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HOW NOT TO TACKLE GROOMING GANGS

THE NATIONAL GROOMING GANG INQUIRY
AND A DEFINITION OF ISLAMOPHOBIA

A Policy Exchange Research Note

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Executive summary

After the Government reversed its position on a national inquiry into grooming gangs, the Home Secretary, Yvette Cooper, promised to “root out” this “scourge,” saying that “those vile perpetrators who have grown used to the authorities looking the other way must have no place to hide.”¹

Yet at the same time, ministers are pursuing a policy which will have the opposite effect. It would have made exposing the grooming scandal even harder and slower than it already was. It will make rooting out the scourge more difficult. It will give perpetrators a new place to hide.

The government plans an official, State-sponsored definition of Islamophobia. This report shows how the accusation of Islamophobia, even without the backing of the State, was frequently used to smear and intimidate those seeking to expose the grooming gang scandal and trying to get justice for its victims. Official reports, including the recently published National Audit on Group-based Child Sexual Exploitation and Abuse by Baroness Casey (‘the Casey review’), found that fear of being accused of prejudice was a factor in the failure of the authorities to act promptly or effectively against perpetrators.

The promoters of the Islamophobia definition, the All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on British Muslims, explicitly say that accusing Muslims or Pakistanis of being disproportionately involved in grooming is an example of the Islamophobia that they seek to ban.

The man the Government has appointed to come up with a definition – Rt Hon Dominic Grieve KC – wrote a supportive Foreword to the APPG report in which this demand appears.²

Potentially more troublingly, the APPG Islamophobia definition has been officially adopted by a number of local authorities which have experienced major grooming scandals, including Telford, Bristol, Oldham and Kirklees.³ It has also

¹<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2025-06-16/debates/51C5DFD1-9C32-4A85-AB4F-4EF38EE7CA1A/ChildSexualExploitationCaseyReport>

²<https://static1.squarespace.com/static/599c3d2febbd1a90cfffdd8a9/t/5bfd1ea3352f531a6170ceee/1543315109493/Islamophobia+Defined.pdf>

³<https://www.civitas.org.uk/content/files/Islamophobia-Revisited.pdf>

been adopted by the national Labour Party, which controlled most of the councils where victims of abuse were failed.

As early as 2013, a member of the working group which Mr Grieve chairs, Baroness Gohir, wrote that what she claimed was “the disproportionate media coverage being given to British Pakistani [sex grooming] offenders” was being “used... to fuel racism and Islamophobia.”⁴

Moreover, the journalist who did more than any other to expose the scale of the grooming gang scandal in Rotherham, Andrew Norfolk, was repeatedly denounced for having thereby amplified Islamophobia.⁵ Among those who led the charge against him were the Islamist lobby group MEND, whose members were involved in producing the APPG definition of Islamophobia.⁶

Many people of good faith will instinctively support an Islamophobia definition, recognising the burdens which British Muslims still face. But what they may not realise is that there is a significant difference between anti-Muslim hatred or discrimination - which all should oppose, but which are already illegal - and the relatively recent concept of Islamophobia.

The latter is much broader. The APPG report endorsed by Grieve says, an official Islamophobia definition should be used to control and police activity “far beyond” anything that can currently “be captured as criminal.”⁷ It should set “appropriate limits to free speech” when talking about Muslims.⁸ The report adds:

“The recourse to the notion of free speech and a supposed right to criticise Islam results in nothing more than another subtle form of anti-Muslim racism, whereby the criticism humiliates, marginalises, and stigmatises Muslims. One real life example of this concerns the issue of ‘grooming gangs.’”⁹

⁴https://www.mwnuk.co.uk/go_files/resources/UnheardVoices.pdf

⁵<https://www.mediareform.org.uk/blog/unmasked-andrew-norfolk-the-times-and-anti-muslim-reporting-a-case-to-answer>

⁶<https://www.mend.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/MEND-Approaching-a-definition-of-Islamophobia-More-than-words-Executive-Summary.pdf>;
<https://static1.squarespace.com/static/599c3d2febbd1a90cfffdd8a9/t/5bfd1ea3352f531a6170ceee/1543315109493/Islamophobia+Defined.pdf> - page 60.

⁷<https://static1.squarespace.com/static/599c3d2febbd1a90cfffdd8a9/t/5bfd1ea3352f531a6170ceee/1543315109493/Islamophobia+Defined.pdf> - page 32.

⁸Ibid, page 11.

⁹Ibid, page 35.

The report describes the allegation of disproportionate Muslim involvement in grooming gangs as a “modern iteration” of “age-old stereotypes and tropes about Islam,” saying talk of the subject “heighten[s] vulnerability of Muslims to hate crimes.”¹⁰

As the recent Casey review has found it is, in fact, according to the available (if limited) data, the truth.

But no-one should imagine that just because Casey has forced Ministers to change their position on an inquiry, the problem is now fixed. Institutional obstruction, failure and denial have not gone away. Those who said the scandal was made up or overblown (including many of the self-proclaimed representative bodies for Britain’s Muslims) will regroup. Many in authority still dismiss speech about disproportionate British-Pakistani involvement in grooming as a far-right bandwagon - even if the Prime Minister, one of those who did so, appears to have changed his mind. Relatively few perpetrators, and very few decision-makers, have been held to account. A state-backed Islamophobia definition will make that task harder.

One key figure involved with the APPG, playing a major part in its Islamophobia definition report, is a man named Muhbeen Hussain.¹¹ Mr Hussain is from Rotherham. As Policy Exchange has previously documented,¹² in October 2015, he played a prominent, and to many in the town deeply unhelpful, part in events around the grooming scandal there – leading a boycott of the police for “scapegoating” Muslims - though there is no suggestion he is himself guilty of any crime.¹³

During the boycott Mr Hussain did not mention that he is the nephew of Mahroof Hussain, a Labour cabinet member and councillor in Rotherham during the grooming scandal. Mahroof was forced to resign from both posts in February 2015 after the Report of Inspection of Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council by Louise Casey into the scandal found council staff felt he had “suppressed discussion [about the problem] for fear of upsetting community relations.”¹⁴

¹⁰Ibid, page 52.

¹¹https://policyexchange.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/The-Rotherham-Grooming-Scandal-and-The-Creators-of-the-Islamophobia-Definition_.pdf

¹²Policy Exchange, The Rotherham Grooming Scandal and the Creators of the Islamophobia Definition, 2025, [Link](#)

¹³<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N2q2eYjWeGs&t=171s>

¹⁴https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5a8152f4ed915d74e33fd945/46966_Report_of_Inspection_of_Rotherham_WEB.pdf

Casey was among those accused of Islamophobia for their work on Rotherham. In 2017, she was nominated by one Islamist activist group as “Islamophobe of the Year” for her report into the scandal.¹⁵ In 2018, the town’s Labour MP, Sarah Champion, received the same accolade for her opposition to the grooming scandal.¹⁶ Muhbeen Hussain criticised Champion for writing that Britain “has a problem with British Pakistani men raping and exploiting white girls.” He said that it had “fuelled” discrimination.¹⁷

Showing how confused the British state still is on this subject, Muhbeen Hussain has been awarded an MBE in the latest King's Birthday Honours List (June 2025) for “promoting unity and inclusivity.”¹⁸

A slippery slope

The Government insists that the Islamophobia definition it adopts will be “non-statutory” and “compatible with the unchanging right of British citizens to exercise freedom of speech.”¹⁹ But that is emphatically not the agenda of the APPG and the activist groups who have promoted a definition. Their report – which Grieve endorsed – repeatedly says the definition should restrict free speech – and be legally-binding.²⁰ If it was, and it followed the APPG template, even discussing the possibility that Pakistani men were disproportionately involved in child grooming would become legally problematic.

Grieve is chair of the official working group appointed by the Government to recommend a definition. At least one of the other members, Akeela Ahmed, has stated that “a definition with legal power is required, one that could be implemented by the government and the police.”²¹

Grieve seeks to stress that the Islamophobia definition he recommends will not necessarily follow the APPG template. But whatever form of words is chosen, and whatever legal status it has to start with, any definition creates a wedge for the plainly-expressed ambitions of groups such as the APPG and the Islamist activists influential in it.

