

Faith Security Consultation
Home Office

By email to: faithsecurity.consultation@homeoffice.gov.uk

15 April 2020

Dear Faith Security Consultation Team,

Re: Consultation - Protecting Places of Worship

The 'Protecting Places of Worship' online consultation launched on 15 March 2020, is a welcome initiative by the Home Office. It is also welcome that you are following through on your pledge after the terrorist attacks at worshippers at two mosques in Christchurch, New Zealand in March 2019. However, there are several areas of concern about the timing and duration of the consultation which may lead to a low quantity and quality of engagement. These include:

1. Short response window

- The consultation deadline is 10 May 2020 meaning the duration for responses is 9 weeks only. This is in contrast to other similar consultations the Government has launched since the New Year, which are 12 weeks in duration instead, thereby affording a wide range of respondents a greater amount of time to produce a meaningful and sound response.
- Secondly, it should also be noted that given one of the main audiences of this online consultation are faith leaders and worshippers who are largely volunteers with limited time available alongside their main employment (unlike other sectors the Government may consult). Therefore, it would be reasonable to provide a longer than average response window compared to other similar Government consultations.

2. Coronavirus lockdown disruption

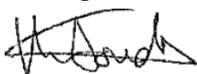
- The online consultation was launched on 15 March 2020, with the Government announcing the enforced closure of places of worship a few days later. Understandably, the lockdown has caused significant disruption and distress to faith leaders and worshippers, including mosques, with many rapidly responding by:
 - informing their congregations of the difficult decision to temporarily close and ceasing regular services
 - organising alternative online delivery of religious classes and services
 - supporting the increased number of deaths and bereavements relating to coronavirus
 - supporting the increased number of mental health and domestic abuse issues relating to coronavirus
 - establishing volunteer community response initiatives for socially isolated community members and key workers including frontline NHS staff and volunteers whilst following social distancing rules
 - emergency financial contingency planning, including reducing their expenses and adapting to new ways to fundraise in order to survive financially
- The above has all taken place in the last 6 weeks. Many faith leaders and worshippers will want to meaningfully contribute to this consultation and have their say on the future of measures to support improved security in post-lockdown Britain. However, we feel it is unrealistic to expect faith leaders and worshippers to respond meaningfully in a 9-week period given how much of their time will have been occupied with coronavirus lockdown response efforts as outlined above.

3. Major religious festivals

- Even without the coronavirus lockdown, April-May 2020 is a busy month for many religious communities, with major religious festivals including Easter, Passover, Vaisakhi and Ramadan. Whilst we appreciate there is never a perfect time in the year to consult, increasing the duration of the consultation will make it more inclusive.

We urge the Home Office to extend the deadline of the consultation from 10 May by at least a further 7 weeks until the end of June, to enable more faith leaders and worshippers the chance to meaningfully contribute. We hope this is considered in the spirit of constructive feedback and we look forward to hearing from you soon.

Kind regards,



Hassan Joudi
Deputy Secretary General (Mosque Affairs Co-ordinator)