Home Affairs Committee

Oral evidence: Islamophobia, HC 1828

Tuesday 11 June 2019

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Watch the meeting

Members present: Yvette Cooper (Chair); Janet Daby; Kate Green; Tim Loughton; Toby Perkins.

Questions 116–198

Witnesses

I: Iman Atta, Director, Tell MAMA, and Miqdaad Versi, Head of Public Affairs, Muslim Council of Britain.

II: Rt Hon Sir Vince Cable MP, Leader, Liberal Democrat Party, and Baroness Brinton, President, Liberal Democrat Party.

Written evidence from witnesses:

- Muslim Council of Britain
Examination of witnesses

Iman Atta and Miqdaad Versi.

Q116 Chair: Can I welcome everyone to this session of the Home Affairs Committee inquiry into Islamophobia? Welcome to our first panel giving evidence to us today. Could I ask you both to introduce yourselves and also the organisations that you represent?

Iman Atta: Iman Atta, Director of Tell MAMA.

Miqdaad Versi: Miqdaad Versi, spokesperson for the Muslim Council of Britain.

Q117 Chair: Thank you very much. Could I ask you to reflect initially for us on what you see as the scale of Islamophobia across the country and also trends that you are seeing at the moment?

Iman Atta: Within Tell MAMA, we have been recording Islamophobia and anti-Muslim attacks since 2012. Since 2015, we have seen a rise in reported incidents to ourselves, but also to police forces. That rise is attributed to multiple factors. One is the rise of anti-Muslim hatred and Islamophobia, but also we have—

Chair: Sorry, could you speak up slightly? Your microphone is not picking up quite as much as the other microphones. Apologies, you might have to speak a little bit louder.

Iman Atta: My apologies, I will move closer to the microphone as well. We have been seeing an increase in the reports that we have been receiving. Equally, police forces have been receiving an increase in reports of Islamophobia and anti-Muslim hatred. From 2015 to where we are today, year on year we have seen a sharp increase in reported incidents on a street level—so incidents that are called “offline”—of between 30% to 50%. That increase is due to multiple factors. We have the rise of racism, of anti-Muslim hatred, we have media and social media, we have the rise of populism and the far right and we have trigger events that are a contributing factor, as well as a driver to anti-Muslim hatred and Islamophobia.

What are these incidents? What do we see? The majority of the incidents that take place are incidents that are abusive behaviour in nature. Over 50% of these cases are abusive behaviour in nature. Nevertheless, we see year on year there is an increase in physical aggression and an increase in discrimination cases. In the last few years we have seen, from the reports that we receive, an increase of over 100% in discrimination cases towards Muslim communities. That is something to look at and to worry about. Whatever used to be a covert type of discrimination today is becoming more overt.
Q118 **Chair:** Is that employment discrimination; is that public services discrimination?

**Iman Atta:** Employment discrimination as well as public service discrimination. Let’s not forget as well when you look at anti-Muslim hatred and Islamophobia, it is gendered. Women are the number one target and the number one victim of anti-Muslim hatred and Islamophobia. That is attributed to two reasons. First, sexism, misogyny. Usually the male feels that he can have a go at that woman who is wearing a headscarf or who is wearing a face veil or is just a woman with a dark colour—it is male to female violence, asymptomatic—as well as that female is visibly Muslim, ie wearing the face veil or wearing the headscarf or being from an Asian background or a dark background. 66% of the perpetrators who are reported to us are male and 58% of the victims are female. This seems to be the case year on year and this trend seems to always reinforce itself.

One of the things to note as well about the perpetrators is that in our 2017 data, and equally in the 2018 data, what we are seeing is that the younger generation have a high percentage in perpetrating that hate. For example, in our 2017 data, 22% of the 66% of male perpetrators were between the ages of 13 to 18. This is something definitely to highlight, to look at social media and what role that plays and to look at how we can work more on the education level, to work on the prevention of such racism and those attacks to decrease.

**Miqdaad Versi:** Iman has covered a lot of the different areas in the trends. It is worth highlighting some of the social attitudes in the polling data just to supplement what Iman has mentioned. When you look at the range of different polls out there that look at the perception of Muslims in society, you see things like a third of the population believing in conspiracy theories about Muslims, like there are these no-go zones where non-Muslims can’t enter, these Sharia no-go zones. These types of conspiracy theories are quite prevalent, a third of the population believing this stuff. It gets even worse when you get into the idea that Muslim immigration to this country is somehow a plan to take over; a fifth of the population believe that. But even when it comes to young children, 31% of young children think that Muslims are taking over England. We are not, but this is a serious problem—a third of young children, and wider society.

Q119 **Chair:** What age are those children?

**Miqdaad Versi:** This was aged between 10 and 14 in the largest survey ever done by The Guardian a couple of years ago. These are not small figures. They are worrying figures. The fact that you have such large numbers that come out from broad polling on this issue suggests there is a serious problem that needs to be tackled, which is more than just mere hatred on the street. That is a major issue that needs to be dealt with, but these societal problems in terms of the broader racism within society are something that need to be looked at very carefully.
Chair: Just to reflect a bit further on those figures around the 10 to 14 year-olds, the other figures around the 13-to-18-year-olds being responsible, do you think that has got worse or do you think that is just being measured now?

Iman Atta: I think it is both at the same time. It is definitely measured now because we are focusing more on racism and hate crimes, and things are getting reported more and people are coming forward more and reporting. That is one factor in why we are seeing that rise as well. Secondly, also we have social media. In the last 10 years it has become kind of the popular thing. That will also be a problem for the coming 10 years, where kids pick up on a lot of things. Kids tend to hear their parents say a lot of things at home. Although they don’t come with any prejudice, they just repeat those words the next day in school.

Tell MAMA receives one in 10 cases from schools, ie from parents, where their children have suffered a type of racism or bullying attack or within the staff, but that is educational institutions and that is mainly schools. That is definitely something also to look at in terms of the education system. When you start to speak to schools about this and flag it and talk to them about it, schools fear saying they have issues with race and hate crimes because of Ofsted, because of the name of the school. It is not going to be good enough for people to enrol there, but nevertheless there is that underlying problem that they have to tackle.

We offer mediation between schools and parents, and we offer workshops around bullying and racism, highlighting all types of racism, because from the workshops that we deliver in schools, when we deliver it to students, a lot comes out beyond anti-Muslim hatred and Islamophobia. A lot comes out there, homophobia, anti-Semitism, racism, around even the looks of the kids, which needs to be dealt with in the education system and that unfortunately is not yet dealt with.

Miqdaad Versi: We see this with groups like Childline. There have been a number of different reports that have come out from Childline talking about the fact that it has received greater numbers of calls about Islamophobia in some respects. The latest figures haven’t yet come out, so I do not have them to hand, but it is a very good organisation that tracks this and looks at the kind of racism that it sees in schools.

Chair: In terms of what schools are doing to respond to this, do you have any estimate of what proportion of schools you think are responding well to it or have policies in place to respond to it?

Iman Atta: Not every school has policies in place to respond to it. We do have engagement with the schools, specifically when they receive a letter from our end and the letter is a bit threatening. That is when they react to things, but there are schools that do not even take that letter seriously and we have to call them out and name them in newspapers. We gave them the chance to speak to us, speak to the families and mediate, and when we saw it at that end, we did name and shame them. That is a
problem, because that kid not only suffered that racism in the school, that kid ends up suffering that racism on the streets.

We had a case in the north of the country where we had a refugee family who had many levels of racism and discrimination. They are refugees from Syria. They are Muslims, but they do not belong to the majority Muslim communities here from an Asian background, they are Middle Eastern. They had multiple levels of discrimination and racism in the school, one from the staff themselves and within other members of their school, from kids, for being refugees, because they were highlighted as being refugees when they entered the school. That is one.

Secondly, they experienced it from kids within other Muslim backgrounds in the school who regard them as non-Muslim, because they look different, they act differently, the mother looks different. We have multiple elements that we have to look at when we look at racism and bullying in schools and how it is looked at and the background of the individuals and the background of the school and the staff who are there. What policies do they have? Some of them do not even know that some of the words that are being used are racist. The head teacher said, “That is not racist” and I said, “That is racist”. That comes back to the education and training that staff need to get for them to address these things.

I understand resources are tight sometimes, there is maternity leave and cover and all this, but there is basic training around racism and bullying that teachers and staff need to have in place for them to address this issue, which is a growing phenomenon in our schools.

_Miqdaad Versi:_ It is when you keep on hearing the same type of tropes coming out, the same type of language and still that not being really understood, for example, “Muslims are terrorists”, this has been going on for a while. The same types of things come up again and again and again and it feels like if a third of young children believe that Muslims are taking over England—and that is not even fully appreciated within many sections of schools across the country and that does not seem to be getting better—then we are not doing as well as we should be in preparing young children for the real life that we all live.

