

11/5/2020

To Rt Hon Robert Jenrick

Secretary of State

Ministry of Housing, Community and Local Government

Dear Secretary of State

Proposal for the Re-opening of Gurdwaras

We wish to thank you for giving due and prompt consideration to our requests and suggestions to maintain some services in Gurdwaras in this difficult period. As you will no doubt know that many Gurdwaras around the country have been providing packed langar boxes for the elderly, vulnerable and front lines staff. While the services unique to Sikhs have also continued at a very basic level without congregations (sangat), services and functions that necessitate some sangat (congregation) such as weddings, celebratory or commemorative services have been suspended. Funeral services have been conducted as per guidelines provided by the department.

The country is looking forward to gradual normalisation of life and graded steps to ease the lockdown. Two large national Sikhs organisations, Sikh Council UK and British Sikh Consultative Forum have been working together in consultation with Gurdwaras to propose a set of steps at easing the lockdown. This is a collective proposal from us.

Gurdwaras would like to move towards gradual normalisation of services and the Sikh public are eager to go to the Gurdwara for their spiritual and related needs. These have been severely affected, especially for the elderly/ As the Government no doubt knows from many studies, the lack of access of a place where people can 'worship' or be in 'sangat' (congregation) affects people's mental as well as physical wellbeing. It can supersede all other impacts of lockdown.

For the Sikhs, it is important to do 'darshan' (presence of) of Guru Granth Sahib and be part of 'sadh sangat' (the congregation in presence of Guru Granth sahib).

We would like to suggest a few early steps to ease the lockdown so Gurdwaras can start to work towards gradual normalisation of services in accordance with Government guidelines.

Restricted congregational services with due attention to hygiene and physical distancing in accordance with Government guidelines. We attach a guideline that we will issue to Gurdwaras. These proposed measures have been carefully devised whilst being mindful of the need to keep safe both visitors to the Gurdwara as well as the volunteers/workers who serve these visitors.

As the department will know, there are both formalised services and informal visits to pay 'darshan' (to be on presence) of the Guru. People come in at any time of the day, pay their

respects and go away. This takes a few minutes per person. Gurdwaras can restrict the number of people at any time and ensure hygiene and physical distancing along with masks.

We suggest that weddings and some other commemoratives services be permitted with a restricted number of attendance and with due care to hygiene and physical distancing. Many couples are waiting for weddings before being able to start a life together.

These proposed measures have been carefully devised whilst being mindful of the need to keep safe both visitors to the Gurdwara as well as the volunteers/workers who serve these visitors.

The number of the congregation will be restricted in accordance with Government guidelines for instance depending on the size of the main hall (darbar). Some Gurdwaras, just like places of worship in other faiths, have small halls and some have massive halls.

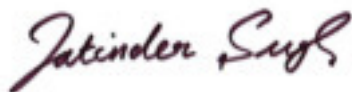
Please see attached suggestions for gradual easing of lockdown and another attachment of our guidelines for Gurdwaras.

We would like to work with the department or any agency the government proposes to ensure compliance although we can say with some pride that Sikh Gurdwaras have shown exemplary responsibility during this period.

The two organisations will also set up a team to assist Gurdwaras on compliance through this difficult period.

We also wish to raise the important issue of finances. As Gurdwaras are dependent on donations from the sangat, the offerings have gone down dramatically. This is affecting payment of bills and mortgages. While we notice that Government has offered grants and loans to businesses and charities, there do not seem to be specific grants being offered to 'places of worship'. We will request the Secretary of State to look urgently into this and set them up.

Yours Sincerely



Jatinder Singh
(Secretary General), Sikh Council UK

Jasdev Singh Rai
British Sikh Consultative Forum