



Cheshire West and Chester Council
Focus on our Communities



Cheshire West and Chester's

RELIGIOUS community



Cheshire West
and Chester

Focus on our Communities

Cheshire West and Chester is made up of many different types of people - with different cultures, beliefs, attitudes and needs.

As a service provider, it is essential we understand our communities so that we can improve quality of life, offer excellent customer services and cater for everyone in the best way possible.

'Focus on our Communities' is a series of short reports, each looking at groups that are often hidden or not well known, and who form part of the equality streams covered by the Single Equality Scheme. These reports aim to provide a snapshot of the issues as a spring board to learning more about the residents of Cheshire West and Chester.

The communities considered in the series are:

- The black and minority ethnic community (BME)
- The lesbian, gay and bisexual community (LGB)
- The transgender community
- The disabled community
- Children and young people
- Older people
- The religious community

This particular report focuses on

Cheshire West and Chester's

RELIGIOUS
community

Accessing Cheshire West and Chester Council information and services

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Further Information

‘Communities’

Although we have used the term ‘communities’, we acknowledge that these communities are made up of very different individuals, with different needs and outlooks. We have grouped them together to help develop our understanding, as they often experience a level of overlap on the key issues they face.

Equality and Diversity

Further information on the ‘Single Equality Scheme’ and ‘Equality and Diversity’ can be found on the Cheshire West and Chester website at www.cheshirewestandchester.gov.uk/equality

Any comments or questions about equality and diversity should be directed to the Equality and Diversity Managers:

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The Reports

The reports were prepared by the Research, Intelligence and Consultation Team. Information has been gathered from a wide range of local, regional and national data. For further questions relating to the reports please contact:

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Background

‘Focus on our Communities’ is a series of short reports looking at communities of interest in Cheshire West and Chester. These communities are linked to the equality streams covered by the Single Equality Scheme. **Whilst the reports highlight many difficulties faced by our communities, they do not present the good work done by many Council service areas, partners and the Third Sector in supporting vulnerable groups.** Instead, they serve as an introduction to the key issues affecting particular communities. **This report looks at the religious community.**

Summary

- In Cheshire West and Chester, from the 2001 Census, 82% of residents stated they had a religion; 11% had no religion and 7% did not state their religion.
- Religion is a complex concept. People describe their religion and beliefs in many ways and this links to aspects of identity and the principles by which people live their lives.
- There are many different types of religions, faiths and belief. Within religions there are also a variety of different denominations and variations in interpretation and practices. This means that stereotypes and assumptions of particular religious groups can be unhelpful and often inaccurate.

Introduction

Faith, Belief, Religion and Culture

Religion can be extremely complex and is a combination of a number of interwoven elements that are difficult to separate out.

Essentially:

- **Belief** is the acceptance that something is true, without necessarily having evidence to prove it one way or the other.
- **Faith** can be thought of as holding a belief or beliefs to be absolute truth and leading a lifestyle (which includes an individual's values, actions and choices) in response to total trust in this belief.
- **Religion** is an organised system of beliefs and practices often involving religious teachings which are followed by a community of religious believers.

Religion plays a central part in many people's lives and, for some, is an entire way of life, forming an important part of an individual's identity. **Culture and religion are very much interlinked, as religion can play a huge part in the formation of norms and values**, as well as forming the basis of ideas that are learned and taught within particular communities. However, culture is not always defined by religious customs, as it often reflects the values and behaviour of society as a whole, such as laws enforced by the police and the legal system.

Strength of belief and the types of activities religious people are involved in vary between and within religions and beliefs. Some people may follow their religious customs strictly, but others may interpret the customs differently, or decide not to follow particular customs, even though they would still consider themselves to be of a certain religion. **There is a considerable amount of personal choice in the extent to which religion and belief affects daily life and behaviour.**

Key issues

Discrimination and unfair treatment

Research conducted by the Home Office identifies three areas of life where those belonging to faith groups are most likely to face unfair treatment:

- Employment
- Education
- The media

Unfair treatment might take the form of direct discrimination, through bullying, ridicule and the reinforcement of negative religious stereotypes via the media; or indirect discrimination through policies or practices that disadvantage people of a particular religion. This may include not allowing individuals to wear traditional dress associated with their faith such as the turban (Sikh), hijab (Muslim), kippah or 'skull hat' (Jewish men).