¹⁵<https://www.ihr.org.uk/press-releases/press-release-uk-islamophobia-awards-2017-26-november/>

¹⁶<https://www.ihr.org.uk/press-release-uk-nominees-announced-for-islamophobia-awards-2018/>

¹⁷<https://x.com/BBCNewsnight/status/897942176100777984>

¹⁸<https://aboutislam.net/muslim-issues/europe/british-muslim-awarded-mbe-for-promoting-unity-and-inclusivity/>

¹⁹<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/government-launches-working-group-on-anti-muslim-hatredislamophobia-definition>

²⁰[https://static1.squarespace.com/static/599c3d2febbd1a90cfffdd8a9/t/5bfd1ea3352f531a6170ceee/1543315109493/Islamophobia+D](https://static1.squarespace.com/static/599c3d2febbd1a90cfffdd8a9/t/5bfd1ea3352f531a6170ceee/1543315109493/Islamophobia+Defined.pdf)
[efined.pdf](https://static1.squarespace.com/static/599c3d2febbd1a90cfffdd8a9/t/5bfd1ea3352f531a6170ceee/1543315109493/Islamophobia+D) – for instance, on pages 27, 30, 32, 35, 42, 43, 49.

²¹<https://static1.squarespace.com/static/599c3d2febbd1a90cfffdd8a9/t/5bfd1ea3352f531a6170ceee/1543315109493/Islamophobia+D>
[efined.pdf](https://static1.squarespace.com/static/599c3d2febbd1a90cfffdd8a9/t/5bfd1ea3352f531a6170ceee/1543315109493/Islamophobia+D) – page 26.

Even if a definition is never legally binding, it will swiftly be adopted as *policy* by many local authorities, public sector bodies, educational institutions and companies. That will make it binding on the staff and contractors of such bodies, at pain of losing their jobs or contracts. The effects at an operational level will be little different to if it were legally binding.

Indeed, even the current Government has stated that the definition will set out what constitutes “unacceptable treatment” of Muslims – a potentially much broader concept than hatred or discrimination.²²

Two-tier policy

The grooming scandal is an undeniable example of two-tier policy and policing. As official inquiries have found, the authorities would have behaved differently had the perpetrators been white or the victims middle-class.

The Government is at pains to rebut charges that it practises two-tier policy. But unless it literally no more than restates and mirrors the existing legal protections for all faiths, an official Islamophobia definition will be an explicit act of two-tier policy, creating special status and protection for members of one faith.

Dangerous for all communities, including Muslims

The two-tier charge is what the pollster Focalddata terms “culturenomics,” an issue that joins up voters’ cultural *and* economic concerns, to deadly effect. Focalddata says that “of all statements that could predict whether someone would consider voting for a right-wing nationalist/populist party, the notion that minorities have better access to job opportunities than white people is the single best predictor of all.”²³

An Islamophobia definition is, therefore, a gift to the populist right – but it will also empower the growing Islamist-populist challenge to Labour. It will not, as Ministers may have been told, alleviate Muslim discontent; It will allow activists to stoke it, creating new opportunities for grievance politics, challenge and attack in every institution and workplace.

²²<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/government-launches-working-group-on-anti-muslim-hatredislamophobia-definition>

²³<https://www.focalddata.com/blog/bi-focal-15-where-will-the-culture-wars-go-next>

Strengthening divisive extremes will be harmful to community cohesion, and to Muslims. Special treatment for Muslims will increase hostility towards them, not reduce it.

No precedent

The IHRA definition of antisemitism, which has been adopted by the Government, is sometimes cited as a precedent. But it is different, both in its wording and in the political risk it poses. The IHRA definition is explicitly framed as a protection against “hatred,” using terms analogous to those used in existing hate crime laws (“hostility or prejudice”). There are also, of course, far fewer Jews than Muslims in Britain; and antisemitism has clearly defined boundaries (as the IHRA definition recognises in accepting that criticism of Israel, for example, can be entirely legitimate).

Any measure which can be presented as an attack on free speech or a capitulation to identity politics may also attract the notice of powerful Trump administration figures or their outriders at a time when US policy is in flux and the maintenance of relationships is critical to Britain’s security and economy.

Tackling anti-Muslim hatred

None of this is in any way to deny the seriousness or wrongness of anti-Muslim hatred and discrimination. But both are already against the law. Adopting the IHRA definition has done nothing to stem the rise of antisemitism. Similarly, adopting an Islamophobia definition would, as explained, be actively counterproductive. Other approaches likely to have more success could include committing extra resources to enforce existing laws against discrimination and hate proportionately.

It is also worth remembering that (all) faith hate crime makes up only 7.4 per cent of hate crime,²⁴ and that anti-Muslim hate crime *per head* has in fact fallen, even with the spike after the Hamas massacre on 7 October 2023. The number of anti-Muslim hate crimes grew by 9.5% between 2018/19 and 2023/24,²⁵

²⁴<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/hate-crime-england-and-wales-year-ending-march-2024/hate-crime-england-and-wales-year-ending-march-2024>

²⁵There were 3530 anti-Muslim hate crimes in England and Wales in 2018/19 and 3866 in 2023/4, a rise of 9.5 per cent.

while over the same period the country's Muslim population grew by at least 18.9%.²⁶

Pre-ordained views?

Grieve is chair of a Government-appointed working group which, apart from himself, consists entirely of Muslim members. The group's terms of reference state explicitly that its objective is "to develop a working definition of Anti-Muslim Hatred/Islamophobia,"²⁷ not to consider whether there should be a definition or not.

Even as the Casey review into grooming was being published, the group was issuing invitations to comment on a definition. Some, including one of the authors of this pamphlet, Sir John Jenkins, were invited to meet the working group. Sir John has declined, saying its terms of reference, and the statements made by Mr Grieve and other group members, left him "concerned that the Working Group may have begun its work with its conclusions pre-determined."

As Sir John put it: "It is hard not to wonder whether the real purpose of the Group's approach to me is not so much because they welcome challenge but instead to help legitimise a pre-ordained conclusion by claiming that they consulted those on all sides of the debate - before proposing a definition which they then seek to present as a compromise." For the full text of his response to Mr Grieve, see Annex A.

Turbocharging cancel culture

Whatever form of words is chosen, any definition will have serious consequences. It will almost certainly turbocharge "cancel culture," reduce social trust and heighten social tensions. In this regard, the debate over whether a definition would be legally binding is something of a red herring. Its effect would inevitably be to shrink even further the space for open debate.

²⁶There were 3,253,631 Muslims in England and Wales in 2018/19. By the 2021 census, the latest available figure, there were 3,868,130 – a rise of 18.9 per cent.

²⁷https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/67e12094d8e313b503358c7c/Anti-Muslim_Hatred_Islamophobia_Definition_Working_Group_Terms_of_Reference_March_2025.pdf

Recommendations

Until the National Inquiry on Grooming Gangs announced this week by the Government concludes, we recommend that all Government activity on an Islamophobia definition, including Grieve's working group, be halted.

We recommend that the National Inquiry examine what part, if any, local authorities' and the Labour Party's adoption of the APPG definition of Islamophobia played in the poor response by councils and local politicians to allegations of disproportionate group-based sexual offending by Muslim or Pakistani men.

We recommend that the Labour Party review and amend their Code of Conduct on Islamophobia to ensure it does not deter Labour Councillors and others in the party from taking action in reporting and addressing grooming gangs or other, similar, issues.

We recommend that the National Inquiry examine and make findings about the use or abuse of the term Islamophobia to deter and defame those seeking justice and truth about the scandal.

We recommend that the National Inquiry examine and make findings on whether an Islamophobia definition would help or hinder the process of achieving justice and truth about the scandal.

We recommend that the National Inquiry examine and make findings about whether a definition would help or hinder the prevention and punishment of similar crimes in future.

Mr Hussain's pending award of the MBE brings the system into discredit. We recommend that it be suspended until his position has been resolved.

We recommend that the Government review the system of due diligence applied to those being awarded honours, to understand how Mr Hussain's prior activity in boycotting the police was overlooked and to implement steps to avoid such awards in future.

Chapter 1

Adoption of the APPG definition by councils and the Labour Party

The APPG report which said that alleging Muslim or Pakistani disproportionality in group-based sexual offending constituted Islamophobia was published in November 2018. Since then, the APPG definition has been adopted as official policy by more than 50 councils, including at least five councils which have experienced major group-based grooming scandals involving largely Muslim or Pakistani perpetrators.

The councils include:

Oldham, which adopted the APPG definition in March 2021.²⁸ A Greater Manchester inquiry in 2022 found the council failed to protect vulnerable children.

Telford and Wrekin, which adopted it in October 2021.²⁹ In 2022, an independent inquiry found more than 1,000 children in Telford were sexually exploited and the abuse was allowed to continue for years, with children often blamed. The inquiry found issues were not investigated because of nervousness about race, with teachers and youth workers discouraged from reporting child sexual exploitation.

Kirklees, which adopted the APPG definition in May 2022.³⁰ Some 41 men from Huddersfield, mainly of Pakistani origin, were convicted of group-based sexual offences between 2018 and 2021.

