

Preparing for Phased Re-Opening

Initial Discussion Guidelines for Leaders of Mosques, Madrasas and Community Centres, as of 18/05/2020

In the Name of Allah, the Most Beneficent, the Most Merciful

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1. Introduction

1. Who is this for?

These initial discussion guidelines are intended for **trustees, staff, volunteers, Imams, scholars and anybody else** serving in a leadership capacity at their local mosques, madrasas or community centre in the UK, as well as **local Muslim networks/regional Council of Mosques**. These discussion guidelines have been drafted by volunteers contributing to the work of an MCB task force based on:

- Consultation run online by the Muslim Council of Britain in early May 2020 completed by over 300 mosques, madrasas, community centre leaders and scholars
- Advice from Muslim professionals including via the British Islamic Medical Association, Muslim Lawyers Pro Bono Group and initial conception by the Muslim Council of Wales.
- Input from Association of Muslim Schools and Association of Muslim Supplementary Schools, and other individuals who have volunteered their detailed thoughts and opinions.
- Guidance produced by Muslim umbrella bodies in other countries internationally where a partial lift of lockdown restrictions has already occurred

The aim of this document is to help leaders of mosques, madrasas or community centres plan in advance for a safe and phased re-opening once COVID-19 restrictions are eased, potentially as early as July, whilst keeping community members safe according to the latest regulations.

2. Where are we today?

As with all sections of British society, the last few weeks of COVID-19 lockdown have presented immense challenges to mosques, madrasas and community centres, with significant spiritual, emotional and financial struggles to overcome. And it has also caused us to change at short notice how we usually observe the Month of Ramadan and Eid Al-Fitr.

It is also evident that the virus has had a disproportionate impact on BAME communities including Muslim communities in Britain. However, our communities and institutions have shown a high-level of discipline and adaptation to the new circumstances. And we have been on the front line of helping others, via volunteer-led mutual aid initiatives to support the most vulnerable in society, giving and delivering for local foodbanks, supporting the NHS and other key services and more.

3. Looking ahead?

As we look ahead to the “new normal” for our mosques, madrasas and community centres, we have the opportunity to re-imagine the role that Muslim institutions play in society and our local communities.

Are there new ways that our mosques, madrasas or community centres can relate to and positively engage with our neighbours? Is this a chance to connect more strongly with local charities, service providers or local interfaith councils and share ideas, resources and funding opportunities? Indeed, with every challenge, there are also many opportunities.

4. Phases - are there defined phases for re-opening?

Not yet. The UK Government has formed a task force to investigate how places of worship and faith buildings can be re-opened in a phased approach whilst being “COVID-19 Secure”. Some devolved administrations have begun issuing some early guidance too.

Whilst exact details of phasing is yet to be published, based on guidance issues by the Welsh Government in mid-May, it is likely that phases for re-opening may be in categories such as:

Full Lockdown	Closure to members of the public
Individual Only Lockdown	Open for individual or private prayer only, with physical distancing measures in place
Limited Groups Lockdown	Open to groups of a limited size and for a limited range of services, linked to ensuring physical distancing measures in place
“New Normal”	Open for wide range of services with physical distancing measures in place

Aside from an indicative re-opening date for places of worship of 4th July announced in the UK Government’s COVID-19 recovery plan, no further details are available. The status of supplementary schools such as madrasas is currently unclear. However, the situation is rapidly changing, and new public health announcements will be monitored closely.

5. Which services / prayers can I run?

The answer to this depends on exact details of the phasing approach which is yet to be announced by the UK Government and devolved administrations. Also, different mosques, madrasas and community centres have different numbers of people typically attending their regular services such as:

- Daily prayers
- Friday (*Jumuah*) prayers
- Funeral (*Janazah*) Prayers
- Classes / Study Circles / *Halaqa*
- Lectures / Seminars
- Open days / schools visits
- Other

and the ability to run a service is likely to be strongly linked to how well physical distancing measures can be ensured.

6. Should I continue to deliver online services?

This is strongly recommended, especially for services which can easily be delivered online via video/teleconferencing software. In addition, only a fraction of attendees are likely to be able to be inside your building at any one point in time (see Step 3 below) in the “new normal”, and highly vulnerable will be discouraged from attending at all, therefore many community members will miss out on your services if you do not deliver anything online.