Q122 **Chair:** Do you have examples of schools that you work with that you think are doing a good job and have good systems in place?

_Iman Atta:_ We do have a few schools in south London, we do have a few schools in Manchester definitely—and we are happy to share their names—that have put practices in place. We do have schools in Stoke-on-Trent as well that are happy to talk about this subject and are happy to address it, but also welcome us going in to deliver workshops to talk about it. That is very important.

**Chair:** If you had any examples, not necessarily the names of the schools, but the kinds of things that they do that you think are good
practice that work, that would be really helpful if you were able to send us those. Kate Green.

Q123 **Kate Green:** Thank you for coming. I would like to ask some questions about hate crime. You were talking a few moments ago, Iman, about the increase in reported hate crime. First of all, how worrying is that for Muslims, hearing about a rise in hate crime, and what impact is it having on them? Even if they are not directly victims of such hate crime, is it impacting their behaviour or how are they regarding it?

**Iman Atta:** Hate crime and hate speech have a huge impact on communities, they have a huge impact on the victim, on their families, on their friends, on their neighbours, on everyone. I am going to pick up on the recent spike that we have seen in reported incidents, which was unfortunately following the New Zealand terrorist attack, which was an attack on Muslim communities, where we have seen a 600% increase in reports to us that were anti-Muslim in nature. That is an astonishing thing to see. Fifty-one individuals who were Muslims have been killed. Nevertheless, Muslim communities here in the UK still have received a spike in the hatred towards them, whether it is statements like, “You deserve it”, whether it is, “It is your turn now to get it”, whether it is people being called terrorists.

That is worrying, because a female who is being abused on the street just because she is a female and she is Muslim, for her to pay the price for someone else who claims to be Muslim and commits atrocities, that is not fair on that individual. We have seen victims end up with anxiety and depression. We have had victims who have had suicidal tendencies. We have had victims who have had financial damages, when you have vandalism, when you have your household property damaged or your institution or your mosque is damaged, you have financial elements in that.

One of the things that victims always tend to tell us is that when they are being abused walking down the street or in a bus stop, as much as the hate incident that they have experienced is bad, what is worse for them is the 15 people watching them being abused on the side and not doing anything—so the bystander element. They say, “That is not the society we live in, that is not what we expect from the communities that we live with. That is the community that we are part of”.

That is something that we need to look at because, yes, that female victim or that male is feeling anxious, emotionally disturbed, carrying this hate with them all the time, but their children are watching them being abused day in, day out. It is the financial impact and their mobility. We have had women who had to change their routes to work because of the abuse they were getting on a daily basis. We have had women who had to change the way they look, either take their headscarf off or wear a hat instead because of the abuse that they were getting on a daily basis.
But going back, what happens to those children who are seeing that, that society is giving up on them, it is not doing anything for them? What ideas do these kids then start pulling out in their heads? What are the drivers that would allow those kids to feel, “I am not wanted for an identity that I carry, one of multiple identities that I carry”? From what we are seeing, this sometimes feels like Muslim communities need to be on their own, to try to defend themselves, and not part of a society that they belong to and are part and parcel of. That is something that impacts our community cohesion in so many ways.

We had victims who spoke to us about hate they would have received online and then when they report it or they talk about it, people tell them, “Well, it is just online. Just close your account and you can live with it”. The impact on victims is unmeasurable. We don’t know what that victim lives at that moment in time, we don’t know what their emotional state is and we don’t know how that is going to impact them moving forward. Does that person decide to shut down his or her connections with the world and wider society? Is that not going to create that element of a “them or us” narrative? We have to look at it in so many ways.

*Miqdaad Versi:* The only thing I would add is the EHRC did a report, which found that 70% of Muslims had reported they had experienced religion-based prejudice in the last year. That is astonishingly high. Another study I saw said that basically every Muslim out there knows people who have suffered some form of prejudice or racism in some way. If it is that normalised, it becomes a very different mentality as to how you therefore deal with it.

Specifically picking up on one thing Iman said, the bystander element is the big thing. The number of people who I have spoken to and have suffered some sort of hate crime, literally the first thing they say is, “But no one came to help me”. We have all been brought up in a society where everyone is our friend, you have been working, you are part and parcel of society and you feel that when that happens to you and no one is going to even stand up. I think the number of cases where that has happened is really hurtful. I am not saying that the hate crime itself isn’t, but that really hurts.

**Q124 Kate Green:** I am interested in what you said about the EHRC saying 70% of Muslims have experienced and reported having experienced hatred or abuse. I want to ask you about reporting. As you may know, I represent a constituency with a significant Muslim population and I have been quite surprised by how limited their knowledge is of reporting routes. They have not heard of Tell MAMA. I am the one who tells them about it. I do not have a sense of how confident they are in reporting to the police. I do not have a sense that there is widespread awareness of third-party reporting routes. Would you like to comment on what the communities’ knowledge is of how to report and why they should report? What could be done to improve reporting both in terms of mechanisms and people’s confidence to do so?
**Iman Atta:** In the many events that Tell MAMA does across the country, one of the things that we always see when we speak to individuals is that, yes, they have suffered a type of racism or Islamophobia, but they never knew that they could report it. They feel that it is something they have been hearing maybe for 10 or 15 years walking down the street, being called a terrorist or the headscarf being pulled off, but they never thought that there was a law that could protect them on this, never knew there were ways to report it.

On the element of how to report and how to increase the reporting, more and more when we are sharing—as well as police forces and the Crown Prosecution—success stories around racism and hatred, people are becoming more and more confident to come and report. Not necessarily that every single report that we receive goes to police forces. We have had cases where victims have gone to police forces, did not get the result they wanted and then they have come to us to reopen these cases. We have had cases where victims reported to us. They felt they could not trust the police, they did not want to go authorities and report to them for many reasons.

Let us not forget that we have over 3 million Muslims in the country, who come from super-diverse backgrounds. Some of them might come from countries where the police are not there to serve their communities, so that perception of, “The police are going to be there to help me” is not there. Some of them might have had a previous experience with police forces, it might be on a theft case that did not work out well, they did not get that treatment and feel, “Oh no, I don’t want to go and report it to the police force”. Some think that it is a waste of time and of police resources. That is something that we are trying to change.

Again, when people report to us, we give them the option to keep their data confidential with us as a third party. A majority wish their data not to go to police forces, but some are happy for us to liaise on their behalf with police forces or continue to follow up with them through the journey and provide them with the support from Tell MAMA, but at the same time pass on their details for police forces also to follow up with them and us to follow up that journey.

The more we speak about what is happening in the country, the more we speak about the laws and legislation that are there to protect our communities, the more we highlight where racism is being addressed, the more victims will come forward to report. That is the number one factor to the rise that we see in the reports coming into us. People are seeing that this is something that we need to speak about, that we need to address and that authorities need to take seriously.

**Q125 Kate Green:** Would you like the police to be doing things differently? Are there things you think the police should do more or less of or in another way?
**Iman Atta:** I think the police have gone way beyond where they were, if I take it a few years back, when Tell MAMA started. There is still a long way for them to go, but I think more and more police forces are becoming more hands-on in how to deal with hate crime and hate incidents. But the one thing we need to look at in police forces is, again, the fact that resources are limited. The police officers trained on hate crime tend to change, so you have lost that training and that knowledge, so where does that go and how do we keep that within those police forces?

The work with agencies like Tell MAMA is really learning about the key words, learning about the language. Tell MAMA offers training to police forces to showcase what we have seen in terms of trends and key words in the data that we are getting, because sometimes a police officer might not understand some of the nuances around the language, that Islamophobia and anti-Muslim hatred is out there. We are there to help them and support them equally in order to increase that knowledge within them, but also offer them the training that specialises in that kind of hatred.

**Miqdaad Versi:** The one thing I would say needs to happen is a real push on the marketing of the fact that you can report. As was said, people think that if you report nothing is going to happen—although I think that is getting better in some places—even with people you would expect better from, people who are councillors. A councillor was attacked just this week on the street and many people seem to not want to report or they are not aware of it. Sometimes they find the online reporting website more difficult to use, but some of them just don’t know about it. That is one of the biggest areas that will stop greater numbers coming through. Until that changes, I think we will often see huge spikes coming up, but that will still only be a small proportion of the actual hate being felt on the street.

Q126 **Kate Green:** What, if anything, could the Government do to help promote awareness of reporting routes?

