Written evidence submitted by Dimensions UK

Executive Summary

Further to Dimensions’ first written submission and following oral evidence submissions to the inquiry, Dimensions emphasises the need for policy change that is common across multiple strands of hate crime, namely change in the law; work in schools; training for police officers.

Dimensions also emphasises the importance of responding to the specific needs of the learning disability and autism community in forthcoming reporting by the Home Affairs Select Committee and in the government response that follows.

1. Response to oral evidence gathering

1.1 Dimensions highlights the limited representation of learning disability and autism in the oral evidence sessions of the inquiry and the fact that the only representation of disability generally related specifically to Northern Ireland. We would welcome further evidence sessions around disability hate crime and learning disability and autism hate crime more specifically.

1.2 Dimensions stresses the need for the inquiry to consider the problem of learning disability and autism hate crime and make recommendations to government that include both the specific needs of this community and the needs that overlap with other community groups currently experiencing hate crime across the UK.

1.3 Dimensions underlines that, whilst disability hate crime is addressed to some extent in the government’s hate crime action plan, more specific initiatives must be developed to protect this group and greater attention should be paid to the problem of disability hate crime and learning disability and autism hate crime within it.

1.4 Dimensions notes that common themes emerge from the evidence submitted to the inquiry thus far and that certain changes would help to combat the problem of learning disability and autism hate crime and hate crime perpetrated against other protected groups.

1.5 In line with these common themes Dimensions emphasises the importance of government including consideration of learning disability and autism as part of:

- Changing current legislation for prosecuting acts of hate in line with the Law Commission’s recommendations
- Investing in schools programmes and resources to counter intolerance, bullying and hate as part of primary and secondary education
- Supporting police training and resourcing to ensure all victims of hate crime receive adequate support that secures the best chance of successful prosecution

2. Change in Law

2.1 A strong zero tolerance message must be communicated by government as it seeks to tackle hate crime.
2.2 Current legislation and disparities between the provision for disability, transgender identity and sexual orientation as compared to race and religion fail to convey the message that all strands of hate crime are taken equally seriously.

2.3 As highlighted in the evidence regarding the LGBT community, perceived inequality in the law similarly undermines confidence in the system amongst people with learning disabilities and autism and contributes to underreporting.

**2.4 Government should respond to the recommendations made by the Law Commission in 2014 on reviewing and extending aggravated offences legislation.**

3. **Schools and Education**

3.1 As in the case of Islamophobic hate crime, school aged young people are closely associated with hate crime perpetrated against people with learning disabilities and autism.

3.2 Whilst there is limited research into this type of crime, it is understood anecdotally by disability organisations and members of the criminal justice system that much of this crime is perpetrated by young people.

3.3 Dimensions, alongside many others who have submitted evidence to the inquiry, underlines the importance of working effectively in schools to combat hate crime. We emphasise that this is particularly important in the case of attitudes towards learning disability and autism.

**3.4 Government should develop resources that encourage positive messages around difference and increased understanding of protected characteristics.**

**3.5 Government should ensure secondary education enables all pupils to understand what hate crime is and that all pupils are able to make connections between their actions, the actions of their peers and acts of hate.**

4. **Police Training**

4.1 The issue of online hate crime has been highlighted by multiple submissions representing different protected groups. Hate online continues to be a significant problem for people with learning disabilities and autism.

4.2 Police officers must be able to respond to the problem of hate online and this would be supported by more rigorous legislation for prosecuting hateful acts, namely aggravated offences legislation.

4.3 Police officers must also be able to provide adequate support to victims of hate crime, responding to the specific needs of the victim and enabling them to give best evidence.

4.4 Best practice for training officers around learning disability and autism includes face-to-face interaction with self-advocates and ongoing interaction with self-advocacy and disability groups.

**4.5 Government should ensure that police officer training is founded on best practice and provides adequate knowledge and skilling around learning disability and autism.**