

Adoption of the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance definition of Anti-Semitism

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Purpose of the Report

1. To seek member agreement of the adoption of the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance definition of Anti-Semitism.

Public Interest

2. As a measure that supports the Council's obligations under the Equality Act 2010, and its responsibilities under the Public Sector Equality Duty, adoption of the IHRA definition of anti-Semitism contributes to the council's approach to promoting equality and meeting its equality duties to the public, customers, contractors/suppliers and staff.

Recommendation

3. That Full Council adopt the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance definition of Anti-Semitism along with the accompanying illustrative examples.

Background

4. The definition

The International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA), founded in 1998, is an inter-governmental body that unites governments and experts to strengthen, advance and promote Holocaust education, research and remembrance and to uphold the commitments to the 2000 Stockholm Declaration.

The United Kingdom has been member of the IHRA since it was founded in 1998.

On 26 May 2016 in Bucharest, the Plenary of the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) adopted the following non-legally binding working definition of antisemitism along with supporting examples that may serve as illustrations:

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

“Manifestations of anti-Semitism might include the targeting of the state of Israel, conceived as a Jewish collectivity. However, criticism of Israel similar to that levelled against any other country cannot be regarded as anti-Semitic. Antisemitism frequently charges Jews with conspiring to harm humanity, and it is often used to blame Jews for “why things go wrong.” It is expressed in speech, writing, visual forms and action, and employs sinister stereotypes and negative character traits.”

The IHRA definition specifies eleven 'contemporary examples of antisemitism' in public life, the media, schools, the workplace, and in the religious sphere which could, taking into account the overall context, include but are not limited to:

- 1. Calling for, aiding, or justifying the killing or harming of Jews in the name of a radical ideology or an extremist view of religion.*
- 2. Making mendacious, dehumanizing, demonizing, or stereotypical allegations about Jews as such or the power of Jews as a collective — such as, especially but not exclusively, the myth about a world Jewish conspiracy or of Jews controlling the media, economy, government or other societal institutions.*
- 3. Jews as a people of being responsible for real or imagined wrongdoing committed by a single Jewish person or group, or even for acts committed by non-Jews.*
- 4. Denying the fact, scope, mechanisms (e.g. gas chambers) or intentionality of the genocide of the Jewish people at the hands of National Socialist Germany and its supporters and accomplices during World War II (the Holocaust).*
- 5. Accusing the Jews as a people, or Israel as a state, of inventing or exaggerating the Holocaust.*
- 6. Accusing Jewish citizens of being more loyal to Israel, or to the alleged priorities of Jews worldwide, than to the interests of their own nations.*
- 7. Denying the Jewish people their right to self-determination, e.g., by claiming that the existence of a State of Israel is a racist endeavour.*
- 8. Applying double standards by requiring of it a behaviour not expected or demanded of any other democratic nation.*
- 9. Using the symbols and images associated with classic antisemitism (e.g., claims of Jews killing Jesus or blood libel) to characterize Israel or Israelis.*
- 10. Drawing comparisons of contemporary Israeli policy to that of the Nazis.*
- 11. Holding Jews collectively responsible for actions of the state of Israel*

British Government and Local Government position

5. In December 2016 the British Government adopted the IHRA definition and the then Home Secretary Sajid Javid wrote to all council Leaders in January 2017 requesting that the definition be adopted at a local authority level.

To date, circa 200 local authorities in the UK have adopted the definition.

Current Climate

6. A record number of anti-Semitic incidents were recorded in the UK for the first six months of 2019 by the Community Security Trust. There were 892 reported incidents between January and June 2019, a 10% increase on the same period of 2018 – which also had a record high. The number of violent anti-Semitic assaults rose from 62 in the first half of 2018 to 85 in the same period of 2019. There were 38 incidents of damage and desecration of Jewish property; 710 of abusive behaviour, including verbal abuse, graffiti, abuse via social media and one-off cases of hate mail; 49 direct threats; and 10 cases of mass-mailed leaflets or emails. Sixty-two public figures became targets, as well as 102 Jewish community organisations, events and commercial premises.

In addition to the increasing number of incidents of anti-Semitism we have also seen high profile cases of alleged institutional anti-Semitism such as the controversy surrounding the national Labour Party.

Within this context, therefore, adoption of the IHRA definition by SSDC would be a timely act and provide a clear message to the council's customers and stakeholders of its position regarding anti-Semitism.

Legal Status

7. Whilst the IHRA definition of Anti-Semitism 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:
- Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct prohibited by the Act.
 - Advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.
 - Foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not

The IHRA definition serves, therefore, as a complementary measure that addresses equalities issues though seeking to deepen the understanding of anti-Semitism.

However, this proposal does not constitute a law. South Somerset like the rest of Britain, is built on free speech. Therefore the council would always uphold the rights of citizens to engage in reasoned debate. Therefore, non-anti-Semitic criticism of the policies of the government of Israel is entirely legitimate, as is the case with any country's government. The right to express such criticism is not restricted by this proposal.

Financial Implications

8. There are no financial implications in respect of this report.

Council Plan Implications

9. Adoption of the IHRA definition of Anti-Semitism would be wholly consistent with, and complement the Council's Equality and Diversity Policy, which in turn is fully aligned to all six Values that underpin the 2016-21 Council Plan i.e.
- Putting the customer first when developing plans and services
 - Supporting people and communities, enabling them to help themselves
 - Being open, transparent and with greater accessibility to those that need to use council services
 - Working with partners to improve services, efficiencies, resilience and influence
 - Embracing innovation and improved technology to improve customer service and access
 - Empowering a confident, flexible workforce

Carbon Emissions and Climate Change Implications

10. Consideration has been given to climate change implications and there is no foreseeable impact.

Equality and Diversity Implications

11. An Equality Impact Relevance Check Form was completed for this proposal which indicates that adopting the IHRA definition is unlikely to disproportionately disadvantage any protected characteristic, and does not directly prevent the promotion of understanding between different groups.

If members support the report's recommendation this will add value to our 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 those that come under the Religion and Belief Protected Characteristic.

Privacy Impact Assessment

12. No implications

Background Papers

Report to District Executive – October 2019
