

MCB Town Halls: Listening exercise on strategic themes & the way forward



As the British Muslim community continues to grow, now numbering nearly 4 million people (6% of the UK population), the Muslim Council of Britain (MCB) has embarked on a series of Town Halls to ensure its Vision 2050 strategy is rooted in the lived realities of our diverse communities. These listening exercises, conducted between January and August 2025, aimed to identify positive features, critical challenges and lay the groundwork to co-create a way forward for Muslim civil society.

The Stats

The findings reveal a community in transition: 50% of British Muslims are now UK-born, and 46% are under the age of 24. This "demographic dividend" offers immense potential for national prosperity, yet it is currently constrained by persistent inequalities, institutional Islamophobia, and a fragmented support ecosystem.



4M

British Muslims

6% of the UK
population

50%

UK-born

Half of British Muslims
were born in the UK

46%

Under 24

A young and dynamic
community

30+

Cities/ Towns

Visited and engaged
with

1,193+

Meetings

Held in person, on the
phone or online

>10

Online Town Halls

Town Halls and communities engaged with included:

London, Birmingham, Bristol, Essex, Walsall, Nottingham, Manchester, Oldham, Milton Keynes, Bradford, Leicester, Cardiff, Belfast, Slough, Croydon, Glasgow, Turkish, Sri Lankan, Bosnian, Somali, Refugees, Converts, Prisoners, Ulemas, MENA, Youth, Islamic Societies, Shiaa, Khojas, Mental Health, Tech, Far East, European Muslims, Women, Black Muslims, Professional Associations and more.

Theme 1: Identity & Integration

The Town Halls highlighted a growing risk of identity dilution among youth, who face intense pressure in schools and universities to settle for "less-than" experiences or code-switch due to entrenched Islamophobia.

Youth

33% of Muslims are under 15. Many report losing confidence in their identity due to peer pressure, the lack of positive role models or opportunities and surveillance cultures like Prevent,.

Reverts/Converts

Often feel isolated, experience prejudice even from within Muslim communities and face "marriage exploitation" or abandonment. Tokenisation and lack of ongoing coordinated care is a major issue.

Marginalised Groups

Far East, Turkish, and MENA (Middle East & North Africa) communities report a disconnect from South Asian-majority mosque structures, leading to a sense of "invisibility" in mainstream Muslim spaces.

Refugees

There is a worrying "faith erosion" as settled communities neglect new arrivals, some of whom feel pressured by missionary activities from other faith groups. Many are suffering from PTSD and poverty.

Recommendations

01

Establish a National Muslim Youth Investment Fund

To support leadership pipelines, mentorship, and social innovation for the nearly 552,000 Muslim teenagers projected by 2031.

03

Create Ethnic Working Groups

Specifically for Turkish, MENA, and Far East communities to ensure their heritage and unique needs are represented within the MCB.

02

Develop "Convert Care" Frameworks

Standardise best practices for mosques to safeguard and integrate reverts, including "buddy" networks and legal support for vulnerable women.

04

Prison Reform Taskforce

Pool community experiences to provide better probationary support and reduce recidivism.

Theme 2: Welfare, Safeguarding & Support

The community is currently filling gaps left by a struggling welfare state, but resources are overstretched. Where the gaps are not being filled, there are many stories of people and entire communities falling through them.



Refugee Poverty

Families often live on just **£8.95 per week**, facing extreme food insecurity and a lack of verified halal food.

Prisoners

Muslims make up **18% of the prison population** (up from 8% in 2002). Ex-offenders face stigma post-release, with weak reintegration pathways.

Mental Health & Loneliness

Mental ill-health is an epidemic affecting our communities. Stigma remains high, NHS service access remains low.

Recommendations

01

National Safeguarding Framework

To be implemented in all Muslim institutions and organisations. Will be necessary for any financial, moral or logistical support.

02

Regional & local councils

Local and regional councils would work on crime prevention and prisoner rehabilitation along with accredited chaplaincy & counselling services.

03

Mental Health Single Point of Access

Online site which can signpost anyone to appropriate faith sensitive Mental Health support.

Theme 3: Leadership, Representation & Advocacy

Grassroots Disconnect

Muslims in senior roles & leadership are often perceived as disconnected from the grassroots. There is real anger out there as well as cynicism and frustration.

