

Anti-Muslim Prejudice

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Report of: Director of Communities, Housing and Environment

Report to: Executive Board

Will the decision be open for call in? Yes No

Does the report contain confidential or exempt information? Yes No

Brief summary

The vision for Leeds is to be the best city in the UK: one that is compassionate and caring with a strong economy, which tackles poverty and reduces inequalities. At the heart of this work is the council's approach to improving equality and tackling discrimination and disadvantage. The approach taken by the council and the improvement work that takes place recognises different people's needs, situations and goals and sets out to remove the barriers that limit what people can do or can be.

Tackling Anti-Muslim Prejudice has been identified as a priority area of work in order to deal with some of the key issues that affect Muslims in the city. The terrorist attack on Muslim worshippers at two mosques in Christchurch, New Zealand on 15 March 2019 brought into sharp relief the scale of threat against Muslims worldwide from individuals and groups that align themselves with white supremacist ideology. Since then, discussions about the levels of Anti-Muslim Prejudice in Leeds and across the UK have accelerated with many activists highlighting the need for a more proactive approach to tackle this rising phenomenon.

Over recent years there has been much deliberation about the need for a universally agreed definition of Islamophobia in the UK. This has mainly been led by the All Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on British Muslims who undertook a year-long inquiry into establishing a definition. Their definition – Islamophobia is rooted in racism and is a type of racism that targets expressions of Muslimness or perceived Muslimness – has been widely debated with some local authorities adopting the definition, some of them have chosen their own definition, whilst others reflect on its usefulness or await the governments work on a definition.

Regardless of the debate on the definition, it is important to recognise the pressing need to act against the rise in Anti-Muslim Prejudice. A definition is important so that perpetrators can be held accountable for their actions. Yet it is only a small part of the work that is needed as a definition alone in the absence of the necessary actions required to combat Anti-Muslim Prejudice is insufficient.

Recommendations

Executive Board is requested to:

- a) Note and comment on the work of the Council to better understand the extent and perceptions of Anti-Muslim Prejudice in the city.
- b) Endorse the adoption of the Leeds definition of Anti-Muslim Prejudice as set out in paragraph 15.
- c) Note the Elected Members responsible for this work are the Executive Member for Communities, Executive Member for Resources, and the Chair of the Hate Crime Strategic Board.
- d) Endorse the Chief Officer Safer and Stronger Communities develops and implements an action plan, reporting to the appropriate member led boards and the Director of Communities, Housing and Environment on this matter.

What is this report about?

- 1 This report sets out a council and citywide approach to supporting Muslim communities by addressing Anti-Muslim Prejudice. The work proposed in this paper responds to reducing the corporate risk on community cohesion.
- 2 In 1997, The Runnymede Trust published its pioneering report '**Islamophobia: a challenge for us all**' that described **Islamophobia and its implications** in more detail, as well as presenting a number of recommendations for practical action. Despite a number of reports by various organisations since then on this issue, the Runnymede report still sets the benchmark for tackling Islamophobia in all its forms and across a number of policy areas. This is evidenced through their 20th anniversary report in 2017 that highlights how the **scale of issues and challenges raised through their original publication in 1997 have intensified**.
- 3 A poll undertaken by Hope Not Hate in April 2019 provides further evidence. The results of the poll have found that **Muslims are overwhelmingly seen as different and viewed negatively in comparison to other religious groups**. Eighteen percent (18%) of people had an extremely negative view of Muslims. By contrast, just 7% shared the same view of Christians, 8% of Jews, 7% of Hindus, 7% of Sikhs, and 5% of atheists.
- 4 **Islamophobia can manifest itself in many forms**. The most clear and obvious examples are where verbal or physical assaults are directed towards individuals who appear to be of the Muslim faith. However, preventing such hate filled attacks is just one aspect of tackling Islamophobia. Other forms of Islamophobia, such as ensuring Muslims have access to the same opportunities as people of other faiths or non-faith, are equally as important. **Figure 1 identifies the key areas of focus required across a number of themes to effectively counter Islamophobia in all its forms**.
- 5 Although, the below areas of focus were identified over 20 years ago, many of the issues since that time have been exacerbated. In 2021, there were **increasing numbers of hate crimes** being reported against Muslims, the media is seen to make continued associations between Muslims and Islam with issues such as terrorism and paedophilia, and **young Muslims feel increasingly alienated** with the lack of opportunities available to them.
- 6 The research reinforces that unfounded hostility towards Islam also results in discrimination against Muslim individuals and communities in other areas of life and society. It also highlighted

