



Home Office

Lord Sharpe of Epsom
Parliamentary Under Secretary
of State

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To:

Viscount Bridgeman
House of Lords
London
SW1A 0AA

23 November 2023

Dear Viscount Bridgeman,

MARRIAGES CONDUCTED UNDER SHARIA LAW

Thank you for your contribution regarding Muslim marriages conducted under Sharia law during the debate on the King's Speech on Wednesday 8 November. I am sorry I was unable to respond to your speech during my closing remarks, but I hope this letter will suffice in its place.

The law does make provision for couples (including Muslim couples) to marry in registered places of worship in a way that gives them legal rights and protections. However, the Government does not prevent individuals from seeking to regulate their lives through religious beliefs should they wish to do so. Couples may use Sharia courts provided their actions do not conflict with the law of England and Wales.

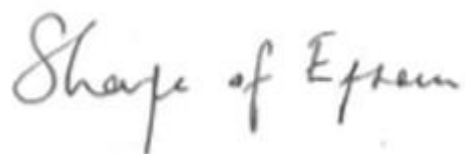
The Government does share your concern that some people, and disproportionately women, may have a religious wedding that does not give them legal rights and protections without being aware of the consequences.

In July 2019, the Government invited the Law Commission to undertake a wholesale review of weddings law in England and Wales. As part of that review the Law Commission made recommendations regarding who should be able to solemnise a marriage and seeking to ensure that, insofar as possible, couples are provided the same opportunities to legally marry in a way that reflects their beliefs. This would mean fewer ceremonies that are conducted according to religious rites result in a marriage that the law does not recognise.

Marriage will always be one of our most important institutions, and we have a duty to consider the implications of any changes to the law in this area very carefully. We are now taking the time to consider the report's 57 recommendations and will publish a response in due course.

I hope this letter has been helpful. I will send a copy to Baroness Cox who I know has done extensive work in this area, and will place a copy of the letter in the libraries of both Houses.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Sharpe of Epsom".

**Lord Sharpe of Epsom OBE
Parliamentary Under Secretary of State**