



Ministry of Housing,
Communities &
Local Government

Florence Eshalomi MP

*Minister for Homelessness, Democracy,
Communities and Faith*
2 Marsham Street
London
SW1P 4DF

Our reference: [REDACTED]

Alexander Barnes-Ross
[REDACTED]

18 August 2026

Dear Alexander,

Thank you for your letter, and petition, of 9 June 2026 to the then then Prime Minister. Your correspondence has been passed to the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, and I am replying as the Minister responsible for faith and community policy.

I am grateful to you for getting in touch and sharing your concerns. To ensure you receive a substantive response, I have instructed officials in the department to provide an update, which is appended.

Thank you again for writing on this important matter. I hope this information clarifies the position.

Yours sincerely,

FLORENCE ESHALOMI MP

Minister for Homelessness, Democracy, Communities and Faith



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18 August 2026

Dear Mr Barnes-Ross,

Thank you for your correspondence to which the Minister has asked me to reply.

The Government's thoughts are, first and foremost, with the individuals whose experiences were included in the survivor stories you shared with your letter and petition. It is clear from these accounts that many have endured distressing and upsetting circumstances and have been deeply affected by the coercive control and psychological abuse described, as well as by the barriers they faced when leaving high-control groups. It is the first duty of Government to keep citizens safe. Its primary focus is to protect people, not religions. The Government keeps its legislative and safeguarding framework under review and will continue to consider evidence on whether further action is required.

Safeguarding expectations apply equally to all organisations engaging with children or vulnerable adults, irrespective of faith or belief. The Government expects all faith and belief groups that engage with children or vulnerable adults to have robust safeguarding policies and procedures in place. The Government is committed to protecting children from abuse and exploitation, wherever and whenever it occurs, and to ensuring that those who work closely with children have the knowledge, skills and confidence to identify abuse and respond appropriately.

The Crime and Policing Act 2026 has introduced a new mandatory duty for those working in relevant roles to report sexual offences against children. This duty will sit alongside existing statutory safeguarding responsibilities and the clear expectations on professionals to safeguard and promote the welfare of children. Where concerns are raised, the Government expects an organisation or group to take those concerns seriously, review its practices accordingly, and cooperate fully with statutory authorities in the event of any investigation.

In your letter, you raise concerns about controlling and coercive abuse. The Government condemns acts of psychological, emotional, physical and sexual abuse against adults and children, as well as coercive or controlling behaviour, including where such conduct occurs in a religious setting or context. The Government recognises that such forms of abuse may have lasting and traumatic effects on individuals. Where abuse amounts to modern slavery, the Government recognises this is a vicious crime that dehumanises people, and is committed to tackling it in all its forms and to giving survivors the support and certainty they need to recover.

You specifically raise the legislative framework for controlling or coercive behaviour in relation to conduct outside domestic settings. The Government recognises that some campaigners and survivors have argued for extending protections to circumstances outside domestic relationships where coercive and controlling behaviours may also occur. However, the controlling or coercive behaviour offence was explicitly designed to address patterns of behaviour within relationships where the perpetrator and victim are "personally connected", as outlined in section 2 of the Domestic Abuse Act 2021. Expanding the offence beyond this context would risk undermining that clarity and creating uncertainty in the identification, investigation and prosecution of the offence. Therefore, there is no intention to expand the offence beyond its current scope at this time.

In instances where a crime is suspected to have taken place, it is right that this is reported to the police. The Government understands that it can often take victims and survivors years before they are ready to talk about their experiences, and it is never too late to report any form of abuse or exploitation to the police. Victims and survivors can call 101 and will be put through to the right team to provide support, regardless of how long ago the incident took place. Anyone who believes they may be a victim of modern slavery should approach a first responder organisation, such as the police, a local authority, or an approved non-governmental organisation. First responder organisations are trained to identify and refer potential victims into the National Referral Mechanism so that their cases can be considered and appropriate support provided as needed. Further, legal powers are in place to protect children in various settings, and local authorities have a legal duty to investigate where they believe a child is suffering, or is likely to suffer, significant harm.

The UK has a longstanding commitment to freedom of religion or belief. The Government's position is that individuals must be free to join, participate in, or affiliate with any lawful organisation or group, provided its activities remain within the rule of law and respect the rights and freedoms of others. While the Government is committed to protecting everyone's freedom of religion or belief, this cannot be used to protect criminal conduct or abusive practices, or to prevent the enforcement of our laws. The Government will not shy away from challenging harmful cultures and practices that restrict individual rights or limit people's chances to thrive in modern Britain.

Thank you for taking the time to write.

Yours sincerely,

ALEX BADRICK
Deputy Principal Private Secretary