that **Islamophobia continues to have a differential impact on the lives of the Muslim communities in the UK.**

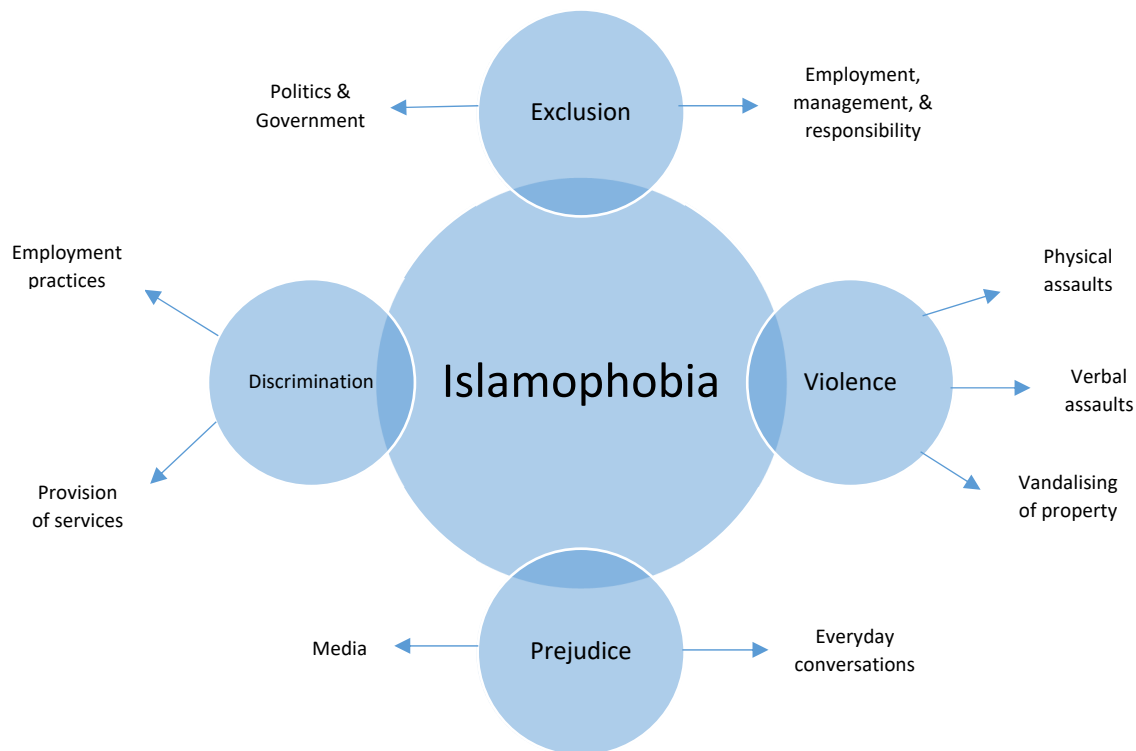


Figure 1 – A holistic approach to tackling Islamophobia (Source: The Runnymede Trust)

7 In addition to the areas highlighted in the diagram above, the Runnymede 20th Anniversary report **'Islamophobia: Still a challenge for us all'** identifies further areas where Muslim communities face disadvantage and discrimination. These include:

- Poverty and the Labour Market
- Racism
- Health Inequalities
- Housing
- Challenges facing Muslim communities and civic society
- Gender and Islamophobia

