Independent Care Systems clinical staff provide direction/steer as to who needs the service (patients), but the Chaplain also does walkabouts on wards occasionally and isn't completely restricted to supporting those of Islamic faith.

The need for culturally appropriate services also extends beyond patients themselves. Whilst in Cambridgeshire and Peterborough this role sits within the Nursing Directorate, in Bedfordshire it's connected to their Learning and Development Teams, where internal demand for cultural advice and guidance for management and front-line levels is also evident. Such advice is often directed towards well-intentioned but sometimes misguided engagement activities – which the Chaplain describes as often 'honourable, but not practical'.

Service and impact

The Chaplaincy doesn't work to quotas – there are no numerical targets, and generally the service is perceived internally as offering good value, for example through its higher ratio of encounters with patients than for most nurses. Referrals generally come through ward staff, though sometimes individuals can self-refer.

Individuals ('parishioners') respond to the service in a number of ways. Most Imams (and Priests) would find themselves supporting mental wellbeing in some way, but this need is amplified in a hospital setting. The approach of the role appears to share

³⁴ [Cambridgeshire & Peterborough Integrated Care System](#)

some similarities with person-centered volunteering approaches – highly-relational, with no particular agenda or prescribed or standardised intervention, built instead on the value generated from a trusted relationship.

Though each approach is individual, the Chaplain did acknowledge the need for a more standardised ‘spiritual assessment tool’ or similar, for assessing the needs of new patients. And in a wider indication of the need to raise awareness around faith as a consideration in health settings, he says he often meets patients whose faith hasn’t been recorded/recognised in their patient records.

The Chaplain is part of a wider Team, which meets monthly, has a Lead Chaplain and its own Strategy (known as ‘Heart and Soul’). Peer support within the team is important because it can be an emotionally draining role.

History and purpose of chaplaincy

Though clearly grounded in faith, Chaplaincy support today is more likely to be found in non-clerical settings – particularly hospitals, prison and universities – anywhere where there is an audience with a spiritual need. This Chaplain has undertaken such work for the past 25 years, only the last 10 of those in hospital settings. He sees his role as bringing a spiritual element to the wider treatment of patients, correcting an ‘absence of humanity’ perceived as common to many state services or interventions.

INSIGHTS INTO POTENTIAL AREAS OF SUPPORT

Infrastructure and networks

Though most groups engaged in this report had access to some forms of infrastructure or support services, usually grounded in their own faith and sometimes with international dimensions, few displayed much awareness or interaction (despite being registered charities themselves) with more mainstream networks within the Voluntary and Community Sector. Where developmental support or wider networking needs were identified, these are summarised in the following table:

Area of need	Feedback, insights
Networking and Peer support	Islamic groups cited a range of potential developmental needs, including support to build their wider community relations, increase approaches to student welfare, build networks with groups tackling health inequalities and develop better links to educational institutions (homeschooling is a growing trend, and at university level to help counter Islamophobia).

Funding and fundraising	Beyond the singular need of Peterborough's Hindu community (which may require significant financing for a new building) groups did not generally indicate a strong or urgent need for financial support. Most groups appear to generate income through their own congregations and wider donations. Despite this however, as registered charities several cited a desire for more support with fundraising activities – both in terms of knowledge of available funds and creating bids. Readers may wish to note that Muslim communities are likely to reject any forms of Lottery funding on religious grounds, though Jewish and Hindu groups do not experience these barriers (and have some minor history of Lottery funding on specific projects).
Training and specialist advice	One group noted that most of their Trustees did not have the experience of running organisations and may be interested in accessing training and support designed to help build such capacities. A particular example was cited around land use and building regulations (the group had bought their own land and constructed their own building).
Volunteering	The Chaplaincy service would welcome stronger links with organisations signposting potential volunteers into activities for students, alongside their team.

