



# The ‘Mosques in Communities’ Project:

**Understanding the Role  
of Mosques in Relation to  
Their Local Communities**





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*Exploratory Perspectives*

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# MINAB (Mosques and Imams National Advisory Board)

The Mosques and Imams National Advisory Board (MINAB, [www.minab.org](http://www.minab.org)) is an advisory and facilitatory body. Its function is to promote good governance in Mosques and Imam Training Institutions, through the process of self-regulation and capacity building. The MINAB is a community-led and inclusive organisation, which is guided by the following principles:

- An independent body
- Non-sectarian outlook
- Representing the diversity of Islam with no role in matters of theology
- Broad based structure with an accountable system of representation

The MINAB is governed by its membership through an open and democratic process. The MINAB standards are upheld via a quality assurance system and framework, which was developed through a wide consultation to promote good governance and good practice. The 5 standards are:

- Standard 1: Corporate Governance
- Standard 2: Service Provision by Qualified Personnel
- Standard 3: Participation of Youth
- Standard 4: Participation of Women
- Standard 5: Promotion of Civic Responsibility

Members will self-regulate on these set Standards and will be offered accreditation by the MINAB team when it is felt that all of the Standards are being met. This approach provides an opportunity to build capacity within the Muslim community and empowers members to share their learning and good practice.

This report has been developed to support Mosques to meet the MINAB Standard 5, ensuring they play a key role in promoting civic responsibility, through a commitment to social action, community cohesion and localism.

The MINAB is unequivocal in its support for the principles of democracy, the rule of law, and equality of opportunity. These principles are embedded in its broad range of programmes which include increasing the participation of women in society and helping faith leaders broaden their skills and expertise, allowing them to better reach out to local communities.

Mosques and Imams can play a central role in building a better society which underlines the importance of the work the MINAB is doing in a practical and outcome focused approach.

# Faith Matters

Faith Matters ([www.faith-matters.org](http://www.faith-matters.org)) is a community-based organisation, engaging with people where they live in social, work and worship matters.

Faith Matters helps to build stronger, more integrated communities, which is central to the Coalition Government's vision for Britain. Its work ranges from supporting faith leadership, promoting mutual understanding and dialogue between communities, producing educational material for young people on shared scriptural texts and histories, and countering groups that promote division within the UK and internationally.

Faith Matters has become a field leader in using technology to reach out to millions of people across the globe in places such as the Middle East and Pakistan. Its work spans across core social themes of:

- Interfaith work (within the UK and Pakistan)
- Conflict resolution (using a grassroots approach to identify areas of existing and potential interfaith conflict and training and enabling people to resolve issues of conflict)
- Preventing extremism and violent extremism (through grassroots work with communities, using scriptural texts, conducting research and releasing publications)
- Supporting integration work (by supporting faith leadership, training and development schemes, sharing resources and engaging with hard to reach groups)

Set up in 2005, Faith Matters has been at the helm of delivering innovative and cutting edge technological solutions on community engagement internationally.

Faith Matters has delivered a range of national social programmes including developing the first directory of its kind on mosques in England that provide excellent services to Muslim women. This is also available as an iPhone and iPad application.

# Foreword

*"And among his wonders are the creation of the heavens and the earth, and the diversity of your tongues and colours: for in this, behold, there are signs indeed for all who are endowed with knowledge" (Q 30:22)*

*"We have made you into nations and tribes, so that you may come to know one another" (Q 49:13)*

The Mosques and Imams National Advisory Board is committed to help build a better society.

We face a number of unique challenges in Britain today. These range from dealing with the financial deficit to an increase in the demand for public services and, regrettably, very weak community cohesion in some areas. Meeting the needs of our young people and the rise in the population of the elderly are also significant challenges faced by communities throughout the country.

Discussions about integration, identity, shared values, citizenship and security will continue to provide opportunities for people to make their voices heard and to play a positive role in shaping their society. In this context, faith institutions have a strong track record in promoting social justice, reducing inequalities, increasing social responsibility and working for the common good.

If these faith based institutions rise to the challenge of becoming 'community hubs,' they can bring about real change, not least through promoting:

- **Better relations between neighbours and communities**
- **Active neighbourhoods** - bringing local people together to participate and contribute
- **Social action, volunteering and civic responsibility** - mobilising local people through passion, motivation and solutions to meet local needs; and
- **Democracy** - fostering all types of constructive, two way engagement

Mosques can play a part by transforming their buildings into centres of excellence. Places where local people can meet, organise activities, socialise, and run inspirational projects for the benefit of the local community.

This publication, which came about through support from the Community Cohesion, Citizenship and Stakeholder Engagement Committee, highlights some of the challenges faced by some British mosques today. It sets out practical recommendations on how to resolve the challenges facing mosques using 'hands on', inexpensive tips that mosques can implement. Faith Matters believes these methods will be effective in supporting the transition of all mosques to become centres of excellence.

Further ideas, information and resources are available on the MINAB website – please take a look.

Join MINAB and sign up to work for the public benefit.

Maulana Shahid Raza OBE  
Chairman of the MINAB

# Executive Summary

## 1.0 Context

1.1 Mosques have been present in England for at least 130 years with one of the first mosques founded by Sheikh Abdullah Quilliam in Liverpool, in December 1889. Through the 1950s and the ensuing two decades, the migration of Muslims from places such as Pakistan, Iran, Bangladesh and East Africa, followed by Arab, Somali, Turkish, Kurdish, Afghani, Nigerian and other Muslims groups in the 1990s meant that the role of mosques changed. Initially small rooms in people's houses which acted as a place for prayer and as a place to socialise and gain support and advice from other community members; mosques transformed over time into buildings that were planned and built by community donations with a central focus for community prayer. Over the last 10 years, this central focus as a prayer space has changed again so that some mosques have started to utilise their space for community work or projects, thereby ensuring that mosques not only provide spiritual care, but also pastoral and other forms of care and support. As reflected in this report, these changing contexts in relation to the roles of mosques in Britain today must be acknowledged.

1.2 This project has been devised and managed by the Mosques and Imams National Advisory Board (MINAB, [www.minab.org](http://www.minab.org)), a community-led body set up to assist in the development of capacity within mosques, including in matters of governance. The work for this programme and the report write up were undertaken by Faith Matters ([www.faith-matters.org](http://www.faith-matters.org)) and this report forms a part of MINAB's drive to promote best practice within mosques.

1.3 This document analyses and offers commentary on the role of mosques in the context of societal needs today and looks at possible areas where their wider engagement needs to be supported. It explores how mosques might overcome a range of issues, some of which are recurring across different parts of the country. This report also looks at some vital ingredients for the formation of stronger, vibrant, dynamic and outward facing Muslim Centres of Excellence. Places that are characterised by an inspiration and drive to work for the common good and in the best interests of the local neighbourhood.

1.4 Given that far right demonstrations have been mobilised virtually week on week across some parts of the UK over the last 4 to 5 months, geopolitical issues surrounding rising Islamophobia through the resurgence of the far right in Britain, represented by the British National Party (BNP) and the English Defence League (EDL), will no doubt continue to test the resilience of mosques in the future. More general issues affecting local areas also impact upon mosques. Parking, planning and reaching out to other local communities are all matters that have and will continue to have an impact on mosques and other faith institutions in the future. This report outlines some of these issues and challenges and considers how mosques can work through these themselves, but importantly also, in partnership with local communities, local councils and other bodies. Solving some of these basic issues and effectively reaching out to communities will help to outflank individuals and groups that are bent on creating division within our society.

## **The Need for this Programme:**

### **Comments**

#### **Malik Salim – Chair of the Islamic Centre, Leicester**

*“MINAB has taken this visionary step around looking at the role of mosques in local communities. This work is essential for community cohesion and in reducing the communication gap between Muslims and other communities. This is more important today than it has ever been and I therefore warmly welcome this report.”*

#### **Mr Bashir Ahmed - Chairman of Southampton Medina Mosque Trust Ltd**

*“There is a real need for this work since if we are to build cohesive societies then institutions need to reach out. It is essential that buildings do not just become places that are used for a few hours but that they are part of the community. We are also thankful for the partnership between MINAB and Faith Matters, to ensure the realisation of this project.”*

## **2.0 Introduction**

2.1 This work involved face-to-face consultation with a number of mosques (masaajid), especially from the London Borough of Brent and the city of Bristol. There were a further four mosques in East London, Portsmouth, Southampton and Leicester who were consulted about their engagement experiences with local actors and communities. Face-to-face discussion groups were set up in order to obtain responses to a number of topics that were raised within the questionnaire, (see Appendix A). The questionnaire was also placed on the MINAB website so that mosques could respond. These responses were collated and passed on to Faith Matters for further analysis.

2.2 In total, 15 mosques took part in the face-to-face interviews and discussion groups and a further 42 responded to the online questionnaire. However, 37 questionnaires were used in this analysis because 5 responses did not contain information that could be usefully analysed and this could have been due to a range of issues, one of which could indicate capacity building needs. Additionally, a further 2 mosques were consulted with over the telephone using the questionnaire that was devised as part of this study, (see Appendix A).

2.3 The questionnaire looked at a number of points including:

- Possible issues that create a barrier to the mosque's engagement with local communities / the local neighbourhood.
- Methods of communication utilised by the mosque to communicate with local residents.
- Any existing relationships between mosques and bodies like Neighbourhood Watch Associations, other faith/community/voluntary sector organisations and

statutory bodies like the local authority and Safer Neighbourhood Teams (SNTs).

- Any existing relationships with influencers and policy shapers in the local area, like councillors, and local area forums (which are an integral part of engagement between elected members, local authorities and residents within respective wards).
- Whether mosques had engaged with Overview and Scrutiny committees, (a vital democratic organ reviewing Executive Decision making in local authorities). In addition, engagement with groups like Local Strategic Partnerships (LSPs) were also cited, since in recent years they have played a key role in setting the strategic direction for resource allocation at local levels.
- Finally, mosques and mosque committee members were assessed in the level of support that they had access to, namely: (i) parking, (ii) crime prevention/reporting, (iii) youth services, (iv) their local Member of Parliament, (v) relevant members or officers within their local authority, and (vi) their counterparts in the community and voluntary sector.

2.4 The questionnaire was the primary research tool used to gain insights from participants. It also acted as a guide around which to frame these important discussions. We considered there was no need for a specific discussion guide for the interactive sessions and it was decided that the conversation should be allowed to flow as freely as possible. Also, all participants were aware that responses would be collated for dissemination and that this report would be made public.

### **3.0 Recommendations**

3.1 Having conducted a detailed exploration of selected mosques, their emerging issues and examples of good practice, this report first considers generic recommendations which we propose for all British mosques. These recommendations are generally inexpensive to implement and are configured around how a mosque can fully engage with local communities through its Executive Committee, through outreach with other faith communities and through other local activities and actors.

