

Criticism of mosque finally revealed as MEN uncovers secret Manchester Arena bomb report

From the [Manchester Evening News](#)

Trustees of Didsbury Mosque 'did not have a formal method of controlling' literature which contained 'possibly extremist messages'. They also 'did not submit' a report to the Charity Commission about alleged links to 'an act of terrorism' after it was reported that the Manchester Arena bomber prayed there.

That's according to documents obtained by the Manchester Evening News following a long freedom of information battle.

The mosque was also told to ensure anyone using its 'Sharia Council', which provides rulings and advice to Muslims, 'are aware no ruling which it makes is legally binding', while it was also criticised for failing to record the suspension and reinstatement of an imam photographed wearing army fatigues in Libya.

The revelations are in an 'action plan' drawn up for the mosque, a registered charity, by the Charity Commission some 16 months after the 2017 suicide bombing at [Manchester Arena](#) which claimed 22 innocent lives and left hundreds more seriously injured.

The Charity Commission initially refused to provide its 2018 action plan to the M.E.N. following an application made under freedom of information legislation in March 2023, arguing disclosure would have a 'prejudicial and chilling effect' on dialogue with mosque trustees and 'seriously undermine' confidence in correspondence it has with the mosque remaining

private. Only the first two pages of the 11-page action plan were made public at the subsequent Arena inquiry.

We took our case to the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) arguing it was strongly in the public interest to release the 2018 action plan particularly following criticism in the public inquiry into the atrocity that mosque leaders had demonstrated 'wilful blindness' to extremism. During the watchdog's investigation the Charity Commission changed its position and agreed to release a redacted version of the action plan, which the ICO ordered the Charity Commission to release.

Arena families have praised the M.E.N. for its 'persistence' in obtaining the action plan and questioned whether the mosque has changed at all as its chairman – who was heavily criticised in the public inquiry – remains in post.



📍 Clockwise from top left: Salman Abedi, Ramadan Abedi, Hashem Abedi, Ismail Abedi, who all attended Didsbury Mosque (Image: MEN)

Suicide bomber Salman Abedi and his jailed accomplice brother Hashem attended Didsbury Mosque while their older brother

Ismail, who has fled the country, volunteered in the mosque's Arabic school. Their father Ramadan had performed the call to prayer while their mother Samia Tabbal taught there briefly.

The action plan was drawn up by the Charity Commission following a two-day inspection of Didsbury

Mosque carried out on August 9 and 10, 2018, some 16 months after the bombing. The plan made a series of criticisms and gave the trustees six months to address them. The Charity Commission says the actions suggested were 'complied with' by 2019.

The action plan pointed out that by law a charity that works with children or vulnerable groups 'must safeguard them from harm'. Among the potential harms referenced in the action plan is extremism. One of the mosque's stated aims is to provide education for children studying the Koran.

The action plan noted: "The current safeguarding policy only covers basic elements of safeguarding children and should be reviewed and enhanced." The mosque was told to appoint a 'designated safeguarding lead'.

...leaders of the Burton Road venue had demonstrated ['wilful blindness'](#) to highly-charged political debate at the mosque about the conflict raging in Libya before the atrocity, inquiry chairman Sir John Saunders concluded. He criticised the 'unreliable' evidence of Fawzi Haffar, the chair of trustees at Didsbury Mosque, who he said 'tended to downplay the strength of the links between the mosque and the Abedi family'. He remains chair despite the criticism.

By contrast Sir John praised the 'generally truthful and reliable' evidence of a liberal imam at the mosque, Mohammed El-Saeiti, who said in his evidence he was ostracised at the mosque after speaking out against radical Islam.

The inspectors noted that in the aftermath of the bombing 'it was alleged that leaflets with inappropriate and possibly extremist messages were distributed at the Charity's premises at an open day', although they 'originated' from another organisation. Weeks after the bombing, an audience member

on BBC Question Time waved an 'anti-western' leaflet he said he had been handed at the mosque during an open day. He read out an excerpt: "Living in a society in which people have accepted Western lifestyle as their way of life brings immorality to every step. Modesty, shame and honour have no place in Western civilisation."

In a statement, the Islamic Centre Manchester, insisted 'no link has ever been established' between Salman Abedi's attack and the mosque although they accepted he was reported to have prayed there. The trustees insist there was nothing to report to the Charity Commission as his reported association with the mosque was 'already very much in the public domain'. The failure to record the suspension and reinstatement of Mustafa Graf was 'due to an oversight', according to the mosque. Moves to control leaflets 'from bad faith actors' had happened 'at many mosques', said the statement, which also criticised Mr Scorer (Richard Scorer, a solicitor who represents the largest group of Arena families), as 'obsessed and hostile to Didsbury Mosque'.

On the front page of its website the mosque – a former Methodist church which is formally The Islamic Centre Manchester – maintains a link to a statement it made following the critical inquiry report which slams the 'misleading comments and smears' it alleges were made at the inquiry by a police counter terrorism boss and a barrister representing the largest group of families.