Bristol, which adopted it some time before 2023.³¹ Thirteen men, mainly Somali-origin, were convicted of group-based sexual abuse in 2014.

²⁸<https://www.theoldhamtimes.co.uk/news/19188244.town-hall-move-combat-racism/>

²⁹<https://democracy.telford.gov.uk/documents/s10225/Equality%20and%20Diversity%20Progress%20Report%20for%20Cabinet%20-%207%20October%202021.pdf>

³⁰<https://www.asianstandard.co.uk/kirklees-council-pass-motion-to-adopt-definitions-of-islamophobia-and-antisemitism/>

³¹<https://www.bristol.gov.uk/files/documents/6555-equality-and-inclusion-strategic-framework-2023-2027/file>

Newcastle-on-Tyne, which adopted the definition in June 2019.³² Seventeen men, mainly of Pakistani origin, were convicted of group-based sexual abuse in 2017.

The authorities in all these places were accused of failures towards victims. It is not clear how far, if at all, their adoption of the APPG definition contributed towards any failings, but answering this question should be part of the National Inquiry.

The Labour Party ran these and many other councils, including Rotherham, at the time of the sex grooming scandals. Labour was an early adopter of the APPG definition, doing so on 20 March 2019, under the leadership of Jeremy Corbyn.³³ Again, the inquiry should consider this in its remit.

On the Labour party website there is a section dedicated to its Islamophobia policy Code of Conduct,³⁴ which appears to build on the APPG definition. The Code of Conduct was introduced in July 2021, when Sir Keir Starmer MP was party leader and Anneliese Dodds MP was Party Chair.³⁵ A full copy of the policy is reproduced at Annex B.

In addition to the APPG Islamophobia definition's position on "sex groomers" Labour's Code of Conduct appears to restrict open debate around the ethnic and religious make up of grooming gangs. Does this explain some of the difficulties the party has had in understanding events in Rochdale and elsewhere, and its initial rejection of a grooming gangs inquiry?

As a guide, the Code states:

When considering allegations of Islamophobia, the Labour Party is advised to take into account the following sorts of treatment that are likely to amount to prejudice or hostility based on the protected characteristic of Islam or ethnic or national origins.

³²<https://www.chroniclelive.co.uk/news/north-east-news/newcastle-stand-islamophobia-school-attacks-16496776>

³³<https://5pillarsuk.com/2019/03/21/labour-party-officially-adopts-appg-definition-of-islamophobia/>

³⁴<https://labour.org.uk/resources/labours-islamophobia-policy/>

³⁵<https://labourlist.org/2021/07/labour-is-changing-were-working-to-make-our-party-a-safe-space-for-everyone/>

There then follow 12 examples, from A-L. Two in particular appear hostages to fortune. Point f, states that an example of Islamophobia is:³⁶

f. Using slurs or grossly offensive imagery about Muslims, portraying Muslims as sexually untrustworthy or dangerous, or that Muslims or their contemporary religious practices are cruel or violent.

The example in point l would appear similarly problematic:

l. Denying, or minimising the significance of, discrimination against Muslims may demonstrate hostility or prejudice because of religion.

While the denial or minimising of discrimination can sometimes be wrong, it may also, in certain circumstances, be entirely justified. To give but one example: in his 2016 appeal to the European Court of Human Rights, convicted Rochdale grooming gang member Shabbir Ahmed “submitted that the case against him was tailored by the police to fit anti-Muslim prejudice” and that “he had been discriminated against on grounds of race and religion.”³⁷

This was not true, and his appeal was rightly rejected. But it is worth asking, if a Labour party member or official commented negatively on this case, and were subsequently accused of Islamophobia, would they be “minimising the significance” of discrimination against Muslims?

Further, categorising the concept of prejudice in a political party’s constitution in such a way, could almost be designed to ensure that no one *ever* minimises the significance of religious prejudice. Even if it is claimed erroneously? Muslims, like those of other faiths, are rightly protected by the Equality Act 2010’s designation of faith or belief as a protected characteristic. Singling out the faith of Islam, with its myriad variations and differing interpretations, for additional protections potentially prepares the ground for a defensiveness that does not sit well with a political party supposedly devoted to debate and the free exchange of ideas.

Secondly, section f of the code, rejects “portraying Muslims as sexually untrustworthy or dangerous.”³⁸ Nobody, with the exception of the most fringe elements of the far-right, is trying to claim that all Muslims are members of

³⁶<https://labour.org.uk/resources/labours-islamophobia-policy/>

³⁷<https://hudoc.echr.coe.int/eng#%7B%22itemid%22%3A%22001-167184%22%7D>

³⁸<https://labour.org.uk/resources/labours-islamophobia-policy/>

grooming gangs, or that all or even most sympathise with such activities. Here again though, the code of conduct appears set to restrict how we may discuss grooming offences. The manipulation of girls and young women by older men, utilising a 'boyfriend model' has been recognised as a core part in this offending for many years.³⁹ Where this involves Muslim men and non-Muslim girls, how can that not be mentioned? Or indeed assessed if we are to better tackle this type of offending?

³⁹See for example p. 25 of the Casey audit, where she cites Barnardo's. (2011). Puppet on a string: the urgent need to cut children free from sexual exploitation. Barkingside: Barnardo's. Available at: <https://norfolkscp.org.uk/media/qn1nbv5a/puppet-on-a-string-believe-in-children-barnardos.pdf>

Chapter 2

Use of “Islamophobia” to attack critics of sexual grooming gangs and deny the problem⁴⁰

As Policy Exchange discussed in a previous report,⁴¹ the term “Islamophobia” is often used by ‘bad actors’ who are Muslim to smear and intimidate their critics. The term has often been directly used to attack those who sought to expose the Rotherham grooming scandal, and other such scandals, or to call for action on them.

As late as January 2025, more than ten years after the first official report confirmed what had gone on in Rotherham, the Institute of Race Relations think-tank expressed concern about disproportionate Pakistani involvement in grooming gangs, a term it placed in inverted commas as if to suggest that the problem was not real, “a new bout of dog-whistle Islamophobia.” It said that “we must challenge divisive ‘grooming gangs’ narratives.”⁴² The IRR was key in popularising the term Islamophobia from the 1990s onwards.

The same month, Ali Milani, chair of the Labour Muslim Network, attacked “senior politicians in Westminster” for “using every platform, every media appearance and every minute in the chambers of the Houses of Parliament to call for a national enquiry and decry ‘Pakistani Muslim’ grooming gangs.” He claimed, incorrectly, that the politicians were describing group-based sexual abuse as an “exclusively Pakistani and/or Muslim problem” and added: “The scale of Islamophobia in British political and media institutions just can not be overstated. I have seen it, felt it, and written about it for nearly a decade. But this latest development is the most dangerous it has ever felt.”⁴³

In November 2018, more than four years after the first official report⁴⁴ confirmed what had gone on, Sarah Champion, Rotherham’s Labour MP, was

⁴⁰Elements of this chapter previously appeared in the Policy Exchange report The Rotherham Grooming Scandal and the Creators of the Islamophobia Definition, published in February 2025, [Link](#).

⁴¹<https://policyexchange.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/A-definition-of-Islamophobia.pdf>

⁴²<https://irr.org.uk/article/why-we-must-challenge-divisive-grooming-gangs-narratives/>

⁴³<https://www.middleeasteye.net/opinion/grooming-gangs-vile-racist-campaign-puts-muslims-serious-danger>

⁴⁴<https://www.rotherham.gov.uk/downloads/file/279/independent-inquiry-into-child-sexual-exploitation-in-rotherham>

shortlisted by a prominent UK Muslim group, the Islamic Human Rights Commission (IHRC), for its annual “Islamophobe of the Year” award.⁴⁵ Her offence was to have raised concerns about the grooming scandal in the town.

Baroness Casey, the author of one of those official reports at a time before she had been elevated to the House of Lords, was shortlisted by the IHRC for the same accolade the year before – again, years after the facts had been established beyond doubt.⁴⁶

One of the two people who wrote the Islamophobia definition in the APPG report,⁴⁷ Salman Sayyid, “Professor of Social Theory and Decolonial Thought” at the University of Leeds, has close links to the IHRC. He has spoken in at least six IHRC events⁴⁸ including the launch of its “counter-Islamophobia toolkit”⁴⁹ and at the 2014 Islamophobia Awards – the year they gave it to Barack Obama.⁵⁰ Nor were the IHRC alone. The website “Islamophobia Watch,” which purported to “document anti-Muslim bigotry,” targeted the then Labour MP Ann Cryer⁵¹ and the journalist Julie Bindel⁵² for their work exposing grooming gangs.