8 There is a growing body of evidence that suggests **work to tackle Anti-Muslim Prejudice is urgently required in Leeds**. This includes:

- Over the two year period 01/01/2020 – 31/12/2021, 312 offences in Leeds were identified as 'Anti-Muslim'. This accounts for 58.8% of all faith hate related incidents over that period.
- 'Public Order' was the most common offence type accounting for 53% of all offences, followed by 'Stalking and Harassment' accounting for 20% of offences.
- Most offences were recorded as 'has victim'¹. Of these, approximately 65% of offence victims were male and 35% were female. Where ethnicity was recorded, approximately 49% identified as 'Asian-Pakistani', and 18% identified as 'Other Asian'. Approximately 49% of offence victims were aged between 20 and 39 years, and 30% were aged between 40 and 59 years.

¹ The 'has victim' flag is to differentiate between victim as a person and victim as crown

- Approximately 60% of offences were recorded as 'has suspect'. Of these, approximately 65% of offence suspects were male and 35% were female. Where ethnicity was recorded, approximately 75% of offence suspects identified as 'White-British'. Approximately 40% of offence suspects were aged between 20 and 39 years, and 35% were aged between 40 and 59 years.
- A number of far-right demonstrations and protests by groups such as English Defence League (EDL), Yorkshire Patriots, Patriotic Alternative, and Britain First.
- Intelligence on far-right groups operating in Leeds, either online or offline.
- Targeting of hotels being used to accommodate Afghan refugees by far-right activists.
- Sticking and posters by far-right groups.
- An increasing number of far-right referrals to the Channel programme, the government's programme to divert individuals away from radicalisation.
- Consultation with young people by Leeds Muslim Youth Forum that identified a range of action points for consideration that would tackle Anti-Muslim Prejudice.

Tackling Anti-Muslim Prejudice is a key strand of current work being explored by the Leeds Race 4 Equality Forum under the leadership of the Executive Member for Resources.

Survey work and definition

- 9 In October 2020, Leeds City Council appointed the Centre for Trust, Peace and Social Relations based at Coventry University, to analyse the findings of an online survey, initiated by Leeds City Council, exploring Anti-Muslim Hatred. The survey was made available to the public from 09/03/2020 and was kept open for two months. The survey **explored public familiarity with anti-Muslim hatred or prejudice, experiences, witnessing and actions taken as a result of these**, in Leeds.
- 10 The survey was successful in attracting almost 3,000 responses² during a period when society was facing and responding to the Covid-19 pandemic. The analysis provides **evidence of a pervasive, damaging and multi-layered social problem** which is likely hampering the opportunities, participation and wellbeing of a great number of citizens in Leeds, **negatively impacting social relations** in the city. The headline findings from this survey are:
- three-quarters of Muslims in Leeds are very concerned about anti-Muslim hatred, rising to nearly 90% being either very or moderately concerned.
 - three-quarters of Muslim respondents have experienced or witnessed anti-Muslim hatred; and
 - more than 1 in 3 Muslim respondents are frequently the victim of anti-Muslim hatred in Leeds.
 - Despite the high prevalence, 67% of Muslims did not report incidents of anti-Muslim hatred to a relevant authority.
 - Nearly half of Muslim respondents believe that Muslims are not treated as equal citizens
 - Respondents were clear that anti-Muslim hatred is present throughout many facets of life in Leeds (and beyond).
 - Anti-Muslim hatred appears to be manifested in experiences of public and community services such as schools, NHS, housing, income support services, sporting activities and community events.

² 2,129 fully completed responses and 650 partially completed responses were received

- Leeds City Council has a dual role in this context: first as a central and accountable body in the governance of diversity issues in Leeds and second as an employer and a democratic organisation in the city.
 - 39% of non-Muslim respondents connected to the Council were not confident in explaining anti-Muslim hatred.
 - 31% of non-Muslim respondents connected to the Council were less than moderately concerned about anti-Muslim hatred compared with the three-quarters of Muslim respondents related to the council that were very concerned.
 - half of the Muslim respondents with an @leeds.gov.uk email address had seen or experienced anti-Muslim hatred specifically in “employment practices” or in “management practices at work”.

