

New taskforce developing plan to reopen places of worship

Faith leaders and government have agreed to develop a plan to enable the phased and safe reopening of places of worship when the evidence shows it is the right time to do so, Communities Secretary Robert Jenrick confirmed today (15 May 2020).

This follows the first virtual meeting of the new Places of Worship Taskforce which includes leaders and representatives from all the major faiths.

Earlier this week the government set out its ambition to reopen places of worship in step 3 of its plan to lift restrictions, which is expected to be no earlier than 4 July subject to further scientific advice.

In recognition of how difficult it has been for people of faith to not be able to practice their religion with their community, members agreed to work together to consider whether some forms of worship, such as individual prayer, might be permitted in places of worship before they fully reopen in step 3, where appropriate and safe to do so in line with social distancing guidelines.

Members of the taskforce also agreed to consult their faith communities on the measures being considered and to support ongoing engagement with their communities on this important work as it develops. The Communities Secretary also confirmed today that Faith Action will receive £125,000 to consult and engage with different community groups and places of worship up and down the country to ensure their views are represented at the Taskforce's meetings.

The Communities Secretary was clear places of worship will only be opened when the government is confident that people can use these spaces safely and will not put themselves or others at risk.

Communities Secretary Rt Hon Robert Jenrick MP said:

During this pandemic, significant spiritual moments such as Easter, Passover, Ramadan and Vaisakhi when families, friends and congregations traditionally gather together, have been celebrated at home.

I realise how challenging being separated from their communities has been for people of faith. That's why I have convened the Places of Worship Taskforce to establish how religious practices can safely resume outside the home as soon as possible.

Today's first meeting of the Taskforce was very productive. We will now work together with all faith communities to understand how we can open places of worship as a priority, while continuing to prioritise safety. I look forward to working with the Taskforce

over the coming weeks to reach a solution.

Faith Minister Lord Greenhalgh said:

Places of worship serve such an important role in supporting and providing spiritual leadership for this country's diverse communities and in bringing communities and the generations together, but this also makes them places that are currently particularly vulnerable to the spread of the pandemic.

We realise that practical issues such as the size of both physical buildings and congregations are significant but we are determined to find a way to safely reopen places of worship as soon as possible, ensuring that people are not put at undue risk.

The Taskforce will jointly produce guidance with Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government which supports places of worship across England to reopen safely.

For the time-being, churches and places of worship must remain closed as set out in law. However, funerals are still able to go ahead in places of worship and in crematoria where possible to do so safely.

Members of the Taskforce that met today include:

- The Archbishop of Canterbury
- Cardinal Vincent Nichols,
- Chief Rabbi, Ephraim Mirvis
- Imam Asim Yusef, Board of British Scholars and Imams
- Rajnish Kashyap, Hindu Council UK
- Jasvir Singh, City Sikhs
- Daniel Singleton, Faith Action

Other faith representatives and government officials may be invited to attend future meetings depending on the Taskforce's priorities.

No place of worship will be able to reopen before a final decision by the government and the accompanying change to the legal position in the published regulations. Faith organisations will be able to reopen at a slower pace if they wish.

The Minister for Faith has held a series of roundtables and one on one meetings with faith and community leaders over the last few weeks and will continue to do so in the weeks ahead.

The funding for Faith Action has been awarded from the £360 million pot of funding recently announced by Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport to provide targeted support to the voluntary, community and social enterprise sector. As made clear at the time, this funding was not allocated via an open bid but awarded in line with agreed departmental priorities.

Adapting Security Council working methods to be innovative and agile

Thank you, Mr President, and thank you also to our briefers this morning. I would like to thank you, Mr President, and Estonia and St Vincent and the Grenadines for arranging this meeting and for bearing the concept note that will inform our discussions.

Mr President, as others have said, COVID-19 has presented an unprecedented challenge to this Council over the last two months or so. Most importantly, the spread of this disease has had significant implications for international peace and security that the Council needs to address. But it's also presented major challenges for the Council's working methods. And in my intervention today, I will consider how the Council has adapted to these challenges before moving on to more general points.

So firstly, on COVID, I would like to pay tribute to the efforts of China, the Dominican Republic and Estonia. Under their presidencies in March, April and May, the Council has been able to move to a position where open videoconferences of the Council cannot be broadcast live on UNTV. And we are able to adopt resolutions and PRSTs through written procedure. We should not understate the work that has been required to achieve this outcome, including from the Secretariat. The move to broadcasting Council videoconferences in full was a particularly important step for the transparency of the Council's work.