In 2019, Andrew Norfolk, the Times reporter who did most to bring the Rotherham scandal to public attention, was the subject of a 72-page report from the Media Reform Coalition written by Brian Cathcart, of the Hacked Off campaign, Paddy French and Julian Petley, a media academic, accusing him and his newspaper of working to “amplify an increasingly prevalent Islamophobia,”⁵³ including by claiming “that ‘the left’, along with leading Muslims and others, have deliberately obfuscated or kept silent about serious problems involving British Muslims, and...made those problems worse by sowing the fear that anyone who tackles them will be accused of racism or Islamophobia.”⁵⁴ This is, of course, precisely what had happened in Rotherham.

The report attacking Norfolk was co-sponsored by MEND, an Islamist political lobbying group named by the previous government as being assessed for

⁴⁵<https://www.ihr.org.uk/press-release-uk-nominees-announced-for-islamophobia-awards-2018/>

⁴⁶<https://www.ihr.org.uk/press-releases/press-release-uk-islamophobia-awards-2017-26-november/>

⁴⁷<https://x.com/SSPLeeds/status/1068537026461556737>

⁴⁸<https://www.ihr.org.uk/an-evening-with-salman-sayyid/>

<https://www.ihr.org.uk/author-evening-with-salman-sayyid-recalling-the-caliphate/>

<https://www.ihr.org.uk/author-evening-with-salman-sayyid/>

<https://www.ihr.org.uk/islamophobia-diversity-and-the-crisis-of-democracy/>

<https://www.ihr.org.uk/counter-islamophobia-toolkit-launch-european-parliament/>

⁴⁹<https://www.ihr.org.uk/counter-islamophobia-toolkit-launch-european-parliament/>

⁵⁰<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D1sTd4xViR8&list=PL0BCSWzStP7Wyx2Rmgn0lqfwlcOfGh7YJ&index=6>

⁵¹<https://www.islamophobiawatch.co.uk/?s=ann+cryer&submit=Search>

⁵²<https://www.islamophobiawatch.co.uk/?s=julie+bindel&submit=Search>

⁵³<https://www.mediareform.org.uk/blog/unmasked-andrew-norfolk-the-times-and-anti-muslim-reporting-a-case-to-answer>

⁵⁴https://www.mediareform.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/Norfolk_Report-FINAL.pdf

extremism.⁵⁵ In opposition, the Labour Party also said that it would not engage with MEND.⁵⁶ MEND has played a major part in the campaign to promote the concept of “Islamophobia” as a broad-brush construct extending well beyond anti-Muslim hatred, prejudice and discrimination. Policy Exchange and others have repeatedly exposed MEND’s agenda.⁵⁷ MEND also played a part in the APPG report which created the Islamophobia definition. Its then senior policy analyst,⁵⁸ Antonio Perra, is thanked in the APPG report for his “considerable” and “immensely valuable” support.⁵⁹

When Sir Trevor Phillips, the former founding Chair of the Equality and Human Rights Commission, was suspended from the Labour Party for alleged Islamophobia, the first item cited in the disciplinary letter from the party to him was that he had written about “the exposure of systematic and longstanding abuse by men, mostly of Pakistani Muslim origin in the North of England.”⁶⁰

Response To Draft Charges

1 Mr Phillips (the respondent) has engaged in conduct prejudicial and/or grossly detrimental to the Party in breach of Chapter 2 Clause 1.8 of the Labour Party Rule Book 2019 by engaging in conduct online which:

- a) May reasonably be seen to demonstrate hostility or prejudice based on race, religion or belief:

☐ **_Item 5 -** *“But the most sensitive cause of conflict in recent years has been the collision between majority norms and the behaviours of some Muslim groups. In particular, the exposure of systematic and longstanding abuse by men, mostly of Pakistani Muslim origin in the North of England,”*

“a group of Germany’s five million or so settled Muslim migrants had, for some reason, suddenly and inexplicably decided to run amok; and that to some Muslim men in Germany, basic norms of decent behaviour are irrelevant.”

“she asserted that it was ‘improper’ to blame recent migrants; but then advised women in public to stay at least an arm’s length away from possible attackers – presumably with men of Arab or North African appearance in mind. It has since emerged that the Germans are not alone in experiencing this kind of cultural conflict.”

⁵⁵<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2024-03-14/debates/4E9FCBC1-F151-470C-840B-1CC58EBF73F4/ExtremismDefinitionAndCommunityEngagement>

⁵⁶<https://www.telegraph.co.uk/politics/2024/04/01/labour-cuts-ties-with-muslim-organisation-named-as-islamist/>

⁵⁷<https://policyexchange.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/A-definition-of-Islamophobia.pdf> and <https://henryjacksonsociety.org/shop-hjs/profitting-from-prejudice-how-mends-iam-campaign-legitimised-extremism/>

⁵⁸<https://www.mend.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/MEND-Approaching-a-definition-of-Islamophobia-More-than-words-Executive-Summary.pdf>

⁵⁹<https://static1.squarespace.com/static/599c3d2febbd1a90cfffdd8a9/t/5bfd1ea3352f531a6170ceee/1543315109493/Islamophobia+Defined.pdf> – page 60.

⁶⁰Policy Exchange, The Trial: the strange case of Trevor Phillips (2019), [Link](#)

In 2023 the Muslim Council of Britain condemned the then Home Secretary, Rt Hon Suella Braverman, for saying that “what's clear is that what we've seen is a practice whereby vulnerable white English girls... being pursued and raped and drugged and harmed by gangs of British Pakistani men who've worked in child abuse rings or networks.”⁶¹

The MCB said these comments were “divisive and irresponsible” and should be withdrawn, claiming that “in 2020, Home Office research found that the vast majority of perpetrators of group-based child sexual exploitation (CSE) were white men under 30 years of age.”⁶² The 2020 report to which the MCB referred (though itself subject to severe criticism by Baroness Casey, see below) did not disprove what Braverman said. It did say that the “majority” (not the “vast majority”) of group-based CSE offenders were white – as you might expect in a country which is 80 per cent white. But it also said: “A number of studies have indicated an over-representation of Asian and black offenders in group-based CSE.”⁶³ The MCB did not mention this.

Nor was the 2020 publication “research.” It was a report of previous research findings and drew on four earlier studies and those works presented a much more ambiguous picture than was later claimed by the MCB.

- The first, by the police’s Child Exploitation and Online Protection Command (CEOP) in 2011, said that “where data was available 30% of [group-based child sexual exploitation] offenders were white, while 28% were Asian,” though “due to missing data, both basic offender information and ethnicity specifically, these figures should be treated with caution.”
- The second, also by CEOP in 2013, said that of 306 such offenders, 75 per cent were Asian, though for the same reasons of data quality the figures needed to be treated cautiously.
- The third, by the Children’s Commissioner in 2015, again using limited data from about half of forces, found that 42% of such offenders were white or white British, 17% were black or black British, 14% were Asian

⁶¹<https://news.sky.com/story/muslim-groups-urge-suella-braverman-to-withdraw-irresponsible-and-divisive-grooming-gang-comments-12854820>

⁶²<https://mcb.org.uk/mcb-joins-in-calling-upon-home-secretary-to-withdraw-divisive-grooming-gang-comments/>

⁶³https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5fd87e348fa8f54d5733f532/Group-based_CSE_Paper.pdf

or Asian British, and 4% had another ethnicity. No data on ethnicity was recorded in 22% of cases.

