

ENGAGING LOCALLY

**A toolkit for working well
with your local authority**

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INTRODUCTION

Churches across the UK are asking the question: how can we work well with our local authorities and other local agencies as our localities look to recover from Covid-19? Communities benefit when LAs and churches have strong working relationships. However, many churches find the world of local government difficult to navigate and get alongside.

This toolkit shines some light on this world in simple terms, and offers practical advice to churches to enable them to strengthen their relationships with their local councils. We have also included case studies of where churches are working well locally – often in partnership with charity partners.

ABOUT YOURNEIGHBOUR.ORG



**Your
Neighbour
.org**

YourNeighbour.org is a UK Church response to Covid-19. We have a network of over 1,300 churches and our denominational partners include the Church of England, Salvation Army, Baptists Together, Assemblies of God, Vineyard, and the Methodist Church. We exist to help churches care for their communities and have created a platform that will enable the Church to respond in transformational ways – increasing impact and drawing more into community.

YourNeighbour.org has three key pillars: supporting communities, equipping churches and connecting churches with the government.

ABOUT FAITHACTION



FaithAction is a national network of faith-based and community organisations seeking to serve their communities through social action and by offering services such as health and social care, childcare, housing and welfare to work.

FaithAction empowers faith-based and community organisations by providing support, guidance and training, conducting research, highlighting the work of the faith-based and community organisations, and encouraging statutory bodies to work in partnership with them and being their voice to Government.

The Faith Covenant was launched in 2014 by the APPG for Faith and Society and FaithAction. It is a joint commitment between faith communities and local authorities designed to guide engagement and build trust. 13 local authorities have signed up to the Covenant to date.

Find out more here: www.faithandsociety.org/covenant

WHAT DO LOCAL AUTHORITIES DO?

Local authorities receive funding primarily from council tax, business rates and government grants to discharge a wide array of responsibilities. Some of these responsibilities, such as child protection, are statutory. Others, such as the provision of youth services, are discretionary.

Their services are extremely diverse, so it is highly likely that one or more of them will be relevant to your church. The following list of services provided by a local authority is not exhaustive:

- ➔ Adult social care
- ➔ Cemeteries and crematoria
- ➔ Childcare and early years
- ➔ Children's social care
- ➔ Communications and consultation
- ➔ Community development
- ➔ Community safety
- ➔ Democratic services
- ➔ Economic development and inclusive growth
- ➔ Employment and skills
- ➔ Energy, fuel poverty and climate change
- ➔ Environment and sustainability
- ➔ Housing and homelessness
- ➔ Integration and cohesion
- ➔ Libraries, arts and culture
- ➔ Licensing and night-time economy
- ➔ Loneliness and social isolation
- ➔ Parks and greenspace
- ➔ Planning and heritage
- ➔ Preventing extremism and exploitation
- ➔ Public health
- ➔ Public protection
- ➔ Refugees and no recourse to public funds
- ➔ Regeneration and town centres
- ➔ Registration Services (births, deaths, marriages)
- ➔ Resilience and civil emergencies
- ➔ Revenues and benefits
- ➔ Schools and lifelong learning
- ➔ Sport, leisure and recreation
- ➔ Street scene, roads and highways
- ➔ Traffic and parking
- ➔ Transport, active travel and air quality
- ➔ Voluntary and community sector support
- ➔ Waste and recycling
- ➔ Young people and youth work
- ➔ Youth offending

THIS TOOLKIT

As you can see, local authorities have a diverse set of responsibilities that require them to really know and serve their local area and population. In the context of Covid-19 many of these areas of responsibility overlap (eg public health, social isolation, care for vulnerable adults and children, resilience etc).

Local authorities are usually keen to work with other local partners who care about the community. Being a credible partner is important: churches having strong legal, financial, governance and safeguarding arrangements are helpful in this. But there are also other ways churches can shape up to be great, trusted collaborators with local government.

This toolkit lays out what some of those principles are, and provides links to case studies and further resources.