Religion and the media

For many, the media is often the main source of knowledge about religions and influences attitudes towards many groups of people. Inaccurate and negative representations of religious practices and crude stereotyping of particular faith groups, through, for example, focusing on the actions of extreme minority groups within larger religions, can present faith groups as extreme, cruel, strange and different. Research by the Department of Communities and Local Government found that improving the presence of people from religious backgrounds in public arenas, where they could be visible representatives of modern Britain, would be an important way forward to help acknowledge faith groups' contribution to our multi-cultural society.

Islamophobia

Whilst discrimination against many religions and faiths takes place, Islam has come to the forefront in recent years. Many definitions of islamophobia exist, but essentially it is the fear and hatred of Islam, Muslims or Islamic culture.

Islamophobia is the belief that Islamic values are not compatible with those of other cultures and views Islam as oppressive and barbaric and supportive of terrorism and extremism.

National research by the Islamic Human Rights Commission has found that, since 'September 11' in New York and the 'July 7' bombings in London, hostility, prejudice, discrimination and hate crime towards Muslims has increased considerably, from racist bullying at schools to violent attacks on Muslims and their property. It is argued that negative stereotyping of Muslims by the media has helped to justify and reinforce islamophobia.

Hate crime

Religious hate crime occurs when someone is a victim of crime or discrimination because of their religion or belief. Although a person's religion or belief is not always visible, certain faiths have particular articles associated with them, such as turbans for Sikh men, and this may lead to people being subjected to discrimination or violence.

Currently, religious hate crime is not recognised as a criminal offence but as ethnicity and religion are often linked, a religiously motivated hate crime may sometimes be treated as an attack on a person's race as well.

National research conducted for the Home Office in 2001 highlighted that religious groups with high proportions of ethnic minority members felt there was a clear overlap between religious and racial discrimination. **Hate crime can have devastating and wide-ranging effects**, leaving people feeling isolated and in fear of the physical safety of themselves and their family. Criminal damage to businesses and personal property can impact on people financially, and vandalism of places of worship can cause tensions and disharmony between faith groups and the wider community.

Education

Children and young people may encounter a number of issues in relation to their religion or faith in all aspects of education. Research by the Home Office on religious discrimination in the UK found that, although many schools allowed pupils to wear headscarves, there were still many issues relating to modesty when taking part in physical activities such as sports and swimming. For example, mixed swimming sessions, showers without curtains and not being allowed to dress modestly whilst taking part in physical education because of school dress codes, are problematic for children and parents of Muslim faiths in particular. Some religions also have specific dietary requirements, such as Halal and Kosher foods (for more information on dietary requirements please see the Key Facts section of this report), which may not be catered for at mainstream schools. The Home Office research also highlighted the problem of important school events or exams clashing with religious festivals and the difficulty parents and children face in having to choose between their religion and education.

Unemployment

Unemployment can have a devastating effect on people's lives, leading to deprivation, poverty and health issues, amongst other things.

This is a significant issue for people belonging to religious groups as the unemployment rate varies between faiths. National research shows that for those aged 25 and over, 14% of Muslims were unemployed in 2004 compared to 6% of Sikhs, 5% of Hindus and 4% for the population as a whole.

There are a number of reasons for this variation. Nationally, Muslim men and women of working age are more likely than other religious groups to be economically inactive.

This is in part due to:

- the young age profile of the Muslim population in Britain
- lower levels of qualification compared to other faith groups
- experience of deprivation
- the large number of women who are economically inactive.

Less than 30% of Muslim women aged 25 and over are economically active and these women are four times as likely to be unemployed than women from other religious groups, with an unemployment rate of 18% compared to 4% for Christian and Jewish women. This may be a consequence of low qualification attainment, but is also attributed to early marriage, early childbirth, large family size and the importance placed on women's role as wives and mothers.

Employment

Religious individuals in employment may face a number of issues. This may include:

- conflicts between traditional dress and employer dress codes
- a lack of knowledge of religious traditions and norms in the workplace, which may lead to misinterpretation of behaviour and result in colleagues and employers believing that individuals are unwilling to take part or conform with workplace culture
- harassment and bullying because of an individual's religion or belief
- inflexibility in relation to time off for religious festivals and/or lack of consideration when observing religious rituals (for example prayer or fasting)
- lack of religiously sensitive facilities, such as space for prayer and washing facilities for ritual washing
- lack of consideration for special dietary requirements (please see the information on special diets in the Key Facts section of the report for more information)
- work-related meetings or social events taking place at locations that may exclude people because of their religion.