- The fourth, from the Police Foundation in 2016, looked at group-based CSE in Bristol, and found that those from ethnic minority backgrounds were over-represented compared to the local area.⁶⁴

In her recent review, Baroness Casey found this earlier ‘research’ wanting due to the limited data available, and observes that it is “hard to understand how the Home Office reached the conclusion in their paper that the ethnicity of group-based child sexual exploitation offenders is likely to be in line with child sexual abuse more generally and with the general population.”⁶⁵

In 2013 the MCB held a special conference to discuss the issue of group-based child sexual exploitation. In the report of the event – not published until the following year – the organiser, Talat Ahmed, then chair of the MCB’s social and family affairs committee, said claims that Muslim men were targeting white children were “scare stories” being spread by “right-wing groups and media...to scaremonger the nation.”⁶⁶ She said that “the unanimous conclusion at the conference was that this was not a ‘Muslim’ problem - though it is key that the Muslim community wakes up to the issue - but also one that, tragically, permeates across all of our society.”⁶⁷

Ibrahim Mogra, the MCB’s then Assistant Secretary-General, complained: “We have never attached Christianity to any criminality, national or international. We have not attached religion, any religion, to any criminality. So, why do we attach Islam to criminality, when we try to tackle the scourge of terrorism? Do not give terrorism a religion. Terrorism has no religion. Let us not give crime any religious label. Crime is a crime. To racialise this problem, to give it a religious label will only stigmatise one particular component of the wider society.”⁶⁸

An “MCB spokesman” said: “We need to recognise there have been a few cases that Muslim men, not Pakistanis in particular, have come up and there have been media narrative that this is a Pakistani issue. The idea of this conference is to bring the facts out and in the reality rather than the fantasy with the English

⁶⁴ibid

⁶⁵https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/684ffae201d3b0e7b62da722/National_Audit_on_Group-based_Child_Sexual_Exploitation_and_Abuse.pdf p. 79

⁶⁶https://mcb.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2014/08/MCB_Postconference_report_2014.pdf

⁶⁷ibid

⁶⁸ibid

Defence League and the far-right. And we heard that in this conference that that is a common problem. The perpetrators can come from any community and victims come from any community. That is the first thing that we have heard and we have put that on record.”⁶⁹

⁶⁹https://mcb.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2014/08/MCB_Postconference_report_2014.pdf

Chapter 3

The police boycotter given the MBE: the case of Muhbeen Hussain⁷⁰

A man named Muhbeen Hussain was a key member of the APPG's staff when it wrote the report creating that group's Islamophobia definition, including the extracts quoted above, and he remains so to this day. There were repeated references to his role in the APPG during the spring and summer of 2018, when the report on the definition was being prepared and written.⁷¹ On its publication Hussain was congratulated for "all the work [he] did" on the report by one of those who gave evidence for it.⁷²

He is the only staff member listed in these references, though another report by the APPG in December 2017 said it had four staff, including Hussain, at that point.⁷³ The Islamophobia definition report thanked "our secretariat for their continuous hard work and all their efforts before, during and after the evidence sessions and community consultations. This inquiry ran smoothly due to their diligence and commitment."⁷⁴ One prominent Muslim activist has described Hussain as "absolutely central" to the Islamophobia report.⁷⁵ As of January 2025 Hussain still provides secretariat services for the APPG, as well as being a researcher for the Labour MP Naz Shah.⁷⁶

⁷⁰Much of this chapter previously appeared in the Policy Exchange report *The Rotherham Grooming Scandal and the Creators of the Islamophobia Definition*, published in February 2025, [Link](#)

⁷¹For instance, <https://x.com/LondonFaiths/status/1014193643568160768> and https://x.com/adel_chowdhury/status/990946783433027584

⁷²<https://x.com/mshafiquk/status/1067481265757143040>

⁷³<https://static1.squarespace.com/static/599c3d2febbd1a90cffdd8a9/t/5a38feee53450a36410e66c8/1513684791406/Report+%3A+A+Very+Merry+Christmas+>

⁷⁴<https://static1.squarespace.com/static/599c3d2febbd1a90cffdd8a9/t/5bfd1ea3352f531a6170ceee/1543315109493/Islamophobia+Defined.pdf> – page 60.

⁷⁵Interview with Policy Exchange.

⁷⁶<https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm/cmsecret/250110/register.pdf>



Muhbeen Hussain (left) on the House of Commons terrace.

As set out in previous work published by Policy Exchange,⁷⁷ Muhbeen Hussain is from Rotherham. His uncle,⁷⁸ Mahroof Hussain, was a Labour cabinet member and councillor in the town during the grooming scandal. Mahroof resigned from both posts in February 2015 after the official Casey report into the scandal found council staff felt he had “suppressed discussion [about the problem] for fear of upsetting community relations.”⁷⁹

The report quoted a police officer as saying: “We discussed targeting taxi drivers and the Pakistani heritage community in relation to CSE [child sexual exploitation]. We were even discussing particular families we had concerns about. These members [Mahroof Hussain and another councillor, Jahangir Akhtar] would push back.... They were saying to us ‘it will cause a lot of community tension if they are targeted specifically.’”⁸⁰

A few months later, in October 2015, Muhbeen Hussain, Mahroof’s nephew and the future APPG staff member, organised Rotherham’s Muslims to boycott South Yorkshire Police for their behaviour over the grooming scandal. Asked the

⁷⁷Policy Exchange, The Rotherham Grooming Scandal and the Creators of the Islamophobia Definition, 2025, [Link](#)

⁷⁸Muhbeen Hussain has stated that Mahroof is his uncle in a letter seen by Policy Exchange. When asked directly by Policy Exchange in a telephone call whether Mahroof was his relative, Muhbeen refused to deny it, stating that he was too busy to answer the question and immediately ending the call.

⁷⁹https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5a8152f4ed915d74e33fd945/46966_Report_of_Inspection_of_Rotherham_WEB.pdf

⁸⁰*Ibid*

reason for the boycott, he told the BBC: "First and foremost, the police pushed a pernicious lie suggesting that they didn't make arrests for the grooming scandal because of fears of being called racist."⁸¹ He also said police had not done enough to protect local Muslims from demonstrations by the far-right. On one occasion Muslim and far-right protestors who fought each other in the street were charged with violent disorder; the Muslims were acquitted after a jury found they had acted in self-defence.

The group Muhbeen founded and led at the time, British Muslim Youth, said police "piggybacked on this hostile environment towards the Muslim community by deflecting the attention of their own failures by scapegoating us.... We, the Muslim community of Rotherham, have voted for all Muslim organisations and institutions (whether religious or secular), which claim to represent Muslims in Rotherham, to cut all lines of engagement and communication with South Yorkshire Police..."

"Any Muslim groups or institutions in Rotherham that do not adhere to this policy of disengagement will also be boycotted by the Muslim community....We will not be treated as criminals any longer, nor will we be held responsible for acts of personal self-defence. If South Yorkshire Police cannot adequately protect and serve the Muslim residents of Rotherham; then moving forward we will take all the necessary action to protect ourselves within the confines of the law."⁸²

The boycott lasted less than two days before cooler heads prevailed. In an editorial, the local newspaper accused Muhbeen of an "ill-informed bit of posturing... steeped in belligerent and threatening language" and an "idiotic political own goal" which had "managed to embarrass every right-thinking Muslim that calls Rotherham home."⁸³

Muhbeen Hussain was subsequently shunned by the new Labour Council leader, Chris Read, who refused to meet him, saying the boycott had "sent a terrible signal to the rest of our town. I can only assume that you did not care that it

⁸¹<https://youtu.be/N2q2eYjWeGs?si=H3o5EpZTCbcpytzu&t=171>

⁸²<https://web.archive.org/web/20151030042336/http://www.britishmuslimyouth.org.uk/south-yorkshire-police-boycotted-by-the-muslim-community-of-rotherham/>

⁸³<https://web.archive.org/web/20181203193033/https://www.thestar.co.uk/news/editor-s-comment-muslim-group-s-fleeting-boycott-has-done-untold-damage-to-rotherham-1-7541010>

would look like trying to position some people as being above the law... or you didn't realise the implication, which may be worse.”⁸⁴

Muhbeen then issued an indignant press release questioning Read's "fitness to lead" for refusing to meet him.⁸⁵ He had claimed the boycott was "successful in facilitating the correct dialogue needed to hear the concerns of many ordinary law-abiding Muslims living within Rotherham and silently enduring hate crimes" and had produced a number of positive outcomes.⁸⁶

In August 2017, Muhbeen went on the BBC's Newsnight to attack Rotherham's Labour MP, Sarah Champion, for writing in The Sun that Britain "has a problem with British Pakistani men raping and exploiting white girls." He said that it had had "fuelled" discrimination.⁸⁷ He may already have been working for the APPG by this point; he was credited in a report it published in December that year.⁸⁸

Muhbeen did not mention that his uncle, Mahroof, had had to resign over the scandal, nor that in 2012 Mahroof had been Champion's rival for the Labour parliamentary candidacy in Rotherham – when dozens of his supporters walked out of the selection meeting in protest that he was kept off the shortlist.⁸⁹

Writing in 2018, Muhbeen said: "We all remember why child sexual exploitation was so prevalent in Rotherham. It was because the police were too scared to make arrests due to political correctness, wasn't it? I'm sorry, but this is far from the truth....To deflect from their own incompetence South Yorkshire Police had to now show everyone that they were getting "tough" on the Pakistani community, to make up for their previous shortcoming.”⁹⁰

Muhbeen Hussain and his group did speak out against the grooming scandal in 2014, calling for prosecutions, as soon as the first of the reports, by Alexis Jay, had been published. He held a press conference and demonstration at the time, saying that "the council, the social services and the police authorities have totally failed us... We want the investigations to go back to 1997, cases reopened and prosecutions made."