7. I have a suggestion for improving this guide?

This initial discussion guide is by no means exhaustive, nor is it a “one size fits all” approach, as it is recognised that there is a wide spectrum in size and nature of mosques, madrasas and community centres. Its aim is only help institution leaders discuss and plan early and holistically.

More detailed guidelines are planned to be produced as further government guidelines are published. However, if you have a suggestion for improving this initial discussion guide or further guidance, please do get in touch at covid@mcb.org.uk

2. Who Makes the Decision to Re-Open?

The decision on how and when to re-open your mosque, madrasa or community centre ultimately lies with your **trustees** or **persons who are legally liable** for your organisation. At a minimum, they must be able to demonstrate that they:

- have thought through the full range of considerations for re-opening; and
- are complying with the relevant regulations in force at the time; and
- are discharging their legal duties to the best of their abilities.

Here are some specific issues that will require your attention and consideration:

- **Safety** - The safety of your community members and volunteers/staff should be of paramount importance and all available protection measures should be considered
- **Insurance** - Consult your insurers on the re-opening options you are considering as they may have certain requirements of you which you need to take into consideration and the validity of your public liability or other insurance may be dependent on this
- **Risk Assessments & Procedures** – Reviewing and updating your building risk assessment and operating plans is essential (See Step 2) and documenting this as this may be required by your insurers should claims arise at a later date.
- **Charitable objects** - If you are significantly changing what you deliver, you will need to check whether you are still operating within your charitable objects or whether you need to make special arrangements to enable you to do so.
- **Record keeping** - Any key decisions are recommended be taken at a virtual meeting of the relevant trustees/directors and minuted/recorded to demonstrate that all material considerations were taken into account in arriving at the decisions.

3. Planning Steps

Step 1: Allocate – COVID Safety Officer

Who should I allocate to lead?

Allocate at least one COVID Safety Officer on your management team. This person must have the ability to engage with a wide range of community members and stakeholders (see below), keep updated with the latest public health regulations and be a focal point for your re-opening preparations.

Who should I engage with?

In the course of planning, it is imperative that **trustees** or **persons who are legally liable** consult with your:

1. **Community Members** – their safety is of paramount importance. Especially given that BAME communities which includes the majority of Muslim communities are heavily affected, your community members whether male/female, young/old, will rightfully want to know what you are doing to keep them and their families safe. You will also need to communicate the changes to your community members when you decide to re-open, therefore engaging them early will help them feel their views are being listened to.
2. **Scholars and Imams** – there will be some difficult decisions to be made regarding which services can and cannot run under a particular limited lockdown phase (e.g. Friday *Jumua* or Eid prayers), or how they will be run differently (e.g. limiting numbers, physical distancing during prayer etc). Consult your local scholars and Imams early to ensure the scholarly view is taken into account, and that your decision as trustees/persons who are legally liable for your organisation is in keeping with your school of thought and *fiqh* (jurisprudential) guidelines.
3. **Neighbours** – the importance of treating our neighbours well cannot be emphasised enough in Islam. Do not let them be surprised when you decide to re-open and they see community members entering your building again. They may be worried about the impact of re-opening on the spread of the virus to the rest of the community so keep them informed of your plans.
4. **Volunteers & Staff** – you will need to train your volunteers and staff in managing the building as it re-opens. Also, no volunteer or staff member should feel uncomfortable or be asked to

perform a role or duty which they feel is unsafe. Therefore, engaging your volunteers and staff early will help them feel their views are being listened to.

5. **Regional Muslim Network/Council of Mosque** – Community members will be confused if some mosques, madrasas or community centres in your town, city or region re-open in a certain way, while others do not. To ensure a united approach, it is imperative to co-ordinate your re-opening plans with your local network of Muslim organisations or Council of Mosques in your town, city or region.
6. **Local Authority/Police** – engage your contact person at your local police force and/or Local Authority to seek their advice and keep them informed of your plans, either directly or via your local network of Muslim organisations or Council of Mosques.