We must also add that by approaching and working with 59 mosques for the purpose of this study, this work is meant to provide a snapshot of the good practice that is taking place in some mosques today. This report is therefore the start of a process of outlining good practice and we therefore hope to build on this work. We would also like to outline the fact that we recognise many mosques around the country are engaged in excellent community work in a number of areas and we would ideally have liked to have listed the depth and variety of the work that they undertake. As suggested before, this work is a start to promoting and disseminating the good practice taking place in mosques and we hope to continue to build on this publication.

#### **Inclusion and strategy**

3.2 At the centre of a mosque stand its Imam and Executive Committee. Well-trained and resourced Imams have demonstrated their important role in leading communities and thus supporting local cohesion. Skilled imams have been instrumental in reaching out to other communities and in working with leaders from other faiths.

Moreover, the role of the Executive Committee is essential in giving leadership and vision to a mosque. Whilst many mosques included women and young people on their framework, there are still issues around the extent to which women are co-opted or elected onto the Executive Committee. In many instances, we found that women were placed on sub-committees or had their own separate committee with no legal powers as trustees and guardians of the mosque. This is an area that needs to be addressed. Below are recommendations as to how this can be achieved.

### **Specific Recommendations for Mosque Executive Committees**

3.3 There is *no* reason why women should not be co-opted or elected onto the Mosque Executive Committee. Without adequate gender representation on the trustee board, Executive Committees may be falling short of statutory guidelines and good practice guidelines. Such committees should re-evaluate gender inclusion on the Executive Committee to ensure that both men and women are involved in the decision making process. This support can and should be provided by voluntary organisations that can assist in the transition to a more inclusive committee. Third Sector organisations can play a key role in building capacity, supporting trustees and strategic and operational guidance for Executive Committees.

3.4 Broadening the diversity of the Executive Committee can also widen the engagement prospects of the mosque through better governance and leadership. This factor needs to be promoted to existing committees.

3.5 We would recommend that the Executive Committee of mosques strongly consider being inclusive of young people and, where possible, newcomers (e.g. recent migrants or converts), to the local Muslim community. Although Mosques are not legally obliged to ensure representation of young people and minority groups, to

do so constitutes good practice and ensures that service provision takes into account the diversity of Muslim communities, groups and individuals in local areas.

3.6 To ensure continued community engagement, we suggest that Executive Committee members actively seek out and encourage congregants / service users to be involved. They should also select members from the wider community who would bring various skill sets (for example finance and project management) with them.

3.7 To ensure transparency between the Executive or Trustee Board of the mosque, we recommend that there should be quarterly meetings where the congregation has a chance to meet the Executive Committee so that they can engage, question, challenge, assess and advise the Executive Committee on its general performance, in line with the organisation's aims and objectives. This transparency helps instil an ethos that the mosque is not a 'closed body' and that its future depends on the service that it delivers to the faithful and to the wider community.

3.8 Executive Committees may want to consider an outreach and communications strategy for work with local communities in the area. As a starting point, this strategy should look at key partners in the local community that the mosque does not engage with, ask why engagement has not happened and frame a strategy as to how they can be engaged. Finally, committees will want to implement and evaluate the impact of the strategy.

3.9 We recommend that all mosque Executive Committee members should receive training in equality legislation and good organisational practices so that they do not fall foul of legal requirements. Training can be provided by groups such as MINAB, umbrella bodies, Faith Matters, or other faith based organisations.

3.10 Executive members may want to consider having regular ‘away days’ to other places of worship so that they spend time engaging with other faith communities. This should broaden their perspective of communities in the local area and absorb the work being done by others.

### **Specific Recommendations for Imams**

3.11 As proposed for Executive Committee members, Imams ideally should also receive training around inclusion and equal opportunities. Whilst many Imams are led by a desire to help all communities, those that are mainly from overseas may especially require such additional support to ensure that service delivery is provided to a standard which is inclusive and which takes into account diverse backgrounds relevant to the community in which they work.

3.12 We would recommend that Imams from overseas (and who have recently come to the UK), be provided with support so that they are able to speak English equivalent to International English Language Testing System (IELTS) Level 7. This allows greater interaction with local communities and members of the congregation that may only speak English. *This is therefore a central recommendation.* Support for up-skilling on English language can be provided through local further education colleges and other approved providers. Mosque Executive Committee members may want to encourage imams with language difficulties to take on English language courses to enhance and to make more succinct and relevant their engagement with their local congregations.

3.13 Our engagement with mosques as presented in this report has illustrated examples of mosques that provide Khutbahs in English and additional languages. This practice needs to be extended to other mosques where the sermon is given

exclusively in either Arabic or Urdu. Ensuring that the congregation understands the Khutbah *is therefore key* in meeting their needs for worship.

### **Recommendations for the Overall Running of the Mosque**

3.14 Sectarianism within faith communities does not allow for outreach and engagement. It builds invisible walls around communities. There are good examples of mosques like Leicester Central and Wessex Jamaat where sectarianism is not an issue and where Imams from other Schools of Thought have been invited to speak in the mosque. Having a visiting Imam who is adherent of another path is one way mosques can put this into practice.

3.15 We recommend that each mosque consider ‘buddying up’ with another mosque in its local area and they should conduct assessments of each other’s outreach activities and involvement in the wider community. This should be done by meeting quarterly and using the MINAB Standards to assess each other’s activities with a view to improving their own services by learning from each other.

3.16 We recommend that mosques ensure that they not only engage with other faith communities, but also do so with a range of denominations within faith communities to ensure diversity of activities and engagement.

3.17 Based on the research undertaken within this report, Mosques should develop a Community Engagement Strategy Checklist<sup>1</sup> which should be implemented and endorsed by the Executive Community. This should be reviewed every 6 months by the wider committee and other mosque members.

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<sup>1</sup> Such a checklist has been produced by MINAB: [www.minab.org.uk/communityengagement/](http://www.minab.org.uk/communityengagement/)

3.18 The untapped potential of women and young people in mosques to become strong leaders in developing inclusive services is a well-documented theme of recent times<sup>2</sup>. It is clear that these constituents are underrepresented in mosque leadership and governance. In order to increase progress on this, mosques may want to consider targeted events and services for women and young people, such as:

- Health and well-being classes,
- Crèche facilities (which will increase the number of women using the mosque). Also, a small number of car parking spaces nearest to the mosque entrance(s) should be set aside for 'mother and baby' parking, as well as for disabled parking,
- Sports and fitness classes,
- A weekly youth group with the Imam so that young people's needs and issues are specifically catered for,

3.19 The mosque can relate to the wider non-Muslim community through:

- Interfaith interaction and inviting followers of other religions to visit the mosque
- Taking mosque users and committee members to visit other places of worship
- Inviting local non-Muslims to the mosque for religious events. This has been done particularly well during Islam Awareness week and during Ramadan by the mosques that were visited.

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<sup>2</sup> For more information please visit the MINAB Office for resources on the inclusion and participation of young people and women in Mosques

- Getting involved: some mosques had committee members make lead contributions to memorial services and Armistice Day ceremonies alongside others in the local community.
- Through the production of community focused newsletters that are written for distribution within and beyond the local Muslim congregation. Communicating with a range of social groups is key.
- By engaging with and maintaining relationships with Neighbourhood Watch groups. Such groups are made up of individuals who take public ownership of the safety and security of local areas and who are dedicated and well-networked individuals. Keeping productive relationships with these groups is essential.

3.20 We recommend that mosques organise social action days for local areas, which can help to support relationships with wider communities. Mosques and their Executive Committees may want to consider social action days for helping the homeless, recycling community campaigns, 'helping your neighbour' and supporting local clean up campaigns.

### **Communications**

3.21 Good communication with the local Muslim and non-Muslim communities as well as inside the mosque and between committee members, is at the core of good practice. Members of the mosque committee and service users may want to consider developing an effective communications system for open dialogue, suggestions and for concerns to be shared.

3.22 Outside of the mosque, communication with the wider community can take place in many forms:

- 'Shout outs' and discussions on local radio.
- Sending press releases to obtain press coverage in local newspapers on issues of concern to Muslims and on issues affecting the surrounding community and local areas.
- Distributing posters and leaflets to advertise events and open days to non-Muslims in the local area.
- Adopt an e-strategy with an updated website and with contact email addresses and updated databases. Ensure that responses to queries take place within 48 hours of the receipt of the e-mail at the latest.
- Use social media such as Twitter and get a Facebook account page, (these being valuable assets when reaching out to younger generations). Also, look carefully at ensuring that the content of the material is actually relevant to young people and not just what you believe young people want to hear.
- The use of Facebook pages in line with the Mosque's profile can be set up when campaigning to create awareness for community causes. (The same can also be done to advertise events and open days to non-Muslims in the local community).
- Video broadcasting of events in the mosque through the internet reaches out to people who cannot attend events.

- Maintain vibrant, two-way communications with the local MPs, faith groups, police groups and Neighbourhood Watch Associations.

### **Relations with Local Authorities**

3.23 Having contact points and a working relationship with the local authority reaps rewards for wider community engagement. It was clear from research in this report that the mosque committees whose members were on good terms and in good communication with local councillors and officers found obstacles such as building, maintenance, planning and parking regulations, easier to overcome, or at least understand. For example, Brent mosques that had good contact with local officers in planning and parking found such issues were resolved quicker and with better outcomes.

3.24 There are numerous ways in which positive relationships can be formed. These include:

- Invite local MP's to have their surgeries in the mosque.
- Invite elected local councillors to highlight impacts on the local ward by policies and initiatives led by the Council.
- Invite delegations from the local police, council and schools to visit the mosque during community open and fun days.
- Invite elected members and local authority officers to Iftar ('breaking the fast') sessions in mosques during Ramadan.

## **Overcoming Obstacles and Areas of Support**

3.25 There are various obstacles a mosque may face in its local area. One of these is parking, particularly on Fridays and holy days in which a higher demand for parking may cause disruption and aggravation to neighbours. Recommendations to overcome these problems include:

- Encouraging mosque users to car share or park and walk / ride on Fridays to cut down on congestion around the mosque. The benefits of doing so are not only for the mosque and external relations, but such actions will also assist the environment and reduce pollution and traffic.
- On occasional holy days in the year, mosques may want to contact the local council and businesses to find out if they can obtain permission to use local business car parking zones. One wider community benefit of this is that local businesses may receive more trade as worshippers walk into the shopping areas after prayers.
- Temporary signage should be put up around the Mosque to inform neighbours when large events are taking place, particularly if there is the likelihood of traffic disruptions.

3.26 Groups such as the English Defence League and British National Party cause significant challenges to mosques and their position in the community. It is recommended that when appropriate, mosques issue joint statements with other faith leaders in response to any such aggravation. If a Mosque does not wish to respond, but is a member of the MINAB, they may delegate a MINAB spokesperson to respond on their behalf.