⁸⁴<https://rotherhampolitics.wordpress.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/2-response-from-chris-reade1.jpg>

⁸⁵<https://5pillarsuk.com/2017/01/17/rotherham-council-leaders-fitness-to-lead-questioned-after-refusing-to-meet-muslim-activist/>

⁸⁶<http://web.archive.org/web/20151030013048/http://www.thestar.co.uk/news/local/rotherham-muslim-boycott-of-south-yorkshire-police-ends-with-new-proposals-agreed-1-7540516>

⁸⁷<https://x.com/BBCNewsnight/status/897942176100777984>

⁸⁸<https://static1.squarespace.com/static/599c3d2febbd1a90cfffdd8a9/t/5a38feee53450a36410e66c8/1513684791406/Report+%3A+A+Very+Merry+Christmas>

⁸⁹<https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2012/nov/13/labour-party-members-protest-rotherham>

⁹⁰<https://www.counterfire.org/article/rotherham-islamophobia-structural-racism-and-the-far-right/>

But he strongly questioned “this idea that people were afraid because of racism or because it might be charged as racist – it's not in the name of our community... I am a Pakistani and I am a Muslim and there is nothing in the religious faith of Islam that would condone the act of child grooming, it completely condemns such things.”⁹¹ He said that “saying it's about race is just an excuse for the failure of the local council.”⁹² He declared: “There is this propaganda and misconception going that the community were aware.” He acknowledged that the inquiry had shown that most abusers were of Pakistani heritage, but he disowned the perpetrators and said: “It is not a Pakistani or a Muslim problem. There is nowhere within the Pakistani culture that condones such action.”⁹³

This continued to be his view as further incidents of grooming networks of mainly South Asian Muslim men came to light, including in Newcastle in 2017.⁹⁴ Speaking after the Newcastle convictions, he said: “I think we are framing it incorrectly... Islam is a religion of all cultures, you find Japanese Muslims, you find Indonesian Muslims...and to say this is somehow a Muslim problem, let's look at these grooming gangs. These grooming gangs were individuals that were using alcohol, using drugs, and actually having sessions exploiting these young girls. I don't know what's Islamic about drinking alcohol, drugs, and exploiting young girls.”⁹⁵

Muhbeen said that deporting dual nationals to the country of their other nationality (a provision used against some of those convicted of grooming)⁹⁶ was “moving towards a modern form of colonialism.”⁹⁷ In October 2018, he said the Casey report into the Rotherham scandal – the one which resulted in his uncle having to resign - was “based on hearsay.”⁹⁸

As well as child grooming, Hussain has sought to reframe cases of terrorism involving Muslims. The day after the murder of the soldier Lee Rigby, he said that “officials were wrong in the way they went about it, I think they came out and said it was a terrorist, Islamic jihadist attack when they had no information

⁹¹<https://www.thetimes.com/best-law-firms/profile-legal/article/muslim-leader-demands-full-investigation-b9cnncl25nc>

⁹²<https://apnews.com/general-news-424380f7aa9d42aaa164885580e5c0f4>

⁹³Billy Kenber, Muslims disown grooming gangs, 30 August 2014.

⁹⁴<https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/muslims-disown-grooming-gangs-0rkv6qjn99d>

⁹⁵<https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2017/aug/09/newcastle-sex-grooming-network-operation-shelter>

⁹⁶<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K7sElhMJgSI&t=9s>

⁹⁷<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-manchester-63404698>

⁹⁸<https://x.com/BritishMuslimY/status/1227190600275054592>

⁹⁹<https://x.com/i/web/status/1057402264267247616>

on the matter itself...When I see analysts and editors and commentators use the word 'jihadist'... jihad means to struggle in the way of good, and Islam completely condemns all acts of violence and terrorism and killing, and this has nothing to do with Islam... it has to be seen as a criminal matter."⁹⁹ In fact, the previous night, footage had emerged of one of the killers stating: "We swear by almighty Allah we will never stop fighting you. The only reason we have done this is because Muslims are dying every day. This British soldier is an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth."¹⁰⁰

Discussing the terror attack by Salman Abedi at Manchester Arena, which killed 22 people and injured more than a thousand, Hussain wrote: "Could Salman Abedi's Libyan heritage have been a grievance, caused by a failed British intervention destroying Libya?...Could an open dialogue have prevented such a drastic conversion? We too easily ready accept ideology as a factor in radicalisation, whilst not accepting that grievances caused by our foreign adventures may be a significant factor?"¹⁰¹

Muhbeen Hussain has close links to the Labour Party. As well as currently working for a Labour MP, he appears to have sought selection as a Labour parliamentary candidate.¹⁰² In 2016, he spoke alongside then shadow chancellor, John McDonnell, on "political policing and state racism."¹⁰³ At this event he used inflammatory rhetoric about British Muslims, claiming that they were put in "separate lines" at airports. "If you're a British Muslim and you go to the airport, you know how it feels to be a suspected community. You know you're not going into that separate line because it's an odd chance of a random selection."¹⁰⁴

In a decision remarkable even by the standards of the British state, Muhbeen Hussain has been awarded an MBE in the latest King's Birthday Honours List (June 2025) "in recognition of his contributions to integration and social cohesion in the UK."¹⁰⁵

⁹⁹<https://youtu.be/OPcCF-GBDQQ?si=pXF8i2F1xLObtivP&t=85>

¹⁰⁰<https://www.theguardian.com/uk/2013/may/22/police-respond-serious-incident-woolwich>

¹⁰¹<https://www.independent.co.uk/voices/manchester-attack-salman-abedi-young-british-muslims-voiceless-islamophobia-a7756926.html>

¹⁰²<https://www.stokesentinel.co.uk/news/stoke-on-trent-news/six-running-labours-next-stoke-1046857>

¹⁰³<https://www.crimeandjustice.org.uk/subversion-sabotage-and-spying-political-policing-and-state-racism-uk>

¹⁰⁴https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Alw_OfWN3vo

¹⁰⁵<https://aboutislam.net/muslim-issues/europe/british-muslim-awarded-mbe-for-promoting-unity-and-inclusivity/>

Chapter 4

The public sector and a definition of Islamophobia

For the national grooming gang inquiry to succeed, it will need to critically examine the work of civil servants, police officers, health workers and local government officials. It will also need the support of public servants to get the information it needs to understand why the country has been so poor at protecting children in recent decades.

The Casey audit has clearly signposted that the gathering of demographic data on both victims and perpetrators has been insufficient and that this must be reversed. Casey has also stated:¹⁰⁶

More effort is required to identify the nature of group-based child sexual exploitation and why it appears men of Asian and Pakistani ethnicity are disproportionately represented in some areas, in order to understand it better, and to tackle it more effectively.

Is the civil service suited to this task?

In January 2025, Policy Exchange published a report entitled “Extremely Confused: The Government’s new counter-extremism review revealed.”¹⁰⁷ This was based on leaked Home Office documents, and contained some worrying indications as to how issues such as group-based grooming are viewed by officials and researchers. Despite wishing to focus on misogyny as part of the government’s wider (and admirable) focus on violence against women and girls, the Home Office documents said little on grooming gangs and the difficult questions they raise.

A section on religion and misogyny featured, not the grooming gangs, but unpleasant, yet largely obscure, Satanist organisations. In the part of the

¹⁰⁶https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/684ffae201d3b0e7b62da722/National_Audit_on_Group-based_Child_Sexual_Exploitation_and_Abuse.pdf p. 87

¹⁰⁷<https://policyexchange.org.uk/publication/extremely-confused/>

counter-extremism sprint dedicated to countering the far-right, claims of two-tier policing are given as an example of a “right-wing extremist narrative.”

Yet, as stated, two-tier policing is a perfectly accurate way to describe the failings in grooming gang cases such as Rotherham or Rochdale – the perpetrators would have been treated differently by the authorities had they been white, and the victims would have been treated differently had they been middle-class.¹⁰⁸

Following a critical public response to Policy Exchange publishing its report based upon the leaked documents, the Government stated that the documents concerned had not been official policy.¹⁰⁹ Home Secretary Rt Hon Yvette Cooper MP is yet to publish the full details of the Government’s counter-extremism strategy, and the infrastructure and appointees who will deliver it.

