

**To:**

Hertfordshire Faith Groups

County Hall  
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Hertford  
SG13 8DE

19 March 2020

Dear Friends

We are writing to you in these challenging times to ask for your continued care and support in responding to the Coronavirus crisis.

The County Council is working hard on ensuring that we do everything we can to protect our residents from the effects of the COVID-19 Coronavirus. There are a range of actions we are taking from seeking to prevent and slow spread, and care for the most vulnerable. We will win over this virus, and we will return to normality.

And we need your help as our Faith Communities in this crucial work. There are three crucial areas where we believe you can make a significant difference, and where we would ask your engagement and leadership: Prevention, Caring for the Most Vulnerable and Providing Reassurance and Hope.

**1. Prevention**

It is with a heavy heart that we are asking you, in line with the advice from Government and increasing numbers of faith groups, to suspend public worship until further notice and follow social distancing guidance.

We include below the links from government to that advice and the links to various faith groups advice.

We need to follow this guidance with great care, help people adjust to the new reality we will be living with for some months, but retain what we can of the rhythm of spiritual life which is so important to so many.

**2. Caring for the Most Vulnerable**

It is a sign of a civilised society, and a mark of all faiths, that we have a particular concern for those most vulnerable at these times, as a shared investment in the dignity and value of our common humanity. We ask you to continue playing your inspirational role in building and maintaining a society which embodies these values.

It is especially important that those most vulnerable to serious effects of the virus, those over 70 and those with serious underlying health conditions are shielded as much as possible. Ensuring the virus does not infect them if at all possible will be crucial. Many people in faith communities will be in this category as we ask you to study carefully the social distancing guidelines and take them seriously to heart for your communities.

There are many things you can do:

- ensuring those who hunger, those who are excluded, those who are frightened or in need are given support, comfort and solace;
- ensuring foodbanks have food;
- ensuring that people who are isolated or are in self-isolation can get support in essential deliveries; and
- ensuring that people self-isolating because of their symptoms or because of their vulnerability are reminded of our love and care for them through email, phone calls or letters.

In particular we invite you to:

- participate in existing volunteer networks;
- be ready to volunteer for the national call for volunteers which will come shortly; and
- if you have a body of volunteers or any social care ministry, please let us know your key contacts so our new volunteering and care for people task force can help reach them and co-ordinate with them. Please [Equalities@hertfordshire.gov.uk](mailto:Equalities@hertfordshire.gov.uk) with your key contacts, email and phone number.

### **3. Reassuring and Providing Hope**

We will, in time, overcome this public health crisis. But we face another potential crisis, of anxiety, fear and panic. We ask you to play your part in reassuring our communities that we will overcome this challenge. Some of you are keeping your places of worship open for private prayer and quiet, using frequent cleaning of touchpoints and asking people to implement social distancing with great care.

Others among you are moving worship and prayer online, or moving to telephone or postal support. Public messages of reassurance and unity from your leaders, stories of coping spiritually and practically in these times and an ability to ensure people remain calm, purposeful and have hope through these times will be among the most important things you can do.

If you are worried about infection control and need guidance on cleaning, you can find this at the links below. If you still have worries or concerns then please email [publichealth@hertfordshire.gov.uk](mailto:publichealth@hertfordshire.gov.uk) who will be able to assist you. Our Director of Public Health, Professor Jim McManus, has significant experience of working with faith communities during this crisis and during the 2009 Flu Pandemics as well as other outbreaks and he can be reached for advice on [jim.mcmanus@hertfordshire.gov.uk](mailto:jim.mcmanus@hertfordshire.gov.uk)

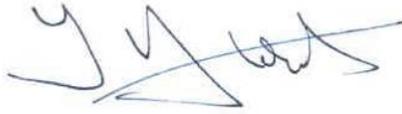
We thank you for all you do, and consider ourselves richly gifted to have a faith sector so vibrant, diverse and active. Your sustained presence, upholding the people of our county in hope at these times will have a major impact.

Signed



Terry Douris

Terry Douris  
Executive Member,  
Education, Libraries &  
Localism



Tim Hutchings

Tim Hutchings  
Executive Member,  
Public Health & Prevention



Ralph Sangster

Ralph Sangster  
Executive Member,  
Resources &  
Performance

## **Key Government Guidance**

The Government issued advice on social distancing, which is set out here <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-guidance-on-social-distancing-and-for-vulnerable-people/guidance-on-social-distancing-for-everyone-in-the-uk-and-protecting-older-people-and-vulnerable-adults>

This advice urges everyone to avoid large gatherings and also gatherings in smaller public places. It also recommends avoiding gatherings with friends and family.

This advice is needed to help prevent the spread of COVID-19 and also to make sure our hospitals have the capacity they need to cope with the pandemic.

Faith Action are collating guidance from all faiths and churches: <https://www.faithaction.net/coronavirus/>

Covid Avoiding Fear and Panic: <https://zenit.org/articles/covid-19-avoiding-fear-and-panic/>

## **Muslim Guidance:**

Further guidance and recommendation has been released by the Muslim Council of Britain which is available at - <https://mcb.org.uk/press-releases/mcb-calls-for-the-suspension-of-congregational-activities-at-uk-mosques-and-islamic-centres/> and includes the advice from the British Board of Scholars and Imams at <http://www.bbsi.org.uk/coronavirus/>