3.27 For those mosques that feel targeted by Far Right groups in the future, information on how to counter extremist groups should be obtained from the MINAB office which has developed guidelines to support mosques so that they can respond in the most effective way to these challenges.

3.28 Finally, openness is highly recommended. Mosques have nothing to fear in faithfully executing their unique communal and spiritual roles. So, transparency to the congregation and to wider communities is important in building best practice and becoming well-respected institutions.

### **Recommendations for Community and Voluntary Organisations**

3.29 Finally, there are responsibilities for community and voluntary organisations to assist mosques in their development. This is important since, over time, public benefit inspired organisations have built up impressive societal knowledge and ‘engagement intelligence.’

By partnering with faith institutions like mosques, together these organisations can:

- Support the strategic and operational needs of each other.
- Carry out capacity building work around community engagement and communication strategies.
- Share resources such as buildings and IT resources.
- Ensure the sustainability of projects if one partner no longer has sufficient resources.
- Work together to share skills.

## 4.0 The Big Society

4.1 Our work in this report emphasises that mosques and other groups have big roles to play in their local areas. It promotes the fact that local issues are best resolved through local partners coming together - this sense of localism is at the core of the Big Society ideal. It is an invitation to citizens and neighbourhood groups to help build this Big Society in their own differing contexts. On the part of Government, this means seeing through fundamental shifts in legislation and 'letting go.' On the part of community based faith bodies, this is about being responsive to change and leading the way for shifts in attitude.

4.2 This report has demonstrated examples of mosques already actively engaged with their elected members and local authority officers in ensuring that the voices of local communities are heard and more importantly, that changes can be made by reaching out to and engaging with policy shapers, influencers, opinion formers and practitioners. **This is crucial and goes hand in hand with the ethos of the Big Society concept.** People will always want to have a reason to vote for councils and mayors. Part of the challenge for the over 1500 mosques in Britain and their congregants is this – will they participate in council consultation exercises? Will they take part in face-to-face and online opportunities to work with the council? Innovation and ideas need to flow from local people, institutions and enterprises. There is no reason why mosques should not feel and be a part of this process, and actively engage in local social developments.

4.3 This work is therefore timely and can act as a resource for good practice. Ideas can generate more social action, local social entrepreneurship and the desire to

achieve local change for the good of others. Mosques can be an important player in that change, in alliance with churches, synagogues, temples and gurdwaras. The role of such institutions can certainly adapt and re-shape to meet the ever evolving needs of populations. It is really hoped that this report can begin some of the discussions about how such institutions can play greater outreach roles in what will be a difficult economic climate over the next few years. For example, the Noor Ul Islam Trust Mosque is involved each year in the 'Big Spring Clean', helping to get the local community together to clean, paint and tidy up the local streets.

4.4 Finally, a new nationwide network of community organisers is being set up which will play a significant role in the implementation of the Big Society. Up to five hundred committed 'Community Organisers' will be resourced and trained with a further 4,500 part-time and voluntary organisers who will support their work. The project is known as the Community Organisers Programme<sup>3</sup> and it is based on catalyzing and supporting change at local neighbourhood levels. It is essential that mosques work with these groups of individuals in the local area who would also be a good resource and signposting point to activities that are taking place in other parts of wards and boroughs.

4.5 Creative, embracing and concerted efforts from all communities to realise a better future is part and parcel of the Big Society. These efforts will become even more relevant given that we as a country are moving into the final stages of preparation for the 2012 Olympics and where communities are at the heart of making this national event truly memorable for decades to come.

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<sup>3</sup><http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/news/government-names-new-partner-deliver-community-organisers>

## **5.0 The Brent Mosques and their Responses**

5.1 Brent mosques vary in terms of service provision that is on offer. They also reflect the variety of theological schools of thought that make up Muslim communities. For example, the Central Mosque of Brent has a capacity of 900 and it is a Sunni mosque while the Al Khoei Benevolent Islamic Centre caters for the welfare of Shia communities in Brent and beyond.

5.2 The Mosque and Islamic Centre of Brent holds a number of services for local residents and worshipers which includes a bi-weekly surgery session where advice, assistance and casework services are provided by the local Member of Parliament. Safer Neighbourhood Teams also visit the mosque and keep open channels of communication so that the Mosque is kept informed of social concerns and issues that may be of relevance to it. Additionally, weekly Qur'an classes are provided and an immigration advice service through pro-bono solicitors is available, as well as advice, learning and guidance sessions for women.

5.3 The work of the Al Khoei Benevolent Islamic Centre attracts members of the Shia community from neighbouring boroughs. The Centre has been extremely pro-active in reaching out to local groups and community organisations and in undertaking interfaith work. It therefore regularly engages with local residents, and local authority and local faith communities. The Islamic Centre has also been active on issues around building trust between communities and in overcoming social barriers.

The Al Khoei Centre is a member of the local authority Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee. The Overview and Scrutiny Committee helps the council develop new policies and plays an important role in monitoring council performance, by holding the council's Executive to account. Its participation

influences decision making on local provisions such as youth services, fostering, educational standards in the borough and on whether services are efficient, value for money and accessible.

The Al Khoei Centre acts as a 'hub' for social service provision and it continues to play a role in supporting the needs of asylum seekers who have left countries in the Middle East through war and instability.

5.4 Two other mosques must be mentioned. These include the Central Mosque of Brent, catering for up to 2,300 Sunni worshippers. The Central Mosque of Brent (also known as the Willesden Green mosque) acts as a community hub with a range of services for its congregants. The Mosque is in the process of completing an extension to the building and has invested in a functions hall, training rooms and access for disabled people. It also offers a space for the local community to utilise. The local community and voluntary sector, police and the local authority have used the hall for various meetings and events. This positively contributes to the Mosques' involvement in local society as well as its financial sustainability.

5.5 At the consultation session with Brent mosques, a number of points were considered to be barriers between mosque engagement and local communities. These included (i) **Engaging with elected councillors** and working through the political maze of portfolios, which were confusing to members of mosque committees. (It was also stated that elected members had their 'favourites' in the community and this sometimes meant that members of standing within the mosque or Muslim community could not get access to these individuals of influence. This in effect stifled new thinking and outreach opportunities.) (ii) **Parking issues**, which were particularly exacerbated on Fridays between 12 pm to 2 pm. It was noted that

some worshippers would sometimes park for Friday prayers and not take into account the impact of their actions on local residents. These individuals would probably not be from the local area. However, the impacts were considered to be potentially severe in shaping negative opinions of Muslims and non-Muslims. It was suggested that parking has the greatest impact on perceptions and opinions and it is usually a key theme, which can possibly even win or lose elections at a municipal level. This is therefore regarded as a priority area - mosques need parking advice and information that they can provide to worshippers so that local impacts are minimised.

5.6 Other potential obstacles included (iii) **local marches from the EDL** who have attempted to stir up hatred and division in the local area. Mosques fed back that many individuals in their teams felt that they did not have the skills and training to be able to put together a strategic plan of activity. They felt isolated and under pressure when marches took place. Such incidents isolated the mosque and Muslim communities and were clearly meant to influence public opinion; with messages implying that 'Muslims are somehow different' and 'not part of the local community.'

The EDL had tried to reach out to other members of Black and Minority Ethnic groups (BME groups), for example in Harrow. But a co-ordinated approach by the mosque and local faith leaders helped to mobilise local activity against the EDL. Jewish, Hindu, Sikh, Christian and Muslim faith leaders in the area came together, developed press statements and ensured that residents rejected the deeply divisive messages of the EDL in an area which is on the whole highly cohesive.

Another key element seen as a barrier between mosque engagement and local communities was (iv) **a sense of fear in some areas about engaging with the**

**local mosque** and mosque committees also fearing interaction with other communities. This was based on a perception by some local communities that some mosques had let radicalisation take hold, a perception fuelled by the actions of a very few Muslims who hold what can be regarded as extremist positions (notably by agreeing with violent extremism). Given the enormous coverage on this issue in the national press, some participants felt that these fears were not helping with engagement efforts at all.

5.7 Some representatives also mentioned that young people within mosques had obviously been affected by the EDL marches. Leadership and guidance was needed to ensure that they did not retaliate which was precisely what the EDL wanted. In the face of extreme provocation, one good example of what can be achieved through joint working with other faith communities is that of *Harrow Mosque*. On Friday 11th September 2009, the EDL undertook a brazen protest in the heart of a community which had not previously experienced such concerted and organised Far Right activism and faith hate campaigns. In fact, it was and remains one of the most cohesive areas in England and has been regarded as an area where community relations are excellent and diversity seen as one of its core strengths.

5.8 Management Committee members and key community leaders had to address a number of new realities when the EDL announced their protest. They had to (i) organise into a cohesive group; (ii) work out their communications within Muslim communities; (iii) work productively and effectively with young people to ensure a non-violent response; (iv) use inter faith links to build a joint response with local faith communities; (v) lobby and work with local elected members, Safer Neighbourhood Teams, other mosques and faith leaders in the local area and national politicians; (vi) ensure that a local media campaign could effectively marginalise the messages of

hate promoted by the EDL; and (vii) explain the negative impact of EDL activities on local residents, other faith communities and local authority stakeholders. What was also interesting was the strong two-way communication that was developed and sustained by members of the Harrow Mosque Management Committee and the local Safer Neighbourhood Team. This relationship was greatly strengthened through this incident.

5.9 Mosque representatives at this session made the point that learning from such events was necessary and that a 'toolkit' on how to manage such events was needed. This toolkit should include sections like working with the local media, other faith communities, policy shapers and local political decision makers etc.

Such a 'tool kit' should also include the expertise gained from other faith communities in combating extreme groups. Participants suggested that silo working should be a thing of the past and that faith communities *could only counter threats by working in a joint and co-ordinated fashion in the future.*

## **6.0 The Bristol Mosques and their Responses**

6.1 The consultation session with Bristol mosques took place in July 2010. It looked at issues affecting mosques beyond London and the South East. Attendees at the event included representatives from the Bristol Jamia Mosque and the Husseinieh Masjid, plus the Hazrat Bilal Centre. These mosques and representative organisations serve a significant section of the Muslim population in the city.

6.2 The Bristol Jamia Bristol Mosque has been in existence since 1968. It was the first purpose built mosque in Bristol. It is seen as a 'beacon mosque' due to its active promotion of engagement between Muslims and non-Muslims. The Bristol Jamia Mosque's management committee has reached out to local residents and positive

relationships have been maintained. Local residents have, for example, been pre-informed of special religious occasions like Eid-ul-Fitr and constant communication is maintained. Given the closeness of the mosque to local residents, this work is essential and not disregarded as an 'add-on' to the work of religious leaders in the mosque or for mosque management committee members. It is considered integral to developing a sense of cohesion and in reducing the risk of flashpoints.

