

# Policy and Sustainability Committee

10.00am, Tuesday 23 May 2023

## Response to Adopting Definition of Islamophobia Motion

Executive/routine  
Wards  
Council Commitments

### 1. Recommendations

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- 1.1 Note the action to address the motion to adopt the definition of Islamophobia.
- 1.2 Agree the establishment of a short life Task and Finish Group to deepen the Council's understanding of the impacts of Islamophobia.

**Dr Deborah Smart**

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## Response to Adopting Definition of Islamophobia Motion

### 2. Executive Summary

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- 2.1 This report responds to the motion agreed at Council on 24 November 2022 to adopt the All-Party Parliamentary Group definition of Islamophobia and use it to embed and drive change both in the Council and across Edinburgh.

### 3. Background

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- 3.1 On 24 November, the Council agreed the following motion which:
- 3.1.1 Recognises that Edinburgh is home to a significant Muslim population for generations and that our Muslim citizens are an integral part of all aspects of city life.
  - 3.1.2 Unequivocally condemns prejudice and intolerance in all forms and recognises that Islamophobia is rooted in racism.
  - 3.1.3 Therefore welcomes, endorses, and adopts the working APPG (All Party Parliamentary Group) definition of Islamophobia, including examples of holding Muslims to double standards, asking Muslims to account for actions of others based on nothing more than being of the same religion and making dehumanising, demonizing, or stereotypical allegations about Muslims – painting Muslims as a threat.
  - 3.1.4 Agrees to continue to tackle hate crime and Islamophobia in partnership with communities, Police Scotland and other stakeholders.
  - 3.1.5 Further agrees as a first step to support Islamophobia Awareness Month in November 2022 to use Council communication channels to bring understanding and attention to the scourge of Islamophobia and encourage better reporting of incidents to the police.
  - 3.1.6 Also requests a report within three cycles to Policy and Sustainability Committee detailing how the APPG definition can be embedded across Council work and consider how Council can raise awareness of crime motivated by prejudice on the grounds of actual or perceived religion.

## 4. Main report

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- 4.1 The Equality Act 2010 (2010 Act) sets out the Public Sector Equality Duty to tackle discrimination, advance equality of opportunity and promote good relations both in the workforce and community. The 2010 Act prohibits discrimination in relation to protected characteristics, including discrimination on the grounds of religion or belief.
- 4.2 The UK All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on British Muslims agreed the following:
- ‘Islamophobia is rooted in racism and is a type of racism that targets expressions of Muslimness or perceived Muslimness.’*
- 4.3 The adoption of the APPG definition does not replace existing legal duties under the Equality Act 2010 nor is it a legal requirement to adopt this definition or take any action under the definition. The existing duties under the 2010 Act and any subsequent case law continue to apply to the Council and take precedence over the definition.
- 4.4 The definition has been endorsed by all political parties in the Scottish Parliament and has been adopted by the Liberal Democrats, UK Labour, Plaid Cymru, SNP Westminster Group and the Muslim Council of Britain. It has not been adopted by either the UK or Scottish Governments. It should also be noted that there is no agreed definition of ‘Muslimness’ which leaves it open to interpretation and individual sentiment.
- 4.5 Notwithstanding the legal position set out above, the definition does provide a useful mechanism for supporting current and new activity through promoting a shared understanding of Islamophobia.
- 4.6 Across the Council, work is underway to tackle islamophobia. This is set out below.
- 4.7 The Council’s [Equality and Diversity Framework 2021 to 2025](#) sets out how the Council will fulfil its legal duties under the Equality Act 2010 and the Public Sector Equality Duty. Key aims of the Framework include:
- 4.7.1 To ensure that people at risk from harm through poverty and deprivation, hate crime or discrimination, violence against women, children and young people, or of becoming involved in crime, are protected and supported.
- 4.7.2 Children and young people have improved health and wellbeing because there is a reduction in bullying and prejudice-based incidents.
- 4.7.3 A more diverse and inclusive working environment is experienced by colleagues who share protected characteristics and colleagues are supported by an inclusive workplace culture and feel confident to challenge prejudice-based behaviours.

