

3rd June 2019

Tackling discrimination and prejudice: MCA adoption of definitions of antisemitism and Islamophobia

Purpose of Report

The Mayoral Combined Authority is asked that as a body it adopts an agreed definition of antisemitism and agrees its intention to do so in relation to Islamophobia to help ensure there is clarity about what antisemitism is and what Islamophobia is as part of the MCA and LEP's general equal opportunities policy.

Thematic Priority

N/A

Freedom of Information and Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972

The paper will be available under the Combined Authority Publication Scheme.

Recommendations

That the Mayoral Combined Authority adopts the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) working definition of antisemitism;

That the MCA agrees its intention to adopt a working definition of Islamophobia when there is greater clarity and a shared understanding of the term.

1. Introduction

- 1.1 MCAs, Combined Authorities and local authorities across the country are increasingly taking a stand against prejudice. The Sheffield City Region is a diverse part of the United Kingdom and at its strongest when our citizens and communities recognise that there is more that unites than divides us.
- 1.2 By adopting recognised working definitions of antisemitism and Islamophobia the MCA will be demonstrating its commitment to tackling racist and religious hatred and all forms of discrimination.

2. Proposal and justification

- 2.1 The adoption of the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance working definition of antisemitism will give assurance to the City Region's communities of the MCA's commitment that antisemitic behaviours will not be tolerated. The working definition of antisemitism, as defined by the IHRA, is below:

"Antisemitism is a certain perception of Jews, which may be expressed as hatred toward Jews. Rhetorical and physical manifestations of antisemitism are directed toward Jewish or non-Jewish individuals and/or their property, toward Jewish community institutions and religious facilities."

- 2.2** Similarly, adoption of a working definition of Islamophobia will send a powerful message of united determination to end Islamophobia. A possibility is the All Party Parliamentary Group definition assuming the current debate about it brings greater clarity and a shared consensus in its favour. The working definition of Islamophobia, as defined by the APPG, is below:

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

- 2.3** The IHRA is an intergovernmental body established in Stockholm in 1998. It comprises 30+ member nations whose purpose is to place political and social leaders’ support behind the need for Holocaust education, remembrance and research, both nationally and internationally. Its definition of anti-Semitism was adopted during a plenary meeting in Bucharest in May 2016. In January 2017 the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government wrote to every council leader in the country urging them to adopt the IHRA’s definition of antisemitism. As well as being adopted by UK Government the definition has been adopted by the Scottish and Welsh Governments, the Greater London Assembly, several Mayoral and non-Mayoral Combined Authorities, more than 130 local councils, the police, Crown Prosecution Service and the judiciary. (Data at 2018.)
- 2.4** The APPG is currently investigating prejudice and discrimination against British Muslims and the aim of their definition is to build a common understanding of the causes and consequences of Islamophobia and show a united determination to end it. The definition was finalised by the APPG at the end of November 2018, following two years of consultation. Authorities which have so far adopted the definition include the GLA, Newham, Islington, Redbridge and Oxford. The definition is currently the subject of Parliamentary and media debate.

3. Consideration of alternative approaches

- 3.1** None. While there is no statutory requirement to do so, the adoption of a clear and practical working definition of antisemitism and a statement of intent in relation to a definition of Islamophobia will give clarity to the MCA’s understanding of these terms. Adoption of working definitions will be a strong gesture by a responsible organisation giving assurance to the city region’s communities and citizens more generally that antisemitic and Islamophobic behaviour and discrimination are not tolerable and have no place in the Sheffield City Region.

4. Implications

- 4.1 Financial – None**
- 4.2 Legal –** adoption of the definition would be non-legally binding and there is no intention to use it as a legal tool.
- 4.3 Risk Management – None**
- 4.4 Equality, Diversity and Social Inclusion**
This proposal clearly supports wider equality, diversity and social inclusion agendas.

5. Communications

- 5.1** By signing up to the IHRA definition of antisemitism and stating an intention to sign up to a definition of Islamophobia the SCR will be sending a powerful message of its pride in the City Region’s diversity and of its united determination and clear commitment to end antisemitism and Islamophobia. The MCA decision will be communicated via the usual channels.

6. Appendices/Annexes

6.1 None

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Background papers used in the preparation of this report are available for inspection at: 11 Broad Street West, Sheffield S1 2BQ

Other sources and references: N/A