6.3 The Bristol Jamia Mosque also ensures that any local events for the Muslim community are supported by English speakers and that women participate fully in their co-ordination. They also have Qur'anic Arabic classes for young girls and boys between the ages of 5 – 14 and they have hosted numerous site visits from inter-faith organisations, the police, Safer Neighbourhood Teams and practitioners in social care. The mosque also has a 'Diverse Doors' open day series, which is part of a multi-faith programme. Rightly, the mosque is viewed as a community building as well as one which functions for religious services. It is at the heart of the local Muslim community.

6.4 Within the Husseinieh mosque, external community links to non-Muslim communities are maintained in a three-way partnership. The Safer Neighbourhood officer ensures that he develops programmes for local residents to visit the mosque. This is incredibly helpful in drawing away some of the stigma that may be attached in going to a place of worship that is different to the religion and beliefs of some of the residents. The Husseinieh Masjid has also nurtured its relationships with local residents by inviting the local Neighbourhood Watch group to use the mosque and its facilities. This has allowed the mosque to win over the trust and respect of socially active local residents. It has also enabled the mosque to engage with active *neighbourhood opinion formers*.

6.5 Local groups like Neighbourhood Watch, allied to Resident Committees on estates, are important local centres of influence where some of the most active residents co-ordinate their activities. These groups are regularly in touch with Council officers and are regarded as the 'pulse' of local communities. Elected members regularly maintain contact and communication with such groups since they are aware of their electoral impact.

6.6 Therefore, by engaging with such groups, mosques can ensure that they are part of local developments and that they can also help to shape local policies (as well as perceptions about mosques and Muslim communities). It is quite often the perceived insularity of Muslim communities in some parts of the UK that can be positively countered by simply offering such groups access to the mosque.

6.7 Mosques in Bristol are dispersed throughout the city and this has meant that co-ordination of services has been difficult. All work within individual mosques has been conducted mainly on a voluntary basis, apart from the work of the imams, for which work is paid. This means that there are ongoing capacity issues and this of course is not something specific to Bristol. Such a lack of capacity has meant that only core services, such as prayer facilities, have been provided.

6.8 Participants from Bristol acknowledged that 'insular working' is not beneficial to their community and they took the strategic decision to develop the 'Council of Bristol Mosques,' which has been in existence since 2007. This model provides mosques with the opportunity to set common themes and to look at common approaches to resolving problems. Participants mentioned that the 7 July 2005 (7/7) bombings were the major factor that encouraged them to work together; previously mosques had little or no engagement with one another. Furthermore, a Mosques representative is

the elected Chair (by the Muslim community) of the Bristol Building Bridge Programme Board, which leads the delivery of Prevent, hence providing greater assistance and capacity building opportunities to mosques.

6.9 Participants underscored the need for imams to be aware of issues within local communities and to move beyond just religious and pastoral care within institutions. They suggested that 7/7 meant that there was a responsibility on all workers within institutions to reach out to and engage with those who needed help and assistance. The key was to maintain trust and assist individuals in overcoming issues that could spiral into deeper concerns. Such community-led early intervention work should also reduce costs to statutory authorities in the future.

6.10 There has been concern about BNP activity within the South Bristol area and in response, the Bristol Jamia Mosque was contacted by the Unite Against Fascism (UAF) campaign. This mosque hosted several meetings of the UAF to take place within the mosque and several organisations within Bristol attended the meeting. It was the first time that many external organisations had attended the mosque. Participants also mentioned that prospective local authority candidates and elected councillors have regularly come to the mosque to meet worshippers and address local concerns, so there is a strong sense of interaction with elected leaders. This is extremely positive for the local Muslim community and for local democratic participation.

6.11 Engagement with the local Member of Parliament needs strengthening. Participants acknowledged that they were not aware of their Member of the European Parliament (MEP). They also acknowledged that organisations such as the EDL and their corrosive outreach activities to BME groups meant that mosques

needed to reach out to Afro-Caribbean, African, Eastern European and other groups in the city. This was essential given that the actions of the EDL were to isolate and vilify Muslim communities across the UK and Bristol was and is not immune to this.

6.12 The Hazrat Bilal Centre in Bristol has taken a very inclusive stance to all communities in the local area. The mosque is open to all and it engages with local communities through a regular newsletter. It has been actively involved in supporting local calls for street parties in which the mosque has been a key player in developing a stronger sense of localism.

6.13 Related to the 'diverse door' activities mentioned above, it should be stated that the Bristol Jamia Mosque works in partnership with two local schools on their Summer Fair activities. There is also governor-level involvement on one of the schools by a representative of the Bristol Jamia Mosque.

6.14 Engagement with the local Safer Bristol Neighbourhood Team is strong. Notice boards are placed within a number of mosques and these provide worshippers with information. For example, they inform worshippers of relevant contact points and also ensure that there is a contact person if there are attacks against worshippers or the mosque itself.

6.15 Outreach activities involving referrals to statutory authorities have been put into place with 5 imams of the mosques in Bristol. Local hospitals and the NHS have developed referral procedures so that imams can work with community members to ensure that they can be referred to support services if required. Such support services are a great help to community members who may be suffering acute mental health problems and who are not receiving appropriate support and care.

6.16 Parking issues continue to be of concern to mosques especially during Friday prayers. Participants raised this issue as one that can have lasting and damaging effects on relations with local residents. They raised, for example, the lack of engagement with relevant council officers and the portfolio member for parking. This led to parking restrictions being recently introduced affecting the Easton, Central and Roman Road mosques. The restrictions mean that there will be more tickets issued and more aggravated people who park on Fridays when the Jumma prayers are taking place. Simultaneously, if there are continued parking violations, local residents will continue to build up a negative impression of Muslims and this will only continue to fuel division. Appropriate lobbying and work with local residents and elected members should have been undertaken in a more co-ordinated and systematic fashion so that this position was avoided.

6.17 Mosques can look to speak to council officers with implementation responsibilities for parking to conduct regular (e.g. quarterly or half yearly) meetings so that two-way communication can take place. This would also help officers to explain existing regulations and enforcement procedures that are confusing and complex for some worshippers to decipher. Some congregants simply want to park and pray and then leave for work.

6.18 There is representation from the Council of Bristol Mosques on the multi-faith forum of Bristol. This representation includes attendance at open days, involvement in strategic meetings and religious festivals. All Muslim schools of thought in Bristol are represented on the Council of Bristol Mosques and the constitution of the mosque council is regularly reviewed to ensure that it is inclusive.

6.19 The Council of Bristol Mosques secured funding for two Mosque development workers' posts. This project was delivered jointly with the Somali Development Group to initiate mini projects to engage the youth in events, discussions, fun activities, seminars, trips and outreach work through Bristol Rovers Football Club, the Police and Bristol City Council.

6.19 Another project that the Council of Bristol Mosques is involved in works with vulnerable adults, which is called the Naseehah project. This is a community led project to work within the community and ascertain signs of vulnerability. This project sits outside the Channel programme, which was implemented in specific areas in the UK through and in conjunction with the Police, the Home Office and local partners. (The Channel programme involved providing interventions to individuals who were in danger of being drawn to violent extremism).

6.20 The Naseehah project will comprise of a series of community seminars to assess and define the level of threat to Muslim and non-Muslim communities, based on community feedback. It will use input from local community members to assess threats and help put into place a series of referral procedures for vulnerable people. This project is therefore a pro-active community based response to violent extremism allied to safeguarding for children.

6.21 Safeguarding has come to the forefront of discussions for the community, not least after 7/7 and recent terrorist related incidents. Participants noted that they had to work through safeguarding issues with the local police on a particular case and this was also a steep learning curve for mosque members. These incidents also brought forward the importance of safeguarding within institutions like mosques so that vulnerable people may be protected and social interventions provided when

necessary. It also outlines the fact that the Bristol Muslim community can identify issues of safety not only for the Muslim community but for the whole city. In this regard the Council of Bristol Mosques provides seminars on safeguarding to professional practitioners on the Bristol board. They are also providing assistance to the policy of child protection matters in Bristol.

## **7.0 Additional Case Studies**

In addition to visiting Mosques in Brent and Bristol, four other mosques from across the country were visited to obtain more analysis and perspectives. They are summarised below.

### **8.0 Noor UI Islam Mosque, Leyton**

8.1 Noor UI Islam Mosque was founded in 1990 and it is situated in Leyton, London. It serves the whole community in various ways. Services span lifetime needs including a range of Islamic services, schooling, marriages, Qur'anic classes, health and fitness and activities for the retired. Although the Mosque is referred to as Sunni, it is open to Muslims of all denominations and nationalities. It is particularly open and inviting to non-Muslims.

8.2 The mosque's departments include a head office, primary school, pre-school facility, Aalimah training, Madrassah and youth group. The board of trustees is made up of eight men of various ages and backgrounds. Separately, there is a women's advisory board, which consists of seven members who meet regularly with the committee; the board has significant influence on the running of the mosque and its services. The Mosque also set up its own 'think tank.' In 2009 it issued a report titled

Vision 2020 setting out a strategy on how Muslims can contribute to better the local community (Waltham Forest) by 2020.

8.3 The Mosque has a well-developed communications system in place. The Head Office is well equipped with computers and email is the main form of communication internally and externally. The Mosque also has a website, Facebook page and blog page. Use of social media is proving to be a great way of reaching out to the wider community and to those who may be unable to visit the Mosque frequently but who have an online presence. The Mosque also has good relations with local and national media with positive mentions in the Daily Mail and coverage on the Islam Channel.

8.4 The Mosque participates in and arranges regular trips for its congregants to visit other faiths' places of worship, making contact with Christian, Jewish, Hindu, Sikh and Baha'i communities. The Mosque also attends events on Holocaust Memorial day. The Mosque trust, which runs an Islamic primary school, also ensures that pupils interact with non-Muslim children of the same age by regularly taking pupils to visit local state schools. Outreach to the non-Muslim community occurs by inviting all local residents into the Mosque. The Mosque is always open to anybody and has particular events where non-Muslims are encouraged to attend. This includes the annual summer fete where all residents in the local area are sent free invitations and open days twice a year and on certain days during Ramadan, non-Muslims are invited to break the fast at the Mosque. In addition to these events throughout the year, there are also weekly events such as tea clubs for local residents (Muslim and non-Muslim) over the age of 50, weekly karate for women (Muslim and non-Muslim)

by a non-Muslim female teacher, weekly boxing classes for Muslim and non-Muslim men taught by a non-Muslim teacher and every Friday there is a revert evening for those looking to come to Islam.

8.5 There is a good relationship with the local council and the police, which regularly holds its surgery in the Mosque, as well as good contact with other statutory bodies. During Islam Awareness week, non-Muslim members of the local community, local MPs and councillors also attend and participate in Mosque functions.