- 4.8 Details of these outcomes and progress towards their delivery is detailed in the [Equality and Diversity Framework 2021-2025: Equality Outcomes and Mainstreaming Interim Progress Report](#) to Policy and Sustainability on 21 March 2023.
- 4.9 Additionally themes in the Education Children and Families 'Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Plan' ([7.2 Promoting Equality.pdf \(edinburgh.gov.uk\)](#) ) include Preventing and Responding to Bullying and Prejudice, and developing an Inclusive Curriculum.
- 4.10 In 2020, we strengthened our procedure for Preventing and Responding to Bullying and Prejudice ([Bullying – The City of Edinburgh Council](#)) and have supported schools through training and advice to review and implement their local policies. Appendix 1 of the authority procedure highlights the importance of knowledge and understanding of the traditions, beliefs and practices of different faiths, with specific reference to how Islamophobia impacts on Muslim children and young people, families and communities, and those who are perceived to be Muslim.
- 4.11 In May 2022, we launched guidance for schools on developing an Inclusive, Diverse and Decolonised Curriculum. A thematic review of Equalities in October 2022 found sector-leading examples of curriculum work and we continue to support schools to review and develop their curriculum. The guidance includes a glossary of terms related to racial literacy and refers to the AAPG definition of Islamophobia, alongside the Runnymede Trust definition.
- 4.12 We promote Interfaith Awareness Week, National Hate Crime Awareness Week, International Muslim History Month and World Hijab Day with schools through Equalities Newsletters and updates. We will also promote Islamophobia Awareness Month. In addition, we have specific guidance for schools on the five daily prayers in Islam and Ramadan. Several schools hold Eid celebrations including, in 2023, Gracemount Learning Community [Gracemount High \(@GracemountHigh\) / Twitter](#) and Lorne Primary School [EqualitiesLorneSt \(@LSP\\_Equalities\) / Twitter](#).
- 4.13 Understanding the demographic profile of our workforce is a fundamental part of how we determine our Equality, Diversity and Inclusion activity. Since November 2020 we have undertaken campaigns to encourage self-reporting which has improved our data. From 8.9% of our employees declaring their religion in November 2020 this has moved to 36% in March 2023. Whilst it is helpful to see this improvement, more work is planned to improve this further so that we can inform our actions.
- 4.14 The Council also works within the legislative framework of the Antisocial Behaviour etc Scotland Act 2004 and as a landlord has a duty of care to our tenants. This is reflected in our Antisocial Behaviour Policy with support being provided to those who are victims of hate crime and more formative action being taken against those who are responsible for such crimes in partnership with our colleagues in Police Scotland.

- 4.15 Working in collaboration with Police Scotland, and key strategic partners such as the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service, Youth Justice and the NHS Lothian Mental Health Services, supports the Council to achieve common objectives and see tangible benefits to the safety and wellbeing of all our citizens across the City. Especially important within this is that this partnership working reflects our values of addressing inequality, operating sustainably, and attaining wellbeing for our city's residents. Hate Crime continues to be a focus, and this is reflected in the work across the local multi-agency Community Improvement Partnerships (CIPS) who meet regularly on a monthly basis to discuss any trends in reported crime and antisocial behaviour and take appropriate and proportionate action against those responsible.
- 4.16 Internally, we have a system to report and record prejudice-based incidents, including incidents of islamophobia or incidents where religion or perceived religion is the motivation for unacceptable behaviour. During the launch period (Autumn 2020) we ran a series of articles outlining what constitutes a prejudice-based incident and reinforcing our position as an employer that we take these allegations very seriously. We also displayed promotional materials in workplaces across the Council encouraging all colleagues to play their part in identifying and challenging prejudice and discriminatory behaviour. A [web page](#) (both internal and external facing) provides colleagues with more information and sources of support. The reporting system is regularly referred to when we run Newsbeat articles focusing on D&I related matters.
- 4.17 In addition to the promotion in education settings outlined above, there is a commitment to support Islamophobia Awareness Month in November each year. Activity will include internal promotion through intranet (Orb) and managers' email updates as well as sharing relevant information externally through our social media and other channels. This is in addition to the regular activity throughout the year [which promotes diversity and inclusion](#). This includes promoting action days/weeks such as Race Equality Week, Elimination of Racial Discrimination Day, Ramadan and Black History Month. Activity also includes regular features on activities of our diversity and inclusion colleague networks.

## 5. Next Steps

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- 5.1 There is still more we can do to understand the challenge of islamophobia. Towards this, proposed next steps include:
- 5.1.1 Continued implementation of the Equality and Diversity Framework 2021 – 2025.
  - 5.1.2 Establishment of a cross party short life Task and Finish Group to help deepen the Council's understanding of Islamophobia and the actions needed to support this.
  - 5.1.3 It is proposed that this group will report findings to the Policy and Sustainability Committee in advance of Islamophobia Awareness Month in November 2023.

## **6. Financial impact**

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- 6.1 The activities outlined in the report are met from the Council's existing budgets.

## **7. Stakeholder/Community Impact**

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- 7.1 The proposals assist the Council to deliver its equality and rights outcomes and the delivery of the Equality Act 2010 public sector equality duties to eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation, advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations.

## **8. Background reading/external reference**

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- 8.1 None.

## **9. Appendices**

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- 9.1 None.