APPENDIX A: STAKEHOLDERS ENGAGED

Group	Faith	Area	Date / Nature of encounter
Mental Health Chaplain - Cambridge and Peterborough NHS Foundation Trust (2 x interviews with the Mental Health Chaplain, about the nature and remit of his work)	Islam	Combined Authority Area	30 July 2024 (online)
			27 August 2024 (in person, at Cambridge Central Mosque)
Cambridge Muslim College / Cambridge Crescent (Interview with the Welfare Officer of CMC, who also volunteers with the community group Cambridge Crescent and has links to Cambridge Central Mosque)	Islam	Cambridge	28 October 2024 (in person, at CMC's premises in Cambridge)
Peterborough Interfaith Support Group	Multi-faith	Peterborough	28 October 2024 (online)
Bharat Hindu Samaj temple	Hindu	Peterborough	29 October 2024 (In person, at the temple)
Masjid Khadijah Mosque – (attending the community open day 'Faith, Food and Friends')	Islam	Peterborough	17 November (in person)
Beth Shalom Reform Synagogue (interview with a long-standing Trustee of the Synagogue, who also worked for the organisation of reform Synagogues in England from 1995 – 2011)	Judaism	Cambridge	19 November 2024 (online)
Husaini Islamic Centre (interview with the Vice President of the Mosque)	Islam	Peterborough	6 December 2024 (online)
Husaini Islamic Centre (joint meeting with conference delegates from Peterborough Cathedral)	Islam	Peterborough	15 January 2024 (in person)

APPENDIX B: PRE-ENGAGEMENT BRIEFING

Learning more about the Faith Sector

Helping to better-understand your work, your needs and ambitions

September 2024

Who we are

Hello - we're the Hunts Forum of Voluntary Organisations ([Hunts Forum](#)) – a registered charity that strengthens and champions social action across Cambridgeshire. Our purpose is to encourage, support and develop voluntary, community and social enterprises (VCSEs) and individuals to have a real influence over the places and communities in which they live.

Why we're contacting you

We're conducting some research to help us understand more about the work of faith groups in Cambridgeshire & Peterborough, funded by the [Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Integrated Care System](#). We think much of your community work goes 'under the radar' or is poorly understood, by us in the charity sector or our colleagues in statutory services. We'd like to meet you so that we can learn more about what you do, develop our understanding of your work and share those insights with other charities, colleagues in the health and social care sector and local government.

What would we like to talk about?

We don't have a set series of questions we want to ask; we will be led by you and what you think is important for us to know about you. But in addition to what you want to tell us, we'd love to hear your feedback on:

- How you prefer groups like us to communicate with you;
- Whether you're interested in using or accessing any of our services;
- Where and how you want to work with other charities, health and care services and local authorities;
- How charities like ours should describe you, when we promote your work and advocate for you in our own networks.

How and when would we meet?

We can suggest a range of options to suit your preferences, including:

- Visiting you in person, on your premises or a place of your suggestion, to speak with your leaders, elders or representatives;
- Visiting with you whilst you undertake your community work, to see what you do in action;
- Joining one of your regular meetings or networks and learning mainly through listening, if this is more appropriate;

- Meeting online or by telephone.

The person leading this work - our consultant – is [Gethyn Williams](#). He is based in Huntingdonshire and can offer flexibility in meeting times, including evenings or weekends. We would like to meet in October or November, to allow us to complete our report by the end of the year.

How we will treat what you tell us

We are not asking to record our meetings but we will take notes, which we will use to inform our final report. Whatever you choose to tell us or share with us we promise to use respectfully and confidentially. We are happy to share drafts of our report that mention you prior to any publication, if you wish to see them, and make edits based on your feedback.

Any data that we hold on you is done in compliance with our data policy, [which you can read here](#), and is fully compliant with GDPR.

What we've done so far

This is the third phase of a project to help us to better understand the faith sector in the combined authority area.

In Phase 1 we mapped **where faith organisations were** throughout the area, based mainly on publicly available information found online. This gave us a picture of over 600 faith-based organisations, the majority of which are grounded in the Christian Faith.

We then invited a sample of groups, from all faiths, to educate us in their work and wider goals. You can **read the results of this work in our [Phase 2 report](#)**, published earlier this year.

Though we learned much from this, unfortunately we haven't managed to speak to many faith groups beyond those grounded in Christianity. The **purpose of this Phase 3 is therefore to address this major gap in our learning**, focusing exclusively on faith groups and activities beyond the Christian faith.

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Hunts Forum

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