

# **Sikh Council UK Issues Advice on Same Sex Marriage Law**

**Following the passing into law of the Marriage (Same Sex Couples) Act 2013 by the bill receiving Royal Assent on 17<sup>th</sup> July 2013 the Sikh Council UK has issued important advice and guidance for Gurdwaras.**

The Marriage (Same Sex Couples) Act 2013 allows for people of the same gender to be married via a wedding ceremony. The Sikh Council UK issued a policy position on same sex marriage during the discussions on the new law. This policy position is based on the principles contained within the Rehat Maryada (Sikh code of Conduct) and a recent edict issued by Jathedar of Sri Akal Takhat.

Secretary General, Gurmel Singh said, "Sikhs believe in equality for all and we do not advocate discriminating against gay and lesbian people in any circumstances. However, the principles laid out within the Rehat Maryada and by the Jathedar Sahib only allows for the Anand marriage ceremony to be between a man and a woman. I am pleased that lawmakers have recognised the importance of sentiment and practice for religious communities and ensured that Gurdwaras will not be forced to carry out same sex marriages."

"In view of this the Sikh Council UK has issued guidance to all Gurdwaras which includes a model resolution to be adopted by their governing body or management committee. This will ensure that Gurdwaras are acting within the law of the land as well as within the principles of the Sikh Rehat Maryada and in accordance with the guidance of Jathedar, Akal Takhat Sahib."

The Sikh Council UK are sending out guidance including a model resolution for Gurdwaras to adopt as well as a letter received from the Minister for Women and Equalities, Helen Grant MP explaining the exemptions for religious places of worship. All documents can also be accessed on the Sikh Council UK website [www.sikhcounciluk.org](http://www.sikhcounciluk.org).

The Sikh Council UK understands there is some concern regarding possible legal challenge to Gurdwaras offering Civil Marriage Ceremonies. We would urge Gurdwaras to be cautious when considering advice to stop Civil Marriage Ceremonies at the Gurdwara premises as the advice clearly betrays a lack of understanding of the legal framework and the actual practice of Anand Karaj ceremony and the associated civil registration procedure.

The Sikh community (and other faith communities) has been given guarantees by Ministers and other parliamentarians following consideration of our concerns. The quadruple lock that has been introduced is a clear indication of intention and there are clear statements of intent from Ministers giving categorical assurances that no faith organisation will be forced to carry out same sex marriages. If there is a legal challenge to a Gurdwara offering Civil Marriage Ceremonies it would be clearly against the spirit and the word of the guarantees and Sikh Council UK will robustly hold politicians to account.

**END**

Note for Editors

The Sikh Council UK (SCUK) is the largest representative body of Sikhs in the UK. We are recognised as the national advocate for British Sikhs in the United Kingdom and at the European Union.

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