

1. Background

Full Council passed a motion on the 24th April 2017 on the Adoption of an amended version of the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) definition of antisemitism (appendix 1). At the time, in response to concerns raised about the definition potentially restricting the freedom of speech, it was agreed that there would be a review to understand the impact that adopting this definition in Camden has had.

The International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) is an intergovernmental body, made up of 31 member nations whose purpose is to place political and social leaders' support behind the need for Holocaust education, remembrance and research both nationally and internationally.

This report provides the details of the review, including key recommendations.

2. Context and aim of the review

The aim of the review is to understand the impacts adopting the definition has had (both positive and negative) in Camden. It does not review the wording of the definition itself, as this was assessed when the definition was adopted.

The review includes:

- Reflections from individuals and organisations on the impact, risks and opportunities adopting the definition has presented.
- Whether venues have used the definition since it was adopted to inform decisions around events held within their venues and what the nature of those events were
- Whether, and how, adopting the definition has enabled open debate or reversely might have led to the restriction of expressions of political opinion

3. Review approach

- A councillor advisory group was set up to feed back on the scope of the review, managed by officers from the Community Partnerships and Community Safety teams.
- A range of stakeholders were identified and approached as part of the review in order to ensure a balance of opinions and experiences were captured.

- Initial contact was by an introductory email and then followed up with either a phone conversation, face to face meeting or email response.
- The following questions were used to structure the conversations with contributors:
 - For interested stakeholders
 - What is your understanding of the impact the definition might/ has had in Camden? Do you have evidence to demonstrate this?
 - How might the Council build on or mitigate the positive and/or negative impacts of the new definition?
 - For community groups in Camden buildings
 - Are you aware the Council has adopted the new definition?
 - What, if any, impact has/might this make on the events that are held in your building?
 - Since April 2017, have you had to cancel any events where the definition might be relevant, and what were the reasons?

4. Responses from participants

The comments below are the key responses from the people that we directly approached.

Responses from organisations/individuals

4.1. Feedback about positive impacts

- Some members of the community feel that adopting the definition is a recognition that their concerns about Antisemitism are being taken seriously in Camden. They felt the definition is not legally binding, and is therefore more of a statement.
- Some responders said the definition is an important guide to what is, and is not racist discourse about Jewish people, and is needed because the subject has been surrounded by confusion, and abuse of free speech.
- Some interviewees recognised that, nationally, the IHRA definition has helped to influence debates about Antisemitism and the Middle East conflict.
- Some fed back that the adoption of the definition has positively enabled public debate at the Council or elsewhere to be guided by principles that help prevent the line being crossed into racism.

4.2. Feedback about the negative impact

- Some people are worried that normal meetings are not going ahead and the potential “chilling” factor. They felt that people are wary and holding back from doing what would have been normal before the adoption, and not organising events.
- Some felt, the definition is used to stop legitimate criticism of Israeli government policy and claims of Palestinian oppression.
- Some responders said that the definition is a poorly worded document. They felt the list of examples gives the impression that references to the State of Israel are examples of anti-Semitic conduct.

4.3. Responses from community groups (venue holders)

- Since the definition has been adopted, they reported that no events had been cancelled in reference to it in Camden.
- The majority of community groups contacted were aware the Council had adopted the new definition, and felt it did not make any difference to events held in their buildings. This is because their equal opportunity policies are in line with the definition already. Those hosting events in Council owned buildings (or receiving Council funding) are required to have equal opportunities policies in place, which includes reference to the council’s framework for tackling hate speech across all communities.
- Community groups contacted felt that adopting the definition has had no impact upon their work or the types of events they host.
- One group was not aware of the definition, and despite working with a variety of groups – no one had mentioned it. Another group thought that this is an example of the Council leading the way.

5. Examples of relevant events held since the definition has been adopted

One of the visible effects of adopting the definition could have, is on whether events had been cancelled. Below is a summary of the key themes emerging from relevant events that have been held since the definition was adopted. Note that not all responses are first hand and neither can they be directly linked to the adoption of the definition.

- A.** Booking venues – complications in completing venue bookings, with a stated reason from venue holders not related to the event (such as a double booking). In the one example given, it was not possible to clarify whether the stated reason was legitimate. It is noted that an alternative Camden venue was found.

- B. Pressure on venue holders - Organisers felt that venue managers are put under pressure from the Council to cancel relevant events due to risks to their funding. In instances where concerns are raised to the Council, officers contact venue managers to alert them to these concerns (often for and against the event), and direct them towards the hate speech framework to guide their decision. Since the definition has been adopted, there have been a few examples where this has happened. None of these events were cancelled.
- C. Anti-Semitic discourse at an event – whilst the event in itself might not be anti-Semitic, there are concerns that anti-Semitic things could be said. In these instances, guidance to venue holders and organisers has been to put in place safeguards such as advising participants the event will be filmed.