ENGAGING LOCALLY

PRINCIPLES

1 DO YOUR HOMEWORK



2 BUILD TRUSTED RELATIONSHIPS:
IT IS THE MOST IMPORTANT THING



3 OPEN UP A PASTORAL SPACE IN
RELATIONSHIPS WITH KEY PEOPLE



4 BE CLEAR AND REALISTIC ABOUT
WHAT THE CHURCH CAN OFFER



5 BE CONFIDENT!



6 SEEK TO BE A BLESSING



PRINCIPLE 1

DO YOUR HOMEWORK

- ▶ Find out who is who locally (statutory sector, and other charities and community groups).
- ▶ Work to understand 'the system' as it is perceived by people in it. Learn the language they use. (But don't be afraid to ask questions: "Why is that important? Can you help me understand...? I'm curious that.... Can you tell me more about...?")
- ▶ Do a bit of a power mapping – it helps to understand how the system works.
- ▶ Honour others' places in the local system – such as other charities or community leaders.
- ▶ If engaging at a senior level, seek to understand the policy pressures and priorities.

"You don't need to know everything but just need to know enough - like knowing enough medicine to be a hospital chaplain."



RESOURCES

- ▶ Explore Tearfund's [Advocacy toolkit](#) to think through how you can do some power mapping or stakeholder analysis.
- ▶ Read Open University's [stakeholder tips for charities](#).

LIFELINE CHURCH AND COMMUNITY RESOURCES

HEALTH AND WELLBEING

Community Resources (CR) – set up by a group of people from LifeLine Church – is a grassroots charity gathering volunteers to improve the health and wellbeing of the residents of Barking and Dagenham, one of the most deprived London boroughs. The charity operates as a series of 'connecting spaces', including a coffee shop and community hub, and seeks to develop social

connections and friendships in order to combat isolation and prevent crisis. Beneficiaries come from local neighbourhoods, with 2/3 from Black and Minority Ethnic backgrounds, and typically face challenges relating to social isolation, low confidence and poor mental health, as well as poverty, language and learning barriers.

In 2008, a mutual friend put Sally Dixon, founder of CR, in touch with a psychotherapist at North East London NHS Foundation Trust, working in the Parent Perinatal Infant Mental Health Service. This psychotherapist was running a support group for women that had been referred to the service. She saw an opportunity to partner with CR, who she felt could provide the friendship, community and peer support that these women needed.

This began a long-term partnership between the

service and CR, and there have been multiple success stories, with some women moving into volunteering roles and then into paid employment. Evaluations carried out by the CR team regularly report reduced feelings of isolation among beneficiaries, many of whom express gratitude in a desire to give back.

Sally explains that part of the strength of the partnership has been her coming to an awareness of the limits of what CR can offer. She has a trusted relationship with this psychotherapist, who does not expect more of Sally than what's within her remit. **"We don't offer counselling,"** she explains, **"but friendship"**. Sally says success has rested on good communication, awareness of limits, and a clear understanding of what each party has to offer, relaying a comment by the psychotherapist: **"You do what I'd like to do but, in my professional capacity, cannot"**.

CASE STUDY



PRINCIPLE 2

BUILD TRUSTED RELATIONSHIPS: IT IS THE MOST IMPORTANT THING

- Ⓞ Positively and proactively engage with key people (local authority, NHS, police etc).
- Ⓞ Make interactions non-transactional. Don't lead with your needs. Always seek to be a blessing before you ask for help.
- Ⓞ Invest time in getting to know key people. *"Things changed when we started to eat together with no agenda."*
- Ⓞ Be committed: trust builds over time.

"It's then no longer a partnership between different faceless institutions but a partnership between people who know each other. The Church isn't a building: it's flesh and blood!"



RESOURCES

- 📖 Read the book Scattered Servants by Alan Scott: Unleashing the Church to Bring Life to the City.
- 📖 Resources: Watch this Working with others (Part 1) video by Jubilee Plus.

EMMANUEL CHURCH BRISTOL AND HOME FOR GOOD FOSTERING AND COVID-19

At the outset of the Covid-19 pandemic Bristol City Council – already in partnership with Home for Good to find foster carers – contacted Home for Good to ask if the churches might be able to find emergency temporary foster carers. Bristol City Council has much higher than the national average number of carers over the age of 65, and there was a very real concern that many could become ill and not able to care. In addition, there was concern that lockdown might push some families already vulnerable to crisis into not coping, and there might be a need to bring children into care to keep them safe.