Housing

Housing deprivation

According to the Home Office, 40% of Muslim, 26% of Hindu and 22% of Sikh households experience housing deprivation. The 2001 Census also shows that **households headed by people of Muslim faith are more likely than those headed by people belonging to other religious groups to live in socially rented housing**. One reason for this is that mortgages are forbidden in Muslim faith, although there are particular financial products that allow them to buy a house. However, choice is limited and a larger deposit and higher monthly payments are normally required compared to an interest mortgage, making houses less affordable.

Social housing

National research by the Home Office has found that **some people from minority faith groups were unaware of how to access information relating to housing services**, and a report by Cheshire Housing Alliance highlights the need for culturally sensitive information relating to housing to be available in places where specific religious communities may find them easy to access, such as places of worship.

According to the 2001 Census, Muslim, Sikh and Hindu households in Great Britain are larger than households headed by someone of another religion, often as a result of larger family units and the tradition of extended and inter-generational family groups living together.

Larger housing to accommodate bigger households can be very important, particularly for Hindus and Muslims, as are factors like toilet and washing facilities that allow for ritual washing. The Home Office has found that nationally there is a lack of religiously or culturally appropriate housing to meet the needs of faith groups.

Health

The 2001 Census shows that Muslims have the highest proportion of people not in good health (13% for men and 16% for women, compared to about 7% for people of all religions) when age is taken into account. This is followed by Sikhs (10% for men and 14% for women). Muslims also had the highest rate of disability (24% for women and 21% for men). However, a report by the Department of Health highlights the importance of recognising that poor health may be linked to other issues, such as poor housing and deprivation.

With this in mind, the need for religiously and culturally sensitive health and social care facilities, such as sheltered housing, is particularly important to these faith communities. Research has shown that health and social care services often assume that Hindu, Muslim and Sikh families prefer to look after relatives who need care within their own homes. However, this may be dependent on factors such as families having the time and financial resources to provide adequate care and having the space and relevant facilities at home.

Medical treatment

Religion and belief can affect the way in which particular faith groups view medical treatment, from attitudes on abortion and contraception, to organ donations and treatment of pain and terminal diseases. For example, Jehovah's Witnesses, a group of Christians who believe it is wrong to take in blood, may not accept blood transfusions, which has consequences for medical treatment and surgery. The importance of modesty in the Islamic faith also has implications for the medical treatment of Muslims. Women may wish to be treated by someone of the same sex and only want to expose the part of the body being treated, as well as preferring to be located on same-sex wards in care facilities.

Adult and child social care

Vulnerable people, such as older people in residential care and looked after children, may find it difficult to access religiously sensitive facilities, such as facilities for prayer and may have specific religious and traditional requirements, such as diet.

For children in care, issues may arise if they are placed with foster carers of a different religion. Foster carers may have a limited understanding of the child's religious needs (for example prayer, dress and diet). Elderly people may choose not to access much needed support, such as a care worker in the home, due to fears of bullying or discrimination.

Mental health

In some religions and cultures there is a stigma attached to mental health conditions, which may make it difficult for members of those communities who experience mental health problems to gain access to adequate help and treatment. Some religious may interpret mental health conditions spiritually, as the consequence of a 'demonic attack' or a consequence of particular actions and behaviour, which may cause more distress for the individuals involved.

Death Rituals

For many religions, death is often seen as a significant event that does not end life but provides an opportunity for spirituality. This can have an impact on care for terminally ill individuals and their families, who may feel forced to continue medical treatment even though, for many religions, death is seen as an opportunity for spiritual insight and enlightenment, and prolonging life is seen to affect how individuals enter the next life. Rituals and practices in death also differ between religions and may have implications for funerals and burial. For example, Muslim funerals take place as soon as possible after a person has died. They involve ritual bathing and shrouding of the body, which is buried without a casket and aligned towards Mecca.

Hindus are normally cremated within 24 hours of death, as are Sikhs. However, these faith groups may encounter issues when trying to access crematorium facilities at weekends or on national holidays, particularly at Christmas and New Year. In Hinduism, it is normal for the eldest son to press the button that ignites the crematorium fire. For male relatives in Sikh families, it is customary to help put the body in the crematorium incinerator. These faith groups may face problems when trying to follow these religious customs, particularly in relation to health and safety procedures.

Gender

Many religions emphasise distinct gender roles and customs – for example, men and women worship separately in mosques and synagogues, and in Islam, a married woman's main role is usually as a mother and wife while the man works to support their family, although the equality of men and women is emphasised.