11 As part of the survey, respondents were asked to select any words that they would like to see included in a local definition of anti-Muslim hatred. A range of options were provided, and the **survey assisted us in identifying the preferred terminology for a local definition.**

12 This showed some agreement, but also an **important malalignment with the APPG definition**, who defined Islamophobia as, *“rooted in racism and is a type of racism that targets expressions of Muslimness or perceived Muslimness.”*

13 In the process of our consideration, a number of different definitions going back over three decades have been researched and officers have more recently tested the Bradford local definition of Islamophobia with the BAME Staff Network as well as strategic partners, such as health and police, who have **all stated their preference for a local definition of that nature rather than the APPG definition or an international definition.**

14 The survey in Leeds found that many respondents also favoured the inclusion of the word ‘prejudice’. The report also suggests that we **reframe our work by using the terminology ‘Anti Muslim Prejudice’ rather than Islamophobia as the latter translates into a fear of Islam whereas we are, in the main, seeing discrimination against individuals due to them possessing the perceived characteristics of a Muslim.** The report states:

‘Our suggestion, as shown in the recommendations, would be to define the term Anti-Muslim Prejudice and use that as a vehicle for progressing this work (as opposed to Islamophobia or Anti-Muslim Hatred). This is because efforts to tackle hate crime and build a safer and stronger society should be focused and consolidated around the inclusion and protection of people, i.e. citizens of Muslim background or heritage, including addressing discrimination and misinformation in addition to hatred rather than be side-tracked into debates around the protection of a religion, i.e. Islam, which is a set of beliefs and ideas and can be legitimately debated and discussed.’

15 Officers have been engaging with Bradford Council who have welcomed the Leeds approach and have endorsed the use of their definition by Leeds City Council. However, in light of the statement above and taking into consideration the findings of the survey, we **propose the simplified local definition for Leeds** to read as follows:

“Anti-Muslim Prejudice is hatred and discrimination against anyone of Islamic faith on grounds of their belief and practice.”

This could manifest in:

1. **Inciting or carrying out acts of racism, hatred and violence against people, and those perceived to be, of the Islamic faith (Muslims).**

2. **Direct or indirect acts of discrimination and exclusion including policy and practice within organisations, which deny Muslims legitimate, fair and equal access to opportunities, facilities and services because of their faith, beliefs and practice.**
3. **Denying people of the Islamic faith the opportunity to practise their faith values, free of harassment, fear of violence against them or fear of incurring discrimination and hatred against them.**
4. **Actions which perpetuate a climate of mistrust, fear and a sense of marginalisation about or within the Islamic community e.g. remarks by individuals and groups that can be made without fear of being held to account. Also use of print, social or electronic media to align and create fear and division surrounding the Muslim community.”**

16 This definition of anti-Muslim prejudice is **not a legal definition** in its own right but **builds on the current legislation and practice** so that the council, its city partners, and the communities of Leeds can work together with a **common purpose** in tackling hatred and discrimination against people of the Islamic faith.

What impact will this proposal have?

17 The council’s Equality Improvement Priorities for 2021–2025 have been developed to ensure that the council meets its legal duties under the Equality Act 2010, to complement the ‘Best City’ ambition aimed at tackling inequalities: for Leeds to have a Strong Economy and to be a Compassionate City.

18 This report sets out a council-wide and citywide approach to supporting Muslim communities by addressing Anti-Muslim Prejudice. The work proposed in this paper responds to reducing the corporate risk on community cohesion. An EDCI Screening is attached as an appendix.

19 The recommendations in the report support the delivery of our Best City Ambition. Our focus has been on supporting communities, aiding integration and building more cohesive and resilient communities.