Home for Good shared the Council's needs with Emmanuel Church, whose leader Mike Cain shared the needs with the congregation. 5 households in their congregation have enquired, 2 are in assessment and a further household is in early conversations.

Home for Good was at work in Bristol building relationships with church leaders and the local authority for over a year before the Covid-19 crisis began. One of Home

for Good's team, Clare Walker, works in the Bristol City Council fostering team offices whenever possible. Clare saw how hidden the work of the team was, and developed a 'ministry of cake' to thank them for the hard work they do to protect the vulnerable children of the city.

Mike reflects that some Christians he knew were nervous of interactions with social workers, fearing they would not understand or respect people's Christian convictions. But Ann James, Director of Children and Families for Bristol City Council dispels this fear, saying, **"Home for Good's commitment to children and finding families has been outstanding, and we are very grateful to the team for their support during this time."**

Mike was ready to share the city's needs with his church because he knew Krish Kandiah, founder of Home for Good, had heard Home of Good spoken of well from



CASE STUDY

someone he trusted. Trust was an important component for him.

Responding to need is not rocket science. **"I've learnt not to assume I know the ways that people can serve,"** says Mike. **"My role is to just share the need and see where people will go with the Lord's leading."**

Home for Good have had over 60 enquiries for emergency temporary fostering in Bristol as a result of their Covid-19 campaign – homeforgood.org.uk/bristol-response.

Nearly 50% of households in assessment by the City Council have come through the church route via Home for Good. 17 households have begun assessment. Children as young as 10 months and as old as 15 years have found a safe and loving welcome from Christians in Bristol through fostering.

PRINCIPLE 3

OPEN UP A PASTORAL SPACE IN RELATIONSHIPS WITH KEY PEOPLE

- 🕒 Ask people how they are. Ask about their families.
- 🕒 Be available to listen, to talk.
- 🕒 Keep in touch: don't just email! Write, ring or text; writing a postcard can be meaningful. *"I've noticed that some people have kept their cards from me on display in their offices."*
- 🕒 Pray for people. Then tell people you are praying for them. Ask them if there's anything they would like prayer for.

"We can be quite bold in offering this: don't underestimate the desire for someone in office to talk to someone outside the system."



RESOURCES

- 🔗 Read this blog on [7 Ways to Be a Community Building Pastor](#).
- 🔗 Resources: Read this blog on [Pastoring Your Community: How Positive Community Relations Brings Favor](#).

C3 CHURCH CAMBRIDGE

RESPONDING TO COVID-19

CASE STUDY

A primary consequence of the Covid-19 pandemic has been a loss of income. Thousands need the basic necessities of life, one of them being food.

Through their Love Your Neighbour ('LYN') campaign, C3 Church has provided food support for hundreds of families who are unable to maintain a food supply because of low or no income. The LYN campaign has also supported people who showed symptoms of Covid necessitating self-isolation. Not having adequate food stock at home (because of weekly wages or family food budgeting) people were unable to collect their food from their regular supply chains thus making it impossible to get food if family and friends weren't around to help.

Through their befriending scheme, the church also reached out to people to help them with shopping or collect prescriptions from pharmacies and offered phone calls to encourage mental well-being and offer emotional support.

C3's church building, the C3 Centre, has been transformed into

a food preparation and storage area at the moment where food supplies are sanitised on receipt and then dated and placed at appropriate marked areas in the centre. All volunteers are encouraged to follow social distancing and other hygiene-related protocols whilst working at the centre. The number of people in the building is kept to a minimum as per requirements for each day. Volunteers who support in sanitising and packing food hampers, and drivers picking up food from the centre for delivering to households, are spread throughout the day in different time slots, thus ensuring minimum requisite staff in the centre at all times. Due care is given to washing hands regularly.

The C3 LYN Team has kept their eyes and ears open to the needs of the community and has been empowered by the help of several donations and grants, including from the UK Government.

