

LIVERPOOL CITY REGION COMBINED AUTHORITY

To: The Metro Mayor and Members of the Combined Authority

Meeting: 12 April 2019

Authority/Authorities Affected: All

EXEMPT/CONFIDENTIAL ITEM: No

Non-Key Decision

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF POLICY AND STRATEGIC COMMISSIONING

ADOPTION OF THE WORKING DEFINITION OF ISLAMOPHOBIA

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 This report will enable the definition of Islamophobia from the All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on British Muslims to be officially adopted by the Combined Authority.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 It is recommended that the Liverpool City Region Combined Authority formally adopts the working definition of Islamophobia as promoted by the All-Party Parliamentary Group on British Muslims:

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

3. BACKGROUND

- 3.1 In 2017 the Runnymede Trust, the UK's leading independent race equality think tank, published its twentieth anniversary report on Islamophobia. The report, marking two decades since the publication of "Islamophobia: A Challenge for Us All", which originally introduced the term into the policy and political lexicon, highlighted how Islamophobia continues to affect British Muslim communities in a negative way. The follow on report with its title, "Islamophobia: Still a Challenge for Us All", encapsulates the persistence of the corrosive effect anti-Muslim sentiment and behaviours have on Muslims and wider society.
- 3.2 The 2017 report also describes that it is not just British Muslims who are impacted by Islamophobia but British society at large who, by virtue of normalised prejudice

against Muslim beliefs and practice, act to the detriment of social harmony and social inclusion.

3.3 In response to the publication of “Islamophobia: Still a Challenge for Us All” the APPG on British Muslims opened its inquiry into a working definition of Islamophobia in April 2018. The report of the inquiry describes hearing from academics, lawyers, local politicians, social activists, campaign groups, and individuals in Muslim communities across the UK about how instrumental a definition of Islamophobia would be to the political will and institutional determination to tackle it. Developing an agreed definition of the problem is clearly a sensible step to take in responding to it. Indeed the development of the IHRA’s working definition on Anti-Semitism provides an appropriate model for the approach.

3.4 However, the APPG identifies that there has been no attempt to adopt a definition of Islamophobia by Government despite recognising the significant impact it has on British Muslim communities. Policy proposals have variously referred to the issue of anti-Muslim bigotry and its effects. In addition, hate crime actions plans since 2012 have placed emphasis on measuring, tackling and educating people on anti-Muslim hatred but in the absence of an agreed definition, with the term being omitted in the 2012, 2014 and 2016 hate crime action plans. In the 2018 ‘Action against hate, the UK government’s plan for tackling hate crime – ‘two years on’ strategy, Islamophobia appears as a concept although once again no definition is forthcoming in the document.

3.5 The APPG reports deliberating whether the term Islamophobia should remain in continued use or whether an alternative term, such as anti-Muslim hatred, should be adopted instead. However, the APPG received an overwhelming amount of evidence across governmental, community, academic, and public and private sector organisations who attested to the cogency and desirability of retaining the term Islamophobia. This was on the basis that;

- it has established itself in the political and policy lexicon,
- has gained traction over time and
- was the predominant choice among Muslims to name and describe the hatred and hostility targeted at them on the basis of their Muslimness.

Islamophobia was the term of choice among British Muslims to describe their experience.

3.6 The APPG therefore says it recognised that the lack of a widely adopted working definition of Islamophobia had lowered the threshold and led to an increase in Islamophobia in society to devastating effect. The detectable shift from overt to subtler or respectable, manifestations of Islamophobia - the normalisation of the prejudice to the extent it is rendered almost invisible to many - warrants a definition that can arrest and reverse its present trajectory.

3.7 The APPG considered the recent history of definitions of Islamophobia in line with the written and oral evidence presented. In analysing the quantitative and, mostly, qualitative data, it describes how a thread of three key factors emerged: the *process* of Islamophobia, the *actions* that qualify as Islamophobic, and the *impact* of

Islamophobia. As a result, the APPG concluded that any definition must include the aforementioned three factors (process, action(s) and impact).

