

# It's blasphemy to oppose having prayers in meetings, blasts councillor

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A Cheadle town councillor has rejected objections to the council holding prayers in its meetings, saying it was blasphemous to deny that the UK was a "Christian country".

A local resident had written to Cheadle Town Council to object to the saying of prayers during meetings. Chris Addis wrote: "I attended a town council meeting in September as an observer, interested particularly in the future of the hospital.

"I was very disturbed to discover that at the commencement of the meeting all those present were asked to stand and share a moment of prayer."

Mr Addis said it was a "huge presumption" to assume that "every person in the room subscribes to the same religious viewpoint.

"We know that cannot be the case. Ours is a multi-ethnic society which hosts a variety of outlooks and religious beliefs."

He wrote that it was a "fact that some people in the room will be made uncomfortable by this request to stand and pray" and accused the council of failing to accept that the UK was no longer a majority Christian country.

"Are council members happy that their decision to open the proceedings with prayer will make some uncomfortable?" Mr Addis asked.

"Britain is not a 'Christian country'. The label is and always has been incorrect, because it implies that every subject is, by choice, a Christian.

"In 2016 many UK residents are Christians, many are not.

"I am aware of the legal ruling following the Secular Society's complaint against Bideford Town Council, and of the March 2015 debates in the House of Lords.

"But I would ask you to ensure that Council members are aware that in opening the meeting with a prayer they are making some members of the public uncomfortable."

According to the [local paper](#), Councillor Ian Whitehouse reacted to the letter by saying, "I don't agree that Britain isn't a Christian country; that's blasphemy."

"I propose we keep the prayer and the Mayor can say if anyone doesn't want to take part they can leave," he suggested.

Several other councillors agreed that the council should not change its policy on holding a prayer in meetings. "Once we let the tail wag the dog it's a downward slope," said Councillor Gary Bentley.

NSS campaigns director Stephen Evans said "This is by far the strangest set of arguments we've heard in favour of local authorities having official prayers in their meetings. Meetings should be

welcoming to all; they are not opportunities to force religious beliefs on others."

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