



Westmorland
& Furness
Council



Westmorland and Furness Faith Covenant

2026



This Covenant is a joint commitment between Westmorland and Furness faith and belief communities and public service bodies in the county to a set of principles that guide engagement, collaboration, and delivery at all levels.

It affirms a shared responsibility to work together across differences of faith, belief, and culture through respectful relationships, open dialogue, and practical cooperation for the common good.

Faith History

The faith history of Westmorland and Furness is a journey from ancient paganism to a diverse Christian and nonconformist landscape. The earliest spiritual practices are hinted at by Neolithic stone circles, but the region was fundamentally shaped by the arrival of Christianity, which persisted through the sub-Roman era and was reinforced by Celtic missionaries and later, Anglo-Saxon and Viking settlements, as seen in the fusion of imagery on ancient crosses. The Normans cemented this dominance by establishing major spiritual centres, most notably the great Cistercian monastery of Furness Abbey and Cartmel Priory, making the Catholic Church the supreme power during the medieval period.

The religious landscape was radically transformed by the Reformation, which saw the dissolution of the monasteries, though a tenacious Catholic adherence persisted in some areas. Crucially, the 17th century marked the birth of the Quaker movement in the Westmorland Dales, with Swarthmoor Hall near Ulverston becoming its revolutionary base. This radical nonconformist spirit, alongside the later arrival of Methodism, created a pluralistic regional society. Today, Westmorland and Furness is characterised by its historical Anglican parish churches, its deep-rooted Quaker heritage, and a modern spiritual life that encompasses a wide variety of faiths and a growing secular population. Both John Wesley and George Fox preached in the area with a variety of impacts.



This evolving history demonstrates a longstanding tradition of religious diversity, dissent, cooperation, and social action that continues to shape how communities live alongside one another today.

Today, religious life in Westmorland and Furness, like the rest of the UK, is defined by increasing secularisation and decline in the established historical religions, though our historical Christian roots remain strong. While the Church of England and Roman Catholicism continue to be central, the most significant trend is the rise of those reporting 'No Religion', which, according to the 2021¹ Census, is now the second-largest category in the wider Cumbria area. Despite this, the region maintains a powerful heritage of Quakerism, with meeting houses still active, and the presence of vibrant, modern non-denominational Christian communities. Furthermore, as the local population in urban centres like Barrow-in-Furness diversifies, the area has seen a modest but growing establishment of other faiths, including Islam, Hinduism, and Buddhism, ensuring the continuation of a dynamic, albeit increasingly secular, faith environment.

This Covenant recognises both religious and non-religious identities as integral to community life and commits to engagement that honours belief, conscience, and difference.

The Covenant has developed out of discussions between representatives of a variety of faith representatives and Churches Together in Cumbria with senior officers in **Westmorland and Furness** Local Authority and is offered to all public service bodies who wish to work collaboratively at all levels with the faith community in the Westmorland and Furness area.

The 2021 Census² identified the significance of faith to the communities of Westmorland and Furness with over 225,000 residents identifying as people of faith, including Bahá'í, Buddhist, Christian, Hindu, Jewish, Muslim, Sikh, and others.

Westmorland and Furness Council Plan

The **Westmorland and Furness Council Plan** is a summary of our vision, priorities and values. It came into being on 1 April 2023, guiding the council through the transition from the four current councils which provide services in the Westmorland and Furness Council area and a period of transformation over the next five years, up to April 2028.

Our Vision

Our vision for **Westmorland and Furness** is to be 'a great place to live, work and thrive'.

The plan for achieving our vision is organised around six priority areas:

- For people
- For the economy and culture
- For the climate
- For our customers
- For communities
- For our workforce

¹[Population - UTLA | Westmorland and Furness | Report Builder for ArcGIS](#)

²[Population - UTLA | Westmorland and Furness | Report Builder for ArcGIS](#)



Our Values

These are our values which underpin everything we do and will guide us in delivering our vision. Being a caring council is the golden thread that will run through everything we do, and this is supported by our values:



Ambitious

We are ambitious for everyone. We will focus on identifying and delivering the outcomes that our communities want to see. We will support our workforce to innovatively transform services for the better, enabling residents and visitors to have healthy, happy lives.



Inclusive

We will be an inclusive council and will work collectively with partners to challenge each other to improve diversity and eliminate all forms of discrimination in our organisations and through local leadership increase participation in local decision making within under represented communities.



Outcome focused

We are outcome focused and we will focus on identifying and leading the delivery of the changes that our communities want to see.



Collaborative

We will work with partners, communities, and residents to deliver the best outcomes for all.



Responsible

We are responsible, socially, environmentally, and financially. Providing leadership in the drive to become carbon neutral and delivering value for money in everything we do. We will make the best and most efficient use of our resources, while making sustainable decisions and striving to deliver on our promises to you.