As described above, there are further grounds to criticise the Home Office’s approach. In the recent Casey review, a 2020 Home Office paper “Group based child sexual exploitation characteristics of offending”¹¹⁰ receives critical analysis. Casey finds it wanting due to the limited data available, and goes on to comment that it is “hard to understand how the Home Office reached the conclusion in their paper that the ethnicity of group-based child sexual exploitation offenders is likely to be in line with child sexual abuse more generally and with the general population.”¹¹¹ The mistakes of the Home Office have, not surprisingly, been repeated by MPs who have used such reports as evidence in parliamentary contributions on Islamophobia and “far-right conspiracies” about grooming gangs.¹¹²

While it may be the case that the Home Office is inconsistently served by its in-house researchers or by the external academics it consults, there is a second issue concerning the ideological atmosphere within today’s public sector, and the important question of the neutrality of the public square. Staff associations based on colour, nationality and/or religion have prospered in the public sector in recent years. Their support for political campaigns such as Islamophobia

¹⁰⁸<https://policyexchange.org.uk/publication/extremely-confused/> See p. 14-15. On the class dimensions of grooming in Rochdale, see for example <https://www.spiked-online.com/2024/01/22/the-betrayal-of-rochdales-working-class-girls/>

¹⁰⁹<https://hansard.parliament.uk/Commons/2025-01-28/debates/839E359D-887F-4693-A0C1-37215382E64C/ExtremismReview?highlight=leak#contribution-BCF649CC-3E39-4B9B-9B7C-BFCBBB553F30>

¹¹⁰<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/group-based-child-sexual-exploitation-characteristics-of-offending>

¹¹¹https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/684ffae201d3b0e7b62da722/National_Audit_on_Group-based_Child_Sexual_Exploitation_and_Abuse.pdf p. 79

¹¹²<https://hansard.parliament.uk/Commons/2023-12-07/debates/370FAD96-8357-415D-82D7-1ED9ECF0A5B1/TacklingIslamophobia#contribution-47411C9A-2954-436D-BA0C-069037C90C3D>

Awareness Month - such as that given by the NHS Muslim Network¹¹³ and the National Association of Muslim Police (NAMP)¹¹⁴ - has been clear.

In written evidence to parliament, NAMP has supported a definition of Islamophobia,¹¹⁵ while the Scottish Police Muslim Association has met with the campaign group MEND “in order to discuss inputs on Islamophobia within Policing.”¹¹⁶ The police were amongst those organisations criticised by the Casey review for not having done enough to act promptly upon the grooming scandal. The potential for such campaign groups to undermine public sector delivery, as well as how it is viewed by all sections of the community, needs the urgent attention of Ministers.

¹¹³<https://www.standard.co.uk/news/uk/islamophobia-awareness-month-what-is-it-theme-how-to-get-involved-definition-b1036819.html>

¹¹⁴<https://www.muslim.police.uk/iammuslim>

¹¹⁵<https://committees.parliament.uk/writtenevidence/105884/html/>

¹¹⁶<https://x.com/SPMAinfo/status/1579796219647254528>

Annex A: Letter from Sir John Jenkins to Dominic Grieve KC

Dear Dominic,

I received an email on 27 May from the Department of Housing, Communities and Local Government, inviting me to meet with the Working Group on Anti-Muslim Hatred/ Islamophobia Definition. It is kind of you to seek my views, and those of Policy Exchange more generally, on “*whether a definition [of Islamophobia] would be helpful*”. As it happens, I could not have made any of the times suggested: the notice was simply too short and I was in any case in Saudi Arabia at the time.

More importantly, I have some fundamental reservations about both the process you are overseeing and its likely trajectory. I owe you the courtesy of explaining what these are. I remain unconvinced that anything I might say would make a difference to the Group’s deliberations. But I am always open to being persuaded otherwise.

First, with regard to process: the creation of the Working Group was announced by the Deputy Prime Minister on 28 February and given a six-month timeframe in which to deliver a report. We are now over half-way through that period and very little information about the work of the Group has entered the public domain. I note that the Terms of Reference (TORs) specify that all discussions will be strictly confidential. On a matter of such public policy significance, this is highly unusual. As matters stand, the absence of transparency is bound to raise serious questions about accountability. This must surely damage the credibility of its conclusions.

Second, the precise nature of the Working Group is unclear to me. The TORs talk about “*technical experts*”. But the question of “Islamophobia” is both heavily contested and subjective. In every definition I have seen – including that of the All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on British Muslims, to whose 2019 report you contributed an introduction – it is treated as a matter of “lived experience”. You described it as such yourself in February. I do not understand how anyone can be a “technical expert” on such experiential matters. What is needed instead

is surely expertise in European law and jurisprudence (which must be the operational framework for such issues), Islamic jurisprudence (which is highly complex and varied but provides a context for some of the more extravagant claims in this area), the philosophy of liberty and the history of both western and Islamic political thought - plus a healthily sceptical attitude to critical theory and an intellectually rigorous approach to both social constructivism and what Marxists used to call “reification”.

I should also have thought that the membership of such a group would need to be diverse, representing different viewpoints, normative commitments and experiences. After all, if the government were to adopt a definition of Islamophobia, it would affect everyone in the country, of whatever ethnicity, faith or political persuasion. The Group’s TORs go some way to recognising this – as indeed did the APPG Report. Yet every single member - apart from you - appears to be Muslim. Muslims, of course, have an entirely understandable interest in the matter: but so does everyone else.

Against that background, I am concerned that the Working Group may have begun its work with its conclusions pre-determined. The TORs make clear that its objective is “*to develop a working definition*”¹¹⁷ not to decide whether to have one or not. As you will know from my own publicly stated position on this issue, I believe that the case for accepting this - as a first principle - is far from proven. This is, of course, a commonly held view not just in this country but across Europe and across political divides. Yet it seems that the Working Group has, without argument, decided otherwise.

That it has done so would seem to be in keeping with what I understand to be your own public position. The 2019 APPG Report claimed a definition of Islamophobia was needed to prevent “*negative attitudes that would not be classed as crimes by police*” and to set “*appropriate limits to free speech*” when talking about Muslims.¹¹⁸ Throughout the report there are frequent suggestions that this would need to be “*legally-binding*”. Akeela Ahmed, a member of the current Working Group, is actually quoted as saying that “*a definition with legal power is required, one that could be implemented by the government and the police.*” Even if the definition were not legally binding, it would still probably operate in much

¹¹⁷https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/67e12094d8e313b503358c7c/Anti-Muslim_Hatred_Islamophobia_Definition_Working_Group_Terms_of_Reference_March_2025.pdf.

¹¹⁸<https://static1.squarespace.com/static/599c3d2febbd1a90cfffdd8a9/t/5bfd1ea3352f531a6170ceee/1543315109493/Islamophobia+Defined.pdf>.

the same way. In the supportive foreword which you wrote, you “*greatly welcome[d]*” the report and added, “*that action is needed I have no doubt.*”¹¹⁹

Then there is the question of how you believe my own views would help shape the current debate. As you will remember, when I and my colleagues at Policy Exchange contested the conclusions of the APPG at the time,¹²⁰ you publicly described our report as in large part “*total, unadulterated rubbish.*”¹²¹ I have not changed my views on this matter. I daresay the same is true of you.

Against that backdrop, it is hard not to wonder whether the real purpose of the Group’s approach to me is not so much because they welcome challenge but instead to help legitimise a pre-ordained conclusion by claiming that they consulted those on all sides of the debate - before proposing a definition which they then seek to present as a compromise.

As I have said, my position is a matter of public record¹²², but I am happy to restate it here. Hatred of and discrimination against Muslims are emphatically wrong – but are already illegal. It therefore remains unclear to me exactly what the definitional, policy or legal problem might be that a new, government-sponsored definition of Islamophobia is trying to address. What then is its purpose? HMG has periodically insisted that it will be “*non-statutory*” and will maintain freedom of speech. The current TORs for your Working Group make the same claim. But they also explicitly talk about determining the “*appropriate and sensitive language*” for discussing issues in this space. And the aim of many of the activists who seek such a definition is clearly to achieve legal enforceability.

Whether a definition is legally binding or not, of course, the impact is clear. You will recall that Sir Trevor Phillips (whom I note you have also invited to speak to the Working Group) was suspended from the Labour Party in 2020 for “Islamophobia”. The suspension was both absurd and later lifted. But it illustrates the problem.

Whatever form of words is chosen, and whatever legal status it has to start with, any definition will have serious consequences. It will almost certainly

¹¹⁹Ibid.

¹²⁰<https://policyexchange.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/Defining-Islamophobia.pdf>; <https://policyexchange.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/A-definition-of-Islamophobia.pdf>.

¹²¹<https://hansard.parliament.uk/Commons/2019-05-16/debates/CF834846-65CA-46CD-B955-CDEF42BAFB26/DefinitionOfIslamophobia#contribution-03E5CD9E-711F-4BA6-B342-77EB121CB1C5>.