**Miqdaad Versi:** There are a lot of different avenues that this can happen through, whether it is through different mosque networks or whether it is more publicly. When Government says something, sometimes it is listened to from the broader public and I think that is especially through networks that already exist. A report came out this week or last week that said that 70% of Muslims go to the mosque at least once a month. Now, whether that is true or not, I don’t know. That seems too high for me, but there was a report that came out, based on a large poll that was done. If that is even partially true, even if that is double what it should be, that still is a large proportion of people who will be reached in some way through a mosque network. That is a very important way to try to reach people.

Q127 **Kate Green:** You have spoken, Iman, of the rise in hate incidents after major events or attacks. What should be done in the aftermath of such
attacks to try to break the pattern of that rise in hateful responses?

Iman Atta: I think strong political leadership and messages coming out to bring communities together and addressing communities on issues of racism is important. We have seen that and we have even done a study following the Westminster attack. We have done a study to showcase how this spike that we have seen was minimal compared with the spike following the London Bridge attack, the Manchester Arena attack and other attacks following that. It is because of the response from police forces, Government officials, the Mayor of London and communities. The engagement with communities, the messaging with communities, the political leadership that was put in place and the messaging going out to the wider public was nuanced and it was a message of us all standing together.

Q128 Kate Green: Could I press you a little more on that? Because in Manchester, where I am an MP, I thought both the political leadership from the Mayor, Andy Burnham, and the police, particularly the Chief Constable, Ian Hopkins, was very strong in the immediate aftermath of the Manchester Arena attack. What was missing in Manchester?

Iman Atta: It was indeed in Manchester itself, but not on the outskirts of Manchester. The majority of the reports that we received following the Manchester Arena attack, with one of the highest spikes by far we have seen—a 700% increase in reports to Tell MAMA a week post-Manchester—was coming from the outskirts of Greater Manchester. The focus was on Manchester itself, but not on the other areas. That is something to look at.

The messaging that came out from London, was that they put a plan in place for 14 days following the Westminster attack, which I think is a model that most probably needs to be followed, picked up on and adapted to the context and adapted to the different regions and cities across the country. Although there was a spike and there was a backlash, that was minimal. That was an attack on Westminster, on Parliament, on our democracy and people lost their lives—the first of many that year—but still, that spike was minimal compared to the rest.

I think that awareness-raising around reporting then was on the increase, so people were aware that they could report. The messaging of unity came out very strongly. Equally, communities came out very strongly following Manchester, but that was the second attack. Kids lost their lives in a horrific attack, people were highly emotionally-driven and they were angry.

Miqdaad Versi: The only thing I would add to that is the way that the media or sections of the media have reported some of these incidents makes a big difference as to how many within the broader public might understand the situation better. Of course there is a non-mainstream social media bubble for some people in certain elements of the far right who may not be that influenced by mainstream media. But sections of
mainstream media in some of the reports that came out when some of the incidents happened, have been very good in nuancing the way that they talk about it. Others have been, let’s say not so good, using very inflammatory language, or having hugely problematic opinion columns that don’t reflect anything about the society that we live in, and not reporting on the really important solidarity work that is happening in communities, and is being done by the Mayor of London and with political leadership.

When you have all of these things together not happening within certain sections of the media, which then flows into some of the elements of the far right—as well as people who would be considered to be far right, but it seems that these attitudes are starting to become ingrained in them—that is a problem that needs to be carefully looked at, because people perceive and understand hate crime. Hate crime occurs very often because of the way people perceive Muslims and studies have shown that the way that that happens very often is because of political leadership and media.

Q129 **Kate Green:** What is your view of the rhetoric of politicians and the way in which it is heard and felt by Muslim communities? Do you have examples where politicians have either given very good leadership or have made statements that have been difficult for the communities?

**Miqdaad Versi:** There are a lot of examples of bad practice. Let me start with the good practice. After the Finsbury Park attack—different, I agree—the Prime Minister was very good. She came out, she engaged with the communities there. She talked about Islamophobia being a serious challenge that needs to be dealt with. She was a leader. We all very much welcomed the actions that she took and generally how the community and the Government looked at the situation.

The problem we have is it is not just a one-off issue. When you see politician after politician seeming to often say quite negative things or do negative things when it comes to Muslim communities and nothing happens on the back of it when they do these things, that is where things become very difficult. It is when you have a politician retweeting Tommy Robinson and sharing anti-Muslim posts on their Facebook page and posting anti-Muslim extremism in Parliament and being part of anti-Muslim Facebook pages and literally nothing happens to such individuals, that is a problem.

It is when you have other Members of Parliament attacking Sadiq Khan for not doing something about grooming, basically, when he has nothing to do with it, other than the fact he is Pakistani and/or Muslim. I don’t know how that necessarily links him in any way to that. It is when someone who votes against same-sex marriage but at the same time weaponises that to attack Muslims in that very same way. These types of really worrying Islamophobia incidents by Members of Parliament—leaders, to be honest, political leaders—is hugely problematic. The lack of action is something that is a real problem.
You need to think back to the mayoral campaign a couple of years ago. I often bring this up and people somehow try to dismiss it. I want to bring it up because I think it is important, because it is the fact that you have a campaign for the Mayor of London, a national campaign, in essence, because people really look at this and look at the leadership that happens in London, and you have what Conservative members of the GLA talk about being not just dog-whistle racism, because everyone can hear it, it is that loud, happening against Sadiq Khan. It is when you have the Prime Minister at the time lying about an imam and then having to retract that that imam was linked to ISIS, because he was not, and had to retract. It is the Defence Secretary at the time having to pay libel damages because he said something very similar about that imam. All of these Islamophobic ideas happening from the leadership of a party, that is a serious problem.

There has not been an apology from the individuals concerned, it has just been brushed under the carpet. The number of people I have spoken to within the Conservative Party and within broader society who will never vote Conservative again because of that campaign and the lack of apology for it is huge. That worries me. For me, the political leadership on important issues is vital. When those political leaders happen to be engaging in Islamophobia for the purposes of political victory, for me that is unacceptable in any sense of the word and it should not happen.

Q130 **Toby Perkins:** Many mosques and Islamic centres in the UK have been victims of vandalism, arson and threats of violence or other forms of attack. The Government doubled the financial support to protect mosques and places of worship up to £1.6 million. To what extent do you think that is sufficient and what other forms of practical support do you think the Government might provide, in terms of supporting security training and from a security perspective?

**Miqdaad Versi:** This is an important area. Many Muslim institutions, especially after the Christchurch attack, were really worried. This was a time when they wanted to change some of the attitudes that were going to happen. At my local mosque, we were talking about having extra security for the first time. It is not something we had even considered in the past. Across the country there were very similar attitudes coming out. There are a few things that need to happen with, first, the way that the fund is currently set up. It does not, for example, help Islamic schools or cemeteries, it is only focused on places of worship, whereas that is something that is a problem, because Islamic schools have been attacked in a very similar way. That really needs to be expanded to cover Islamic institutions more broadly. It is not right that it should only cover places of worship. It should be much broader than that.

The second thing is the actual bureaucracy and how you apply through this process. I am happy to share a briefing document we have put together that outlines all the key deficiencies in the process as it currently stands. We will send that through later.
There are also big problems, because there is this idea that when you apply to this fund, you have to put in 20% yourself as a Muslim institution. Half of Muslims live in the 10% most deprived areas, so you often have mosques in areas where they struggle to pay even their imam a useful salary. They struggle with being able to pay that 20% in the first place. You have a range of different barriers for the first step, to apply in the first place. Then when that fund comes into place, there is also a cashflow issue. The mosque has to pay for the full amount and then get refunded, which is very difficult for some of these institutions.

Some of these things are being dealt with, some of the bureaucracy issues have been improved, but there is a long way to go. I would argue that the fund is very small, given the scale of the issue that the Muslim community is facing, but Muslim communities are not really applying in the first place. One of the reasons why they are not applying is not just because of the bureaucracy, it is because they do not even know about it. The amount of money that has been put into marketing that fund or even working with Muslim organisations to ensure that people know about the fund is zero—I don’t know about zero, but it is minimal. Muslim organisations on the ground are not aware of the fund in the first place.

I was on the “Today” programme talking about this and asking why the fund was so small. Part of the answer is because Muslim communities are not applying for it, so why expand it even further? The reason they are not applying for it is because they don’t know about it. Even if they do know about it, they don’t trust the people who are telling them about it. Even if they do trust them, the bureaucracy stops them from doing it. Even if the bureaucracy doesn’t stop them, the money does.

You put all of these things together and you think, “Well, that is why people aren’t applying and these same issues are not being dealt with”. We have raised these issues with the places of worship fund. I think there is definitely some movement and there seems to be a real willingness for some of this stuff to change. My hope and my expectation is that it will get better, but if these things are not solved, I think that the overall amount that will be accessed will be far less than is needed on the ground.