Step 2: Conduct – Risk Assessment of your building

Physical distancing measures - such as maintaining a 2m distance and avoiding unnecessary physical contact - will introduce significant changes to the way your building will be used. Key questions to consider when conducting a new Risk Assessment and reviewing procedures for your building:

1. **Security** - If your building has been empty/unoccupied for several weeks since the lockdown began, perform a thorough security check for any evidence of break-ins e.g. are your doors and windows sound and secure? Is your building alarm still working?
2. **Entrance/Exit Procedures** - Which entrance and exit routes will you re-open? Have you considered a one-way system? How will you ensure a crowd does not develop at your building's entrance or exit points?
3. **Shoes** – For shoe storage areas, have you considered encouraging community members to bring their own shoe bag, to minimise physical contact with shoe racks when handling shoes?
4. **Fire hazards** - Is there unnecessary clutter which might prove an obstacle during an emergency evacuation or present a fire hazard?
5. **Mark spaces**- Consider marking 2m gaps on the floors with tape at your entrances and exits and in your main rooms/prayer halls.
6. **Wudu at home** – Wudu and toilet areas will likely need to remain closed to members of the public to minimise touching taps/spread of infection – how will you barrier them off/indicate they are closed?
7. **Posters and Notices** - Are your posters/noticeboards up to date? What new information will you need to display?
8. **Door steps** – For non-fire doors only, consider using door stops to keep doors open for users to pass through without touching door handles
9. **Cleaning procedures** – what frequency of cleaning will you put in place, by who, where and using what equipment?
10. **Fundraising** – Can you introduce a contactless payment facility for taking donations? Can you widen the reach of your online donation platforms e.g. via www.supportourmosques.com or other platforms? If you will still maintain a donation box for cash/coins, how will you ensure it is kept clean to minimise spread of infection?
11. **Face Masks/PPE** – It is likely that building users may be required to or highly encouraged to wear face masks, gloves or other Personal Protective Equipment (PPE). How will you encourage or remind your building users to do this? Have you considered providing these items to your users for a small donation?
12. **Timing** – depending on the phase of re-opening, how will you limit the amount of time users will stay in your building? Have you considered staggering prayer times to minimise the maximum number of people in your building at any one point in time?
13. **Vulnerable users** – It is likely that vulnerable community members should be discouraged from attending (i.e. sick, high risk, frontline healthcare worker). If some want to enter and use your building, how will you manage this?
14. **Trauma** – Many community members will have had family members or people they know die from the virus. How will you help these community members cope as they re-enter and use your building again?

Step 3: Calculate – Estimate your ‘new capacity’

Physical distancing measures such as maintaining a 2m distance between individuals from different households, will markedly reduce the capacity of your building. Calculating your building’s ‘new capacity’ is essential to plan ahead. Consider:

1. **Mark-out** – Trial run your main rooms, halls or classrooms with physical distancing.
2. **Calculate** – Estimate your ‘new capacity’ for each room. For example, based on latest physical distancing measures of a 2m gap, most train and bus companies are reporting they can hold approximately 15-20% of their pre-lockdown maximum capacity.
3. **In/out flow** - How will you communicate and enforce the capacity limits and physical distancing requirements? What new signage roles will you need (See Section 4)? How will you train volunteers/staff (See Step 5)? Where will you store excess tables/chairs?

Step 4: Identify – New equipment you will need

1. **Signage/Barriers** – What new tape, signage or barriers will you need?
2. **Sanitization** – Will you be providing hand sanitizer and tissues at entrances/exits?
3. **Cleaning routines** – what additional types and quantities of cleaning products, disinfectants and tools will you require? Have you estimated the weekly cost of this?
4. **Disposable** – Will you use disposal items such as table covers/sheets on top of carpets in prayer halls or classrooms? Where will you dispose of this? Do you have sufficient rubbish/bin capacity to store the additional waste you will be generating?
5. **Bring Your Own** – what equipment or items will you be asking your community members to bring? e.g. their own prayer mats, face masks/PPE, shoe bags etc.