Youth, Female & Minority Disconnect

Young people, women and minorities (e.g. Black or Somali Muslims) feel that there is no clear pipeline into leadership. There is a strong feeling that our organisations are not meritocracies. It is all about who you know than what you know or do.

Professionals & Glass Ceilings

Professionals struggle with accessing seniors, systems and processes, mentorship and workplace censorship, particularly regarding Palestine.

Under-represented Groups

Turkish and Far East Muslims have almost no leadership representation within national umbrella structures.



Recommendations

01

Create leadership pipeline

The pipeline will increase the youth, female and minority access to leadership roles.

02

Leadership to Coaching pipeline

Create leadership to coaching pipeline to create vacuum for next generation to come to leadership

03

Specialist role pipeline

We need leadership in specific areas (e.g. public affairs, digital comms, sports, Ai etc...) so creating a pipeline specifically for these is especially useful.

Theme 4: Funding & Resources



British Muslims are the UK's most generous givers, donating £2.2 billion annually (many times the national average per capita).

However, these funds are primarily donated to worthy causes overseas or to build large Mosques and rarely spent inside the UK or to strengthen Muslim communities or institutions at home.

There is an understanding that a class divide is being exacerbated with parts of the Muslim communities escaping poorer communities & others left behind.

The Paradox

Despite this wealth, grassroots organisations—particularly those serving youth and converts—work on "shoestring budgets". A consistent theme was the unbelievable strain on volunteers who sacrifice their physical, mental, financial & family health to keep underfunded systems going despite available funds.

Institutional Barriers

Many Muslim charities are "de-banked" or face disproportionate scrutiny under counter-terrorism laws, making it harder to access traditional grant funding.

Financial Pressures

The Cost-of-Living crisis, inability of young people to afford buying houses, worsening employment is having an impact on all aspects of communities - from marriage breakdowns to reduced productivity.

Recommendations

01

National Zakat & Waqf

National Zakat and Waqf organisations to be supported to help plug gaps in the communities. Support establishing local and regional models.

02

Sustainability & Support

Support for communities and organisations to become sustainable (not handouts), support with grant applications and joint working.

Theme 5: Islamophobia & Discrimination

Islamophobia has intensified, with huge **increase** in hate cases recorded in the year.



Institutional Bias

Muslims in the NHS are referred to Prevent eight times more often than non-Muslims.

Hyper-visibility/Invisibility

Young Muslims feel they are only "seen" by the state when viewed as a security threat.

The "Muslim Vote"

Political agency is often vilified in the media as "sectarian" or "undemocratic," rather than a healthy exercise of democratic rights.

Recommendations

01

Change the narrative

Media, social media and grassroots changing of the narrative and exploring how we do that.

02

Unified Legal & Advocacy body

A UK version of UCLA, CAIR or other advocacy body that is funded and robust.

03

Monitoring, reporting and acting

Coordinate between monitoring, reporting and acting bodies with data, marketing and funding.

Themes & Needs from under-represented communities

GROUP	COMMON THEMES	SPECIFIC NEEDS
Youth (inc FOSIS, Islamic Societies and youth groups)	- Underfunding vs other faith groups - Islamophobia/discrimination in schools & workplaces - Socioeconomic deprivation in deprived boroughs - Lack of coordinated youth leadership platforms	- Develop Youth Council/Board for structured representation - Online Youth Hub with resources, mentorships & scholarships - Long-term FOSIS funding for student/university engagement - Youth-led Islamophobia campaigns using creative/media strategies - Imam training on youth issues: gangs, drugs, mental health, wellbeing
Converts	- Funding/resource gaps - Weak mosque support/organisational collaboration - Islamophobia and prejudice from Muslims & wider society - Isolation and mental health challenges	- Post-Shahada care system: buddy/"adoption" style networks, housing, welfare - Legal/marriage/domestic abuse support - Converts (esp. women) face exploitation, visa marriages, abandonment - Appointment of Walis for vulnerable women - Dedicated mosque spaces & resources for women - National convert directory - Best practice framework for mosques to safeguard and integrate reverts
Turkish Communities	- Strong Islamic identity but facing assimilation/identity dilution - Youth engagement gaps - Islamophobia and lack of recognition - Funding/visibility issues	- Turkish Working Group - ESOL/adult education for first-generation migrants - Empower digital presence via younger Turks (mosques/associations lack this) - Leverage Turkish gov't/embassy for bursaries, teacher training, religious support - Cultural/heritage exchange events (Ramadan, Eid, history) to connect youth with roots

Themes & Needs from under-represented communities (contd.)