- 3.8 The aim of establishing a working definition of Islamophobia is neither motivated by, nor intended to curtail, free speech or criticism of Islam as a religion. Evidence read and heard by the APPG clearly delineated between the desirability of criticism, debate and free discussion of Islam as a religion. Such criticism, debate and free discussion by Muslims and non-Muslim participants in the inquiry. Consideration was also given to the victimisation of Muslims through the targeting of expressions of Muslimness to deny or impair their fundamental freedoms and human rights. Criticism of religion is a fundamental right in an open society and is enshrined in a commitment to freedom of speech. No open society can place religion above criticism. The working definition of Islamophobia is not formulated with the purpose of protecting Islam from free and fair criticism or debate. The definition recommended here has been developed through conscientious deliberation that has sought to negotiate the tensions arising between freedom of speech and freedom of religion. Adoption of such definitions is in full recognition that in a democratic society it is both possible and necessary. There is evidence arising from the adoption of definitions relating to other forms of group-based hostility such as anti-Semitism, therefore showing that it is indeed possible. The available evidence confirms that Muslim communities in the UK are experiencing heightened levels of Islamophobia and that adoption of the definition is therefore necessary.
- 3.9 Adoption by the Combined Authority of the working definition of Islamophobia is particularly timely as an act of solidarity with Muslim communities in the City Region and beyond in the wake of the appalling massacre of 50 Muslim worshippers at two Mosques in Christchurch, New Zealand on 15 March 2019. Tell MAMA (Measuring Anti-Muslim Attacks), the hate-crime reporting service, reports that there was a 593% increase in anti-Muslim hate crime incidents between 15 and 21 March. 89% of those incidents contained direct references to the Christchurch terror attacks and featured gestures such as mimicking firearms being fired at Muslims. Tell MAMA identifies this increase as more significant than similar spikes following the EU referendum in 2016 and the Manchester Arena attack in 2017.
- 3.10 Since publication of the APPG's "Report on the inquiry into a working definition of Islamophobia/anti-Muslim hatred" their definition of Islamophobia has been adopted by the Labour Party, the Liberal Democrats, Mayor of London Sadiq Khan on behalf of the GLA, 750 British Muslim organisations, 50 MPs, and 80 academics.

4. RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 There are no resource implications arising directly from this report.

5. RISKS AND MITIGATION

- 5.1 There is a risk that failure to make clear the Combined Authority's strong support for the APPG on British Muslims' working definition of Islamophobia, particularly in the current context, will give succour to those who seek to discriminate against and spread hatred towards Muslims on the basis of their Muslimness or perceived Muslimness. This will be mitigated by expressing unequivocal support for the working definition of Islamophobia.

6. EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 As a recognised religious minority, Muslims are protected from hate and discrimination by existing UK legislation, such as the Crime and Disorder Act 1998, and the Equality Act 2010. Any criminal offence can be a racist or religious hate crime, if it can be proven that the offender targeted the victim because of their prejudice or hostility based on race or religion. There are two main types of racist and religious hate crime:

- racially or religiously aggravated offences under the Crime and Disorder Act 1998
- any other offences for which the sentence can be increased under the Criminal Justice Act 2003 if they are classed as a hate crime

In both cases, when a criminal offence is classed as a racist or religious hate crime, the judge can impose a tougher sentence on the offender.

- 6.2 However, such legal protection operates on the basis of a high bar that can fail to take account of the insidious nature of Islamophobia, where even the lack of an agreed definition has undermined efforts to counter anti-Muslim hatred.
- 6.3 The working definition of Islamophobia has therefore been developed and promulgated in order to ensure that culprits will not be able to get away with being anti-Muslim because the term is ill-defined, or because different organisations or bodies in the UK have different interpretations of it.

7. COMMUNICATION ISSUES

- 7.1 The APPG report describes being informed by widespread consultation with academics, lawyers, local and nationally elected officials, Muslim organisations, activists, campaigners, and local Muslim communities.

8. CONCLUSION

- 8.1 For the reasons set out above, and in order to be consistent with the position adopted by the Combined Authority in relation to the IHRA working definition of anti-Semitism and anti-Jewish hatred, it is recommended that the APPG on British Muslims working definition of Islamophobia be adopted. This will provide a strong statement of support and empathy at this particularly troubling time for Muslim communities, but in a way that should help sustainably eradicate the scourge of discrimination against Muslim communities for the long term. Such a measure will serve to underline the Combined Authority's vision is for a fair and prosperous Liverpool City Region that is a safe, tolerant place to visit, live, work and prosper for all people, true to historic traditions.

KIRSTY PEARCE
Director of Policy and Strategic Commissioning

Contact Officer(s):
Olly Martins – Lead Officer for Fairness and Social Inclusion (07880 480 109)