

Governance and Ethics Committee

22 October 2021

Report title	Adopting a definition of Islamophobia	
Cabinet member with lead responsibility	Councillor Paula Brookfield Cabinet Member for Governance and Equalities	
Accountable director	David Pattison, Chief Operating Officer	
Originating service	Equalities, Diversity and Inclusion Team	
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Report to be considered by	Council	3 November 2021

Recommendations for decision:

The Governance and Ethics Committee recommend that Council:

1. Approves the adoption of the All-Party Parliamentary Group on British Muslims (APPG) definition of Islamophobia as follows:

“Islamophobia is rooted in racism and is a type of racism that targets expressions of Muslimness or perceived Muslimness.”
2. Confirms that it will continue to prioritise tackling hate crime and Islamophobia in partnership with all stakeholders; listen to their concerns and develop policies that will continue to ensure we live in an inclusive city.

1.0 Purpose

- 1.1 This report provides background information on: the All-Party Parliamentary Group on British Muslims (APPG) definition of Islamophobia, other optional definitions and proposes appropriate recommendations to Council.

2.0 Background

- 2.1 This briefing is prepared following a request to consider where the Council stands on Islamophobia. The Council has committed itself to and delivered a truly broad range of actions and initiatives to combat the scourge of racism over many years. It does not however have a statement in its Constitution; in the Councillor or the Employee Codes of Conduct that specifically mentions challenging this form of racism or of any other form of racism, other than that of Anti-Semitism. Governance Committee approved a recommendation on 11 September 2020 which resulted in an addition to the Council's Constitution only, i.e. not to the Codes of Conduct.¹ Officers have previously drafted a briefing on Islamophobia in 2019 but at the time it was decided not to proceed with a Council adoption of a stance based on a definition as at that time there was no specific definition of Islamophobia that enjoyed broad support. The Government's response to the All-Party Parliamentary Group on British Muslims (APPG) consultation work being to seek further development of the definition.

- 2.2 The APPG was launched in 2017. The Group was established to highlight the aspirations and challenges facing British Muslims; to celebrate the contributions of Muslim communities to Britain and to investigate prejudice, discrimination and hatred against Muslims in the UK.

- 2.3 The APPG argues that, in order to tackle anti-Muslim hatred, the "Government, statutory agencies, civil society organisations and principally, British Muslim communities" should adopt this "working definition of Islamophobia", which emerged from its inquiry:

"Islamophobia is rooted in racism and is a type of racism that targets expressions of Muslimness or perceived Muslimness".

- 2.4 The Runnymede Trust in its 1997 Report popularised the term Islamophobia because it recognised that racism against Muslims was going unchallenged because Muslims were not considered to be a 'racial' group.

- 2.5 The Muslim Council of Britain (MCB) supports the APPG definition of Islamophobia following its year-long consultation across the UK; its June 2019 report 'Defining Islamophobia: A Contemporary Understanding of How Expressions of Muslimness are Targeted' argues that the APPG definition of Islamophobia. First put forward in 2019, "has since become the preeminent reference point for Islamophobia in the UK today."

- 2.6 The MCB report, gives a detailed account of how the definition has since been embraced by Muslim communities around the Country and proposes for this most "preeminent definition of Islamophobia to be taken up."

- 2.7 The report also claims that "the APPG definition of Islamophobia has been adopted by a cross section of political parties, local government, civil society and activists" all motivated by the desire to challenge hatred and discrimination against Muslims. The report amplifies

the need for all civil society leaders to take a proactive approach to identifying and addressing Islamophobia.

- 2.8 It is worthy to note that 22 local authorities have adopted the APPG definition including Walsall, Manchester, Birmingham, Coventry and a number of London Borough Councils.
- 2.9 The latest figures for Islamophobic hate crime in Wolverhampton indicate that there have been 6 incidents of Islamophobic hate crime between May and August 2021 from a total of 375 reported incidents. It should be noted however that Islamophobic incidents are not considered race hate crimes and that some incidents will only be indicated as a religious hate incident when they are actually Islamophobic in nature. Additionally, it should also be noted that reported incidents of hate crime are a very small proportion of the actual number.
- 2.10 With the low reporting rates of hate crime on grounds of religion, this is a community that the Community Safety Partnership needs to reach out to and understand the experiences of the local Muslim community.
- 2.11 Islamophobic incidents can be recorded as both religious based hate incidents and racist incidents. Muslims may be practising or not, but still be targeted due to their ethnicity, and non-Muslims, who are from South Asian, Middle Eastern or other ethnic groups associated with the stereotype of a Muslim, can also be targeted with Islamophobia. Given the significant size of the South Asian population in Wolverhampton this discussion needs to encompass all affected communities.

