

**Muslim Council of Britain Briefing to the Home Office – Amendments to the Places of Worship Protective Security Scheme****11 June 2019**

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**About Us:**

The Muslim Council of Britain is the UK's largest and most diverse Muslim umbrella body with over 500 national, regional and local organisational members, including mosques, charities, schools and professional networks.

It is an independent and democratic body with the leadership elected every 2 years. A National Council drawn from the membership reviews the activities of the leadership every quarter whilst all members can hold the leadership accountable annually at the General Assembly and through day-to-day regular interactions.

**Background:**

On 19 March 2019, following the Islamophobic terrorist attack on Masjid An-Noor in Christchurch, New Zealand, the Home Secretary announced additional funding and a widening of the scope for the Places of Worship Protective Security Scheme for England and Wales, aiming to reassure communities and safeguard mosques and other places of worship, with the scheme planned to re-open in July. MCB welcomed this announcement<sup>1</sup>, which addressed some of the concerns raised in its letter to the Prime Minister on 17 March.<sup>2</sup>

**Key risks**

MCB believes the expansion and simplification of this scheme is a positive intervention that has the potential to provide re-assurance and support to Muslim and other faith communities. However, given the atmosphere of distrust amongst some British Muslim communities towards Government funding, in addition to widespread lack of awareness of the existence of this scheme despite its launch in 2016<sup>3</sup>, there is a significant risk that uptake to this scheme from Muslim and likely other faith communities also vulnerable to hate crime will be low.

In light of this, the MCB has produced this briefing paper to constructively feedback into the design of the updated scheme, to ensure it is accessible and fair with respect to all aspects of its provision and addresses potential barriers to access and take-up.

**Methodology**

During April/May 2019, MCB consulted a wide cross-section of mosques, regional representative bodies and various Council of Mosques, who are both within and beyond its membership, for their views on issues of safety and security for mosques in the UK and their likely engagement with the amended Protective Security Scheme. The key feedback themes are summarised below and recommendations listed under the relevant sub-headings.

**Overall Commentary**

- **Openness is intrinsic** to most of Britain's estimated 1,700 mosques - where almost anyone can walk in and out for most hours of the day for the five daily prayers – leading to high vulnerability of hate crime related violence. In its letter to the Prime Minister following the New Zealand Islamophobic attacks, the MCB said, *"Open seven days a week, especially on Fridays, mosques across the UK are places servicing well attended congregations. This makes the risk of copy-cat attacks here in the UK a real possibility, especially in a climate where we are now fully appreciating the growth in the far-right. There is form here when, in 2017, we saw a terrorist attack against Muslim worshippers during the holy month of Ramadan at Finsbury Park"*<sup>4</sup>
- **Over-securitization** is of concern for many owners and users of mosques – as well as other places of worship – as nobody wants to see places of worship become fortresses and the associated negative psychological impact this may bring. Dr Harriet Crabtree, Executive Director of The Inter Faith Network for the UK, said, *"For all faith communities, it can be a difficult challenge to balance security requirements with the desire for continued openness and hospitality."* Most respondents agreed that they do not want to see knife arches or airport-style security scanners at the entrances of their places of worship. With many mosques severely limited in basic security measures such as door access systems, alarms and CCTV, the importance of installing such basic

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<sup>1</sup><https://mcb.org.uk/mcb-updates/home-office-security-funds-statement/>

<sup>2</sup><https://mcb.org.uk/press-releases/new-zealand-attacks-muslim-council-of-britain-calls-on-government-to-fund-security-of-mosques/>

<sup>3</sup><https://www.thetablet.co.uk/news/8702/low-take-up-on-anti-hate-crime-fund-for-places-of-worship>

<sup>4</sup><https://mcb.org.uk/press-releases/new-zealand-attacks-muslim-council-of-britain-calls-on-government-to-fund-security-of-mosques/>

measures at a minimum cannot be emphasised enough, whilst expenditure for additional security measures beyond the basics should be at the discretion of the place of worship.

- **Consultation** on improvements to policy is welcome and provides a valuable opportunity for genuine engagement with faith communities. However, concern was raised by many respondents that the Government appears to often restrict consultations to Whitehall-appointed individuals, organisations and consultants at a national level, compared to those who work independently and directly with mosques and are embedded at regional levels (i.e. at the grassroots). In the words of one respondent: *“Regional faith structures and networks, for example, various council for mosques operating in different regions of the country provide valuable channels for feedback. Of course, national networks have a legitimacy but their input should be along with and not in place of regional and local inputs.”* Another respondent commented: *“Consultation is always valuable so long as it is not used as a means to establish ‘community leaders’ or isolate independent voices.”*

### Protective Security Scheme – Physical security component

The following section makes recommendations to specific aspects of the physical security component of Protective Security Scheme. Recommendations are structured based on the user journey i.e. from hearing about the scheme, through to eligibility to apply, trust/willingness to apply, application process and final impact.

