

# **Somerset West and Taunton Council**

## **SWT Full Council – 3 December 2019**

### **Adoption of the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) Working Definition of Anti-Semitism**

**This matter is the responsibility of the Executive member for Community; Cllr Chris Booth**

**Report Author: Paul Harding, Strategy Specialist**

#### **1 Executive Summary / Purpose of the Report**

- 1.1 This report seeks agreement for the council to adopt the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance's (IHRA) definition of anti-Semitism, in line with central government's decision to do so and its encouragement of local authorities to follow suit. This is intended primarily as a clear signal of the council's intolerance for anti-Semitism and an aid to help our council and our community identify the types of actions that may be anti-Semitic so that these can be robustly challenged.
- 1.2 The definition has already been adopted by the British Government, Police, Crown Prosecution Service and Judiciary, the devolved administrations in Scotland and Wales as well as over 200 local councils.
- 1.3 Adoption of the definition does not imply that the Council believes discrimination of those of the Jewish faith is any more or less acceptable than discrimination relating to other faith groups. All discrimination is abhorrent.
- 1.4 Furthermore, the adoption of the definition, does not limit the right to ongoing debate and discussion over the Israeli /Palestine conflict or the state of Israel itself.

#### **2 Recommendations**

Full Council are asked to:-

- 2.1 Adopt the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance Working Definition on Anti-Semitism, including the examples.

#### **3 Risk Assessment**

- 3.1 Failure to adopt the IHRA definition could have a negative impact on the council's reputation and relationship with the Jewish community in our area.
- 3.2 The self-identified Jewish community in the SWT area numbers 87 people, based on the 2011 Census, in which 0.1% of our local population identified as Jewish (compared to 0.5% of people across England and Wales and 0.1% in Somerset).
- 3.3 However, this is likely to be something of an underestimate as completion of the question, 'What is your religion?' was the only voluntary question on the 2011 Census.
- 3.4 Many Jews who do not observe/are secular may not answer this question and there are also historical reasons why Jewish people may be reticent to disclose religion on public surveys, including ongoing anti-Semitism and the legacy of the Holocaust (or Shoah, as it is known in Hebrew).
- 3.5 There is a risk that adoption of the definition, is seen in some quarters as curtailing the right to free speech and, in particular, ongoing debate and discussion over the Israel/Palestine conflict and whether the definition or its examples may restrict legitimate views being expressed in this area.
- 3.6 It is the view of the UK government that this does not restrict debate about the situation in Israel/Palestine or the holding of views supportive of either side in the conflict.
- 3.7 On 15 October 2019, the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government wrote to Leaders of all councils in England, in which he strongly urged all Councils to adopt the definition or to explain to him any reluctance to do so. It is unclear what the political consequences, if any, of such a course would be.

## **4 Background**

- 4.1 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.
- 4.2 The United Kingdom has been member of the IHRA since it was founded in 1998.
- 4.3 On 26 May 2016 in Bucharest, the Plenary of the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) adopted the following non-legally binding working definition of anti-Semitism along with supporting examples that may serve as Illustrations.
- 4.4 Adopting the international definition, and examples, will help ensure that culprits will not be able to get away with being anti-Semitic because the term is ill-defined, or because different organisations or bodies have different interpretations of it.

### **4.5 The Definition**

“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. Anti-Semitism 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.”

- 4.7 The IHRA definition specifies eleven ‘contemporary examples of anti-Semitism’ 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:
- I. Calling for, aiding, or justifying the killing or harming of Jews in the name of a radical ideology or an extremist view of religion.
  - II. 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.
  - III. 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.
  - IV. 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).
  - V. Accusing the Jews as a people, or Israel as a state, of inventing or exaggerating the Holocaust.
  - VI. 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.
  - VII. 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.
  - VIII. Applying double standards by requiring of it a behaviour not expected or demanded of any other democratic nation.
  - IX. Using the symbols and images associated with classic anti-Semitism (e.g., claims of Jews killing Jesus or blood libel) to characterize Israel or Israelis.
  - X. Drawing comparisons of contemporary Israeli policy to that of the Nazis.
  - XI. Holding Jews collectively responsible for actions of the state of Israel.

## **5 Links to Corporate Strategy**

- 5.1 There is a direct link to Theme 3 (Homes & Communities) objective 3 (‘Reduce anti-social behaviour, through working with residents and our partners as well as tackle economic, social and health inequalities within the groups and communities that need extra support’) of our approved Corporate Strategy.
- 5.2 There is also a direct link to the Council’s approved equality objectives, in particular to ‘Work with Communities to improve the opportunities for integration and cohesion’.

## **6 Finance / Resource Implications**

- 6.1 There are no finance /resource implications arising from this report.

## **7 Legal Implications**

- 7.1 The IHRA definition of Anti-Semitism is not legally binding. However 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.
- 7.2 The IHRA definition serves, therefore, as a complementary measure that addresses equalities issues though seeking to deepen the understanding of anti-Semitism.

## **8 Climate and Sustainability Implications**

- 8.1 There are no carbon/environmental impacts arising from this report.

## **9 Safeguarding and/or Community Safety Implications**

- 9.1 Raising awareness of anti-Semitism among our community, our members and our workforce will help to promote good relations between British Jews and the rest of British society by working towards the elimination of racism, and anti-Semitism in particular.

## **10 Equality and Diversity Implications**

- 10.1 Adoption of the IHRA definition will support 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 to equality for our residents, customers, contractors/suppliers and staff who share the Protected Characteristic of Religion and Belief.

## **11 Social Value Implications**

- 11.1 There are no social value implications arising from this report.

## **12 Partnership Implications**

- 12.1 The Council has an important role in tackling hate crime in partnership with our communities and the local Police force.

## **13 Health and Wellbeing Implications**

- 13.1 Helping to maintain good relations between different members of our community helps keep Somerset West and Taunton a pleasant and positive place in which to live a happy and healthy life.

## **14 Asset Management Implications**

14.1 There are no asset management implications arising from this report.

## **15 Data Protection Implications**

15.2 There are no data protection implications arising from this report.

## **16 Consultation Implications**

16.1 The Somerset Equalities Officers Group, of which SWT are part, made contact with the Somerset Jewish Association and they are supportive of the Somerset local authorities adopting the definition.

16.2 Adoption of the IHRA definition of anti-Semitism has been strongly urged by a number of Jewish organisations nationally.

## **17 Scrutiny Comments / Recommendation(s)**

17.1 Not applicable.

### **Democratic Path:**

- **Scrutiny - No**
- **Executive – No**
- **Full Council – Yes**

### **Contact Officers**

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