**Iman Atta:** There are two funds that are being opened currently by the Home Office. One of them is the places of worship fund, where places of worship can apply for security funds—ie CCTV, increasing their fences, having double glazing—which is the £1.6 million increase. That applies to all places of worship other than synagogues, because the Jewish community have a separate fund. I think the Home Office have moved in the right direction by doing consultations and going out to mosques. There is more to be done, reaching out to other mosques and other institutions and smaller ones to talk to them about the process, help them with the process and reach out to community organisers in these areas to reach out to mosques. That is one element of the fund.
Addressing your question on what needs to be done in terms of training, cameras, CCTVs, fences and double glazing are not always going save mosques, so we need to have training in place. That is the second fund that is opening up in July, where training will be put together and organisations can apply to the Home Office to get through that process. Even Tell MAMA has started a national mosque security panel that brings police officers and community members together to tailor training to mosques, to institutions, to Islamic schools according to their needs, because each mosque has a different context, each mosque has a different capacity, each mosque has different access levels. In order to deliver that basic training and how to deal with an incident when it takes place, how do you manage an incident? Who is the person to talk to? How do you spot someone who is suspicious? What do you do in terms of this? It is not only the CCTV that is important, it is also people on the ground and communities. How do you deal with your neighbours around this?

Let’s not forget one of the things that always, always is being left behind when we talk about security is women. There are women’s sections in mosques. No one talks about the women’s sections; no one talks about what kind of security these women’s sections have; no one talks about women being trained to address this. Women’s sections are separate to the mosque, so what training are the Muslim women getting in order to address these issues? That is also something that needs to be put on the table to be addressed. There is a lot beyond just CCTV, which is the £1.6 million, that needs to be looked at.

We work with the Community Security Trust, with the Jewish organisation that delivers that training, in order to pick up on best practice and how they have been delivering their security to synagogues and to Jewish schools in order to tailor them to Muslim communities, but also from previous incidents and attacks that have been taking place in places of worship. It is not only mosques that are being attacked—churches and synagogues are being attacked. It is about how places of worship work together on securing themselves, and as communities supporting each other through the time of turmoil that we are all going through.

Q131 **Toby Perkins:** As Members of Parliament, we have different experiences based on the different sizes of Muslim communities in our area. In Chesterfield, there is a very small Muslim community, much less than 1% of the population, and the approach that they have taken is to have a very low profile. Every few months I get contact from members of the public either on the phone or on Facebook saying, “Oh, there is some new building work started. I have heard there is a mosque being built in Chesterfield” and I usually say, “No, it is a McDonald’s or a KFC” or whatever it turns out to be. We had a huge Mormon church built fairly recently and there was no interest in that whatsoever. I am certain if a mosque the same size had been built there would have been a huge amount of controversy over that. The approach that they have taken is that they have the Chesterfield Muslim Association building. It is not seen, I think, by the wider community as a mosque, although it is where...
Friday prayers take place. It means that they keep a very low profile. While they have quite good community outreach, they do it on a very quiet basis.

We are used to religious organisations making a great effort to encourage people in, yet they feel unable to do that because of the hostile response and potential vandalism that it might attract towards them. It seems to me that they are unable to do the things that other religious groups would feel free to do. To what extent is that typical of Muslim communities where they are much more of a minority and to what extent does that fit in with the training that is being provided? What does that say about the extent to which we have normalised and accepted Islamophobia, particularly in those areas where the Muslim community is very small?

**Miqdaad Versi:** One stat that is relatively useful and relevant to what you said is 43% of people, according to one poll, said they would be concerned if a mosque was built near them. If 43% of people would be concerned if a mosque was built near them, that demonstrates why, when you see something come up, people might be concerned. It is a large number. It is quite normalised and I think that people across the country, when it comes Muslims, are always very conscious as to what is happening in their local area. If they have heard of certain incidents happening in those areas, there are always people who try to say, “We should keep a low profile”.

In mosques that I have spoken to, in management committees I have spoken to across the country, there have been people who have different views. Some have said, “You know what, we need to be proactive, public, talk about all the good that we do in order to change the attitudes around us” and you have others who are saying, “Look, we need to just keep on going about our normal business as quietly as possible”. You literally see both groups in many different places across the country. Those different people who win that battle in their executive committee will lead to a different conclusion. I think that that is a real problem, when people feel that they have to be quiet because otherwise the impact will be quite large. Unfortunately, that attitude is not a small incidence within only a small community—I think it happens across the UK.

**Iman Atta:** I think in areas where there is a small percentage of Muslim population you tend to have Islamic centres, where people tend to go to pray. We have seen that. In terms of training to be delivered, as the training is being delivered to bigger mosques, which might be on a different scale, equally training should be delivered to institutions like faith schools, Islamic schools as well as Islamic centres, because it is not only about the visibility of a minaret or of a crescent for people to know that there is a mosque there—it is about Muslim communities coming out from that building. We saw that with the attack on the Muslim Welfare House—the Finsbury Park attack that took place. It was a congregation of Muslim communities that were there that Darren Osborne drove into. It is the visibility as well that we need to look at.
It is not only just the visibility of the institution, it is the visibility of the communities that we need to look at. How do we break those barriers between the wider society and Muslim communities? Again, whether it is leadership within the local authority or leadership by Members of Parliament within these areas, that would bring communities together that would go and attend events at this Islamic centre, at these institutions, and speak out about it to bring communities together.

You kindly said that you always rebut the messages—explaining that it is not a mosque that is being built—but at the same time you do stand for the Muslim communities. Again, we don’t want to normalise Islamophobia and anti-Muslim hatred. We don’t want people to be scared to showcase their own identity. We live in a country that is very much proud of freedom of religious belief. This is something that we should celebrate and talk about more and engage more with other communities.

Q132 **Tim Loughton:** Can we talk more about less explicit forms of discrimination? Mr Versi, you mentioned employment rates. In particular, I think it is 16% of Muslims will be in professional management positions against about 30% of the population at large, as well as lower employment rates and so on. How do you account for that?

**Miqdaad Versi:** There is no easy answer for most of these questions. There are lots of studies that have looked at different areas and why the employment rate is low within certain communities versus others. They often try to split things out based on socioeconomic status, based on ethnic background and based on faith. The Women and Equalities Committee, in one of its reports, talked about the triple penalty that Muslim women in particular face: the fact that they are, first, women and therefore experience certain discrimination; secondly, they primarily come from an ethnic minority background—I think 90% of Muslims come from an ethnic minority background—and thirdly, their Muslim identity is also a barrier.

Part of the issue is definitely to do with the discrimination that Muslim women may face. Some of it may be to do with familial cultural approaches. In some areas in some communities, for example, it appears Muslim women are at home more often compared with a broader section of society. That could be due to a large number of reasons. The question is does that also happen in the second generation and the third generation coming forward? Some of these studies have not had long enough to understand what the driver of things is.

Q133 **Tim Loughton:** I understand there may be cultural differences for why fewer Muslims are putting themselves forward to gain employment, but those who are and are not progressing, social mobility is a problem there. Let’s just stick with men—whether it is a female issue, which will be experienced by all women—who is responsible for that discrimination? Is it proactive discrimination, that an employer is taking an informed decision as far as they concerned that that person, who happens to be a Muslim, is going to be lower down the priority list for an offer for that
job? Is it passive discrimination that has been instilled in that person through whatever form? Who is exercising this and why are they exercising it?

*Miqdaad Versi:* We can't be 100% sure of this, but what we can say is that there have been studies. The BBC did a study and it tried to put applications under the name Adam and under the name Mohammed and three times as many people who had the name Adam—similar qualifications—got the interview compared with the person called Mohammed. What else can you say is intentional other than choosing someone solely based on their name? There is clearly some element of discrimination. Is that because unconsciously that is happening or is it proactive? We do not know. What we can say is the output is very clear. There have been a number of similar studies looking at the issue, that something even as simple as a name can be the difference between someone getting a job and not getting a job. That is level one.

The real question about social mobility often arises when someone is in a job. They have demonstrated merit and capability in doing something and the question is whether they rise up in the same way as others. You will see in some professions that seems to happen better than in other professions. Again, we do not have enough data to look at this properly. One area that I think would be great is if there was more work and more data and more research in this space. But from what you do see is that progression seems to be more challenging. If I am not mistaken, a report by Demos looks at this in a lot more detail when it comes to Muslims in professional services. When you go higher, then the proportion of Muslims gets significantly lower.