- **Marketing and awareness** requires significant improvement, as except for the most organised and politically-aware respondents - the majority of respondents had not heard about this scheme until approached for comment or post-New Zealand terror attacks.  
**R1:** Greater investment in marketing and publicity of the scheme compared to previous years, via multiple avenues and channels, to a wider range of places of worship at the grassroots who are most vulnerable to hate crime, is strongly recommended.
- **Eligible costs** currently covered within the scheme include physical security measures such as CCTV, fencing, gates, lighting and alarms etc and these were viewed positively. Whilst not a widespread sentiment, some mosques also expressed a desire for the fund to be able to cover additional costs such as the wages of security guards, in similarity to their Jewish counter-parts many of whom have professional security guards at synagogue entrances. This feeling appeared strongest amongst respondents who felt most vulnerable and/or had suffered violent hate crime incidents recently.  
**R2:** Provision within this scheme should be made for funding security guards to those places of worship that feel most vulnerable (e.g. have suffered incidents in the past or who have received multiple threats), as well as where requested at major events with large crowds attending (e.g. outdoor festivals). Where a place of worship feels their local police force are preferable to offer this support than private contractors, funding support should be provided to the local police force, many of whom may already have stretched resources and would otherwise struggle to fulfil these requests for support.
- **Choice and transparency** in the scheme must be maintained and communicated strongly. Many respondents expressed anxiety that there were ‘strings’ attached to this Government funding which was a barrier to their convincing their internal management committee from applying.  
**R3:** There should be transparency in the tendering process between the Government and installation contractor with the independence of contractors maintained at all times, and the place of worship having the choice of selecting from a pool of approved contractors to perform the installation work.  
**R4:** Furthermore, with many Muslim communities feeling a distrust of the Prevent strategy<sup>5</sup>, a clear signal in all marketing & communications issued and organisations partnered with, that the Protective Security Scheme, since its launch in 2016, has been and will remain separate to the Prevent strategy and has no strings attached must be made absolutely clear.
- **Streamlining the application process**, including assessment, quotation and installation by a centrally approved supplier will help simplify what many respondents described as a bureaucratic process and reduce one of the notable barriers to entry. However, centralised provision increases the risk of the scheme being negatively perceived by some as the Government - via an approved supplier - directly installing equipment on places of worship and spying on faith communities. Several respondents expressed that this was a significant barrier to mosque management committees in their region from applying to the scheme, or encouraging other mosques in their region to apply.

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2016/feb/03/prevent-strategy-sowing-mistrust-fear-muslim-communities>

**R5:** The pros and cons of a centrally approved supplier approach and any effective mitigating measures to avoid worsening distrust issues (e.g. providing choice via a pool of suppliers, see Choice & Transparency section above) should be carefully considered before a decision is reached.

- **Limited application window** during the year is another barrier to entry, primarily because many places of worship are run heavily by volunteers who are often reactive in their decision-making. If they decide to apply to the scheme and find that it is currently closed for applications, they are likely to be discouraged or lose momentum to submit an application later.

**R6:** The scheme should be permanently open throughout the year rather than limited to fixed application windows.

- **Sustainability** in the form of the beneficiary's contribution of at least 20% of the total cost, whilst some respondents considered this to be burdensome, is viewed as a positive feature as it ensures that the beneficiary organisation and their local community is invested in their security improvement project and take ownership of it. However, cash flow consideration was deemed to be a major obstacle for some respondents, with many places of worship reporting they would not be able to handle the significant negative cash flow expenditure to an equipment installer prior to receiving reimbursement.

**R7:** A mechanism of delayed payment terms or direct payment to the supplier should be developed to ease the cash flow burden on places of worship with challenging cash flow positions.

### Protective Security Scheme – Security Training component

The following section makes recommendations to specific aspects of the security training component of Protective Security Scheme. Overall, respondents shared concerns that whilst the aim of providing security training of £5m over three years to support staff and volunteers is well-intentioned, however:

- **Relative budget size** – Although training was generally welcomed, some respondents questioned the relative training budget size with the physical security scheme budget, and commented that most small to medium size places of worship lack basics such as CCTV, access control systems or alarms, which are most urgently needed first before training would be useful.

**R8:** Increasing the current relatively small budget for physical security measures (see Size of Fund section below) compared to training is recommended, to ensure a more effective use of expenditure that delivers greatest impact for the places of worship most in need.

- **Local police integration** – Security training provision is most effectively delivered when it is strongly integrated with local police and fire rescue services who are best placed to support places of worship on the ground at a local and regional level, building rapport with staff and volunteers, and provide location-specific advice and training e.g. developing a crisis management plan, improving local community cohesion. Care must be taken to ensure that the responsibilities of staff and volunteers are clearly differentiated from professional security guards and local police personnel.

As one respondent commented: *“We should not be expecting them [staff/volunteers] to act as security guards, pseudo-police or put themselves at any risk. The training should be appropriate to their role and primarily be focused on improving safeguarding and security processes and signposting, rather than them taking things into their own hands and escalating situations. Training should build the confidence of volunteers/staff at places of worship and we are in discussion with our local police about this already.”*

**R9:** Provision from this training fund to support local police & fire rescue services deliver adequate and tailored training to places of worship (for example via a dedicated Outreach Officer for each police force who understands the dynamics of local places of worship) – rather than expecting them to do this on top of their current high work load and stretched resources – should be made.

