

## Waheguru Ji Ka Khalsa, Waheguru Ji Ki Fateh

November 2014 Bulletin 47

### **Sikh Council UK Office Holders**

Following the recent General Assembly and subsequent Executive Committee the following office holders have been agreed for the third administration of Sikh Council UK:

- **Secretary General** - Gurmel Singh
  - Assistant Secretary General
    - Dr Piara Singh Bhogal (Internal Community Affairs and Link to Servicing Board of Jathedars)
    - Sukhvinder Singh (SSP to also Chair Policy and Strategy)
- **Administrative Secretary** - Jagtar Singh Gill
  - Assistant Administrative Secretary - Ranjit Singh Seehra
- **Treasurer** - Paramjit Singh Dhillon
  - Assistant Treasurer - Serbjit Singh Landa
- **Membership Co-ordinator of Affiliate Organisations** - Surinder Singh Jandu
  - Membership Assistants & Regional Co-ordinators
    - North - Manjit Singh Cheema
    - Midlands - Surinderpal Singh
    - South - Baldev Singh Bains
- **Spokesperson** - Gurinder Singh Josan
  - Assistant Spokesperson - Jagjit Singh

### **Chairs of Sub-Committees**

- **Chair of Community Safety Committee** – Balvinder Kaur Sandhu
  - Vice Chair – Balvinder Kaur Saund
- **Chair of Education Committee** - Jaspal Singh
  - Vice Chair - Hardip Singh
- **Chair of European & International Affairs Committee** - Paramjit Kaur Matharu
  - Vice Chair - Jaswinder Singh Khatkar
- **Chair of Finance Committee** – Paramjit Singh Dhillon
  - Vice Chair – Serbjit Singh Landa
- **Chair of Indian Sub-Continent Affairs Committee** – Cllr Gurdial Singh Atwal
  - Vice Chair - Jarnail Singh Dhaliwal
- **Chair of Media and Communications Committee** - Gurinder Singh Josan
  - Vice Chair - Jagjit Singh
- **Chair of Sports Committee** - Parminder Singh Birdi
  - Vice Chair - Inderjit Singh Gill

## **Meetings/Events**

1<sup>st</sup> November 2014 Representatives of Sikh Council UK attended and participated in the Candlelight Vigil in Victoria Square, Birmingham in remembrance of the victims and to commemorate the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the pogroms unleashed against Sikhs in Delhi and other places in India.

4<sup>th</sup> November 2014 Sikh Council UK organised a follow up meeting with the Migration Policy Advisor from the Home Office at Guru Nanak Gurdwara Sahib, Smethwick to get an update on the review of the process to grant visas for religious workers/ Granthis. The meeting was attended by Sikh Council UK members from across UK who were able to make representations to the Home Office. (power-point of workshop attached)

8<sup>th</sup> November 2014 the first official meeting of the Executive Committee of the third administration took place at Guru Tegh Bahadur Gurdwara, Leicester. The meeting agreed the various office holders of the Sikh Council UK.

12<sup>th</sup> November 2014 Sikh Council UK facilitated and attended a meeting between representatives of all Gurdwaras in Derby, the Akaal Primary School and Cllr Ranjit Banwait, Leader of Derby City Council to discuss difficulties the school had encountered in securing a suitable site for the school.

18 -19<sup>th</sup> November 2014 Secretary General of Sikh Council UK attended the launch of an exhibition on Sikhi at the European Parliament organised by the Nishkam Sewak Jatha and Neena Gill MEP. The launch was well attended by MEP's and officials with several dozen Sikhs from UK also attending. Also in attendance was the Indian Ambassador to EU with whom the issue of closure of a Gurdwara in Brussels was raised.

20<sup>th</sup> November 2014 Attendance by Executive Member, Surinder Singh Jandu, with colleagues Gurmej Singh Josan and Sukhdev Singh Marway at the launch of a Jewish news and interfaith channel at House of Commons with Eric Pickles MP. Also present was Lord Tariq Ahmad of Wimbledon who gave an inspiring speech based on common goals of all faiths.

27<sup>th</sup> November 2014 a telephone conversation took place in lieu of a meeting with the Health and Safety Executive to discuss progress of legislation extending exemptions for turban wearing Sikhs from having to wear safety helmets to all workplaces.

25<sup>th</sup> November 2014 Executive Member of Sikh Council UK, Balvinder Kaur Saund, attended a roundtable meeting 'Azerbaijan - A Nexus Between East and West an Example of Co-existence of Faiths in the Caucasus'. The event was attended by His Excellency Tahir Taghizade, Ambassador of Azerbaijan who spoke very highly of his country and encouraged other faiths and businesses to do business there.