Part of that is due to migration patterns and the fact that Muslims have not necessarily been in some of these professions for as long, but a big part of it is because of unconscious bias. The reality is that many people in society have an unconscious bias about different people. Part of it is also due to the fact that some Muslims—and we do not know how many—will not be in the same social circles and will not be willing to go to a pub, for example, or will not choose to go to a pub as often as someone else. That could be a situation where familiarity with someone helps in the promotion of that individual. There are lots of these different things together, but the problem that we have is we don’t have enough evidence to say, “That is the thing that is really driving that difference of percentage once you are in there”. All we do have is very clear evidence that simply by having a different name, Adam or Mohammed, you can get a significantly lower application success rate.

*Q134 Tim Loughton:* There is also a problem with students as well. Many Muslim students will achieve higher than average at school and yet the incidence of them going on to universities or whatever is lower. Even within the education establishment, on the face of it, there is prejudice against them progressing too. You used the phrase “unconscious bias”. At what point does unconscious bias become racism, discrimination,
Islamophobia or whatever?

**Miqdaad Versi:** I think that structural racism, in essence, could be argued at least partly is unconscious. When you see the fact that you are 70% less likely to have a job as a Muslim man compared with broader society—I have the exact stats in the submission that we put in—part of that is likely to be unconscious bias, the fact that people seem not to know about it. But you are right, some of it is going to be very conscious. The problem we have is we cannot distinguish between the two. There is no way for us to know, other than by real research and qualitative research, by talking to employers. It is very difficult to try to distinguish what is driving that.

We look at it structurally, we look at it in society as a whole, we look at the overall numbers in the same way as the Lammy report looked at prisons and the justice system. If you stand back and say, “What is the output?” it is clearly not how it should be, based on merit, and there needs to be something done to try to resolve that.

**Q135 Tim Loughton:** What is the solution? On the names thing, we heard from the authors of the Islamophobia definition report that they had tried blind testing for getting a car insurance quote and one for Mohammed became much more expensive. Presumably a computer has been programmed by somebody, for whatever reason, to come up with discrimination against that person. But if you look at what we have done elsewhere for women, now there is a national imperative that we have more women represented on boards of companies, the pay equality gap, the pressure for that to close or whatever. What do we have to do? Because every answer you have given is, “We don’t know. We don’t have the research”. What do we have to find out, how do we commission this research so that we can have a similar sort of programme to say, “Hold on, that is not right, where apparently there is only 1% of Muslims on board against 6% of the population” or whatever it may be?

**Miqdaad Versi:** One very good positive is the Race Disparity Audit, which happened a couple of years ago. Many things happened as a result of that, which is a very important first step. It is when you identify disparity within any different area and something that does not sound right, like the Lammy review, again it talks about Muslims as well, in terms of the fact that Muslims are significantly overrepresented in prison. When we look at all of these individual elements, each one of those reports has specific outcomes and specific recommendations. There is no one-size-fits-all solution. For each individual area, there are different ways it needs to be dealt with. For example, many of the universities have not spent, I do not believe, as much on access as they could or should be. I think more of them are doing much more. There has been a real push in that direction and that has led to more people applying.

When it comes to employment, there are people who are saying we should have name-blind CVs sent out in the first place. That is only one step, because once you get through the door and you look different,
again that discrimination is very difficult to do much with. But then you have the support for those who have problems in employment in terms of discrimination, the legal support that is required, the actual fact that they know what they can do and what rights they have in a situation when they feel they have been discriminated against, making sure that that is an easy process.

Different groups like the Runnymede Trust, Demos and others have all looked at individual areas. Even the Lammy review has looked at individual reviews and they have specific recommendations as to how these should be dealt with. I think that collating all of these is very important, to try to say, “Let’s go forward”. The outputs of the Race Disparity Audit have shown a lot of disparity in lots of different areas. There are specific things that need to happen in each different area.

Q136  Janet Daby: Thank you and good afternoon. Mr Versi, you mentioned, with great passion elected representatives and how they have been in some cases very negative and anti-Muslim in their expressions on social media and so on. The question to both of you is what do you feel that political parties need to address in terms of claims levelled against their members and their party?

Miqdaad Versi: When it comes to all parties, I think that everyone talks about a zero-tolerance policy against any form of racism. That has been mentioned by different people for a long time from all parties and from all backgrounds. I really dislike it when people say things like that, when at the same time the evidence demonstrates the exact opposite. I am going to talk only about Islamophobia because that is the scenario that I have looked into. I am not going to talk about other areas, because that is not what this is about.

We have seen unequivocal failures, specifically in the Conservative Party, when it comes to Islamophobia, not just small failures, fundamental failures in every single way. I am talking about leadership within the party when it comes to, for example, the mayoral election; I am talking about when Members of Parliament have done certain things and no action has been taken against them; I am talking about when councillors and representatives of the Conservative Party have said or done things that are inappropriate and unacceptable and sometimes have had action taken against them and sometimes no action taken, unless and until the media have been called, at which point action was done. Then what happens? A few weeks later they are quietly let back into the party. These types of things are unacceptable.

You have policies that seem to be made off the hoof. For example, the idea that any time someone shares something that is clearly Islamophobic, they will be suspended. That was a view that the Chairman of the Conservative Party, Brandon Lewis, said publicly in The Guardian. A few weeks later the exact thing happened, that same thing happened. A councillor was found to have said something unacceptable. Was that person suspended? No. There is a fundamental failure of process, there is
a fundamental failure in fact that this is an important issue. I think there is this idea that this is not a problem for us. That is unacceptable. We need to be fully cognisant of where things are going wrong so things can get better, and unless and until there is that acknowledgement that there is a serious problem, there will never be a solution.

Who knows about these issues? As part of the Muslim Council of Britain, a couple of years ago I was at this Committee and I raised this as a concern and people said there was not enough evidence. We now have a significant amount of evidence demonstrating that. I put together the submission for the Equality and Human Rights Commission and anyone can look at it and see the hundreds of cases that are out there that demonstrate the scale of the problem within the Conservative Party. It is not that there is nothing happening in other parties, but I am focusing on where the specific and large-scale issue is. All I think that needs to be done is listen to those who know, listen to the victims of Islamophobia, listen to those who have been in the party who are passionately supportive of that party.

The founder of the Conservative Muslim Forum, Lord Sheikh, has talked about this consistently and talked to the Prime Minister. He wrote to the Prime Minister asking for action to be taken—an inquiry to be undertaken. The current Chair of the Conservative Muslim Forum, same thing; the Youth Chair of the Conservative Muslim Forum, same thing. They have all raised these as serious concerns. Baroness Warsi, who is the Chair of the Conservative Party, understands what happens at the dinner table and polite parties, she knows the kind of words that have been used against her within those circles. Many of these individuals tried to do this in private before, but what is very clear, unfortunately, is that unless something is public, unless something is high profile, it will be swept under the carpet. That is just not something that is appropriate.

**Iman Atta:** I think with political leadership comes responsibility. Whether it is one individual who is promoting racist language or 10, they are equally bad. It is not about the scale, it is about the existence of racist language in any political party. Political parties should be clear on their communication, communicating on the process of how they are dealing with racism within their own parties. They should be transparent on outcomes, on what is happening. That is something we have not been seeing from the political leadership in parties. How are they addressing this problem that they are facing? What are the measures that have been taken to address this problem for the future?

Training and policies need to be revised and put in place. The climate of where racism and hatred is today is different from where it was a year ago. It is different from the way it was in 2016, following Brexit. Every single day or every few months, these things need to be revised, these things need to be looked at. The context of what things are happening needs to be looked at and revised, and when issues are being raised by communities, they need to be taken seriously because, as I said, with
leadership comes responsibility. When leadership comes with language that is racist, that language emboldens the individuals on the street to take that hatred on at street level. It becomes, “Well, my political leader is saying this, so I am allowed to say this”. They become more emboldened to take that hatred on the street and the impact of that is really on the day-to-day victims.

How do we do that? It goes back to the political leadership and how they are addressing it, but from the different leadership and the different political parties, there has been no communication of what the processes have been. There has been no transparency of what actions have been taken. Even when people have raised things, again, it is not equally addressed in the same manner. No policies have been shared. When training has been offered by different entities and organisations, the proposal has not been not taken on board. Unless you do this, you are not going to have the trust of the communities to take you as a political leader.

*Miqdaad Versi:* Can I just add one thing? What is worrying for many Muslim communities on the ground is the fact that, maybe unconsciously, people are thinking “Is there a situation where Muslims are not going to vote for us?” being considered as an approach. The evidence I put on the table is the fact that according to the University of Manchester, I think cited in *The Times* editorial, only 11% of Muslims voted for the Conservative Party at the last election. The Muslim community, like every community, you would expect to vote for every party. In fact, many Muslims would be considered to be socially conservative, and in many senses you would expect that number to be significantly higher and you just do not see that. At the same time you see a situation where according to the “State of Hate” report in 2018, they found that almost 50%—I think it was 47%—of Conservative Party voters thought Islam was a threat to the British way of life.