Step 5: Train – your volunteers and staff

1. **Advance Planning** – Once you have decided what your new measures and procedures look like, when and how will you train your volunteers and staff in these? Do they know who the allocated COVID Safety Officer in the organisation is? Will you require your volunteers and staff to wear face mask/PPE as standard?
2. **Male/Female** – How will you ensure both male and female volunteers and staff receive the same training, so that they can comfortably deal with both male and female community members using your building again?
3. **Young/Old** – How will you ensure both young and old volunteers and staff receive training, in order to be able to communicate effectively with both young and old community members using your building again?
4. **Escalation** – What will your volunteers and staff do to ensure crowds do not form at entrances and exits? How will they deal with an unhappy community member at the door? What is the process of escalating if a situation gets out of hand?
5. **COVID-19 response projects** – some of your volunteers and staff may be the same ones who have been helping to co-ordinate your foodbank support, shopping for neighbours or other COVID-19 mutual aid project. As you plan to re-open for regular services again, ensure you give your regular staff and volunteers enough time to rest and recover, and divide up the tasks equally so that nobody feels over-burdened.
6. **Safeguarding Officer** – who will this be? Are they aware of their new duties in-line with your new measures and procedures?

Step 6: Communicate – expectations of the wider community

1. **Educating** – Whatever additional measures you put in place at your mosque, madrasa or community centre will be useless unless your community members are educated about them. How will you let them know of the changes you have introduced? Will they have the chance to ask you questions / discuss the changes? What will they be expected to bring from home themselves if they attend?
2. **Regular attendees** - Be aware that some of our older members of the community may be more resistant to the idea of staying away from our mosques and community centres any longer. How will you communicate your new measures and procedures to them?
3. **Children** – Depending on public health advice that will be issued, it is likely that very young children will not be able to attend, due to their not being able to maintain physical distancing

and risk of being carriers for the virus to others. How will you communicate to your community members to not bring their young children with them?

4. **Vulnerable/Shielding** - Consider how many of your community members may still be shielding or vulnerable, and thus should not be entering your building. How can your institution still keep in touch with them and ensure they don't feel left out? Can you continue delivering some services online, or reach out to them through volunteers phoning or knocking on their door to check they are ok?
5. **Finances** - Some of your community members will be in considerably reduced financial circumstances and may not be able to resume donating at their previous level. How can you communicate your financial needs to your community without putting any pressure on anyone, or making anyone feel guilty?

4. Conclusion

The "new normal" for the foreseeable future for our mosques, madrasas and community centres will be markedly different to what we were used to before. To assist in this transition, it is important that Muslim institution leaders plan early, consult widely and take a holistic approach to re-opening to members of the public when it is safe to do so, in-line with public health regulations.

Ultimately, the decision on how and when to re-open lies with the trustees or persons who are legally liable for the organisation. Allocating a dedicated COVID-19 Safety Officer is essential to be a focal point for the transition. It is important that the decisions to re-open are not rushed and that all necessary preparations, training and measures are in place well in advance. Trustees have significant legal responsibilities to keep their community members safe and community members will rightfully have an expectation that trustees do not neglect their duties.

Leaders of mosques, madrasas and community centres, as well as local Muslim networks/Council of Mosques, will have some very challenging decisions to make in the coming weeks. We hope that the 6-steps offered in these initial discussion guidelines helps you and your team to navigate through this process to ensure the safe and phased re-opening of your institutions. The situation is rapidly changing, therefore new public health announcements will be monitored closely. More detailed guidelines are also planned to be produced as further government guidelines are published.

In collaboration with a range of partners, the following support is also planned in coming weeks:

**Training Webinars | Legal Advice | Posters/Notices |
Recommended Checklists | Medical Advice | Fundraising Advice**

Register your interest for support at: bit.ly/reopening-support

May Allah (swt) rewards all those who have sacrificed much in the last few weeks to support their communities in these challenging times and give you the patience and strength to continue your vital work in the weeks and months to come.

5. Feedback and Contact Details

- Feedback on the contents of this document or your views on how the new ways of running Muslim institutions are developing are always welcome. Please email: covid@mcb.org.uk
- Collated by the Muslim Council of Britain (MCB) and Muslim Council of Wales (MCW). Information accurate as of 18/05/2020. Latest guidance at www.mcb.org.uk/coronavirus
- Keep up to date with the latest Broadcasts / Announcements by:
 - Join WhatsApp broadcast group at bit.ly/covidwhatsapp4
 - Telegram: <http://t.me/MCBupdates>
 - Join Email mailing list at bit.ly/MCBcovidupdates
- To support the MCB's work in responding to COVID-19, please visit www.mcb.org.uk/friends



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