GROUP	COMMON THEMES	SPECIFIC NEEDS
Professional Networks	- Community fragmentation and political divisions - Limited funding - Islamophobia in workplaces & career ceilings - Lack of mentorship pipelines for young Muslims	- Employment rights training (discrimination, career progress, HR bias) - Mentorship networks: link students/young professionals to senior Muslims - Campaign for workplace advocacy - Counter "silencing Muslims" - Establish new sector bodies (e.g. Muslim Journalist Network) - Parliamentary/select committee representation - Promote ethical leadership + fight "Muslims in management" disconnect
Refugees	- Funding/resource scarcity - Poor coordination among Muslim orgs - Islamophobia & far-right hostility - Risk of losing faith identity due to neglect	- Frontline engagement system (mosques, butchers, clinics) for arrivals - Scale & support Madrassa Project (700+ children, preserving faith identity) - Coalition of Muslim refugee orgs; MCB to map "Who's Who" - Address extreme poverty: families live on £8.95/week, rely on food banks & unhealthy food, lacking halal meals - Safeguards against missionary pressure (churches exploiting refugee needs → conversions) - Connect psychotherapists & counsellors for trauma/PTSD support - Regional champions for sustained long-term refugee care
Far East Muslims	- Lack of engagement with MCB - Islamophobia/segregation challenges - Very limited representation nationally	- Far East Muslim Working Groups - MCB awareness campaigns (social/digital outreach) - Leadership training & pathways for representation in civic/national roles - Cultural exchange programs to integrate with wider Muslim & UK society - Celebrate heritage while fostering unity with other ethnic Muslim groups

Themes & Needs from under-represented communities (contd.)

GROUP	COMMON THEMES	SPECIFIC NEEDS
Mental Health Communities	- Chronic underfunding (mosques & services under-resourced) - Lack of coordination among orgs (duplication, inefficiency) - Islamophobia's direct impact on wellbeing - Stigma/taboo around mental health in Muslim communities	- Audit of Muslim MH sector + mapping of services - Push NHS for faith-sensitive mental health provision (currently absent despite research) - Accreditation for Muslim practitioners - Training for Imams, teachers, community leaders to handle MH issues - Awareness campaigns to break stigma, esp. on anxiety, depression, PTSD - Develop subgroups (youth, teachers, imams) - Tech-based support: apps, online therapy, awareness campaigns - Lobby for policy inclusion (white paper on Muslim MH inequalities)
MENA Communities	- Scarce/disorganised resources - Disconnect from South Asian mosques & leadership - Islamophobia/discrimination in wider society	- MENA Working Groups via MCB - Joint initiatives with South Asian mosques: shared khutbahs/events - More English khutbahs to include youth & MENA attendees - Address alienation: cultural exchange, translators for elders - Economic solutions: halal mortgage access, job support for older members - Dedicated MENA Youth engagement programs - Cultural sensitivity training for mosque boards/leaders

Conclusion: The Way Forward



The French Generals snickered and chuckled to themselves. Napoleon rebuked his marshals who were mocking the quick collapse of the once feared Ottoman - Mamlukes in Egypt with the phrase, "The East awaits, but a man."

No one believes this great-man theory of history more than the Muslims themselves. We tend to see our past as a series of great men who were able to pick up a fallen nation and lead it to victory.

The problem is, we see our future this way too. We look for saviours, and if they arise, we abandon them to their fate and realpolitik. Just look at any Muslim country, even those that are stable, economically successful and pluralistic. There are very few systems, only saviours and the chaos that awaits once they exit the stage.

This applies to the UK Muslim community too. Many, if not most, of our organisations, our projects and our Mosques are run by a version of the great man (almost always men.) The strengths and weaknesses of the institution are his. The longevity, success and lifespan - are usually his as well.

For a society to mature, for a civilisation to revive, for a people to succeed, they need to move towards building procedures, protocols and practices. We need to speak to the people. We need to understand their fears, hopes and dreams and then we need to work together to try to deal with them.

"We hope that these Town Halls are the start of the conversation, not the end."

We hope that these Town Halls are the start of the conversation, not the end. We pray that they will be something that becomes a tradition not a one-off innovation. We hope that this will help us move from saviours to systems.