¹²²<https://policyexchange.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/On-Islamophobia.pdf>.

turbocharge 'cancel culture'. Indeed, I have heard it described as potentially the most retrograde step in this country since Sir Robert Walpole's government in 1737 granted the Lord Chamberlain's office powers to licence theatrical scripts. And it will inevitably reduce social trust and heighten social tensions. In this regard, the debate over whether a definition would be legally binding is something of a red herring. Its effect would inevitably be to shrink even further the space for open debate.

Moreover, this initiative comes at a time when the government is at pains to rebut the charge - not just in this country but from the Trump administration - that it operates a "two-tier" policy in various areas. But unless it literally restates the existing legal protections covering all faiths, any official Islamophobia definition will be an undeniable act of two-tier policy, creating special status and protection for members of one faith alone.

The charge of special treatment may in fact increase hostility towards Muslims, not reduce it. It will certainly strengthen divisive extremism on all sides - not just from the populist right, but also the growing Islamist challenge to mainstream parties. That, too, is likely to harm both community cohesion and Muslims more generally.

It is unlikely to alleviate Islamist discontent - it will stoke it, creating new opportunities for grievance politics, challenge and attack in every institution and workplace. Even without the force of an official definition, claims of Islamophobia are already used to close down legitimate debate and deter investigation of alleged wrongdoing, as in Rotherham or Batley, with disastrous results all round, including for the wider Muslim community itself.

I have little confidence that the Working Group will approach these questions with an open mind. As I said at the beginning of this letter, I should be happy to be proved wrong on both points.

Yours sincerely,

Sir John Jenkins

Senior Fellow, Policy Exchange

Annex B: Labour's Islamophobia Policy.¹²³

All highlighting and formatting is as per the original.

Labour's Islamophobia Policy

Code of Conduct

Introduction

1. The NEC will view any acts of discrimination, prejudice or hostility based on religion or race as prejudicial and grossly detrimental to the Labour Party and its interests. Chapter 2, clause 1.8 of the Labour Party Rule book applies to all members of the Labour Party. It provides:

2. *"No member of the Party shall engage in conduct which in the opinion of the NEC is prejudicial, or in any act which in the opinion of the NEC is grossly detrimental to the Party. The NEC and NCC shall take account of any codes of conduct currently in force and shall regard any incident which in their view might reasonably be seen to demonstrate hostility or prejudice based on age; disability; gender reassignment or identity; marriage and civil partnership; pregnancy and maternity; race; religion or belief; sex; or sexual orientation as conduct prejudicial to the Party: these shall include but not be limited to incidents involving racism, antisemitism, Islamophobia or otherwise racist language, sentiments, stereotypes or actions, sexual harassment, bullying or any form of intimidation towards another person on the basis of a protected characteristic as determined by the NEC, wherever it occurs, as conduct prejudicial to the Party. The disclosure of confidential information relating to the Party or to any other member, unless the disclosure is duly authorised or made pursuant to a legal obligation, shall also be considered conduct prejudicial to the Party."*

3. This Code of Conduct on Islamophobia supplements the "Code of Conduct: Antisemitism and other forms of racism," reproduced in Appendix 9 to the Labour Party Rule Book. The NEC and NCC will take this Code of Conduct on

¹²³<https://labour.org.uk/resources/labours-islamophobia-policy/>

Islamophobia into account when determining allegations of hostility or prejudice based on the protected characteristic of Islam or towards Muslims.

4. Complaints of Islamophobia will be investigated and processed in accordance with the Labour Party's disciplinary policies, which can be found on the Labour Party's website and in the Labour Party Complaint Handling Handbook. **What is Islamophobia?**

5. There is no single agreed definition of Islamophobia, albeit various civic, social, legal and political sources have attempted to define it. One definition is the All Party Parliamentary Group on British Muslim's definition (APPG). The APPG defines Islamophobia as:

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

The Labour Party adopted the APPG definition and its examples in March 2019 as an important statement of principle and solidarity. The NEC reaffirms that position in this Code of Conduct.

6. The Runnymede Trust has defined Islamophobia as anti-Muslim racism and further said:

"... any distinction, exclusion, or restriction towards, or preference against, Muslims (or those perceived to be Muslims) that has the purpose or effect of nullifying or impairing the recognition, enjoyment or exercise, on an equal footing, of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural or any other field of public life".

7. Under equality law, Muslims are a religious group and they do not comprise a distinct ethnic or national group. Unlawful discrimination against a person because they are Muslim is, therefore, a type of religious discrimination and not a type of race discrimination. Nonetheless, adherence to Islam may often be used as a proxy for race discrimination against people who are Muslim and from extra-European ethnicities. People may also perceive others to be Muslim and treat them detrimentally because they share perceived cultural or physical traits common to various ethnic groups: that may constitute hostility or prejudice based on race.

8. One example of this sort of race discrimination arises especially against Sikhs, who may be perceived to be Muslims because of their skin colour, names, dress,

religious practices and other personal attributes, and therefore subjected to prejudice. This is religious discrimination against Sikhs by perception (that they are Muslim) and also race discrimination (the perception arises from their skin colour and ethnic background).

9. Another example is where a person makes derogatory references to Muslims but the discriminator's real target is people from South Asia or the Middle East. This 'dog whistle' is used particularly by far-right political groups against Muslim, and other South Asian, politicians. **Further guidance and illustrative examples**

10. In all cases, whether conduct is discriminatory must be assessed according to the particular context, facts and circumstances at hand. When considering allegations of Islamophobia, the Labour Party is advised to take into account the following sorts of treatment that are likely to amount to prejudice or hostility based on the protected characteristic of Islam or ethnic or national origins:

- a. Inciting by word or deed hatred or violence against Muslims, including calling for or justifying actual or threatened harm towards Muslims.
- b. Engaging in derogatory or dehumanising stereotypes about Muslims, for example, by suggesting that Muslims in general have a particular propensity to commit, or to support, acts of terrorism; or that individuals who are Muslim are necessarily socially or politically illiberal or regressive; or that Muslims have particular physical characteristics, names, dress or moral or ethical values; or that Muslims have a propensity for violence or are incapable of living peacefully in a democratic society; or that is not used to those of other backgrounds.
- c. Suggesting that Muslims, individually or as a group in British society, pose a threat to British or European society, civilisation or values, for example, by claiming that Muslims are a demographic threat to British people, by claiming that Muslims are taking over British society or civic or political institutions through their presence in the same, or by catastrophising immigration from Muslim majority countries.
- d. Requiring Muslims to act in a way not expected or demanded of any other group.
- e. Requiring Muslims to criticise terrorist acts more vociferously than other people, or requiring Muslims to apologise for terrorism committed

by extremists in the name of Islam, or holding Muslims collectively responsible for the acts of Muslim majority countries, paramilitary groups or terrorists.

f. Using slurs or grossly offensive imagery about Muslims, portraying Muslims as sexually untrustworthy or dangerous, or that Muslims or their contemporary religious practices are cruel or violent.

g. Mocking or belittling people's personal characteristics that are associated with their national or ethnic identities or origins, for example, by mocking Muslim names, the Arabic language, or national, religious or ethnic clothing, facial hair, or other physical attributes.

h. Objecting to the presence of Mosques or Koranic scripture because of their association with Islam or Muslims is very likely to be considered prejudicial. However, an objection to the presence of religious symbols, places of worship or religious scripture on the basis of secularism or atheism is very likely to be protected by the rights to freedom of conscience and freedom of expression and should not, by itself, be considered Islamophobic.

i. Making irrelevant references to the protected characteristic of being Muslim. This practice is often a form of discrimination and stereotyping. It is perpetuated in media reports of alleged crime, routinely referring to the perpetrators as "Muslim", when no other equivalent reference would be made to any other faith.

j. Accusing Muslims of being a "fifth column" or of lying or acting in 'stealth', and/or implying a Muslim, or Muslims in general, are inherently antisemitic, homophobic and/or misogynist.

k. Minimising or justifying the persecution, oppression or denial of the human rights of Muslims on the basis of concerns about 'Islamic' terrorism, or national security. This may manifest itself by using stereotypes in an international context (for example, in respect of the position of Palestinians or Kashmiris, to deny the right to self-determination) or in a domestic context.

l. Denying, or minimising the significance of, discrimination against Muslims may demonstrate hostility or prejudice because of religion.

11. The Labour Party must remain a forum for discussion about important social and political issues that involve Islam or Muslim people. However, these discussions about important social and political issues that involve Islam or Muslim people must always be undertaken sensitively and respectfully. All Labour Party members are required to act with and to promote tolerance and respect. Personal abuse has no place in political discussion and such abuse is, for the purposes of the Labour Party, always unacceptable.