To date the campaign has provided 40,000 meals to over 700



households.

Many beneficiaries have been self-referring and C3 have also grown their partnerships with other churches, local housing associations, Salvation Army, and local authorities to reach the most vulnerable families in the surrounding areas.

Someone who C3 Church has helped said: **"Please know that the love shown through your act of kindness has gone a long way to help us with hope and healing during a period of challenge."**

PRINCIPLE 4

BE CLEAR AND REALISTIC ABOUT WHAT THE CHURCH CAN OFFER

- ▶ Map local need and discuss within your church community which issues your church could most meaningfully contribute to.
- ▶ Start where you are, with what you already have (experience, skills, building etc).
- ▶ Think through the offer carefully. **"Which space can we really play in? Do we have a specialism?"**
- ▶ Be particularly alert to the needs of the most vulnerable.
- ▶ Seek to join up with and add value to what is already going on.
- ▶ Make your offer one that can be sustained and consistent. Open a window to what you are already doing well, rather than making commitments that take energy and resource to set up/sustain.
- ▶ Find ways to have a unified voice across local churches into the public square.



RESOURCES

- 🔗 [Foundations for Partnering](#) from Commission offers questions to consider when putting together a Memorandum of Understanding.
- 🔗 Watch [Working with others \(Part 2\)](#) video by Jubilee Plus.



CASE STUDY

LIGHT CHURCH, BRADFORD AND CHRISTIANS AGAINST POVERTY EMPLOYABILITY

The CAP Job Club at The Light Church, Bradford has been running in partnership with Christians Against Poverty for over 4 years. In that time the church built a number of strong relationships with other churches, organisations and service providers across the city. Their mentality has always been a 'holistic approach' to supporting people back into employment. There can often be many different barriers for people to overcome. The Club has a back-and-forth relationship with most of their referral groups.

Bradford Central Food encourages their members to volunteer as this helps improve their chances of finding work, plugs gaps in their CVs and brings members into community. The Foodbank also sends people to the CAP Centre as they know unemployment and living on benefits is one of the main reasons why a lot of people use the Foodbank service.

The local Department for Work and Pensions Jobcentre Plus office has been very supportive of Light Church's work and often invite them

in to speak with their work coaches about their courses. The DWP Partnership Manager understands the church's approach and highlights the church as being able to care for the 'whole person', often referring to Light Church's Debt Help, Life Skills, Budgeting and Job Club courses. The unique selling point is that the church is able to provide a hot meal, community and support that the Jobcentre Plus can't. Jobcentre Plus often visits and shares opportunities and best practice with the church.

Housing Associations often send people who have rent arrears to Light Church, primarily because they know the church can provide debt help, but also because the church Job Club will help people improve their income and in turn ensure they can afford their rent, again a win-win situation.

All of these relationships are built on a bedrock of trust, integrity and honesty. The other local agencies know who the church are, what they provide, how they go about it and how agencies can help each other and ultimately improve the quality

of life for their clients/tenants/group members/service users.

Light Church's top tips are:

- Find organisations who are providing similar services, they will always be open to sharing the load.
- Be upfront about your faith: most organisations are not against it, they understand churches' heart to help and they know that the community the church offers is a unique thing.
- Know your USP's (unique selling points), when others can see the value in what you are offering, they will want to work alongside you.
- Be consistent in everything! Communication, visiting them, updating them on members' progress, good stories, sharing challenges and contacts. This will all build a stronger and deeper relationship and trust.

Gareth Thompson from Light Church says **"This is a long term endeavour, it will take time to build these relationships and they will bear fruit over time. Keep going! It's totally worth it!"**

PRINCIPLES

BE CONFIDENT!

- ▶ Don't underestimate the value of what you have locally. People appreciate what churches are doing. So many churches comment that what was "obvious" or "simple" to them was a game-changer for people in the public sector.
- ▶ Invite council members and staff to visit your church or social action project.
- ▶ Remember and use the entrepreneurial flair in the church.
- ▶ Don't be shy to be seen and understood in faith terms.
- ▶ Be confident to ask for what you need from the local authority to do things – that could be direct funding, help with raising funds from elsewhere, practical support (e.g. around communications), introductions to other agencies or public permission.