When you look at that and you are thinking of missing communities on the ground, what is happening? Why is that so prevalent within that voter base? Are there people who are trying to play to that voter base? That is what is really worrying. We have seen what happens in America, we have seen what happens when certain people play to prejudice. We have seen it in many parts of Europe, where certain elements of the far right have gained because they played to the prejudice. People worry that is happening here.

You might see a councillor on the ground or even a Member suspended for sharing, for example, a tweet from Tommy Robinson—or Stephen Yaxley-Lennon—but if an MP does that and no action is taken, you wonder what is happening. Why is this happening? Why are there different levels for different people? Why is there a lack of process? There are real concerns on the ground.
My real hope is that this will be taken seriously, that the people who are trying to give sincere advice to make this better are listened to, because if that happens we will be able to have politics that is not worried about bigotry, but voting for people based on policy, which is what needs to happen.

Q137 Janet Daby: Thank you very much. At one of our recent meetings we have been discussing the definition of Islamophobia proposed by the APPG on British Muslims. What are your views of the definition and what is your understanding of the expression of "Muslimness"? Do you think the definition is helpful? If not, how it could be improved?

Iman Atta: Within Tell MAMA, we welcome the fact that the APPG on British Muslims has taken the initiative to take evidence, do consultations to try to get a definition of Islamophobia and anti-Muslim hatred. This is definitely one we welcome from our end. What we do within our work and what we believe in is any definition of anti-Muslim hatred or Islamophobia should always centre the voices and the experiences of Muslims and of victims. This is what we do within our work, this is the role that we play, supporting the victims of hate crimes.

Any adopted definition must defend the right of Muslims to live freely without fear from prejudice, from violence and discrimination, while at the same time ensuring that the core principle of freedom of speech is protected and the fundamental rights are protected. There is a clear distinction when we talk about freedom of expression and when we talk about the freedom of speech. A clear and distinctive line is that where hate translates against Muslims, their institutions, their rights and employment chances and other real-life matters, that also affects their emotional and mental wellbeing. That is something we need to look at when we balance the freedom of expression and look at how it is impacting on communities.

One of the other things we need to look at—we work within the standards of the law—is a definition that relates to the laws and legislation that we have in place around hate crimes and hate incidents. When we look at issues around internal Muslim hatred, we do get reports from the Shia community, we do get reports from Ahmadi communities, and we think that a definition should have an element of internal Muslim hatred to be included in that definition. Let’s not forget all the work that has started in the UK around racism, all the work that has started in the UK working around the MacPherson recommendations. If you refer to the MacPherson recommendations, everyone has the right to self-identify with how they see themselves. As such, hate incidents are recorded.

When an individual from the Shia community or the Ahmadi community goes to the police and says, “I have been attacked for being Muslim” it is logged as such by police forces. That is something that we always have to take into account. There is a crossover when we talk about internal Muslim hatred and hate crimes, and that is something we need to take into account. We need to ensure that MacPherson is the fundamental
principle that we must adhere to and the self-identification of victims is key, because as the law is, the police will record it and as such victims will identify and be proud of the identities they carry.

_Miqdaad Versi:_ The Muslim Council of Britain has very warmly welcomed the definition proposed by the All-Party Parliamentary Group on British Muslims. I think what we have realised is that the debate is very clear when it comes to those who have been looking at this issue for a long time. The idea that Islamophobia is a type of racism is very well established within academia. Basically everyone knows it is. There will be some people who will try to pretend and say there are legal issues to do with it. It is not a relevant and useful discussion.

Just one thing to bear in mind in case people were unaware, in December 2016 Sajid Javid said, “The Government believed that while the anti-Semitism definition was ‘legally non-binding’ it was nevertheless ‘an important tool’ for criminal justice agencies and public bodies”. It is very clear that you do not necessarily need to have a legally-binding definition when we are talking about this. What we care about is trying to find a way of identifying what something is. The Islamophobia definition does that very clearly as a type of racism. The question is what its target is, because when you try to understand and define something it is very important to try to understand what the target of that racism is.

Some people would say what you need to do is be very clear and talk about every single type of racism that exists: there is structural discrimination, there is institutional discrimination, there are elements to do with the way people talk about the attacks that have hate crime elements. All of these are different sections of racism, but we know what racism is, we know what anti-black racism is, we know what anti-Asian racism is. These are things that happen. We are aware of how racism manifests itself, so the only question is what is the target that is different that makes this Islamophobia rather than something else? That is very clearly some element to do with Muslim identity. It could be Muslim individuals, it could be mosques, it could be the Koran. Wes Streeting, who was at this Committee a couple of weeks ago, talked about the fact that if people were burning the Koran and then videoing it for a far right manual, clearly that would be Islamophobia.

There has to be something more than just being a Muslim that is a target, because, guess what, Sikhs get attacked. An MP, Tanmanjeet Dhesi, got attacked or his friend, I believe, got attacked outside the Houses of Parliament because a racist did not know that a turban was not an identifier for a Muslim, but of a Sikh. Clearly we need to have something that is a broader idea rather than just saying Muslims are the target, some sort of expression of Muslim identity or Muslimness or perceived Muslimness.

Again, I think the best way is to look at the IHRA definition. On the website it says at the end, “Criminal acts are anti-Semitic when the
targets of attacks, whether people or property—like buildings, schools, places of worship and cemeteries—are selected because they are or are perceived to be Jewish or linked to Jews”. Now, “linked to Jews” one could argue is a huge identity, but people know what this means. We already understand the idea of Muslim identity. A Koran is clearly a type of Muslim identity and clearly the painting—I am not sure it is a painting—of the thing is not. We understand what this is, it is not complicated.

Sometimes we have to recognise that there are going to be differences of opinion when it comes to the issue of is this a racist attack or not. Some people who perceive this as a racist attack might believe it is a racist attack; when it goes through the courts it might be different.

Chair: I am conscious that we need to move on to our second panel. I want to put a final question to you. We are about to move on to take the first of our evidence sessions from one of the party leaderships and we will be taking evidence from main political parties, as we did—or as our predecessor Committee did—on the inquiry into anti-Semitism. Mr Versi, you have raised a few examples from within the Conservative Party. Do you have any particular examples or concerns about other parties that you would raise with us that we should be putting to those parties? You also made the point about the current Prime Minister having struck the right tone at the Finsbury Park mosque incident. Do you have any issues, concerns or questions that you would raise about the candidates to become the next Prime Minister and anything that they may have done or said in relation to Islamophobia as well?

Iman Atta: I would happily share with you, from across all three parties, data and cases that we have identified as anti-Muslim and Islamophobic in nature. I will happily send you that to help you in informing the sessions.

As for the candidates, I think different candidates have said different things, but one of the things that we have seen following Boris Johnson’s comments around women wearing the face veil was a rise in reports that we received from women wearing the face veil, because the words “letterboxes” and “bank robbers” were used on the streets to abuse women wearing headscarves—not only a face veil. Again, that is where I refer back to the fact that with political leadership comes responsibility, a huge responsibility, because people will look up to that political leader, people will look to the words that political leader is using and people eventually will use these words on the ground and on the streets. We do ask every single candidate that is coming out now in the leadership to ensure that they work on addressing issues within communities, but also on being responsible in the language that they use.

We have many issues in this country and it is not only Islamophobia that is on the rise. We have homophobia that is on the rise, we have anti-Semitism that is on the rise and we need to be careful when we talk about communities, we need to talk about the nuances that communities
care about and be responsible in our actions and that is going to show up on the ground later on.

Q139 Chair: Does that raise concerns for you about where things go next?

Iman Atta: I do hope that the different candidates reflect on what they have said and I do hope that the future does not take us to see the levels of hatred or racist attacks that we have seen following political leaders coming out with statements.

Miqdaad Versi: When it comes to different parties, in our submission we gave examples from all the various parties. We have highlighted more within the Conservative Party, but there are examples within all the parties. Anas Sarwar, for example, in the Labour Party in Scotland has had a number of very difficult issues with the way the process has worked and how Islamophobia that he has faced has been dealt with. We shouldn’t pretend: given the scale of the issue of Islamophobia in society, the idea it is only within one party is not true. It is across all political parties, it just happens to be a much greater incidence within the Conservative Party.

When it comes to the actual leaders, I echo what Iman mentioned just now in the sense that there are real concerns. When it comes to Britain, I am very proud of the fact in many senses we have not faced the hurt that many Muslims in America have when it comes to Donald Trump being in charge. We have not faced racist attacks to the same level as many areas in France and other parts of Europe. We have a very good model in many ways of how Muslim communities have been engaging with society. People worry that that is changing. People worry that we might have a Trumpification to some extent of politics, where the words that you say may be flippant words that you might have just done for the sake of writing them or maybe intentionally to try to provoke a certain group, or maybe to try to pander to a certain section of society, either one of those—I don’t know which—where the impact and the hurt is only with a small minority of communities. That is a real concern that cannot be allowed to be normalised. Where that happens there needs to be strong solidarity from everyone that that is no longer acceptable in any way in the future that we live in.