Needs-led

We will intervene early to prevent harm, act in an equitable way leaving no-one behind, and enable all to ask for help in order to gain access to the right service, in the right place at the right time.



Ecologically aware

We will provide leadership in the drive to become carbon net zero and sustainable.

As a public authority, Westmorland and Furness Council is subject to the public sector equality duty set out in the Equality Act 2010. This means that in exercising our functions we must work towards:

- Eliminating discrimination, harassment, victimisation and other conduct prohibited under the Act
- Advancing equality of opportunity between those with and without protected characteristics
- Fostering good relations between groups with and without protected characteristics

We are also subject to specific duties requiring us to:

- Set organisational equality objectives every four years
- Report annually on our progress under the Equality Act
- Report annually on our gender pay gap

We use the following definitions of equity, diversity and inclusion (EDI):

- **Equity:** means that, in some circumstances, people need to be treated differently in order to provide meaningful equality of opportunity
- **Diversity:** recognising, and celebrating, that people have different characteristics, backgrounds, attributes, cultures and experience
- **Inclusion:** actively ensuring that everyone is included, welcomed, represented and reflected, in our services, council and community

We have agreed that the following groups and characteristics are within scope of the EDI work the council undertakes:

Protected characteristics under the Equality Act 2010:

- Age
- Gender reassignment
- Maternity/pregnancy
- Religion/belief
- Sexual orientation
- Disability
- Marriage/civil partnership
- Race
- Sex

Additional themes identified by Westmorland and Furness Council:

- Armed forces families
- People who are care experienced
- Rurality
- Socio-economic inequality



Principles of the Faith Covenant

The Faith Covenant is built on the following principles:

- Faith communities are free to practise their beliefs and religious observances without restriction, to raise their voice in public debate and to be respected, within the framework of UK law.

This freedom is accompanied by a shared responsibility to engage with others respectfully and to uphold the dignity and safety of all.

- A Westmorland and Furness Faith Covenant is grounded in mutual respect and understanding, recognising the wide diversity of faith, belief, and non-faith perspectives across the area. It values the distinctive contributions that people of all faiths and of no faith bring and affirms a shared commitment to the common good by serving all local residents equally in their access to public services.

Partners commit to building trusting relationships, learning from one another, and working together in ways that strengthen social cohesion and community resilience.

- The Covenant emphasises equity, diversity, and inclusion, ensuring that the voices of both large and small faith communities, urban and rural groups, and people of all ages and backgrounds are heard and respected.

Particular attention will be given to those who are marginalised or underrepresented, recognising that equitable participation may require different forms of support.

- Public services and faith-based social action will respect service users from all backgrounds, offering appropriate services to one and all without discrimination (direct or indirect).

Service delivery will be guided by compassion, professionalism, and a commitment to peaceful coexistence.

- The voice, participation, and solutions that faith communities bring are important and should be included fully in consultations for services that benefit the wider community.

This includes creating safe and constructive spaces for dialogue, reflection, and collaborative problem-solving.

- At its heart, the Covenant is a mutual pledge: the council recognising the trusted role of faith groups in the area and faith communities committing to inclusivity, partnership, and shared responsibility for the wellbeing of all who call Westmorland and Furness home.



Commitments of the Faith Communities

Westmorland and Furness faith-based organisations will work actively with local authorities, health trusts, and the wider public sector in the design and delivery of services to the public. In addition, they commit to:

- Seeking opportunities to bring people together to serve the community, particularly its most marginalised, isolated, and vulnerable members.
- Balancing different faiths and beliefs in ways that promote good relations and reduce misunderstanding or tension.
- Working in partnership to support all communities, contributing a spiritual dimension as part of a holistic approach.
- Ensuring excellence in safeguarding, accountability, and transparency
- Responding to consultations where appropriate.
- Sharing training and learning opportunities between faith organisations and partners.

Faith communities further commit to resolving differences through dialogue, reflection, and cooperation, prioritising relationship and shared purpose over division.



Commitments of Public Service Organisations

Public service organisations in Westmorland and Furness welcome the involvement of faith groups in the delivery of services and social action on an equal basis with other providers, recognising that capacity may vary.

In this they commit to:

- Building relationships of trust with faith and belief communities.
- Adopting inclusive strategies for engagement and consultation.
- Encouraging collaboration and co-design of services and local solutions.
- Maintaining open and transparent procedures for funding and commissioning.
- Providing resources to support positive engagement.
- Sharing training and learning opportunities.

Public bodies commit to engagement that is fair, respectful, and grounded in partnership, recognising the value of sustained relationship-building alongside practical outcomes.

Signed by









Supported by





Translation Services

If you require this document in another format (e.g. CD, Braille or large type) or in another language, please telephone: **0300 373 3300**.

للوصول إلى هذه المعلومات بلغتك، يرجى الاتصال **0300 373 3300**

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