"It's okay to be spiritual, for example talking about praying; we've found this helps people understand us."



RESOURCES

- 🔗 Have a look at Power to Change's [A guide to local government for community businesses](#). NB: this is not written for churches but is relevant to churches thinking about what they do and trying to understand LAs better.
- 🔗 Read FaithAction's [Local Impact Assessment Toolkit](#).

ST PETER'S BETHNAL GREEN

YOUTH EMPLOYMENT

In 2014, a church member of St Peter's Bethnal Green heard about how Resurgo helps churches run the Spear employment programme. After visiting another church-based Resurgo project she was inspired to bring it to East London for the first time, and with the support of the Vicar and other church members, Spear Bethnal Green started.

The Spear programme is run exclusively in partnership with local churches, who create individual charitable trusts which fundraise to employ a small team of coaches. These coaches are then trained and resourced by the central Resurgo team to run the year-long Spear curriculum, which involves an intensive 6-week course followed by one-to-one support to help 16-25 year olds get into, and stay in, work. After this year, over 75% of young people on the programme have successfully found and maintained employment.

Partnership lies at the heart

of Spear. Recruitment to the programme often happens through local Job Centres, the local authority or other charity partners, requiring good relationships and trust. Participants on the programme take part in a workplace visit hosted by a local company and are given a mock interview by professional volunteers. In Bethnal Green, Spear has developed such good relationships with local businesses that many have become repeat employers of their young people, including a financial sector organisation in the City where Spear graduates now amount to over 10% of their workforce.

Such a range and depth of partnerships is only possible due to the unique combination of strengths found between the local church and Resurgo. As Centre



CASE STUDY

Manager Tim Lovell explains,

the church provides a sense of local rootedness and permanence which partners like the Job Centres find very attractive.

"A lot of the relationship is based on the fact that we're not just a flash in the pan, that we're here for the long-term".

But at the same time, the rigour and success of the programme, which Tim largely attributes to the culture and skill of Resurgo, makes Spear Bethnal Green an attractive partner to many.

"When you meet a Work Coach or someone who is a decision maker and they've had a customer, as they call it, who has participated in the Spear programme and really been transformed, that's gold."

PRINCIPLE 6

SEEK TO BE A BLESSING

- ▶ Reach out (don't expect people to come to you), but be conscious of people's time.
- ▶ Ask what is needed: "How can we help, partner or serve?"
- ▶ Support and serve those doing valuable things in the locality.
- ▶ If you have a building, offer it.
- ▶ Thank people.

"We try to bless people practically. We took doughnuts to the meeting!"



RESOURCES

- ✚ For examples of church-secular organisation partnerships and a guide for churches interested in partnership working see the [Holy Alliances](#) report by Demos and the Good Faith Partnership.
- ✚ Read this article from [The Chelmsford Diocese](#) on blessing your community during Covid-19.

CHECKLIST The Principles in this toolkit offer lots of ideas about how churches can serve their community by being in relationship with and working well with local authorities. Our case studies showcase the sort of relationships that are possible. The toolkit and further resources suggested in the guide should help a church in a practical way to enhance its understanding of, and engagement with, its local authority. Here are some ideas for how you might be able to help your local authority and vice-versa:



My church can help my local authority with:

Applicable

- | | |
|---|--------------------------|
| Volunteers | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Physical space | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Reaching into communities | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Reducing loneliness and social isolation | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Understanding local needs | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Providing practical support like foodbanks or meals | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Providing mentoring/buddying | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Setting up a new social action project | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Prayer – for programmes and people | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Other... | <input type="checkbox"/> |



A closer relationship with our local authority could help our church:

Applicable

- | | |
|--|--------------------------|
| Understand local needs | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Learn where the gaps are in service provision | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Be more informed about what is going on | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Focus more on the very vulnerable | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Join in with what other local agencies are partnering on | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Become more relevant beyond the church-going community | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Pray more effectively | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Support and encourage local leaders | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Other... | <input type="checkbox"/> |

WANT MORE?

Get in touch!

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