Chair: Thank you very much for your time. We will move on to our second panel.

Examination of witnesses

Rt Hon Sir Vince Cable MP and Baroness Brinton.

Q140 Chair: I welcome you to this evidence session and thank you for coming to give evidence for us today—we appreciate your time—following the previous evidence session, some of which you will have heard. Could you give us your reflections on the responsibility of political parties to address Islamophobia and also on your assessment of Islamophobia currently in
public life?

**Sir Vince Cable:** I will give the first reply and then I will pass to Baroness Brinton, who is our party president and has been deeply involved in assimilating the definition of Islamophobia into our rules and procedures.

Our starting point is that Islamophobia in the way that you have just been discussing it in the last hour, the prejudice and hatred directed against Muslims as a group, it is a fact of life. It has to be tackled. It is a fact of political life, it happens in political discourse. If it is going to be tackled there has to be some common definition and basis for discussion. We know from many of the controversies over the last few years between parties and within them we get some very aggressive language used against Muslims and indeed other groups too. There has to be some basis for dealing with it.

We have taken the view that the All-Party Group did a great deal of work and was very thorough and consultative, and has produced what we consider to be a good working definition and we have adopted it as part of our disciplinary processes. If anybody within our party was to use what we regard as Islamophobic comments directed at other members or people outside the party we have a basis for calling them to account.

We do not feel this is the final word. We have heard the objections from Tell MAMA and the Quilliam Group and others. We think that as a working definition this is a useful way of proceeding as a political party and are finding it useful.

**Baroness Brinton:** I was very taken with the comments of both your previous witnesses about the journey of unconscious bias through to Islamophobia. I would want to make it clear that we don’t just support the definition of Islamophobia, which is at the far end of that, but also we work through unconscious bias training of key officers in the party, returning officers, selection committees, candidates, and particularly for candidates because we have a higher standard of behaviour required by our candidates than for members. Unconscious bias will cover a range of things, but that would obviously include Islamophobia and being aware of unconscious bias in that area.

I am not aware of many cases in the discipline code but it tends to be social media. If it is something egregious, the advantage of social media is that the evidence is there and it is pretty clear for a disciplinary committee to then take action. Inevitably again—and I am sure all political parties will say this—if it is “he said, she said” in a private debate somewhere it becomes hard, but that is when we would go back and look at unconscious bias. We have used compulsory training to make sure that if we think somebody may have used unconscious bias but is not aware of it, then they will be required to have training. They will be required to work with a coach and mentor. We would come back and report to the chair of the disciplinary panel if they felt that this person had now
understood what the issue was. That is very different to something on social media, which has moved straight into the definition that includes hatred, intolerance, stereotyping, all of those things.

I will just add one other thing. Our members’ code of conduct is very clear that this is not just about the rights of being a member, it is also about the responsibilities of being a member. That talks quite specifically about responsibility to others, sensitivity to others’ views. Although you have the right to be heard with understanding, you must also use that yourself as a member, not just with other members, but also to the public as well.

Q141 **Chair:** Just to follow on, you said something there about the unconscious bias training that you do for staff.

**Baroness Brinton:** For officers, members. For example, if you are a returning officer or if you are chair of a selection committee or a wider selection committee, we make sure that a number of people involved in that will be trained.

Q142 **Chair:** That is selection for candidates?

**Baroness Brinton:** That is selection for candidates, yes. Under our new discipline process we are making sure that our adjudicators, the discipline panel, the people who are running it and investigators, if they are investigating a case of anti-Semitism or Islamophobia, they will have had specific training in that area.

Q143 **Tim Loughton:** Sir Vince, you heard some of the points about what has just been referred to as unconscious bias in terms of employment, getting into Russell Group universities and others. To what do you attribute it and how ingrained is it, unconsciously or proactively, in society?

**Sir Vince Cable:** It is pretty deeply ingrained, I would guess. We hear it on a daily basis. The association, which is quite common, of Muslims not just as individuals, as a group, and terrorism has also added colour to this phenomenon. All the more reason for going through the kind of discipline that Baroness Brinton has just described. Of course it is not just about Muslims, there are many other groups, not just ethnic groups, people with disability, sexuality, in all of these things there is an element of bias, which many of us have without realising.

Q144 **Tim Loughton:** Do you think it is worse for Muslims?

**Sir Vince Cable:** I think so. Given the recent history, it is out there, it is very obvious that it is the case. The example that was cited to you in the Committee hearing a few minutes ago of Mohammeds applying for jobs or for insurances is a good example of how this thing comes up.

Q145 **Tim Loughton:** Why is it worse?
**Sir Vince Cable:** Because of the recent history. So many of our recent domestic and international conflicts have often been framed in terms of religion, which people then not attribute to a whole group of people that they then classify in rather racial terms. It is probably fairly deeply rooted in our society.

Q146 **Tim Loughton:** Is it the media, is it politicians, the way they portray those conflicts or what?

**Sir Vince Cable:** It is both of those and it is the interaction between them. That is why we have to be particularly careful in the way we go about these things.

Q147 **Tim Loughton:** What are examples of people in positions of political responsibility who you think may have exacerbated an innate discrimination against Muslims or some form of Islamophobia or potential hatred towards Muslims? Where has that been triggered by politicians? What examples do you have?

**Sir Vince Cable:** If you are wanting one example that I got involved in the public controversy around was your colleague’s description of Muslim women as letterboxes or whatever. It may have been funny on one level, but it did undoubtedly have the effect of stereotyping a whole group of people with different motivations. It wasn’t at all helpful.

Q148 **Tim Loughton:** These are the comments by Boris Johnson?

**Sir Vince Cable:** Yes. You asked me for an example. I have given you one.

Q149 **Tim Loughton:** What exactly did he say?

**Sir Vince Cable:** I do not have the words in front of me, but I think it was describing—

Q150 **Tim Loughton:** Not describing all Muslim women as letterboxes, was it? You are now generalising.

**Sir Vince Cable:** That was the impression that was conveyed, that women in burqas, the type of headdress, gave the impression as if they were pillar boxes, which was probably an attempt at humour, but it certainly had the effect of—it is essentially pejorative comments on people wearing traditional wear.

Q151 **Tim Loughton:** Are there not examples of pejorative comments about the dress of other people from other cultures as well?

**Sir Vince Cable:** I cannot think of any, which is why the comments about Muslim women were I think quite provocative at the time.

Q152 **Tim Loughton:** You think that Boris Johnson making a flippant, poor attempt at humour comment about the dress of certain Muslim women gives rise to Muslim hatred?
**Sir Vince Cable:** Prejudice rather than hatred in that particular case, yes. He probably intended it as humour and, as you say, it was flippant, but we are political people in positions of responsibility and it probably helped to feed a public attitude of seeing negatively people dressed in a traditional way, which they have every right to do so.

Q153 **Tim Loughton:** That directly incites violence?

**Sir Vince Cable:** No, I would not put it as far as that, no.

Q154 **Tim Loughton:** So where is this link that I asked for about the way politicians, the media or other leaders link terrorism to therefore all Muslims must be some form of terrorists?

**Sir Vince Cable:** The particular example we cited was not directly linked to terrorists.

Q155 **Tim Loughton:** What is? That is what I asked for, some examples.

**Sir Vince Cable:** There have been examples within the recent European elections. There is one candidate, as we know, in Lancashire who made a point of directly associating Muslims with terrorism as a group. He was not elected in the event, but that kind of discourse makes it very clear that there is this prejudice out there and some people respond to it.

**Tim Loughton:** Baroness Brinton, do you want to add anything to that?

**Baroness Brinton:** Yes. Personally, from my perspective, I have talked to a number of Muslim women after Boris Johnson made that statement who commented that they had had insults thrown at them on the street. It was as if a senior politician saying something had given permission for others to be offensive. That is where it is worrying for me because you could struggle to find a link through to extremism, to terrorism, but the moment a remark is made by someone in senior life and others feel they have the right to insult people they do not know on the street because of their dress, for me that is heading dangerously close to Islamophobia.

Q156 **Tim Loughton:** How would you compare that with a comment by a former Lib Dem here, Baroness Tonge, who said that she sympathised with suicide bombers, she understood suicide bombers? Do you think that is inciting a more violent reaction than a flippant comment about dress?