But the UK regrets that the Council working methods have not been able to respond in a more agile and effective way to this crisis. I recall in this context Article 28 of the Charter, which requires the Council to be organised in a way that enables it to function continuously. Due to a lack of Council consensus, neither the Council nor its subsidiary bodies have held formal meetings since the 12th of March. There are therefore no verbatim transcripts of our meetings. Our technical platform has not been able to accommodate simultaneous interpretation or open debates and continues to suffer from occasional technical glitches. Meetings are conducted without the benefit of the established framework of the provisional rules of procedure and the mechanisms for resolution of disagreements that they provide. We all hope that we can return to the chamber soon, but as long as we are confronted with these extraordinary circumstances, we need to continue to pursue opportunities for improving our working methods. When we do return to the normal, we need to consider how we can put contingency plans in place to ensure that we are able to respond more quickly and effectively to any future crises. Last week's Arria on the anniversary of Victory in Europe Day showed us what can be done with quite some style.

Mr President, I would like to turn to the potential tension between

transparency and effectiveness that is highlighted in the concept note. One significant challenge in this regard is maintaining an appropriate balance between open and closed meetings. Achieving the right balance requires Council members to approach the monthly programme of work with an open mind. It is too easy to fall into the trap of following the same format each time an issue appears on our agenda. One option that I would like to highlight is the private meeting; the opportunity for UN member states to participate provides an element of transparency, but the closed nature of the meeting removes the temptation to address the media rather than Council colleagues.

But, Mr President, the assumption that closed meetings are more effective does not always hold true. To be effective, Council members need to enter these meetings with a willingness to engage in a discussion and consider action. Regrettably, we still see too many examples of Council members reading up prepared statements or refusing to engage in a serious discussion of outcomes or next steps.

My final point on transparency relates to civil society. The UK believes that engaging with a diverse set of briefings is an important element of transparency, and we will continue to promote civil society participation in Council activity. But as highlighted in the Arria that the UK and the Dominican Republic held in February, the Council needs to do better at handling the risk of reprisals to our briefers. We look forward to continuing discussions with Council colleagues on this important issue.

Turning to efficiency, there has been some progress in bearing down on speaking times to the Council, but the Council still spends too much time in lengthy meetings that address the conflicts of yesterday rather than shouldering its responsibilities to address today's conflicts and prevent future conflicts. We support informal horizon scanning briefings by the Secretariat and the development of sofa talks to address this challenge. It's important that we use these opportunities effectively, and as Professor Luck has said, implement agreed working method reforms widely.

But informal discussions are no substitute for Council meetings, not least for reasons of transparency. We must therefore continue to subject the Council's programme of work to critical analysis and be prepared to bring new issues to the Council. The current crisis means that the Council's work on prevention is more important than ever, and I was pleased to hear Ms. Landren's point on systemic threats. We have to look beyond the immediate geographic nature of the challenge to the wider challenges like climate that threaten us more globally.

The UK is also prioritised reducing the length and the pace of Council products over the recent years. We've had some success, especially with reducing the length of peacekeeping mandates. But there is more work to be done and the UK will maintain our focus on this.

In conclusion, Mr President, the Council's working methods have perhaps never been under greater scrutiny. While we have made significant progress since March, our ambition should be for the Council to be a leader in innovation and agility. And we must remember fundamental reason for this Council's

existence and ensure all we do best serves that purpose. I look forward to continuing discussions on how we can rise to that challenge.

Thank you, Mr President.

[Health and Social Care Secretary's statement on coronavirus \(COVID-19\): 15 May 2020](#)

[Coronavirus press conference \(15 May 2020\)](#)

Good afternoon and welcome to Downing Street for the daily coronavirus briefing.

I'm joined by the Deputy Chief Medical Officer Dr Jenny Harries and by NHS England's Medical Director for Primary Care Dr Nikki Kanani.

I want to take this chance to update you on the latest coronavirus data. 2,353,078 tests for coronavirus have now been carried out in the UK, including 133,784 tests yesterday. 236,711 people have tested positive for the virus, an increase of 3,560 since yesterday. 10,024 people are currently in hospital with coronavirus. This is a 13% fall from the same time last week.

And very sadly of those who tested positive, across all settings, 33,998 people have now died. That's an increase of 384 since yesterday. And we mourn each one. The number of deaths is falling each day, in all settings thankfully, and we are past the peak of this virus.

I want to take a moment to remind everyone about our plans for this second phase. We have set up the new COVID Alert Level System. That's the five levels of threat – based on the R value and the number of new cases. The alert level in turn guides the social distancing rules, which are vital in our efforts to control the virus.

