

CLAS CIRCULAR
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FAITH & SOCIETY

DCLG faith advisers' panel

Communities Secretary John Denham has appointed thirteen new faith advisers to advise on effective engagement and the impact of DCLG policy on faith communities. Government already engages with faith communities through the Faith Communities Consultative Council: that will continue. The membership of the new panel is as follows:

- Canon Dr Alan Billings: formerly Director of the Centre for Ethics and Religion at the University of Lancaster.
- Dr Harriet Crabtree: Director of the Inter Faith Network for the UK.
- Marcia Dixon: Editor of *Keep the Faith*, a publication distributed to black majority churches.
- Dr Doreen Finneron: founder and director of the Faith Based Regeneration Network.
- Jenny Kartupelis: Director of the East of England Faiths Council and Fellow of the Faiths and Civil Society Unit at Goldsmiths College.
- Wakkas Khan: Director of the Exploring Islam Foundation and a founding member of the Radical Middle Way.
- Alveena Malik: Principal Associate at the Institute of Community Cohesion and a Trustee of the Muslim Institute.
- Mehri Niknam: founder and director of the Joseph Interfaith Foundation.
- Rosalind Preston: President of the Jewish Volunteer Network and Chair of Nightingale House.
- Dr Jasdev Singh Rai: General Secretary of the British Sikh Consultative Forum and Director of the Sikh Human Rights Group.
- Tim Stevens: Bishop of Leicester and Founder and Chair of the Faith Leaders Forum of Leicester.
- Arjan Vekaria: President of Shree Kutch Leva Patel Community (UK) and the Hindu Forum of Britain.
- Prof Paul Weller: Professor of Inter-Religious Relations, University of Derby.

[Source: *DCLG News* – 6 January 2009]

Radio microphones

As you will be aware, Channel 69 is going to cease to be available for radio-microphone use from 1 January 2012. There may be a short extension to this, but the loss is now a certainty – and churches and charities will face bills to replace sound equipment rendered useless by the change. A new dedicated channel will be provided, but older equipment will need to be retuned by technicians or, more probably, replaced completely. This is potentially very expensive: the Church of England alone calculates that it is facing an extra cost of £1 million.

The Government appears to have agreed in principle that existing users whose kit is rendered useless should be compensated, but the terms of the compensation have not yet been announced. CLAS has pressed very strongly for a full compensation package: the cost of buying new equipment plus the cost of installing it. There is now an industry-wide campaign on this – [Save Our Sound UK](#) – which is a consortium of theatres, entertainment and event production companies and technical trade bodies formed to lobby Government for full compensation that meets the real cost that will fall on these organisations when the channels are migrated. Peter Luff MP has tabled an [Early Day Motion](#) on the issue which, at the time of writing, had 119 signatures. Readers might usefully write to their own MPs to enlist support.

Security in places of worship

The National Counter Terrorism Security Office, a police unit funded by and reporting to the Association of Chief Police Officers, has recently produced [Counter Terrorism Protective Security Advice for Places of Worship](#). The accompanying introduction suggests that, though congregations may find it difficult to believe that they could be at risk, it is possible that a place of worship could be the target for a terrorist because of its nature, the size of its congregation or because of a special event. Measures to counter terrorism are also relevant to other threats such as theft, burglary and arson – which remain the greatest threats to places of worship.

The authors recognise that places of worship have to be welcoming and accessible and the guide is not intended to create a ‘fortress mentality’; but there has to be a balance between openness and security against the threat of terrorism. Absolute security is almost impossible to achieve; but the measures in the guidance should reduce the risk to as low as reasonably practicable.

We certainly do not intend to be alarmist, but the advice is well worth reading.

PROPERTY & PLANNING

Church halls and non-domestic rates

In a helpful parliamentary answer, Ian Pearson, the Economic Secretary to the Treasury, has set out the current Treasury position with regard to rating of church halls and the like:

As stated in the Local Government Finance Act 1988, if church halls, chapel halls and similar buildings are used in connection with a place of public religious worship and for the purposes of the organisation responsible for the conduct of public religious worship, they are, like the church or place of public religious worship, exempt from business rates. This exemption usually extends to where they are hired out for social events.

It should be noted that this is not an 80 per cent relief for a building used for charitable purposes: it is an *exemption*.

[Source: HC Deb (2009–10) 11 January 2010 cc 769-770W]