Because of strict gender norms associated with a number of religions, transgender people may also encounter hostility and exclusion in their religious community

Hijab

Modesty is incorporated into the Islamic dress code of both Muslim men and women and is called Hijab (modest dress). Hijab for females requires Muslim women to cover their entire body, except the hands and face (including the covering of their heads), for clothes to be loose enough so as not to describe the body and should not resemble the clothes of men or non-Muslim women. A Muslim man's basic Hijab is the covering of his body from belly-button to below the knee; in addition they should wear loose, long and non-transparent clothing when possible. Muslim men and women must also behave appropriately in the presence of the opposite gender, and observe modesty at all times (including behaviour, manners, speech and appearance).

Religion and Sexual Orientation

For both cultural and religious reasons, some faith groups view homosexuality in a negative way. This can have huge implications for gay, lesbian and bisexual members of religious communities who may find themselves ostracised and excluded from places of worship and religious groups they were once part of.

Relationships and marriage

Traditionally, in many religions (including Islam, Hinduism and Sikhism) parents are encouraged to arrange their child's marriage to someone who is considered to be a good life partner. It is forbidden to force, coerce or trick young people into marriage (commonly known as forced marriage) and, although a partnership may be arranged, it is only if both partners are willing participants. In this way it is important to **note that arranged marriage is not the same as a forced marriage**, where an individual is pressurised to enter into marriage against their will.

Key Facts Religions and Faiths

A total of 170 religions were counted in Britain by the 2001 Census. Key facts about some of the main religions are outlined below.

- **Buddhism** is based on teachings of a man called the Buddha. Buddhists strive to lead a moral life, be mindful and aware of thoughts and actions, and develop wisdom and understanding. Achieving enlightenment (Nirvana) is key and can be defined as being fully awake to the reality of life – why there is suffering and how it can be overcome. The Four Noble Truths, the essence of Buddhist teaching, set out Buddha's answers to suffering – all life involves suffering; the origin of suffering is desire; when desires cease suffering will cease; and the Middle Way is a path to Nirvana, the final state of holiness.
- **Christianity** is the largest religious group in Britain and Cheshire West and Chester and is based on the life and teachings of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. The Christian Holy book is the Bible and followers believe that God sent Jesus to help people fulfil their religious duties. There are many denominations, including Church of England (Anglican), Roman Catholic, Quakers and Jehovah's Witnesses, and have different beliefs about Jesus and his teachings.
- **Hinduism** is based on many diverse traditions and religious teachings dating back several thousands of years. There are many diverse beliefs and practices within Hinduism, but the main beliefs include the belief in one Supreme Spirit or God (Brahman) that is worshipped through many different forms and deities, the belief that it is wrong to hurt any living thing (Ahimsa), Samsara (or reincarnation) – the cycle of birth and death, the belief that all behaviour and actions will impact on the next life (Karma), and the belief in common systems of values and duties called Dharma.
- **Islam** is a way of life and those who follow it worship Allah. Muslims live their life according to Allah's wishes as outlined in the Qur'an, which Muslims believe to be the final revelation and was revealed to the Prophet Muhammad by God. The foundation of Muslim life is based around five main pillars: declaring faith in the Oneness of God and the finality of the Prophet Muhammad (Shahadah), five daily prayers (Salat), giving to charity and the needy (Zakah), fasting through Ramadan (Sawm) and the pilgrimage to Makkah for those who are able (Hajj).
- **Judaism** follows the teachings and rules for everyday life as set out in the Torah and the Talmud, which outlines interpretations of the Torah. Jews believe they have a covenant, or special agreement, with God – in exchange for all the good God has done for the Jewish people, they promise to live a holy life and follow the laws of God. Jews observe the Sabbath day of rest from sunset on Friday to sunset on Saturday.
- **Sikhism** is based on the teachings and writings of Guru Nanak and the nine Gurus who followed him, and are enshrined in the Sikh Holy Book Sri Guru Granth Sahib. Sikhs believe in living a good life remembering God at all times, living honestly and working hard, treating everyone equally and helping the less fortunate. There are five physical symbols worn by Sikhs who have been initiated into the Khalsa, the community of baptised Sikhs: uncut hair (Kesh); a steel bracelet (Kara); a wooden comb (Kanga); special undergarments (Kachha) and a ceremonial sword (Kirpan).
- From the 2001 Census, the largest religious groups that did not fall into the main religions outlined above were **Spiritualism, Paganism, Jainism, Wicca, Rastafari, Bahà'î and Zoroastrianism**.
- **Atheism** means the absence of belief in any Gods.



