



# SANDWELL FAITH SECTOR NETWORK

*"A voice for communities"*



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# WELCOME MESSAGE

*From the Faith Sector & Inclusion Development Officer*

**Shahin Akhtar**

**Faith Sector & Inclusion  
Development Officer**



**Welcome** to a space where we bring together faith leaders and partners from across the Sandwell borough to discuss the issues and concerns affecting our communities. Through unity, we explore how, as a collective, we can work together to address and resolve these challenges.

The Sandwell Faith Sector Network (SFSN) is committed to ensuring that faith communities have a voice in consultations and policy-making within the Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council (SMBC). We also work closely with Public Health initiatives to promote health and wellbeing of all community members.

Continue reading to learn about our core members and the history of (SFSN).

# WELCOME MESSAGE

*From officers who shape this network*

It's a great privilege to represent the grassroots voices and communities I serve with humility and dedication. As a longstanding public servant, I feel blessed to engage with schools, youth, policing, faiths and community organisations, listening and learning from their experiences. My aim is to use this knowledge and experience to shape conversations and decisions that truly reflect our borough's needs and values.

**Imam. Ghulam Rasool, Chair**



*It's a privilege to serve as the first woman officer in the SFSN. My focus is on building trust, understanding, and collaboration between faith and community partners. I work closely with Gurdwaras, the police, and statutory bodies to ensure diverse voices are heard and the right people are part of conversations shaping our borough. With experience across mental health services, the third sector, and the private sector, I bring a rounded understanding of communities and a strong belief in the power of working together for good.*

**Sharie Kaur, Vice Chair**

# WELCOME MESSAGE

*From some of our core members who shape this network. . .*

I am a Sikh community leader with a deep commitment to serving the people of Sandwell. I have contributed to multiple community boards and been Chair of many community organisations. My focus has been on creating positive change and strengthening local relationships. Guided by my Sikh values of fairness, service and community spirit, I will continue to champion local voices and work collaboratively to build a more connected and inclusive Sandwell.

**Balbinder Singh (Core member)**



I have been a minister in Wednesbury for over 20 years and have a passion for youth and children's ministry, working in schools and I am also a school governor. I have lead bereavement groups in schools for children and I am passionate about helping people with mental health challenges. before becoming an ordained minister i was a research scientist working in both clinical and academic settings.

**Rev Nicola Woodcock (core member)**

Namaste, I am honoured to be a member of the Sandwell Faith Sector Network. Working collectively, especially with people from diverse faiths, beliefs and practices, enriches my own journey to the sacred. Importantly I believe, by combining our collective strengths, resources and experiences – our capacity to serve and meet the needs of all Sandwell citizens, businesses and others makes the impossible – possible.

**Mark Gifford (Core member)**





# WELCOME MESSAGE

*From some of our core members who shape this network. . .*

🙏 Namashkar — I'm honoured to become a Core Member of the SFSN representing the Hindu faith. With experience across education, play, youth and community work in both statutory and voluntary sectors, and decades of interfaith collaboration, I've seen the power of faith communities in driving positive change and ensuring every faith has a fair and representative voice that strengthens unity and wellbeing.

**Shobha Sharma (Core member)**



I have been a minister in Wednesbury for over 20 years and have a passion for youth and children's ministry, working in schools and I am also a school governor. I have lead bereavement groups in schools for children and I am passionate about helping people with mental health challenges. before becoming an ordained minister I was a research scientist working in both clinical and academic settings.

**Mazhar Mohammed (Core member)**

I have been a minister at Holy Trinity Church Smethwick for over 10 years, it is a joy to work in a parish with such a rich faith life. I am passionate about interfaith work, both for how it helps us to live well together in our diverse home and what it does for each of our faiths in prioritising our openness to others. Having previously been a teacher at the University of Birmingham, I know that we are all teachers and learners and that we learn best when we learn together.

**Rev Nick Ross (core member)**



# OUR HISTORY



The faith sector in Sandwell played an instrumental role during the pandemic - from strengthening community engagement to changing perceptions. Faith leaders and volunteers mobilised swiftly to fill critical gaps while public services were under immense pressure.

## The Pandemic

Our Churches, Mosques, Gurdwaras and Temples stepped up, leading the way in delivering food parcels, serving hot meals, and tackling isolation and loneliness by moving activities online. Many places of worship became vaccination centres, enabling rapid outreach to protect the most vulnerable in our communities.



# OUR HISTORY

CONTINUED . . .



## Formation of SFSN

Public Health Sandwell recognised the strong communities within the borough, particularly their ability to engage a large part of the population. Sandwell Public Health was able to see the leadership and collaboration within these communities. This understanding led to the creation of the Sandwell Faith sector Network, designed to bring faith communities together to share learning, collaborate on local priorities, and help shape inclusive approaches to community wellbeing.





## VISION

Our vision is to be a *critical friend* to the civic leadership of our borough. We aim to strengthen and empower faith communities, ensuring they have a meaningful voice in local decision-making. Our focus includes health and wellbeing, **community policing, council services**, and promoting ethics in public life. We strive to be a trusted voice, engaging with civic partners on behalf of our diverse communities.

## MISSION

- Provide a platform for the faith sector to have a strong, united voice in guiding decision-making.
- Create opportunities for faith representatives to share updates, raise concerns and collaborate on practical solutions.
- Offer training and support to voluntary and youth services connected to the faith sector.
- Work in partnership with Public Health Sandwell, to tackle health inequalities by: supporting public awareness campaigns, facilitating community workshops and training, offering advice and empowering communities to improve health and wellbeing.

# IMPORTANT CONTACTS



Name	Position/organisation	Email/phone
Officers of SFSN	Sandwell Faith Sector Network Officers	SFSNoffice@gmail.com
Shahin Akhtar	Faith Sector & Inclusion Development Officer	shahin_akhtar@sandwell.gov.uk
Exploitation	Modern Slavery & Exploitation Helpline	08000 121 700
Safeguarding	Adult Safeguarding	0121 569 2266 (9:00-17:00) 0121 569 2355 (out of hours)
Sandwell Children's Trust	Child Safeguarding	0121 569 3100 (9:00-17:00) 0121 569 2355 (out of hours)
Domestic Abuse	Black Country Women's Aid	0121 553 0090 0121 552 6448 (24hrs)
Mental Health	Black Country Mental Health 24hr Helpline	0800 008 6516
Community Safety Team	community_safetyTeam@sandwell.gov.uk	





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