A higher alert level means stricter rules. Throughout the lockdown, we have been at Level 4 which means that Covid-19 is in general circulation and transmission is high or rising exponentially.

But, thanks to your shared sacrifice, we've brought R down. Cautiously, carefully and responsibly, we are now in a position to start moving to Level 3.

We've set out the first of the three steps that we'll take to carefully to modify the social distancing rules and start to restore freedom to this

country all the while avoiding a disastrous second peak that could overwhelm the NHS.

At each step, we will closely monitor the impact on R, on the number of new infections, and on of course all available data. And we'll only move to the next step when we judge it is safe to do so.

In the first step, as of this week if you work but can't work from home, you should speak to your employer about going back in. People can now spend time outdoors and exercise as often as you like and you can meet one other person from outside your household in an outdoor, public place. But please keep 2 metres apart.

This weekend, with the good weather and the new rules, I hope people can enjoy being outside but please stick with the rules, keep an eye on your family and don't take risks.

We've also updated what we're asking to people to do, which is to Stay Alert, Control the Virus and Save Lives.

For the vast majority of people, staying alert still means staying at home as much as is possible. Working from home when you can, limiting contact with people, keeping your distance if you go out: 2 metres wherever possible. washing your hands regularly. This is still the single most effective thing that you can do to keep yourself safe and of course, self-isolating if you or anyone in your household has coronavirus symptoms.

By staying alert and following the rules, you can play a part in the national effort getting the R down and keeping R down controlling the virus so that we can save lives, rebuild livelihoods and start to recover our freedom.

Care home support package backed by £600 million to help reduce coronavirus infections

- £600 million Infection Control Fund to reduce transmission of coronavirus in care homes
- This forms part of wider support for care home residents and staff, including by limiting staff movement, protecting wages and giving access to NHS personal protective equipment (PPE) training
- Each care home in England to be given a named clinical lead to provide direct care for residents
- A wellbeing package will be also launched on CARE Workforce app to support the workforce with Hospice UK and Samaritans

A new £600 million Infection Control Fund has been introduced to tackle the spread of COVID-19 in care homes in addition to £3.2 billion of financial support made available to local authorities to support key public services since the start of the crisis.

The fund, which is ringfenced for social care, will be given to local authorities to ensure care homes can continue to halt the spread of coronavirus by helping them cover the costs of implementing measures to reduce transmission.

Care homes will be asked to restrict permanent and agency staff to working in only one care home wherever possible. The funding could be used to meet the additional costs of restricting staff to work in one care home and pay the wages of those self-isolating.

[Care home support package](#)

Health and Social Care Secretary Matt Hancock said:

This £600 million Infection Control Fund will help as we continue to reduce infections in care homes and save lives.

From the very start of this outbreak, we have been working to protect our brilliant social care workforce and the most vulnerable in our society.

Our package sets out clearly the extra steps local councils and care homes should be taking as we stamp out the spread of this virus.

In further measures announced today:

- all local authorities must conduct a daily review of care homes in their area to ensure care homes have the support they need with staffing, help with accessing PPE and other areas of operation
- the NHS will ensure that each care home has a named clinical contact to provide better access to clinical advice through weekly check-ins to review their patients, and offer direct support for staff with use of equipment and medication
- a wellbeing package for social care staff is also being rolled out today on the new CARE app including 2 new helplines, led by the Samaritans and Hospice UK. This will help support care staff with their mental health and wellbeing and support those who have experienced a traumatic death as part of their work or help with anxiety and stress

Minister for Care Helen Whately said:

Our care homes, and those working tirelessly to look after our loved ones are at the heart of our fight against this invisible enemy, which is why we're doing everything we can to make sure the

sector has all the support it needs to stop the spread and save lives.

Our support package introduces stronger measures on infection control and steps up clinical support to make sure there is a clinical lead assigned to every care home right across the country to offer advice and quicker support. This is an important set of measures to support care homes and their staff – to continue to do wonderful work caring for people, even at this most difficult of times.

Local Government Secretary Rt Hon Robert Jenrick MP said:

We have already provided councils with over £3.2 billion during this pandemic so that they can respond to the immediate pressures they are facing, including supporting social care.

This new funding will be distributed to councils based on the number of care home beds in their area and will be passed on quickly to care providers. It will fund new measures to reduce the transmission of coronavirus in care homes, minimise infection, keep staff and residents safe and, ultimately, save lives.