8.6 Noor UI Islam plays a prominent role in the local community on various levels. The Mosque is very active on environmental issues, which saw it receive an award by Ken Livingstone for its school's teaching and awareness on the environment. The Mosque also has its own allotment area where children are encouraged to grow vegetables and lead an organic lifestyle. Furthermore, the mosque partakes in the yearly 'Spring Clean' with the local community to paint, tidy and clean up the local area of Waltham Forest and ensures that fitness services such as swimming sessions are held separately for men and women. Recently it was a quarter finalist in the first Model Mosque competition and has been visited by various dignitaries including previous Home Office Ministers.

8.7 As can be seen, the Mosque practices intensive engagement with the rest of the local community. Often, however, there are obstacles that Mosques can face in their local community. Fortunately though, Noor UI Islam has not been singled out by far-right groups nor have there been marches in the area. However, the Mosque has a

strategy in place for such an event, one element of which is that it would allow umbrella bodies to respond with a statement on their behalf.

8.8 One significant issue that the Mosque faced in the community was in 2006 after the failed airline plot, as one of the suspects was from Leyton. Despite no connectioof the suspect to the Mosque, Noor UI Islam opened its doors and welcomed the local community in to express concerns and ask any questions. This transparent approach on such a sensitive issue was a great initiative taken by the Mosque and helped keep community relations strong.

## **9.0 Southampton Medina Mosque**

9.1 The Southampton Medina Mosque is a Sunni mosque situated in the heart of the City. It serves the established local Muslim community of various nationalities and denominations, as well as the constantly changing student community. On Fridays, it is not unusual to see 400-600 men and 60-100 women visit the Mosque for prayer. The Mosque is very inclusive of all ages with children's classes beginning at age 5, a teenagers evening with the Imam is held every Friday and Sunday classes run for youth.

9.2 The Mosque committee is made up of 15 elected male members and it works together with the Alisa association, which is made up of elected women.

9.3 The Mosque operates the majority of its communication by word of mouth and SMS messaging, particularly between members. There is also an up to date website with email addresses for different service departments. When reaching out and

welcoming the local non-Muslim community, the committee makes use of the local radio station to invite people into the Mosque.

9.4 In reaching out to other faith communities, the Mosque has a great open door policy welcoming Jews, Christians and other non-Muslims at all times (as well as on specific open days and during Ramadan when non-Muslims are invited to fast with others in the Mosque).

9.5 The Mosque is dedicated to propagating Islam's central values of peace and tolerance. In doing so the Mosque is very transparent in all that it does, including its financial accounts, which are published regularly. This transparency builds greater trust between the Mosque and its local community. Additionally, the Mosque welcomes between six and seven thousand school children per year as well as delegations from the local police force and other public services' representatives.

9.6 The Mosque is well connected to local authorities with local MPs visiting the Mosque regularly. This includes non-Muslims partaking in the community breaking of the fast during Ramadan. The local councillor is also part of the Mosque committee.

9.7 The Mosque has not had any direct communication with the EDL or BNP to date. However, it maintains that it will respond with tolerance and that it will consult and work with local communities on such matters.

## **10.0 Wessex Jamaat Mosque, Portsmouth**

10.1 The Wessex Jamaat Mosque serves the Shia population right across the South West, as well as the Muslim and non-Muslim community as a whole. It has a visiting Sunni Imam and many non-Muslim outreach activities.

10.2 The executive committee of the Mosque is made up of 7 members including two women and one young person (under age of 30). There are three additional committees including a separate youth committee, women's committee and 'String of Pearls,' a women-only inter faith group.

10.3 The Mosque has a dedicated communication system to meet the needs of its service users. This is also used to promote local events and activities for all communities. The Mosque reaches out to its widespread Shia community, and the local Muslim and non-Muslim population through its active Facebook page and website. It also employs video conferencing. It broadcasts all of its lectures and meetings live on its own website. Therefore the Khutbahs (sermons) are available for all to access.

10.4 Currently, the Mosque is located in a rural setting in which the majority of the surrounding community is Christian. It has strong links with the Christian community and together they perceive themselves as one community, with the Sheikh leading Remembrance Sunday services in 2010 and the Vice President of the Mosque attending Armistice Day every year. The Mosque also interacts positively and productively with the nearby Sikh community.

10.5 There are also many conferences and workshops implemented by the Mosque such as 'Bridging Wickham'. Through this, the Mosque liaises with the local Christian community on how to maintain unity between the various religious communities. During Ramadan, the Mosque operates a 'bring a friend day' where children all bring one non-Muslim friend to the Mosque to break the fast.

10.6 There is also close inter faith work with Portsmouth Cathedral. In addition, the Mosque gets involved with local traditions such as the Harvest festival and last harvest it collected cans of food in the remembrance of a noble Shia. Together with the Cathedral, it donated the cans to a homeless shelter. The Mosque regularly welcomes Religious Education trainees from the University of Chichester as well as other adults and children so that they can learn more about the mosque.

10.7 The Mosque has well developed relations with local MPs and public bodies including the police, the Portsmouth Race Equality Network Organisation (PRENO) and Wickham Parish Council.

10.8 The Mosque has no obstacles in regard to accessibility – there is ample parking and the live streaming of Khutbahs (sermons) through the internet takes place which caters for those who cannot physically visit the Mosque. However, the Mosque has suffered from negative campaigning on two occasions, both of which were resolved. The first hate incident was in the form of a campaign by the BNP against the proposed building of the new Mosque. However, precisely because the mosque had done so much outreach work, the local community defended the plans. Secondly, in a council meeting on 25<sup>th</sup> January 2011 a local Councillor, also from the Standing

Advisory Council for Religious Education (SACRE), left the meeting when the Imam of the Mosque led a prayer in the Council Chamber, returning only after he finished. An emergency meeting was called in which many agreed that the Councillor be suspended as he disrespectfully walked out before the Imam's recitation. However, Wessex Jamaat Mosque responded with a letter asking others to forgive him as they had. This remarkable response by the Mosque prevented a further escalation of community tensions and showed the real value of tolerance and forgiveness.

### **11.0 Leicester Central Mosque**

11.1 The Leicester Central Mosque is predominantly Sunni but is open to all. Both men and women are welcomed with separate prayer facilities; the main prayer section is able to accommodate up to 1300 people and a separate women's prayer gallery can accommodate up to 300 women.

11.2 The Mosque management council consists of 29 male members. Management meetings are attended by the Islamic Centre Women's Association (ICWA), who input into the decision making process. There is also a pro-active youth committee.

11.3 The Mosque invites people for visits using local radio and by distributing posters widely in places such as universities and the local council. The Mosque also communicates with service users and interested persons through its active website.

11.4 Leicester Central Mosque has very good relations with people from all faiths in the community. Frequent visits take place by people from almost all the major faith groups in the City. The mosque has hosted a number of international delegations

too. Most of these visits were from Denmark, Sweden and Norway. The former Archbishop of Canterbury, John Cary, visited the mosque in the past and there was a well-attended function to welcome him. Locally, people from all faiths are invited to the annual celebration of Eid-e-Milad-un-Nabi (annual celebration to mark the Prophet Muhammad's Birthday, may peace and blessings of God be upon him) with over 3,000 people attending in 2010.

11.5 In terms of participation in interacting with local bodies, the mosque has a very close working relationship with Leicester City Council. It is actively involved in housing, education and other welfare services for the community.

11.6 The major obstacle for Leicester Central Mosque is parking on Fridays. Currently, the Mosque car park can accommodate 250 vehicles but this caters for only half of the visitors known to travel there by private transport on Fridays.

## 12.0 Acknowledgements

MINAB acknowledges that this report would not have been possible without the help and assistance of a number of people and organisations. We value and appreciate the goodwill and voluntary support that many individuals provided in this work and which also reflected the skills, abilities and strong sense of volunteerism that is ingrained within communities.

We would therefore like to acknowledge and thank the following mosques for their support:

- Wessex Jamaat Mosque, Portsmouth
- Leicester Central Mosque, Leicester,
- Southampton Medina Mosque, Southampton
- Noor Ul Islam Mosque, Leyton, London
- Zakarriya Masjid, Manchester
- Abrar Islamic Foundation, London
- Masjid-e-Saliheen, Blackburn
- Ahlul Bayt Foundation, Kilburn
- Al Madina Islamic Centre , Oldham
- Al Mustafa Cultural & Educational Centre, Bradford
- Anjuman e Haideria, Bradford
- Bilal Mosque, Oldham

- Darus Salam Mosque & Islamic Centre Mosque, Manchester
- Mohaddis-e-Azam Mission, Blackburn
- Doha Mosque, Bradford
- Hossienieh Foundation, Bristol
- Hussaini Mission, London
- Hussaini Mission Mosque, Newport
- Al Madad Madrassah, Blackburn
- Islamic Social and Educational Trust, Manchester
- Jamia Islamia Of Manchester, Manchester
- Jamia Islamia Rizvia, Bradford
- Jamiyat Ahle Hadith, Bradford
- Jamiyat Tabligh ul Islam, Bradford
- Khadija Education Centre, Oldham
- Jamia Ghosia Mosque, Blackburn
- Manchester Central Mosque & Islamic Cultural Centre, Manchester
- Masjid-Imam Ali, Luton
- Masjid-e-Zainabia, Blackburn
- Makki Masjid, Blackburn
- Al-Khoei Foundation, London

- Harrow Central Mosque, Harrow
- UKIM Al-Hira Centre, Bradford
- UKIM, Bradford
- Watford Mosque, Watford
- Leeds Makkah Masjid, Leeds
- Al Madina Masjid, Leeds
- Ghusia Masjid, Leeds
- Abu Huraira Masjid, Leeds
- Dudley Central Mosque, Birmingham
- Muslim Welfare House, Sheffield

We would also like to acknowledge and thank the following local authorities for their support in this work:

- Brent Council
- Luton Borough Council

## **Appendices**

### **APPENDIX A**

#### **13.0 Questionnaire analysis**

13.1 A total of 42 questionnaires were distributed to Mosques across the UK. 37 of these were returned with relevant data which could be analysed, (please see Appendix B for the distributed questionnaire). For the purpose of sampling, the questionnaire was distributed to affiliate members of MINAB, with a wide scope nationally to ensure even geographical representation.

13.2 The questionnaire began by addressing engagement with local authorities and elected members and showed some positive results. The majority, 32 out of 37 of the mosques did have some engagement with local authority figures including elected councillors and/or with relevant portfolio members. However, less had engagement with their local Member of Parliament, with just 21 having regular engagement with their local Member of Parliament and 16 of the mosques having no engagement at all. So there seems to be a disparity in the scale of engagement with policy shapers with greater engagement taking place between local elected members and mosques and less with local Members of Parliament. Part of the reason could be that local parking and planning issues bring mosque committee members into closer contact with local elected members.