Key religious events

Buddhist

- **Weska or Vaisakha Puja** – marks the Buddhist New Year and commemorates the birth, enlightenment and passing away of Buddha. This festival is very colourful and often marked by the release of birds, and services and teaching at a local temple.

Christian

Many different Christian denominations exist, each having different festivals. Christmas and Easter are two key events celebrated by many Christian faiths.

- **Christmas** – celebrates the birth of Jesus and is usually celebrated by exchanging gifts with family and friends and marked by attending church.
- **Easter** – commemorates the resurrection of Jesus after his death on the cross. Lent, 40 days before Easter, is a time of abstinence and sacrifice where a particular food or habit is given up for the period.

Hindu

- **Holi** – known as 'The Festival of Colours', is celebrated in March and welcomes in the spring season. It is an energetic festival celebrated with bonfires, dancing, singing and the throwing of paint.
- **Diwali** – 'The Festival of Lights' is celebrated for five days in October and marks the New Year in the Hindu calendar. It is a time of spring cleaning the home, lights, fireworks and sweets.
- Devout Hindus often fast during a number of other religious festivals, including **Hanuman Jayanti**, **Swaminarayan Jayanti**, **Mahashivratri**, **Rama Navami**, which celebrate the birth of a number of deities and Holy figures.

Jewish

- **Yom Kippur** – is the holiest day of the year for Jewish people. Also known as the Day of Atonement, the day is characterised by atonement and repentance. Jews fast and refrain from working, spending most of the day worshipping at the Synagogue.
- **Sabbath** – marks the end of the Jewish week and is a day of rest which lasts from sundown Friday to

sundown Saturday. No form of work can take place (including cooking and cleaning) and should be a day spent with family.

- **Passover** – the 'Feast of Passover' commemorates the liberation of the Israelite slaves who were led out of Egypt by Moses. This lasts around 7 days and is celebrated with a seder meal. The first two and last two days of the festival are full days of rest.
- **Rosh Hashanah** – Jewish New Year and celebrates the creation of the world. It is celebrated at the Synagogue with special services and in the home with a special meal.

Muslim

- **Ramadan** – marks the beginning of the ninth month of the Islamic calendar and is a very important and Holy practice for Muslims, who are required to fast for the entire month.
- **Eid ul Fitr** – means the 'Festival of Breaking the Fast' and celebrates the end of Ramadan. The event is marked by communal prayer and people celebrate by holding parties and giving presents.
- **Eid ul Adha** – the four day festival which remembers the prophet Ibrahim's willingness to sacrifice his son when God ordered him to. Celebrations are very similar to Eid Ul Fitr, although a domestic animal, usually a sheep, is often sacrificed and the meat shared (in Britain the animal must be killed in a slaughter house).

Sikh

- **Hola Mahalla** – celebrated in March, the festival began as a day for Sikhs to practice their military exercises but is now marked with sports events, music and poetry readings.
- **Vaisakhi or Baisakhi** - festival celebrating the Sikh New Year takes place in April. Festivities include parades, dancing and singing. During the festival, Sikhs decorate and frequently visit Gurdwaras, the Sikh place of worship.
- **Gurpurbs** celebrate the birth or death of one of the Gurus throughout the year. Sikhs dress up in their finest clothes and join together for special services.
- Sikhs also celebrate **Diwali**.

Population

RELIGION	Cheshire West & Chester		North West		England	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
All Persons	321,971	100	6,729,764	100	49,138,831	100
Christian	259,981	80.7	5,249,686	78.0	35,251,244	71.7
Buddhist	540	0.2	11,794	0.2	139,046	0.3
Hindu	393	0.1	27,211	0.4	546,982	1.1
Jewish	236	0.1	27,974	0.4	257,671	0.5
Muslim	1,058	0.3	204,261	3.0	1,524,887	3.1
Sikh	163	0.1	6,487	0.1	327,343	0.7
Other	440	0.1	10,625	0.2	143,811	0.3
No religion	36,997	11.5	705,045	10.5	7,171,332	14.6
Not stated	22,163	6.9	486,681	7.2	3,776,515	7.7

Source: 2001 Census, Office of National Statistics, Crown Copyright

Places of Worship

There are more than 160 churches in Cheshire West and Chester for various denominations of Christianity including Church of England, Roman Catholic, Methodist and Baptist. There is also a mosque in Blacon, a Quaker Meeting House in Chester City Centre and a Buddhist Centre in Thornton le Moors, Chester. No Synagogues, Gurdwaras (Sikh places of worship) or Hindu temples (Mandirs) are sited in the Cheshire West and Chester area – the nearest are in Warrington, Liverpool and Manchester. However, worship often takes place in less formal settings, such as community centres and people's homes.

