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Achieving safely managed restarting sangats based services at Gurdwaras

The Government is introducing measures to ease lockdown restrictions including in 'places of worship', Gurdwaras in the case of Sikhs. This is a welcome step and will please many members of the sangat. Sikh Council UK consulted a sample of Gurdwaras, representing every region of England and Wales. This included Gurdwaras that served medium and large congregations. This consultation identified both their common and specific concerns during COVID 19 and highlighted a number of good practises and strategies for reopening. Likewise, the British Sikh Consultative Forum also consulted Gurdwaras through their networks.

The Sikh Council UK and British Sikh Consultative Forum (BSCF) have worked together with government on plans for safely managed reopening of Gurdwaras. We urge you to comply with these and where you need help, the two organisation, SCUk and BSCF have set up a team to assist you with this.

Gurdwaras in every part of the country have utilised their food preparation facilities (*langar*) and other resources (monetary, volunteers) to support society and the NHS. This has received positive response from the general public, local government and media. This has been much appreciated by the Government and the British public.

It is also important during this difficult period that Sikhs be given access to Sri Guru Granth Sahib Jee and be part of the Sadh Sangat. This is important for their mental and physical well being. It is important for the spiritual needs.

Further following requests from many Gurdwaras, we have also suggested to Government to permit some services such as weddings and Amrit Sanchar with due compliance with restrictions on numbers, physical distancing and hygiene practices.

This document proposes the roadmap to reopening Gurdwaras in a managed and safe way once the government makes an announcement for the reopening of places of worship. The road map in summary covers the following:

- Before Entering the Gurdwara (Self Isolation)
- Once in the Gurdwara – (Social Distancing and Hygiene)
- Events
- Financial Support
- Other Support



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1. Self-Isolation

Gurdwaras should display large, visible signs at entry points (car-park/front door/foyers/jorha ghars) asking people to not enter the Gurdwara premises and self-isolate as per NHS guidelines if they are symptomatic of Coronavirus or have had contact with a Coronavirus patient or a family member have any symptoms. Please point out that it is their duty as Guru's sangat to ensure safety of others.

Gurdwaras should relay these messages on their social media and make use of Sikh media channels. These should also reiterate the importance of self-isolation.

We will be releasing a resource pack which Gurdwaras can utilise for signage.

2. Social Distancing

1. Gurdwaras must impose a limit on the maximum number of people inside the Gurdwara at any one time - this is known as the safe maximum occupancy limit. Like supermarkets, Gurdwaras should make an assessment of their indoor spaces - especially the *darbar sahib* (worship hall) and *langar hall* (food preparation and eating area) and identify how many people could enter the premises safely observing the 2 metre distance. (this needs to follow guidelines stipulated by the Government { if that happens})
2. Household units can cluster together if they wish to but its is important that others maintain the safe distance from them.
3. The best way to do this is by marking seating spaces in the *darbar* and *langar* and any queuing areas. This also ensures easy compliance for *sangat* when Gurdwaras are re-opened.
4. Sangat waiting to enter the Gurdwara premises for any reason should be directed to maintain social distancing.
5. Clear informational notices and leaflets highlighting these restrictions and explaining the reasons for them.
6. Where possible a one-way system should be adopted, with a single entry point and exit point.

3. Hygiene

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- Hand-washing basins should be regularly cleaned and disinfected (including all taps and handles). Hand gels and liquid soaps should be used instead of soap-bars.
- Posters displaying the correct method of washing hands (in accordance with 'WHO' guidance) in Punjabi or English should be displayed at every sink, including toilets and kitchen). Posters should encourage people to clean *karas* every time they wash their hands as well. - These are now available on <https://sikhcouncil.co.uk/#resources>
- General signage reminding people 'catch it, bin it, kill it' for sneezing/coughing with tissues should be displayed around Gurdwaras.
- We recommend that Gurdwaras offer sangat disposable non surgical masks and gloves whilst recognising it may not be financially viable or possible to source the amounts needed. *(We are actively engaged in procurement of gloves/masks for Gurdwaras. Please get in touch with the team)*
- Every individual coming to the Gurdwara should bring a scarf (*parna*) and keep their faces covered at most times.
- Existing scarves and head coverings that are often available for those visitors without turbans and head scarves should be used once before washing. Please keep separate boxes for people taking these and those disposing them.
- Gurdwaras with a high volume of sangat or all Gurdwaras during peak times should appoint 'officers' (*pehredaars*) in *Darbar Sahib* and *Langar Hall* to make sure that social distancing and enhanced hygiene measures are maintained.
- All Gurdwara staff and volunteers need to have appropriate levels of PPE - for example those involved in food preparation and serving must have adequate face covering and gloves.
- Gurdwaras may also consider equipping sewadars in langar and those handling Prashad with visor to protect eyes and nose.

Please refer to our earlier guidance(s) for more details and examples of good practise.

4. Events

We have issued guidance for funerals in accordance with Government guidelines, which has been shared and utilised by many Gurdwaras and Funeral Directors.



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We have negotiated with the Government to permit Gurdwaras to hold weddings, Amrit Sanchar and other special commemorative services and events. These will all follow guidelines as above and agreed with Government. We strongly urge you not to break them as the Government could withdraw the reopening of services.

As you all know Anand Karaj ceremonies have to be officiated at Gurdwaras. The attendance of weddings during this time should be kept at the safe maximum occupancy limit permitted at Gurdwaras according to their size and facilities. This is inline with our historic traditions where Sikh weddings were minimalistic.

Amrit Sanchar is an essential part of the Sikh faith. Gurdwaras that wish to restart these can do so but have to comply with guidelines as above. Our team is at hand to advise on this.

5. Financial Support

Many Gurdwaras are financially challenged during this time and have expressed concerns about the lack of financial support available to them. We are requesting the Government to set up a special fund for places of worship.

6. Support

Sikh Council UK and British Sikh Consultative Forum will support the implementation of good practise in Gurdwaras. As we have done previously, we can translate and adapt Government guidelines to create resource-packs for Gurdwaras. We will be looking at producing safety videos and carrying out risk assessment for Gurdwaras that need further assistance in collaboration with the Sikh Doctors Association.