

PE1737/E

Scottish Government submission of 18 October 2019

The petitioner has called for the Scottish Government to consider a review of hate crime legislation and security funding in Scotland. The Committee subsequently asked the Scottish Government whether we considered establishing a scheme, similar to the UK Government's Places of Worship (POW): Protective Security Funding Scheme, in Scotland and, if so, why had the Scottish Government decide against this action.

I can advise that the Scottish Government is clear that all places of worship should be places of peace and sanctuary, and that our faith communities should feel safe and secure when they visit them. We value our relationships with all our diverse communities and welcome their contribution to our society.

While there is currently no security funding scheme for places of worship in Scotland, Ministers are currently considering what more we can do to ensure safety and security at their places of worship, including exploring the possibility of establishing a security fund.

In the meantime, we would encourage members of faith communities to continue to contact Police Scotland if they are concerned about their security and the safety of their churches and members.

The Scottish Government was also asked whether there are other options which we are considering to address security concerns at places of worship across Scotland. I can confirm that Ministers are currently considering what more we can do to ensure safety and security at their places of worship, including exploring the possibility of establishing a security fund.

The Scottish Parliament video response to petition PE1737 refers to the final report of the Independent Review of Hate Crime Legislation in Scotland which was published in May 2018 and the subsequent Scottish Government consultation on hate crime legislation – 'One Scotland: Hate Has No Home Here'. It may help if I provide additional background.

The Scottish Government is committed to tackling hate crime and prejudice and takes hate crime very seriously. We are clear that there is no place in Scotland for any form of hate crime or prejudice. We understand that hate crime has hugely damaging effects on victims, their families and communities. We must all play our part to challenge it.

In June 2017 the Scottish Government published an ambitious programme of work to tackle hate crime and build community cohesion. We established an Action Group, chaired by the Cabinet Secretary for Communities, with key stakeholders to take this work forward. As part of this:

- Following Lord Bracadale's 2018 Independent Review of Hate Crime Legislation in Scotland, we committed to consolidate and modernise hate crime law.
- in September 2018 we launched a hate crime campaign to encourage witnesses to report
- in February this year, we published information on police recorded hate crime, across the five hate strands and we are working with the Action Group to inform how we can improve the collection and publication of this data going forward.
- the Action Group are working with Police Scotland to consider how to improve the third party reporting
- Lord Bracadale's review and recommendations were the basis for the Scottish Government's consultation on the detail of what should be included in a new hate crime

bill. The consultation provided a range of organisations and groups, as well as members of the public, with an opportunity to share their views and inform what is included in the new hate crime legislation. Approximately 1,159 written responses were submitted in total: around 91% of these were provided by members of the public and the remainder by organisations. We published the full analysis on 27 June 2019.

- Scottish Government has a commitment to use plain English where possible. Owing to the requirement to review legislative provisions, officials acknowledge that the language of the hate crime consultation may have been more technical than normal. To mitigate this we also actively promoted:
 - an easy read version of the consultation made available on line
 - a series of roadshows, comprising some 11 events, held across the whole of Scotland, enabling contributions for 400 individuals and organisations.
 - officials were happy to help facilitate workshops for those organisations running their own events and where necessary to provide a re-worked version of the consultation e.g. with subtitles
 - a mailbox made available for any queries from stakeholders and the public.