6. Media - light touch review

- 6.1. Local media (CNJ) was analysed in the 6 months between April and October 2017 to see where there have been any reports or letters where the definition may apply.
- 6.2. The review found that there were 18 letters/articles that referenced antisemitism. Some backed the definition others opposed it, there were a few articles in relation to an event where people thought that it should not be hosted, and there were some letters/articles relating to the suspension of a couple of Labour party members.
- 6.3. From this light touch media review we can see that adopting this definition has contributed to the ongoing local debate about antisemitism but it is not possible to measure the wider impact that adopting the definition in Camden has had from this.

7. Suggestions from consultees who engaged in the review and response from Camden

	Consultees	Officer response
	The Council might build on the adoption, by publicising the definition and by making the text readily available, for example on its website.	The definition has been incorporated within the councils existing document “Framework for responding to speakers promoting messages of hate and intolerance in venues in Camden” which is promoted and published on the website.

	<p>To mitigate negative effects of the definition, the Council should declare that the definition should not limit or deter bookings for Palestine solidarity events at Council-funded venues</p>	<p>This is not possible as it is not possible to guarantee that any events on any particular topic are racist or not. We are looking at providing more guidance around the Hate Speech framework. Decisions should be taken in relation to the framework.</p>
	<p>A nominated group ought to be set up as a monitoring body which would deal with issues arising from the applications of the IHRA's guidelines by the Council or by other public bodies in Camden. Such a solution is bound, to help resolve a mounting pressure and arising tension within the multi-cultural community of Camden</p>	<p>This is not currently necessary. This continues to be a live issue in Camden, which the Community Safety and Community Partnership teams continue to monitor. Officers will continue to monitor tensions and by reaching out to Camden's diverse community.</p>
	<p>If the Council chooses to preserve the definition, it should accept the recommendation of the Home Affairs Select Committee of the House of Commons, and include the following two clarifications:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It is not antisemitic to criticise the Government of Israel, without additional evidence to suggest antisemitic intent. • it is not antisemitic to hold the Israeli government to the same standards as other liberal democracies or to take a particular interest in the Israeli Government's policies or actions, without additional evidence to suggest antisemitism" 	<p>This review has not looked at changes to the wording of the definition.</p>

	Camden should drop the list of examples, which have led to misunderstanding and misrepresentation of the definition.	This review has not looked at changes to the wording of the definition.
	Camden should make a definitive statement that criticism of the Zionist state is not the same as antisemitism.	This review has not looked at changes to the wording of the definition.

8. Conclusions

These are the main points identified from the responses we have received:

- 8.1. There is no persuasive evidence that adopting the definition in Camden has in and of itself had a negative impact. Rather there is clear evidence that adopting the definition has had a positive impact: some people feel more reassured as there is a recognition that concerns about anti-Semitism where it exists have been taken seriously.
- 8.2. There does however continue to be some confusion, and the Council needs to strengthen support and advice for venues and event managers on how to interpret the definition within the Council's Framework for responding to speakers promoting messages of hate.
- 8.3. The definition has been used as guiding principles on making decisions about holding debates and events. Venue managers (community centres) focused on the fact that they have equal opportunities policies and guidance in place, which when applied correctly adhere to the principles of the definition without having to look at the definition in isolation.
- 8.4. Whilst some people continue to be worried about the "chilling effect" (because they feel the definition is confusing and people will be erring on the side of caution by not organising events or turning down booking requests) there is no clear evidence that this has in fact happened, and relevant events continue to take place in Camden. Clearer support and guidance for venue managers and event organisers will help ensure people are able to hold debates in an open and safe way and deal with any suggestion that there has been an adverse impact.

9. Council officer recommendations

Action	Detail
Clearer guidance is needed on how to interpret the definition	The Council will strengthen support and advice for venues on how to interpret the definition; this guidance will be encompassed within the Council's "Framework for responding to speakers promoting messages of hate".
Make it clear that people can contact Community Partnerships or Community Safety for advice	If they are unsure, the Council can give advice to venues and organisers in line with the guidance, which will help organisations make informed decisions. This might include advice on helping events to be open and safe, and that discourse does not cross the line in to racism.
Work with local community groups	To consider whether and how further support and guidance can be provided, ensuring Camden is a safe place for people to have open and informed debate

