

Thank you for your letter dated 24 September 2019 in which you asked for the following information:

- what impact has the Places of Worship (POW): protective security funding scheme has had across England and Wales since its launch in 2016;
- to what extent has there been a reduction in crime around places of worship;
- what feedback has been received from communities who have received funding from the scheme.

The Places of Worship (POW): Protective Security Funding Scheme was a key commitment in the UK Government's 2016 hate crime action plan (Action Against Hate: The UK Government's plan for tackling hate crime). The Home Office committed to funding a fourth round of the Scheme (2019/20) in the Hate Crime Action Plan Refresh last October, following the success of the initial three years of funding.

The scheme provides protective security measures such as CCTV cameras, perimeter fencing, and entry control systems, to places of worship that have been victims of, or are vulnerable to hate crime. Over the first three years, in total, the scheme has approved grants worth approximately £1.5 million to 63 churches, 49 mosques, 5 to Hindu temples, and 17 to Sikh Gurdwaras.

The UK Government publishes police recorded hate crime yearly in October. Last year we published experimental data on perceived religion of victims of religious hate crimes. We do not however, have any centrally recorded data in relation to levels of hate crime around places of worship. We know that some faith communities are anxious about hate crime, particularly at their places of worship. These anxieties have been heightened following the terrorist attacks in Christchurch, and Sri Lanka. This scheme helps to improve perceptions of risk, and to alleviate concerns of hate crime, within these communities.

We have received a lot of feedback from previously successful applicants demonstrating successes of the scheme. For example, a mosque which recently received funding stated that many families with young children now feel much safer attending Mosque for prayers and are confident their children will be safe due to the boundary fencing and a secure gate. People now feel that the Mosque is their second home where they feel secure. Additionally, a gurdwara who received funding for lighting and CCTV, stated that members of their congregation now feel less fearful to attend in the late evening, and that installations are a deterrent to cause damage against the Gurdwara or the congregation.

On 19 March 2019 the then Home Secretary announced a package of funding to help protect places of worship from hate crime, including doubling the amount of funding awarded last year for this year's scheme; uplifting funding to £1.6 million for 2019/20. In addition, he committed to a new £5 million security training scheme and a public consultation on what more could be done to protect places of worship.

Following this announcement, and in response to engagement with and feedback from faith communities and stakeholders, several changes were made to this year's scheme to make it easier for places of worship and ensure the most vulnerable had the capability to apply. Changes included appointing a central contractor, Esotec Ltd, to administer all assessments, quotes and installation, removing of the previous requirement for applicants to obtain three quotations, which applicants found particularly burdensome. In addition, the scheme was opened to associated faith community centres as well as places of worship, and we removed the need for applicants to demonstrate they had been a victim of hate crime, instead focusing on vulnerability.

As part of the fourth year of this scheme, we are running a process and outcome evaluation to help us understand whether the updated scheme has been successful and help inform how the scheme might run for a fifth year. We anticipate the evaluation completing in 2020.

During the Spending Round earlier this year, the Chancellor announced the funding for the scheme will double from £1.6 million in 2019/20 to £3.2 million in 2020/21. Details regarding the fifth year of the scheme will be released in due course.