3.0 Other Definitions

- 3.1 A number of English / Oxford dictionary definitions of Islamophobia do exist, such as: "Irrational fear of, aversion to, or discrimination against Islam or people who practice Islam."
- 3.2 "Islamophobia is the fear, hatred of, or prejudice against the Islamic religion or Muslims generally."
- 3.3 In the 1997 Runnymede report, Islamophobia was defined as:

"An outlook or world-view involving an unfounded dread and dislike of Muslims, which results in practices of exclusion and discrimination."
- 3.4 Another definition widely used:

"Islamophobia is rooted in racism or prejudice of Islam."
- 3.5 "Islamophobia is any distinction, exclusion, or restriction towards, or preference against, Muslims (or those perceived to be Muslims) that has the purpose or effect of nullifying or impairing the recognition, enjoyment or exercise, on an equal footing, of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural or any other field of public life".

Runnymede Trust, *Islamophobia Still A Challenge*. 2017

- 3.6 "a prejudice, aversion, hostility, or hatred towards Muslims and encompasses any distinction, exclusion, restriction, discrimination, or preference against Muslims that has the purpose or effect of nullifying or impairing the recognition, enjoyment or exercise, on an

equal footing, of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural or any other field in public life.”

MEND – Muslim Engagement and Development. 2018

- 3.7 ‘In our reporting, Islamophobia includes when someone is targeted, discriminated against or excluded in any way, due to their actual or perceived Muslim identity. It also includes prejudice that promotes fear against Muslims and Islam’
- 3.8 A brief web-search indicates that Councils who have adopted a definition of Islamophobia have adopted the APPG definition though only a small number have adopted the definition on Islamophobia at this time.

4.0 Options and Reasons for Recommendations

- 4.1 Adopting the APPG definition could be seen to add value to the existing commitment to Equality and Diversity and help contribute to the Council's compliance with the Equality Act 2010 and Public Sector Equality Duty, particularly in relation to those that come under the Religion and Belief Protected Characteristic.
- 4.2 The adoption of the definition will support CWC and the Community Safety Partnership in proactively tackling Islamophobia in Wolverhampton.

5.0 Financial Implications

- 5.1 It is anticipated that any policy and training material reviews required following the adoption of the Islamophobia definition will be conducted using existing staffing resources. [GE/20092021/D]

6.0 Legal Implications

- 6.1 Whilst the APPG definition of Islamophobia is not legally binding its adoption will support the Council's obligations under the Equality Act 2010, and its responsibilities under the Public Sector Equality Duty, to demonstrate due regard and to:
- a. Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct prohibited by the Act.
 - b. Advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not
 - c. Foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not. [SZ/27092021/P]

7.0 Equality Implications

- 7.1 Part of the issue when considering the definition of Islamophobia in relation to the provisions of the Equality Act 2010 is that unlike Anti-Semitism where people from a Jewish faith background constitute a racial, as well as a religious group, is that Muslims do not constitute

a racial group and therefore harassment or discrimination of Muslims, as far as the Act is concerned would relate to Religion and Belief discrimination or harassment only.

7.2 Adoption of the APPG definition of Islamophobia, would not conflict with the Council's duties under the Equality Act 2010. It will be a matter for the Council to consider how these definitions are given effect in equality policies and the codes of conduct for councillors and employees

7.3 Should the Council adopt a definition from this report the Council's Constitution, codes, policies or strategies etc will be amended and be the subject of a future report(s) to ratify the proposals.

8.0 All other Implications

8.1 There are no other implications arising from the recommendation in this report.

9.0 Schedule of background papers

9.1 None