Qualifications and Employment

Research by the Office of National Statistics in 2004 found that around a third of all Muslim people of working age in Great Britain had no qualifications, compared to 16% of all people. 20% of Sikhs had no qualifications. Jewish people were least likely to have no qualifications and the most likely to have a degree (7% had no qualifications, and 44% were qualified to degree level); 16% of Christians had a degree. It is important to note, however, that a range of complex factors may impact on an individual's educational attainment, including deprivation and poverty.

Qualification level can, inevitably, impact on the type of employment or occupation a person is likely to have. Findings from the Office of National Statistics showed that in Great Britain in 2004, of all groups, Jewish people were most likely to be self employed – around a third were self-employed compared to 12% of all people. Almost 60% of Jewish men were in managerial or professional occupations. Sikh women were least likely to be working at this level – less than 20% had managerial or professional roles of employed Muslim men, 37% worked in the distribution, hotel and restaurant sector, compared to 17% of Christian men. Also 1 in 10 Muslim men were taxi drivers or chauffeurs, 1 in 7 Sikh women worked in manufacturing, and 1 in 20 Hindus were medical practitioners.

Health

Special diets

Some religious groups have special dietary requirements that they must follow:

- **Muslims** do not eat pork or any food containing the meat. Any other meat they eat must be killed according to the law of Islam, known as Halal
- **Hindus** do not eat beef, as cows are held in special regard
- **Jews** eat meat that has been killed according to Jewish law, known as Kosher, although they don't eat pork or shellfish
- **Sikhs** are forbidden to eat Halal or Kosher meat.

Key Legislation

There are four key pieces of legislation that aim to protect people from discrimination and harassment because of their religion or faith. **The Employment Equality (Religion or Belief) Regulations** were brought into force in 2003 and make it unlawful to discriminate against individuals on the grounds of religion or belief in vocational training and employment. The regulations cover:

- **direct discrimination** - treating current and potential employees less favourably than others because of their religion
- **indirect discrimination** – enforcing policies and practices that disadvantaged those of a certain faith
- **harassment** – offensive, threatening behaviour related to an individual's religion.

The Equality Act 2006 (discrimination on the Grounds of Religion or Belief) states that it is unlawful to discriminate against anyone on the grounds of religion in the area of goods, facilities and services. Finally, the act of threatening people because of their religion, or stirring up hatred against a person because of their faith was made illegal by the **Racial and Religious Hatred Act 2006**. However, this Act only covers threatening behaviour and language, not the use of abusive or insulting words.

The Equality Act 2010 simplifies previous laws by putting all laws that protect people from discrimination (on grounds of race, gender, sexual orientation, disability, religion or belief, transgender and age) in one piece of legislation. In addition to previous protection, clubs with 25 or more members who select their members (such as a golf club) won't be able to discriminate against members or guests on grounds of religion or belief.

What does this mean for Cheshire West and Chester

For the Area

- The make up of Cheshire West and Chester is becoming increasingly multi-cultural and will be reflected more so in the city and larger towns than in rural communities. Religious places of worship and shops may develop to cater for a diverse population.

For the Council

- **The Single Equality Scheme** places a legal duty upon councils to offer all information in different languages and to ensure services and staff do not act in a discriminatory way. For Council services, the first step will be to recognise the impact of religion upon services and to take forward **equality impact assessments** to ensure positive progress can be made.
- **Awareness training** to ensure all staff have an understanding of not only their duty but of the issues that affect different groups of people can help identify potential issues in service areas.
- The Council also has a duty to ensure **fair employment** and that employees are treated in an equal manner and supported.
- The issues around employment, health and discrimination (besides others) emphasise the **importance of support and advocate groups** (groups that petition and promote the rights of minority groups). Funding and supporting these groups is a function of the Council. These groups can give information about benefits, health promotion and learning resources and act as a social network.
- Services that have a significant impact on different faith groups, such as burial and cremation, residential homes, supported living, social housing and children living in care will need to consider how their services are received by the religious community.
- The importance of **working with partners** to act against hate crime, support health promotion, look at issues around education and social care is also key to transforming services. This ensures that all services, not just those directly related to the Council, are explored in their impact on all groups of residents.

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