20 **Our strategic approach to tackling hate crime, including Anti-Muslim Prejudice, enables the council to deliver its priorities and its ambitions for the city** and maximise the economic and civic contributions of all communities regardless of their background. It helps to address the risks for community cohesion - an important Leeds City Council corporate risk.

How does this proposal impact the three pillars of the Best City Ambition?

Health and Wellbeing

Inclusive Growth

Zero Carbon

21 Tackling Anti-Muslim Prejudice contributes towards the achievement of the councils Equality Improvement Priorities that are an integral part of the Best City Ambition, and help to underpin the ambition for Leeds to be the best city in the UK: the best city in the UK: compassionate and caring with a strong economy, which tackles poverty and reduces inequalities.

What consultation and engagement has taken place?

Wards affected:

Have ward members been consulted? Yes No

- 22 The definition of Anti-Muslim Prejudice has been derived following feedback from an extensive survey of almost 3,000 members of the public in Leeds, as well as council employees. In addition, the BAME Staff Network, Hate Crime Strategic Board, Hate Crime Operational Group, police and health colleagues, and the Leeds Council of Mosques have been consulted on the findings of the survey, and the definition. Adoption of a local definition of Anti-Muslim Prejudice has been strongly urged.
- 23 The council's Equality Member Champions have also been consulted and had an opportunity to comment on the proposed definition.
- 24 A report was also taken to Cabinet in February 2022 who were supportive of the progress on a local definition.

What are the resource implications?

- 25 There are no additional resource implications as a result of this work and the recommendations will be subsumed into existing officers' work programme and within the remit of the Hate Crime Operational Group.

What are the key risks and how are they being managed?

- 26 The investment in a survey of this kind is demonstrative of the Council's current and future commitment to understanding and managing issues of extremism, hate crime and social relations and **should be recognised as an important and rare step in the practice of local authorities in this arena.**
- 27 The analysis finds **evidence of a pervasive, damaging and multi-layered social problem** which is likely hampering the opportunities, participation and wellbeing of a great number of citizens in Leeds, ultimately **corroding social relations** in the city.
- 28 Failure to adopt a definition for Anti-Muslim Prejudice could have a significant impact on the council's reputation and relationship with communities in Leeds, in particular the Muslim community. The delay in a nationally recognised definition has frustrated Muslim communities and consideration needs to be given to a locally adopted definition that will provide a stimulus for further action and progress against this important issue.
- 29 The Hate Crime Strategic Board, Hate Crime Operational Group, and a Strategic Stakeholder Group will be important contributors to implementing the recommendations of the report, alongside key individuals from partner organisations.
- 30 The Executive Member for Resources and Elected Member for Communities are both supportive of this work and approach. Elected Member oversight of this work is secured through the Chair of the Leeds Hate Crime Strategic Board, Cllr Abigail Marshall-Katung and through the Leeds Race 4 Equality Form chaired by the Executive Member Resources.

What are the legal implications?

- 31 There are no specific legal implications associated with this report.

Options, timescales and measuring success

What other options were considered?

32 None. The findings of the survey and local consultation with key groups demanded the formulation of a local definition and for progress against Anti-Muslim Prejudice.

How will success be measured?

33 An action plan detailing the required action against the recommendations of the report will be produced and regular updates provided to the Hate Crime Strategic Board. A community advisory board will also be established to ensure independent oversight of the work and progress against Anti-Muslim Prejudice.

What is the timetable and who will be responsible for implementation?

34 Elected Member oversight of this work is secured through the Chair of the Leeds Hate Crime Strategic Board, Cllr Abigail Marshall-Katung and through the Leeds Race 4 Equality Form chaired by the Executive Member for Resources.

35 The Chief Officer Safer and Stronger Communities will immediately commence on the development and implementation of an action plan, reporting to the appropriate member led boards and the Director of Communities, Housing and Environment on this matter on at least a quarterly basis.

Appendices

- Report on the Findings of the Leeds Anti-Muslim Hatred Survey 2020
- EDCI Screening

Background papers

- None