13.3 With regard to issues around parking, greater engagement work is needed by mosque committee members. Over one third of respondent mosques did not inform neighbours at times such as Eid or other holy days when parking is likely to cause

some disruption in the local area. Moreover, almost a third did not get in touch with local authorities at such times in preparation for the parking issues that religious days could create. Additionally, one of the easiest forms of notification in regards to parking is signage. Over two thirds of mosques asked had never placed signage outside their mosque in relation to parking, with just 11 of the 37 mosques having placed some form of signage.

13.4 Parking therefore seems to be a continuing issue which could hamper relations with local residents around the mosque. A key example of how such local relations can be corroded is shown through an on-line publication of 'Luton Today,' on the 14<sup>th</sup> of April 2011<sup>4</sup>.

13.5 The questionnaire also investigated planning permission and any problems that mosques had encountered in the process. 30 of the 37 of the mosques asked had applied for planning permission for other building works to be carried out. Out of those 30, 20 had faced some difficulties. On a 5 point scale rated from 'easy to very difficult', 9 mosques said that they had faced 'quite difficult' planning issues. The questionnaire also included an open question allowing participants space to elaborate on this issue. Most of the issues that arose were with regards to the potential of disturbance to neighbours. Such disruption could include vehicular and traffic noise and parking problems but also the potential of damage to trees. However, there were some unique objections, for example in one case the dome of one Mosque was not agreed upon, but the rest of the building accepted.

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<sup>4</sup>[http://www.lutontoday.co.uk/news/local/tory\\_voter\\_s\\_anger\\_over\\_mosque\\_parking\\_pledge\\_1\\_2594839](http://www.lutontoday.co.uk/news/local/tory_voter_s_anger_over_mosque_parking_pledge_1_2594839)

13.6 There were two more specific cases that attention must be paid to. One was an objection to changing part of a church's building for accommodation for the Imam and the other was regarding a former church complex where car park development work had been granted, but had to be stopped due to unfounded complaints by the BNP and the EDL. According to the questionnaire response, these radical groups had managed to stall the building process despite the mosque having followed the correct legal application process.

13.7 The questionnaire also looked at whether mosques engage with their local Safer Neighbourhood Teams (SNTs) and if so, how easy they found such engagement? Out of the 37 mosques, 24 said that an officer from the mosque engages with its local SNT. We know from individual consultations with mosques that not all areas have an operating SNT. Therefore some of the 13 mosques that answered 'no' to such involvement may not have had the opportunity for such engagement. Furthermore, data collected from question 4.2 illustrates that when engagement is made it is usually straightforward and with few difficulties. This is clear from the scaled results illustrating that 17 mosques found engagement easy, 8, quite easy and 7 average with no mosques reporting that engagement was 'quite difficult' or 'difficult'.

13.8 The final focus of the questionnaire was on interfaith activity. Almost two-thirds (23 out of the 37) mosques responded that they were part of a local interfaith group in their area. When asked whether the mosque had undertaken any joint press releases with other faith communities in the local area on local issues, the figure declined further with 10 mosques answering 'yes' and 27 'no'. Clearly,

communications and local messaging support is needed for mosques. Without an overarching campaign that not only includes outreach activities, but also community messaging, local residents may fail to understand the enormous energy and work that many mosques are undertaking throughout the nation.

13.9 Support for developing communication strategies is therefore essential and will need to be provided as a matter of urgency to mosques, particularly where there is Far Right and EDL activity. Even without such pressures, the majority of mosques surveyed simply failed to undertake such strategic communication planning.

## **APPENDIX B**

### **Mosques in the Community Programme Questionnaire**

Mosques (Masajids) play an important role in their local communities, not only as centres for religious worship for Muslims, but also in supporting local volunteering, social activity, social justice campaigns and supporting local economies by providing a focal point for donations and giving to those less fortunate in society.

This checklist, which has been produced as part of the 'Mosques in the Community Programme,' is meant to provide some guidance on how mosques can play key roles in their local areas by reaching out to other communities, resident's groups (resident's associations and neighbourhood watch groups), faith leaders, elected members and other key stakeholders in local areas.

This checklist is not exhaustive and is meant to provide a guide and a reference to ensure that mosques continue to play constructive and positive roles in the lives of local residents in wards and boroughs within England. The checklist is broken down into key themes around engagement.

#### **What is the 'Mosques in the Community Programme?'**

This is a project that is being delivered by MINAB (the Mosques and Imams National Advisory Board, [www.minab.org.uk](http://www.minab.org.uk)). Faith Matters ([www.faith-matters.org](http://www.faith-matters.org)) facilitates and compiles reports on behalf of MINAB.

The programme looks at how mosques can develop links and reach out to others in their local areas so that they support the development of integrated and socially cohesive communities. This programme therefore complements the social cohesion agenda, which is increasingly relevant to local communities. This programme will also ensure that mosques play a pro-active role in their local areas, as many are doing, though through a sustained and inclusive set of processes.

## **Role of Mosque Committees and Others**

The roles of Mosque committees are varied and include providing strategic direction in the delivery of services to worshippers, providing oversight functions on capital build projects within the mosque, the recruitment of staff, fundraising and much more. The role of Mosque committees is therefore integral to this work, as is the role of the women and young people within these institutions. We hope that this checklist supports their work in continuing to get faith institutions like mosques to reach out and to play integral roles in their local communities.

This list is meant to be a guide and is not exhaustive. It outlines some of the areas of engagement which staff and Mosque Committees may want to take as part of their outreach and community development activities. The checklist boxes below are therefore to stimulate further thought on the areas outlined and should be used as a guide.

### **1) Engagement with the local authority and elected members**

1.1 Is there engagement with the local authority, whether with elected members/ councillors or officers?

Yes  No

1.2 Is there engagement with the local Member of Parliament whether through their surgeries or having the MP hold them within the mosque?

Yes  No

### **2) Parking Issues**

2.1 Are local residents informed of religious events such as Eid, when there could be more vehicles parked around the mosque?

Yes  No

2.2 Does anyone from the Mosque Committee or an officer from the mosque get in touch with the local authority to get advice on issues of parking on religious holy days or events?

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Yes

No

2.3 Has the Mosque Committee or an officer ensured that signage is placed around or outside the mosque regarding parking?

Yes

No

### 3) Planning Issues

3.1 Has the Mosque ever had to apply for planning permission for building works to be carried out?

Yes

No

3.2 If yes, and there were problems; can you list the kinds of issues that came up?

.....  
.....  
.....

3.3. In relation to the planning issues that came up, how difficult would you rate them?<sup>5</sup>

1	2	3	4	5
Easy	Quite Easy	Average	Quite Difficult	Very Difficult

### 4) Engagement with Safer Neighbourhood Teams

4.1 Does anyone from the Mosque Committee or an officer from the mosque engage with the local Safer Neighbourhood Team?

Yes

No

<sup>5</sup> Please circle one of the options

4.2 If someone from the mosque has tried to engage with the Safer Neighbourhood Team, how easy has that engagement been?

1	2	3	4	5 <sup>6</sup>
Easy	Quite Easy	Average	Quite Difficult	Very Difficult

## 5) Communities and Cross-Campaigning Themes

5.1 Is your mosque part of any local interfaith group in the area?

Yes  No

5.2 Has your mosque undertaken any joint press releases with other faith communities in the local area on local issues?

Yes  No

### Notes

The points raised within this document are not exhaustive and are meant as a guide to stimulate thought. Due caution and care should be given to matters such as joint press statements since intensive work may be required with other communities and this may involve greater time commitments. Further support in these areas can be obtained from [www.minab.org.uk](http://www.minab.org.uk)

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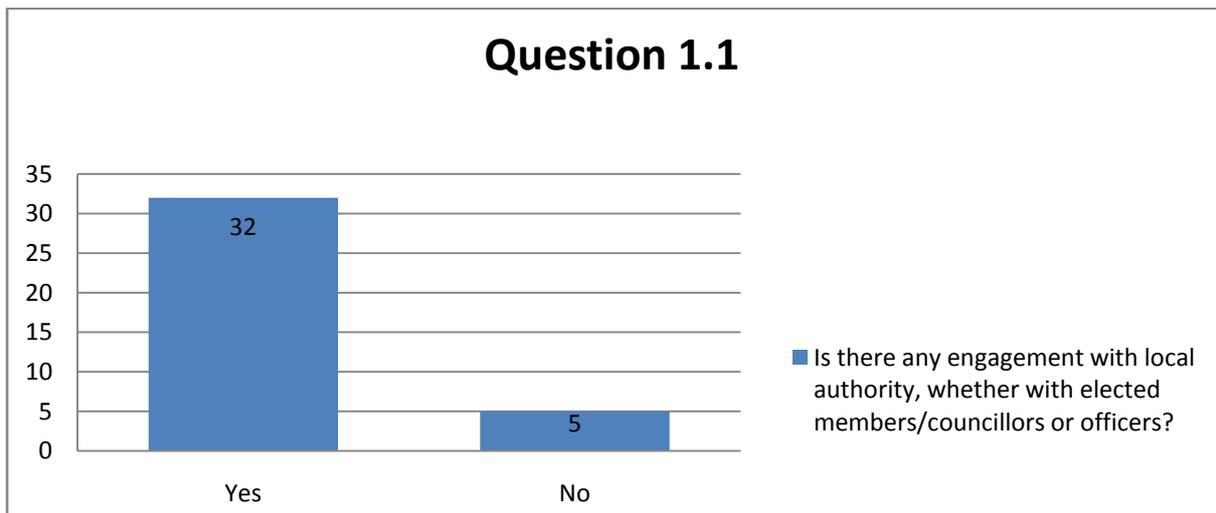
<sup>6</sup> Please circle one of the options

## APPENDIX C

### Questionnaire Results

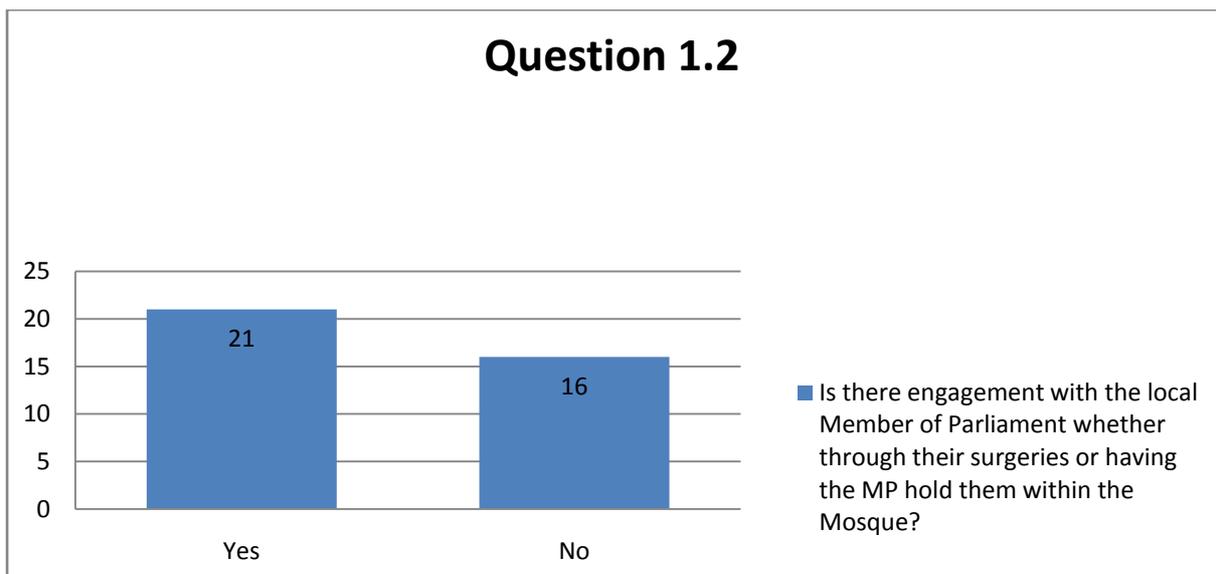
#### Appendix C.1

Q 1.1) Is there any engagement with the local authority, whether with elected members/ councillors or officers?