Wellbeing support

Samaritans, working with NHS England, have extended the use of their helpline to all social care workers. Social care staff will be able to speak to a trained Samaritans adviser who will provide a non-judgmental listening ear, safe space to offload and signposting to other services.

Hospice UK will also extend their bereavement and trauma support hotline to people working in social care, with specialist counsellors available to support staff who have experienced trauma, stress or anxiety through their work. Mental health and wellbeing guidance for the adult social care workforce was recently published on the app to support staff and employers through the outbreak.

Testing

All symptomatic and asymptomatic care home staff and residents in England are already eligible for testing, and testing is prioritised for care homes that look after the over 65s. The new digital portal now enables care homes to register for the delivery and collection of test kits directly.

Workforce recruitment

Today's announcement also aims to further boost the social care workforce and work has begun to attract thousands more people into social care over the next 3 months through the new national social care recruitment campaign.

NHS support will see nurse returners being deployed to care homes through the Bringing Back Staff programme, as well providing infection control nurses to lead a 'train the trainers' approach for care homes available to every area in England. This includes advice about the recommended approach to infection prevention control, PPE usage and testing advice. This programme commenced at the beginning of May with the offer available to every area in England.

Ruth Sutherland, Samaritans CEO, said:

We are so pleased that we can offer support to even more key workers who are doing such critical work on the frontline. Our volunteers are ready and waiting to provide a non-judgemental listening ear and a safe space to offload, at a time when we know so many are under huge emotional strain.

All calls are completely confidential and answered by trained volunteers who will talk for as long as people want to, whilst also offering information about other sources of support that could be helpful.

Paul Johnstone, Deputy SRO for PHE COVID-19 Response at Public Health England (PHE), said:

We are delighted that the social care sector will get even more support in the form of the Social Care Fund, based on PHE research and emerging evidence from the World Health Organization. We are confident that these interventions will help to further reduce the transmission of COVID-19 and keep our care home residents and workers safe.

The excellent work carried out by Directors of Public Health and PHE's Health Protection Teams has already made a huge difference to the local response to COVID-19. We will continue working with NHS England and DHSC to provide advice and support to the sector.

Tracey Bleakley, CEO, Hospice UK said:

We welcome the commitment the government is making to ensure that the care workforce is to benefit from bereavement and trauma support. These dedicated, frontline health professionals face very difficult situations dealing with COVID-19 which can take a toll on their mental health and wellbeing. This is why Hospice UK is so pleased to be able to extend our services to those in social care.

Background information

- The scheme will cover frontline staff in England.
- As a result of this £600 million the devolved administrations will receive £113 million through the Barnett formula:
 - the Scottish Government will receive £58 million
 - the Welsh Government will receive £35 million
 - the Northern Ireland Executive will receive £20 million
- The allocation shares for each council are calculated as $[\text{Number of care home beds} * \text{Area Cost Adjustment}] / \text{England sum of } [\text{Number of care home beds} * \text{Area Cost Adjustment}]$. The Area Cost Adjustment reflects differences in wages and prices in different councils.
- The funding will be paid in 2 equal instalments to local authorities. We have allocated funding to local authorities according to the number of care home beds in each area, with an adjustment to reflect the costs of operating in each area.
- We will request that 75% of the initial funding received is passed straight to care homes within the local authority's geographical area for use on infection control measures, including to care homes with whom the local authority does not have existing contracts. The second payment will be contingent on the first being used for infection control. The remaining 25% must also be used for infection control measures, however local authorities are able to allocate based on need. This may involve support for domiciliary care workforce measures. To be eligible for support from the grant, providers who do not already must complete the daily care home Capacity Tracker.
- This approach ensures that the majority of funding reaches the front line as quickly as possible, while ensuring that local authorities have the flexibility to top up where it is most needed.

Further details of the [Samaritans helpline](#) are on its website.

[Allocation table for the infection control fund for adult social care](#) (PDF, 104 KB, 5 pages)

[PM's call with Prime Minister Trudeau: 15 May 2020](#)

Press release

Prime Minister Boris Johnson had a call with Canadian Prime Minister Trudeau.



The Prime Minister spoke to his Canadian counterpart, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, today on the global response to the coronavirus pandemic.

Both leaders agreed on the importance of international collaboration on the fight against the virus, including through the G7 and Commonwealth.

They also discussed how the UK and Canada can work together to support global economic recovery and emerge stronger from this crisis.

The Prime Minister extended an invitation to Prime Minister Trudeau to attend the upcoming virtual Global Vaccine Summit, and thanked him for Canada's recent pledge to Gavi.

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