

# **EQUALITIES SUB-COMMITTEE**

## **MINUTES**

Of a Virtual meeting held on Monday 24 August 2020 following the Extra Policy and Resources Committee from 8pm to 9.02pm.

Councillors present:

Stephen Giles-Medhurst (Chair)  
Sarah Nelmes (Vice-Chair)  
Matthew Bedford  
Steve Drury  
Roger Seabourne

Phil Williams  
Alex Hayward  
Reena Ranger  
Joan King (Substitute for Cllr Stephen Cox)

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Also in attendance: Councillors Joanna Clemens, Paula Hiscocks, Joy Mann, Alex Michaels and Debbie Morris

Officers present: Rebecca Young, Acting Head of Community Partnerships  
Jayne LaGrua, Principal Solicitor  
Sarah Haythorpe, Principal Committee Manager

### **ESC01/20 APPOINTMENT OF THE CHAIR OF THE SUB-COMMITTEE**

Councillor Stephen Giles-Medhurst was proposed and duly seconded to be appointed as Chair of the Equalities sub-committee.

RESOLVED:

That Councillor Stephen Giles-Medhurst be appointed Chair of the Equalities sub-committee for the Local Government Year 2020/21.

### **COUNCILLOR STEPHEN GILES-MEDHURST IN THE CHAIR**

### **ESC02/20 APPOINTMENT OF THE VICE-CHAIR OF THE SUB-COMMITTEE**

Councillor Sarah Nelmes was proposed and duly seconded to be appointed as Vice-Chair of the sub-committee.

RESOLVED:

That Councillor Sarah Nelmes be appointed Vice-Chair of the Equalities sub-committee for the Local Government Year 2020/21.

### **ESC03/20 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

An apology for absence was received from Councillor Stephen Cox with Councillor Joan King as the substitute Member.

**ESC04/20 NOTICE OF OTHER BUSINESS**

The Chair announced that the appendix to Item 8

**ESC05/20 DECLARATION OF INTERESTS**

There were no declarations of interest.

**ESC06/20 TERMS OF REFERENCE**

The sub-committee's terms of reference as discussed at the preceding meeting of the Extra Policy and Resources Committee were accepted and noted.

RESOLVED:

That the Terms of Reference be noted.

**ESC07/20 ANTI-SEMITISM DEFINITION**

The Chair introduced the item. This had been a difficult process for many people. He said any hate crime or religious discrimination was to be condemned, and it was clearly the Council's intention to adopt the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance's (IHRA) definition of antisemitism.

He proposed that the Equalities Sub-Committee make the appropriate recommendations to the Policy and Resources Committee on 1 September 2020 which in turn would recommend the adoption of the definition at the Extraordinary Council meeting immediately following the Committee meeting.

The Chair expressed his apologies on behalf of the Council to everyone affected by antisemitism and for the delay in approving this recommendation.

In accordance with the Council's Committee virtual meeting protocol which sits alongside the Council Procedure Rules the Chair of the Northwood United Synagogue spoke on the proposed terms of reference of the sub-committee.

The Chair formally moved the recommendation, seconded by Councillor Alex Hayward.

On being put to the Sub-Committee, the voting was 9 For, 0 Against and 0 Abstentions. The Chair declared the recommendation carried unanimously.

RECOMMEND:

That Equalities sub-committee approves the IHRA definition and makes formal recommendation to Policy and Resources Committee to adopt the definition as follows:

"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".

**ESC08/20 ISLAMOPHOBIA DEFINITION**

The Chair said the sub-committee needed to bear in mind that a large percentage, 47%, of all hate crime is directed at Muslims with 3,530 in the last Home Office statistics for England and Wales. There had been some concerns in past discussions in relation to an agreed definition of Islamophobia and there clearly had been some other definitions both in terms of the dictionary and in terms of the Runnymede report from 20 years ago. It is clear that the agreed definition which is included in the papers circulated and prepared by Officers had been agreed by a large number of bodies including the Scottish Government, the Greater London Authority, the Mayor of London, a large number of Councils particularly those with a large Muslim population such as Manchester as well as our neighbours Watford and Harrow. He felt that the sub-committee should be cautious of adopting a definition which does not have a wide range of support from Muslim Groups hence the reason why he had referred to in the revisions to the recommendations the Muslim Council of Britain. Equally in speaking to them it is quite clear to me that agreeing this definition is the first step in helping to address the issue they face and also people perceived to be Muslim with hate crime. It is regrettable that there was a 14% increase in hate crime relating to race or religion in 2018/19 and a further increase in those against Muslims. It is the case that the All Party Parliamentary Group (APPG), which took a year of evidence in relation to this, with 185 items of written evidence, 22 oral items of evidence and 54 organisations or representatives of three community consultation events for this particular definition to be agreed. The Runnymede Trust provided a very early definition but had made it clear that it supports an official definition of Islamophobia and saw adopting a definition of Islamophobia as anti-Muslim racism. The adoption of an official definition of Islamophobia would go a long way to ensuring all Muslims in this country felt listened to, cared about and could put an end to the engagement fatigue that the communities feel and foster better relations in the community and the establishment as a whole. This statement was written in the Runnymede Trust mission to the Home Office Select Committee. The Trust was critical of the Government for adopting the APPG definition.