26<sup>th</sup> November 2014 Sikh Council UK members attended a WW1 event at the National Sikh Museum in Derby at which the Home Secretary, Rt Hon Theresa May MP unveiled two WW1 statues and wall Plaques commemorating the Sikh contribution to the British WW1 campaign.

### **Campaigns/Casework**

- A member of the Board of Jathedars took on a special trip to Anandpur Sahib during his visit to India to establish facts about the wellbeing of a young lady following social media reports that a vulnerable British National in India residing at Anandpur Sahib was homeless, mentally unstable, extremely vulnerable and roaming the streets. The representative met with the lady in question as well as others and established that the suggestions on social media were unfounded. On the contrary the young lady is said to be safe in the care of a Khalsa Family. The findings along with a statement issued by the young lady were used to help quell the speculation and comments on social media along with a plea for the family / young lady's privacy to be respected. The findings were also shared with her family in the UK who were further reassured and appreciated Sikh Council UK's intervention.
- Sikh Council UK was contacted by concerned Sangat that Maharaj Saroop Sri Guru Granth Sahib Ji was taken to Cyprus from Ilford by an individual without the required protocol in transferring Maharaj Saroop being observed. Local representatives from Ilford were requested to take the matter up with the individual on his return from Cyprus.
- Forthcoming changes in legislation in relation to food allergen awareness requirements that come into force on 13<sup>th</sup> December 2014 were widely circulated. Gurdwara Sahibs were asked to take note.
- The European and International Affairs Committee of the Sikh Council UK led by the Chair, Paramjit Kaur Matharu, continued dialogue and correspondence in relation to a decision by the Mayor of Volvoorde to close a Gurdwara Sahib in Brussels alleging illegal immigrant and trafficking issues.
- Sikh Council UK wrote to the Food Commercial Director of Sainsburys following concerns from the Hindu and Jain Community about Haribo sweets being promoted as part of the diwali festival despite containing beef gellatin and other animal extracts. The Sikh Council UK raised the broader issue of consultation with communities concerned when products are promoted as part of cultural/faith themes and the need for accurate labelling of halal products and the definition of vegetarianism as observed by faiths of Indian subcontinent origin.
- London RE-Hub contacted Sikh Council UK requesting our input on their blog as to how the teaching of Sikhism could be improved in schools. Sikh Council UK

welcomed contribution to this from Sikh Missionary Society. Executive member of Sikh Council UK, Mankamal Singh also referred the request to SikhRi for their response.

- Sikh Council UK widely circulated guidance from the Home Office in relation to new requirements for landlords to undertake checks on potential tenants to establish if they have the 'right to rent' (i.e appropriate immigration status) prior to a tenancy being offered. Failure to do this could result in penalties. The scheme is initially beginning in the West Midlands and will be extended across the UK in due course.
- Sikh Council UK continues to lobby against changes in regulations which may result in meat having to be served in Sikh Faith schools as part of their lunch meals.
- Sikh Council UK widely circulated information through social media about West Midlands Police recruitment campaign.
- Assistant Secretary General, Dr Piara Singh Bhogal took up a case from an individual who shared concerns about a Granthi in a Leicester Gurdwara Sahib. The Gurdwara Sahib Committee was not responding to the individuals concerns but were forced to take action when they witnessed first-hand the Granthi being found drunk in his room and becoming aggressive when approached. Sikh Council UK is discussing the possibility of guidelines being prepared for Gurdwara Committees to follow when recruiting Granthi's to ensure they have an understanding of the background of the individuals.
- Sikh Council UK has written to Westminster Forums team ahead of their conference 'Future of Food labelling Policy - European Information to Consumers, Regulations and Next Steps for Voluntary Nutritional Labelling' due to take place in July 2015. Sikh Council UK has raised concerns about the need for clear labelling of halal and non-halal foods and clarity about the definition of vegetarian food that is applicable to beliefs and practices of the Asian communities.
- Sikh Council UK has been awarded a small amount of funding to undertake developmental / consultation work in local areas. Further details will be available shortly.

## **Queries**

Query 1: BBC Religion and Ethics Department contacted Sikh Council UK wanting to understand Sikh community perspective of Prince Phillips impact on religious community in Britain. This was referred to Anglo Sikh Heritage Trail for their better knowledge of any impact.

Query 2: Headwear query from Thames Policing staff wanting to understand better what the requirements are for Turban wearing officers. We shared information regarding this matter and provided an update regarding the latest legislation.

Query 3: Based on its established relationship Sikh Council UK was contacted by the Home Office regarding their desire to set up Immigration surgeries in Oxford (Banbury) Gurdwara Sahib. We contacted the Gurdwara Sahib to facilitate their direct liaison with the Home Office to meet and decide on way forward.

Query 4: Sikh Council UK was contacted by ITN to find out about any events they could cover relating to WW1. They were made aware of events that had been organised but many had already taken place in October and beginning of November (their request being received late November).