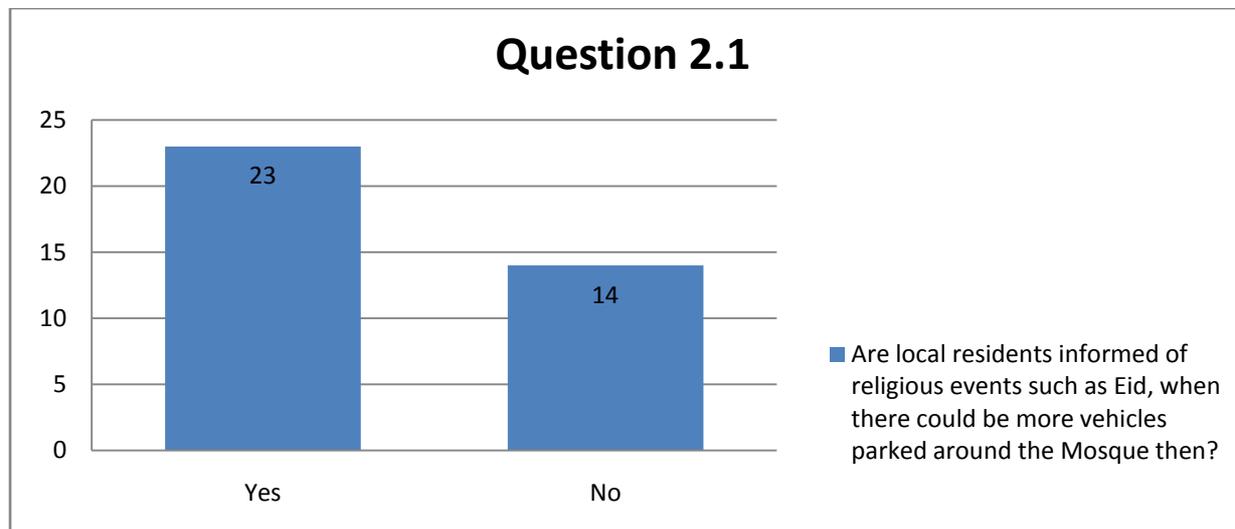
#### Appendix C.2

Q 1.2) Is there engagement with the local Member of Parliament whether through their surgeries or having the MP hold them within the Mosque?



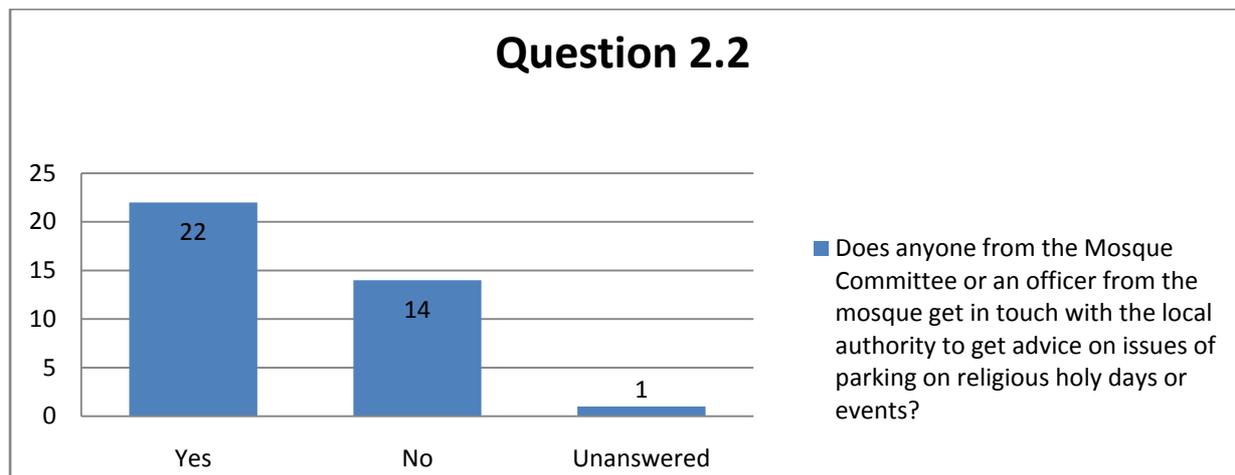
### Appendix C.3

Q 2.1) Are local residents informed of religious events such as Eid, when there could be more vehicles parked around the Mosque?



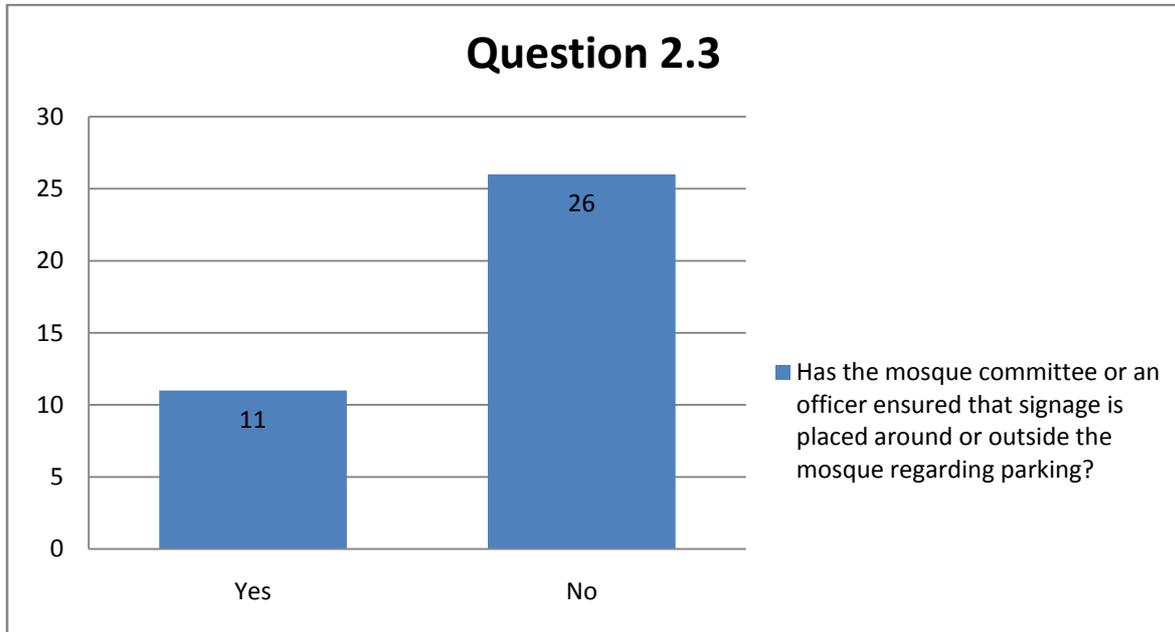
### Appendix C.4

Q 2.2) Does anyone from the Mosque Committee or an officer from the mosque get in touch with the local authority to get advice on issues of parking on religious holy days or events?



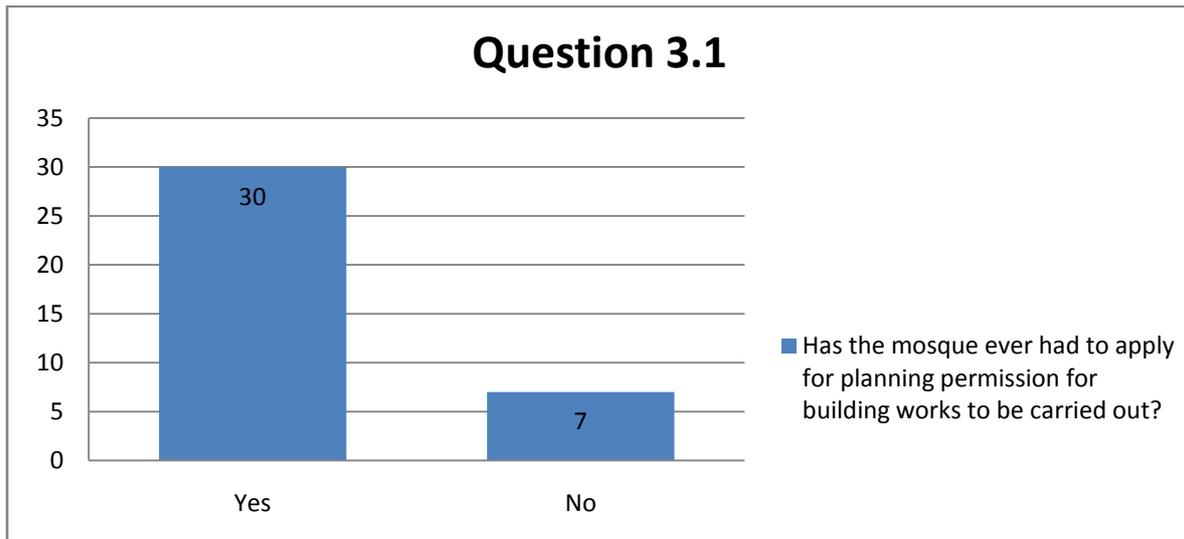
**Appendix C.5**

Q 2.3) Has the mosque committee or an officer ensured that signage is placed around or outside the mosque regarding parking?



