

## **PE1737/F**

Muslim Council of Scotland submission of 18 October 2019

### **About MCS**

The Muslim Council of Scotland is a diverse Muslim umbrella body with 90 members; including mosques, charities, schools and professional networks. It is an independent and democratic body with an executive board elected every 2 years. MCS is accountable annually at the Annual General Meeting and through day-to-day regular interactions with members.

### **Executive Summary**

The Public Petitions Committee considered petition PE1737: Review of hate crime legislation and security funding in Scotland at its meeting on 19 September 2019. The petition is “***Calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to address increasing levels of hate crime in Scotland by providing security funding similar to that in place in England and Wales.***” At that meeting the Committee agreed to write to the Muslim Council of Scotland (MCS), seeking its views on the action called for in the petition.

At the hearing, a number of issues were discussed including the need for a fund similar to the *Places of Worship Protective Security Funding Scheme (PWPSFS)* in England and Wales, hate crime reporting, Islamophobia and more broadly, Racism and Xenophobia in Scotland. In our submission, we feel it is important to focus on just one of the manifestations of hate crime and Islamophobia; Attacks on places of worship; as this is the key point of the petition.

In summary, MCS supports the introduction of an enhanced version of PWPSFS in Scotland although we are concerned at the time taken to announce/consult on/implement this. We have attached, a list of recommendations from the Muslim Council of Britain on how the Scheme in England and Wales can be enhanced.

### **Islamophobia in Scotland**

The experiences of Muslims living in Scotland can no longer be framed under ‘Scottish Exceptionalism’; the idea that there is ‘no problem here.’ Islamophobia is sadly just as rife in Scotland as the rest of the UK with an increase in animosity and hostility towards Muslims.

Islamophobia manifests itself in five key ways (i) attacks on persons perceived to be Muslim; (ii) attacks on properties considered to be Muslim in nature (iii) acts of intimidation e.g. marches through Muslim areas, anti-Muslim advertising campaigns etc (iv) acts in an institutional setting be they forms of harassment, discrimination or another (v) incidents in which there is a sustained and systematic elaboration of comments in the public domain that disparage Muslims and/or Islam.

In order to quantify Islamophobia, we need to define it, not just as hate crimes against Muslims and places of worship. Islamophobia must be recognised as a product of a series of interconnected and interlocking environments and the experience of Muslims and persons perceived to be Muslim therein. In short,

Islamophobia is broader than just hate crime and attacks on Muslims, perceived Muslims or Muslim properties.

### **Attacks on places of worship and the need for funding**

In the past few years there has been an increase in attacks and vandalism on Mosques and other places of worship in Scotland. The nature of the targeting has ranged from offensive material posted online to racist graffiti on buildings to Mosque “invasions” by the far right and the intimidation of worshippers. Some Scottish Mosques have also been through deliberate break-ins to cause damage and desecrate the sacred spaces and scriptures. In the most extreme case, the Islamic Centre in Bishopbriggs, an arson attack.

These attacks aren’t limited to just the big iconic buildings such as Glasgow Central Mosque or Edinburgh Central Mosque, but smaller centres have been found to be equally a target as well. The locations also vary, from inner city to small towns and villages and affluent suburban locations as well. We can provide the committee with case studies on a range of incidents from across the country if required.

Almost all of the Mosques in Scotland are funded by their service users and congregations. This means that most have a hand-to-mouth financial situation. The majority rely making enough through “bucket” collections, regular direct debits and donations to break even. There is no central authority or funding structure and the vast majority are reluctant to take state funding. For a Mosque to invest in new physical security measures, they would need to fundraise directly for it, potentially meaning diverting funds away from a vital service such as a food bank or Mother and toddler group.

### **Conclusion**

In the wake of the fatal attacks this year on Mosques in New Zealand, Churches in Sri Lanka and Synagogues in America, this must be treated as a matter of urgency. More needs to be done to ensure places of worship in Scotland are secure. MCS, as well as other faith representative bodies, has been in dialogue with the Scottish Government around a scheme of funding, similar to the **PWPSFS**, being implemented in Scotland. Most recently, the Cabinet Secretary for Justice indicated that a scheme is close to being finalised. Whilst we welcome the news, we are concerned at the time that is being taken in bringing this forward. We would also request that the Scottish Government begin consulting on a Scottish Scheme, one which is an enhanced version of the **PWPSFS**, considering the recommendations from MCB.