The Chair said he had previously circulated a slightly revised recommendation for consideration by the sub-committee with regard to recommendations which he proposed and read out as follows:

The Muslim Council of Britain (MCB) supported definition of Islamophobia is:

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

The sub-committee however does not endorse the overall content of 'Islamophobia Defined' report that definition stems from.

That the Council will continue to prioritise tackling hate crime and Islamophobia in partnership work with all stakeholders to listen to their concerns and develop policies that will continue to ensure we live in an inclusive District through task and finish groups and consultation.

The Acting Head of Community Partnerships said the report provided a brief overview of the background information on the APPG definition of Islamophobia but did not go into detail on the reports and documents that had gone alongside in part due to the short timescales of pulling all the reports together for the sub-committee. Officers had outlined some other possible definitions in the report following research undertaken but had yet to find any other Councils which had adopted a different definition. The Scottish Parliament had gone with the adoption of the definition but not associating with the report itself. For other Councils in Hertfordshire only Watford had adopted the APPG definition so far

and others were looking at it or considering it in the future. In the same way as the previous report Officers had highlighted some of the community information around Three Rivers and some work that the Community Safety Partnership do in terms of their attention monitoring reports that we receive showing increases in hate crime that we are working on with all communities. Officers would be seeking over the next few months to develop this work through the Community Safety Partnership. This definition is also in line with the Council's Equalities Policy and would be reviewed by the Equalities sub-committee in the future to ensure all definitions that we do and adopt are in line with the Equalities Policy.

A Member spoke of an Anti-Hatred Muslim Group which comprised several senior members of society, and suggested the Council should adopt a correct definition as suggested by the Runnymede Trust and then pledge to adopt the Anti-Muslim hate group's definition when it is published. This would go far beyond the limitations within the current proposals. The Member said that Islam wasn't a race, and the faith encompassed many races and groups which would be protected.

The Chair said no timeline existed on this matter, and there was no reason to not agree a definition.

Councillor Joan King said no one should be discriminated against, and wished therefore to second the Chair's recommendation.

A Member asked why the British Government had not endorsed the APPG definition of Islamophobia, to which it was stated that no reason was given but the Runnymede Trust had been critical of the Government's stance. It was known, that several senior Government Members did support the APPG definition.

A Member said it was important that this recommendation was passed as amended, and it could be revisited at a later date. A similar procedure should then apply for other religions and minorities, including atheists, so that all elements of society were protected.

A Member asked why there was a rush to push through a policy when thorough debate and examination was required of the complexities, particularly if opposing factions existed within the same faith.

The Chair said there was a need to adopt a position on the issue, and one which was supported by the largest Muslim Group in the country. Of concern, though, were the contents of the 'Defined Report' within the original recommendation.

The Member said this matter was far more contentious than others discussed at Council meetings, and was not influenced by what the Scottish Government had approved, and that it was what took place in Three Rivers that mattered.

A Member said the Anti-Semitism and Islamophobia issues did not compare, and the latter needed more time to consider and a more thorough debate. The Council should make its own decisions, and not be influenced by other bodies.

Councillor Alex Hayward requested a recorded vote, to which the Chair advised that voting in zoom would record how all the Members of the sub-committee voted and this could be recorded in the minutes. The Member clarified that she wished to see the result of the vote noted in the minutes.

The Chair advised that the Runnymede Trust had made recommendations to the Home Affairs Select Committee and expressed further concerns of British

Muslims that the state did not take seriously the views of the All Party Parliamentary Group, which he believed to be significant.

The Chair moved to a vote on the recommendation as amended.

On being put to the sub-committee, the voting was declared CARRIED by the Chair of the Meeting the voting being as follows:

For 6: Councillors Matthew Bedford, Steve Drury, Stephen Giles-Medhurst, Joan King, Sarah Nelmes and Phil Williams

Against 3: Councillors Alex Hayward, Reena Ranger and Roger Seabourne

Abstentions 0

The Chair declared the recommendation carried.

**RECOMMEND:**

That the Sub-Committee recommends to the Policy and Resources Committee to recommend to Council at the Extraordinary meetings on 1 September 2020 to adopt the recommendation as amended below:

The Muslim Council of Britain (MCB) supported definition of Islamophobia is:

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

The sub Committee however does not endorse the overall content of 'Islamophobia Defined' report that definition stems from.

And that the Council will: Continue to prioritise tackling hate crime and Islamophobia in partnership work with all stakeholders to listen to their concerns and develop policies that will continue to ensure we live in an inclusive District through task and finish groups and consultation.

## **ESC09/20 TIMELINE FOR THE EQUALITIES SUB-COMMITTEE WORKPLAN**

The Acting Head of Community Partnerships presented the draft version of the workplan. It stated that the Task and Finish groups were projected to be organised for September but advised the sub-committee they would be organised at a later time. The workplan would be updated accordingly.

The results of an Equalities Policy Survey would be presented to the sub-committee in November. A Prejudice and Harassment survey had also been commissioned and the results should be available shortly.

The next meeting of the Equalities Sub-Committee was on 28 September, before which the timeline would be refreshed and distributed.

The Acting Head of Community Partnerships confirmed that the Task and Finish objectives for 14 and 21 September were now to be deleted.

**RESOLVED:**

The Equalities sub-committee work plan as amended be noted.

**CHAIR**