



Response to the UK government “Protect Duty” consultation

The Salvation Army in Scotland is part of the UK Territory, and the present submission, which is approved by the UK leadership of The Salvation Army, supplements that presented by The Salvation Army UK, and addresses areas which are of particular concern in Scotland.

While fully supporting in principle the core statement that “*Venues and organisations owning, operating or responsible for publicly accessible locations should take appropriate and proportionate measures to protect the public from attacks in these locations*”, The Salvation Army in Scotland is concerned that the regulations that could be imposed through the proposed legislation would not be “appropriate and proportionate” for faith communities, and might result in the reduction, or even the closure of many programmes which provide vital support and assistance to the local communities, and especially those who are most vulnerable.

Criteria

The Salvation Army, like many other faith communities, considers that while **capacity** is a factor in determining if a public space falls within the scope of Protect Duty, it is not a suitable criterion by itself. There are a number of Salvation Army community churches in Scotland which have a capacity of over 100, but in the vast majority of cases, the number of those attending is far smaller. The Salvation Army in Scotland therefore proposes that **attendance** should also be considered and indeed given more weight as a criterion.

The Salvation Army in Scotland further proposes that due consideration be given to **location** as a criterion. The Salvation Army in Scotland is present in major urban conurbations, smaller towns and villages, and in rural or semi-rural locations. Each of these settings poses different levels and kinds of risks, with the risk of terrorist activity at its highest in (some) urban areas and lowest in rural/semi-rural areas. However, even within urban areas there is considerable variation in risk, depending on where churches are situated, and therefore variations in the security measures those churches might need to implement.

The Salvation Army in Scotland also wishes to express concern regarding the proposal that any body with more than 250 employees who work in publicly accessible spaces should be subject to Protect Duty requirements. While The Salvation Army in Scotland has a large number of employees¹ who conduct programmes such as Employment Plus, Debt Advice and floating support for people struggling with addictions, the community churches which provide their operational base are often extremely small and it is not unusual for the programmes to be conducted on a network basis, with the employee working in different locations throughout the week. If each location is subject to Protect Duty requirements, this could adversely affect their capacity to offer such programmes, with negative consequences for the people who are assisted.

¹ For The Salvation Army, as for other Churches and faith communities, the precise number will depend on whether officers, who are clergy and technically “office-holders”, are considered as “employees” for the purpose of Protect Duty.

Training and Ethos

The Salvation Army in Scotland, like other churches and faith-based organisations, depends heavily upon volunteers to conduct its community service programmes. While The Salvation Army strongly supports the principle that all personnel should be provided with suitable training, and already provides extensive training for employees and volunteers (e.g. fire safety), we also believe that it is important to safeguard the particular status of volunteers, who give of their time to help others, and may well be deterred from offering their services if they are subject to disproportionate administrative burdens which reduce the time they can give to serving others.

We understand that the Home Office has indicated that it understands this vital difference between places of worship and other public spaces, and we welcome the recognition that volunteers play a key role. However, at present it is not clear how that distinction will be reflected in the proposed legislation and the duties it will impose on faith communities and places of worship: the government consultation paper appears to be geared largely towards paid staff, who are mentioned some 81 times, while volunteers are mentioned only 8 times.

Equally, The Salvation Army in Scotland believes it is crucial that Christian churches and other faith communities be able maintain an ethos of welcome and hospitality, and that our gatherings and services be inclusive and open to all. We are deeply concerned that Protect Duty requirements could conflict with this ethos: we do not wish to give those who use our services the impression that they are regarded as a security risk or threat, and welcome teams must not become security teams! We therefore urge that due consideration be given to the particular status of Christian churches and faith communities, which often act as community hubs.

Funding

Finally, The Salvation Army in Scotland must register concern regarding the funding mechanisms for implementing Protect Duty measures. While the legislation is of UK scope, the Places of Worship Security Funding Scheme applies only to England and Wales, while the Scottish government's Hate Crime Security Fund supplies only £500,000 across all the country, applies to a different piece of legislation, and is to close to applications on 1st July 2021. It is not clear how funding will be delivered through devolved channels, and this is a matter which requires urgent clarification if faith communities are not to find themselves obliged under UK law to introduce measures for which no funding is available from devolved administrations.