**R10:** Given that volunteers and staff– who are not security professionals – can only be trained so far and who often have high turnover rates, a key outcome from this security training (to be tracked by appropriate KPIs) should be stronger interaction with and positive perceptions of the management teams of places of worship with their local police forces and fire rescue services.

- **Holistic training** for faith leaders is an important provision that the Government is already supporting, for example via the Faith Leaders Training Initiative<sup>6</sup> funded by MHCLG that encompasses other key topics (e.g. safeguarding, mental health awareness etc). Integration of security training with wider capacity building programmes such as this would be more cost-effective in delivering the desired outcomes as well as minimising perceptions of over-securitization of places of worship.

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.birmingham.ac.uk/schools/ptr/departments/theologyandreligion/research/projects/flti/index.aspx>

**R11:** Integrating security training as one component into wider capacity building programmes as part of a “joined up” approach by Government, rather than offering as standalone packages is strongly recommended to gain trust and increase uptake in both the Physical Security and Training components of the scheme.

### Wider structural issues

Aside from the Physical Security and Training components of the scheme discussed above, a number of wider structural issues with the scheme have been identified:

- **Size of funding**, whilst welcome that it has doubled to £1.6m this year, is still relatively small in comparison to the level of vulnerability faced by mosques and other places of worship. It is noteworthy that in the United States, the federal Nonprofit Security Grant Program (NSGP) has a budget of \$60m (c £48m) in 2019<sup>7</sup>, which is approximately 30 times greater than in the UK. In addition, whilst the Home Office’s £14m/year Protective Security of the Jewish Community grant is equivalent to approximately £25k per institution on average, if only eligible Muslim institutions are considered for the increased funding size of £1.6m/year, it amounts to less than £1k per institution on average (noting even this is an over estimate). However, whilst security funding for the Jewish community is rightfully fit-for-purpose, the level of support available for Muslim communities to apply for is not, and does not appear to match with evidence from:
  - The Office for National Statistics (ONS) figures indicating Muslims are the second largest faith group in Britain after Christians, and thus have the largest number of places of worship aside from Churches, that may be vulnerable to hate crime<sup>8</sup>.
  - The Home Office’s own figures for the level of risk that Muslim communities face, which show that of the 8,336 religious hate crime incidents in 2017-18, 52% were targeted at Muslims<sup>9</sup>.

**R12:** The fund size should be reviewed in-line with the proportionality of the risks faced by Muslims and other faith communities based on the Government’s latest data.

- **Geographic omission** of Scotland and Northern Ireland from the scope of the scheme is naturally of concern to faith communities residing in those regions, unlike the Protective Security of the Jewish Community grant of £14m<sup>10</sup> administered by the Community Security Trust (CST), which extends to Scotland. This is worrying in particular in light of Islamophobic incidents in Northern Ireland by far-right groups in recent years<sup>11</sup> and recent vandalism of a mosque in Elgin, North East Scotland by vandals who spray-painted the Nazi swastika symbol and profanities on the mosque’s premises.<sup>12</sup>

**R13:** The scheme should be extended or replicated to cover places of worship in Scotland and Northern Ireland to address the vulnerability of places of worship there, with the proportionate increase to the funding available provided either centrally via the Home Office or via the devolved administrations.

- **Omission of faith schools** from the scope of the scheme is another significant shortfall, unlike the Protective Security of the Jewish Community grant (formerly split into a separate grant from the Department for Education of £2m/year) where Jewish community faith schools are eligible to apply.

**R14:** Strategies for addressing the vulnerability of faith schools should be reviewed urgently.

### Conclusion

This paper has summarised the views of a wide cross-section of mosques and regional Muslim representative groups that the MCB has consulted during April/May 2019 to help formulate its position on this issue. As such, this paper can only comment on the perspective of Muslim communities, and the perspective of other faith communities eligible for this scheme should be sought via the consultation too.

In total, 14 recommendations have been made around the physical security grant component, training component and wider structural issues of the scheme. In particular the omission of faith schools and certain geographic regions of the country are of considerable concern.

Overall, the expansion and simplification of this scheme announced in March is a good first step, and with a few further efforts, has the potential to deliver value and impact for places of worship across the country. However, without the serious changes to the scheme outlined above, the scheme will fail to deliver the desired outcomes of good uptake<sup>13</sup>, trust and respect amongst Muslim and likely other faith communities in Britain today.

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.fema.gov/nonprofit-security-grant-program>

<sup>8</sup> <https://mcb.org.uk/report/british-muslims-in-numbers/>

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-45874265>

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.thejc.com/news/uk-news/home-office-raises-grant-for-protection-of-jewish-institutions-by-600-000-1.480719>

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/news/northern-ireland/nejghbours-rally-in-support-of-syrian-family-after-racist-attack-on-co-tyrone-home-38054491.html>

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-scotland-north-east-orkney-shetland-48349021>

<sup>13</sup> <https://www.whatdotheyknow.com/request/459431/response/1114635/attach/3/47021%20response.pdf>