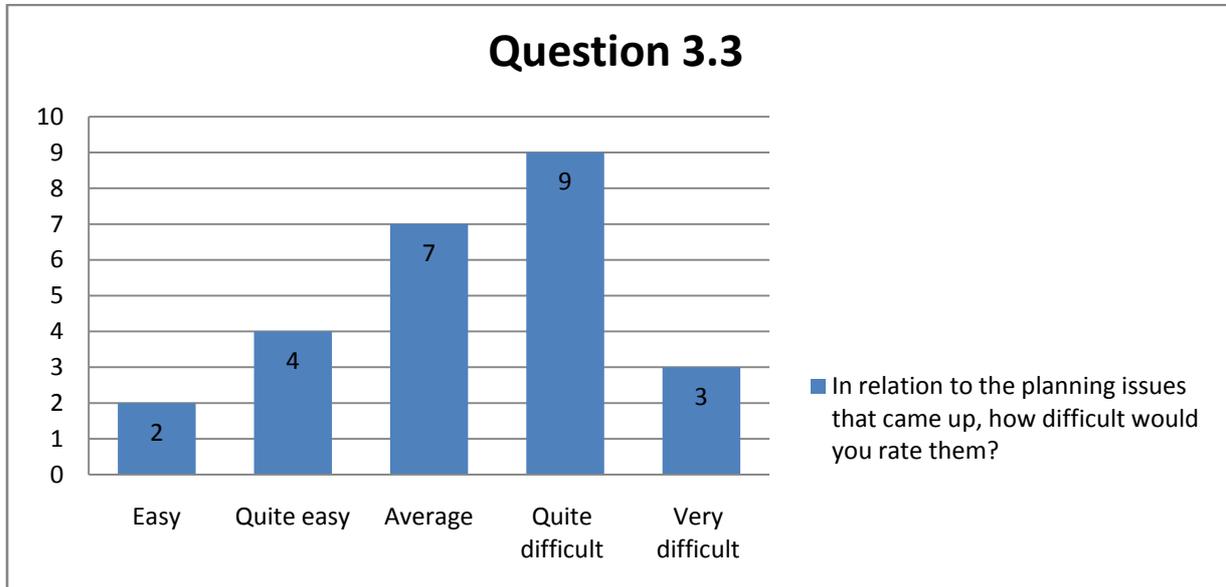
**Appendix C.6**

Q 3.1) Has the mosque ever had to apply for planning permission for building works to be carried out?



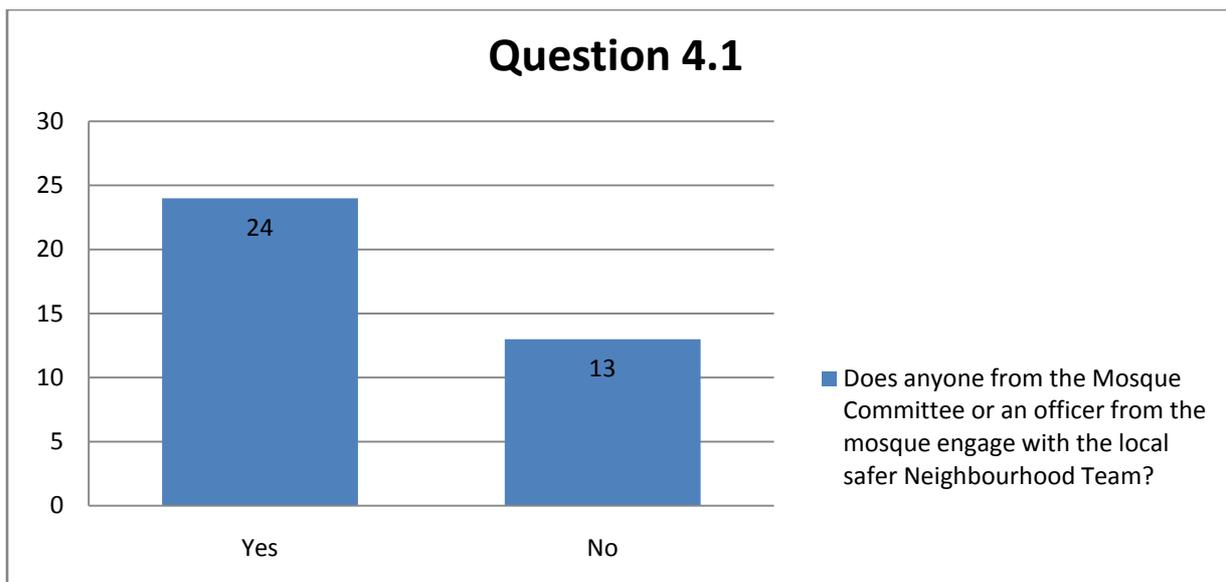
### Appendix C.7

Q 3.3) In relation to the planning issues that came up, how difficult would you rate them?



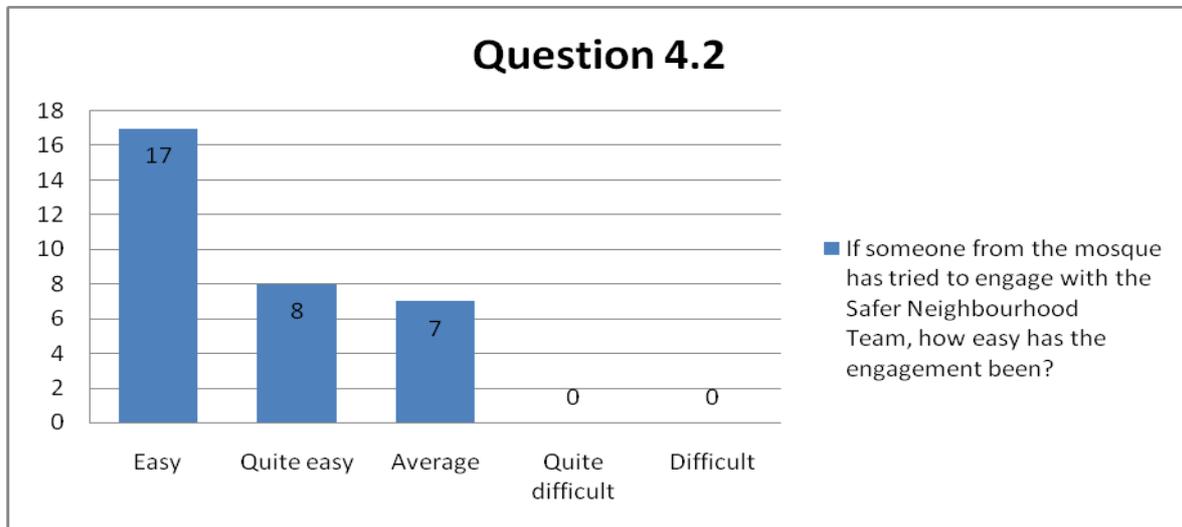
### Appendix C.8

Q 4.1) Does anyone from the Mosque Committee or an officer from the mosque engage with the local Safer Neighbourhood Team?



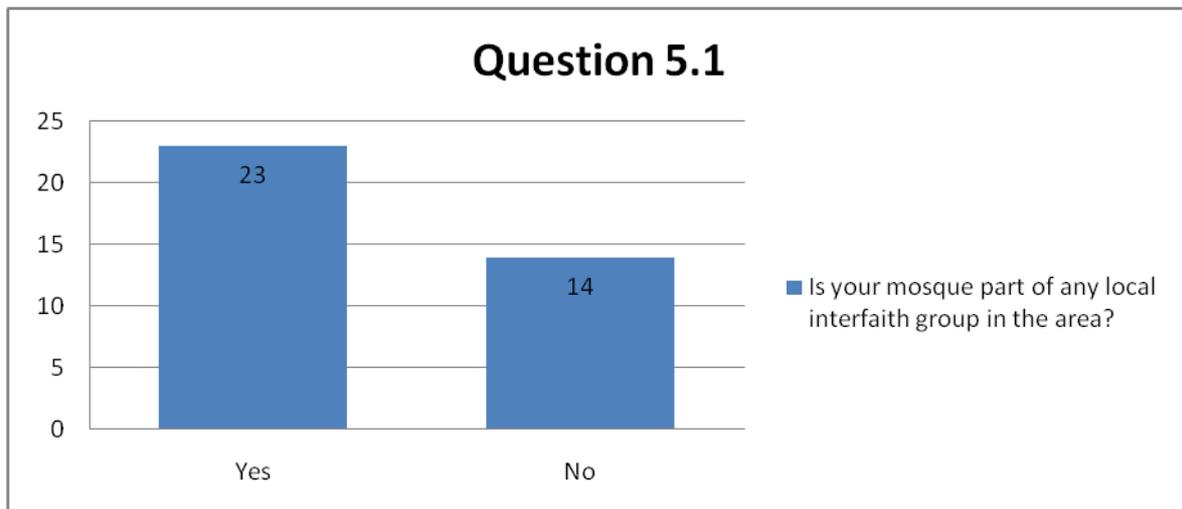
### Appendix C.9

Q 4.2) If someone from the mosque has tried to engage with the Safer Neighbourhood Team, how easy has the engagement been?



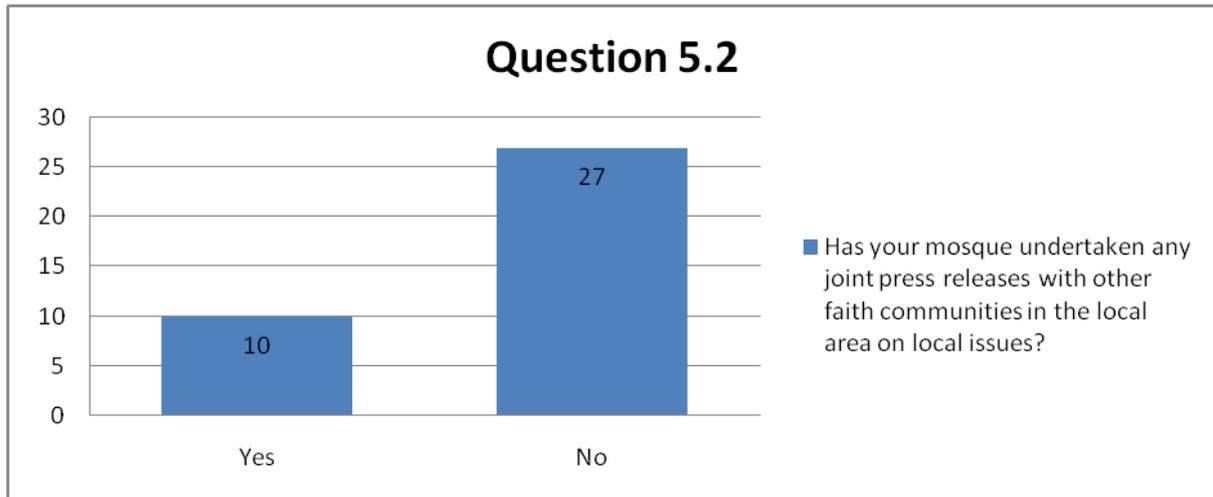
### Appendix C.10

Q 5.1) Is your mosque part of any local inter faith group in the area?



### Appendix C.11

Q 5.2) Has your mosque undertaken any joint press releases with other faith communities in the local area on local issues?









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