**Baroness Brinton:** Indeed it is. Indeed, she was disciplined for that and she is no longer a member of the party. That is not unconnected.

Q157 **Tim Loughton:** Why did Sir Vince draw on a single episode of comment on somebody’s dress rather than what I would deem to be a far more serious—and I acknowledge that she is no longer a member of the Lib Dem Party—and dangerous comment to make?

**Baroness Brinton:** Absolutely.

**Sir Vince Cable:** There is obviously a whole spectrum.
Baroness Brinton: Comments like that are clearly not acceptable and that does not mean that other comments are also not unacceptable. They may be of a different range. When I have talked to young women who have said that they have been verbally abused on the street because of their headwear, frankly, if people feel they were given permission to do that by a senior politician saying it, then that is, at the very least, to be regretted.

Q158 Tim Loughton: Do you agree with the comments we had just now that the Conservative Party is in some way institutionally Islamophobic?

Baroness Brinton: I think you need to do your own investigation. I have not seen all the detail. If we had had somebody who had said that, then there is no doubt that we would have received complaints and our discipline system would have kicked in, regardless of them being a senior high-profile parliamentarian or not. Hence the case you raise about Baroness Tonge, where our system did kick in with the Whips in the Lords.

Q159 Tim Loughton: One could say it did not kick in for the former Lib Dem Member of Parliament for Bradford. Do you, Sir Vince, think that there is institutional Islamophobia within the Conservative Party?

Sir Vince Cable: I don’t know until you investigate it properly. I am from a competing party and probably not objective about this, but Baroness Warsi, who was my Cabinet colleague for three years and is a colleague of mine at my local university, has said publicly that she feels her party—I think she is still a member of the Conservative Party—are institutionally Islamophobic and that it would be helpful if you had this definition and you tested your own conduct according to it.

Q160 Tim Loughton: Do you think the Conservative Party not having adopted the All-Party Group’s recommendation of the definition of Islamophobia suggests that there is institutional Islamophobia within the Conservative Party now?

Sir Vince Cable: I don’t know what the reasons are, but it does suggest a rather unnecessarily defensive response. I am sure there are individual cases. We have had cases, the Labour Party have had cases. Surely we should be open about it and be open to internal criticism and examination.

Q161 Tim Loughton: The Conservative Party has not said there should not be a definition of Islamophobia, the Conservative Party has said so far it does not agree with the suggested definition of Islamophobia.

Baroness Brinton: If I could just comment here. That I do regret, I wish the Conservative Party would do it.

Q162 Tim Loughton: Why?

Baroness Brinton: In the discussion between the political parties under the guidance of the Committee for Standards in Public Life about the
intimidation of candidates at elections, we are all trying to move to a common standard and if Islamophobia and anti-Semitism become part of the forms of intimidation, then it would be good if there was one standard to which we could all agree. It may not be possible and that is entirely within the right of the Conservative Party to say that it is not. If we are starting to have those discussions cross-party then this should be on the table. I would much rather we all had common standards.

Q163 Tim Loughton: You do acknowledge that a reason that the Conservative Party has not officially adopted that recommendation is because it has serious concerns, as were exposed when we had the witnesses from the All-Party Group, about just how flimsy that definition is and could be counterproductive? That is the real reason it has not been adopted. The Conservative Party is keen to find an alternative definition that is far more robust and does not rely on a highly questionable adjective of “Muslimness”, which would be very difficult to uphold in any court of law.

Baroness Brinton: The target expressions of Muslimness or perceived Muslimness are helpful. That covers the point that was raised by the witness earlier about those of other religions being assumed to be Muslims. For me, the key is, particularly with the evidence that you took from my colleague, we do not see this, as far as the party is concerned, for us internally, as requiring a criminal standard. What we are looking for is something that is more akin to employment standard of proof, rather than criminal standard of proof. That means we can hold our members to account when they fall short of that, whether it is full-blown Islamophobia or unconscious bias and all the range in between. That is why we want to be able to do that. I would urge the Conservative Party to consider that, and also to make sure that they investigate and respond to the cases that I know many of which are outstanding in the same way that people urge us to do so and we will do so as well.

By the way, I do not think we ever believe that we are going to solve this problem. What we have to do is to show that we have the mechanism to tackle it when it comes up on a case by case basis.

Q164 Chair: Tell MAMA reported in the week after Boris Johnson’s article referring to letterboxes a significant spike in hate incidents against Muslim women. Would you regard that as being significant? Do you think that we should be taking into account the consequences, not just the intention, of politicians’ actions?

Baroness Brinton: Absolutely. I think part of the insidiousness of discrimination, whether conscious or unconscious, if it means that Muslims feel uneasy about walking around in their communities then that absolutely has to be regretted and as a society we need to tackle that.

Q165 Janet Daby: You have mentioned disciplinary procedures and you have alluded to some of the processes that you would follow. What action would you take against a party member accused of being anti-Muslim or Islamophobic?
Baroness Brinton: The system is straightforward for all disciplinaries, but it goes in through a central system so that every complaint is now monitored and logged and therefore clerked so that we can monitor the progress. That is important so that delays do not get built in and cases do not get lost.

Under our new system, which is starting in two and a half weeks’ time, we have a completely independent process from elected officers of the party, which has been set up over the last two years and we have been training independent adjudicators and investigators, the top team of whom are all legally qualified. They will decide whether it requires further investigation or if it is a social media comment. It is usually pretty clear and it might go straight to a judgment or a panel hearing. As I said, we will make sure that if it is a specific case of Islamophobia then it would be heard by somebody who had had training in that area.

Q166 Janet Daby: Would they be Liberal Democrats members or would they be—

Baroness Brinton: They would be party members, but they are not allowed to sit on party committees. They are not party officers, so they cannot have influence through friends of friends who might be involved in the case.

Q167 Janet Daby: Would you allow an individual who has made an anti-Muslim or Islamic comment to stand as a candidate?

Baroness Brinton: We do research on candidates when they first stand. It is not always perfect, but we do that. If we discover later on that someone has made comments then it will go back through the disciplinary system. It is slightly different for candidates. There is this higher bar, because we have a higher standard code of conduct for our candidates.

Janet Daby: Is there anything you would like to say, Vince?

Sir Vince Cable: We have precedents of candidates who have been disowned and are no longer standing as candidates because of their past behaviour, not specifically on Islamophobia, but certainly anti-Semitism. We have one or two cases that have been well advertised and we have dealt with them and those people are no longer candidates.

Q168 Toby Perkins: How many allegations of Islamophobia against members of the Liberal Democrat Party has the party investigated?

Baroness Brinton: I am only aware of about three or four, not very many, but part of the problem is that we did not collect all our complaints centrally. Some of them used to be handled by local parties and they did not have to report in centrally. We now have a central mechanism that has been running since 1 January this year, so we can tell you that in the future.

Q169 Toby Perkins: Was there a particular reason why you changed that
Baroness Brinton: Absolutely, in that we needed to be able to respond to complaints of all kinds and be able to catalogue them. We started cataloguing the ones that we received centrally three to four years ago, and it has taken that long to change our discipline processes so that we can get a new system and monitor it all centrally.

Q170 Toby Perkins: So there have been a relatively small number of complaints that the parties investigated?

Baroness Brinton: Received.

Q171 Toby Perkins: Received, but they have all been investigated?

Baroness Brinton: Yes, as far as I know.

Q172 Toby Perkins: How many Muslim party members and parliamentary candidates does the Liberal Democrat Party have and what is that as a proportion of the membership?

Baroness Brinton: I cannot give you those figures off the top of my head. I can send them to the Committee, if that is useful, afterwards.

Sir Vince Cable: I think with the knowledge that it is disproportionately small and that we should ideally have more.

Q173 Toby Perkins: I accept that it might not necessarily be a figure that will always be in your head, but you were aware you were coming to this Committee today. It would have been interesting for you to have investigated in advance what proportion of your membership was Muslim. Was it not something that you considered might be relevant?

Baroness Brinton: Unfortunately the way we collect our data we do not ask about specific religion, for example, for candidates. I can give you the BAME figure, but I cannot give you those candidates who are Muslim, sorry.

Q174 Toby Perkins: Would you consider the Liberal Democrat Party to be institutionally Islamophobic?

Sir Vince Cable: Not from my experience, but there are cases and we are dealing with them. We would like to have more Muslim members and candidates. I have gone out of my way to try to encourage that, because we want to be more diverse.

Q175 Toby Perkins: You referred previously to Baroness Warsi’s comment and many other pieces of evidence suggesting that the Conservative Party was institutionally Islamophobic. Do you share that view, from what you know?

Sir Vince Cable: There have been a lot of comments, but it is not my role to do the forensic work that you would need to do to establish whether that is a fair comment. I followed the Lawrence Inquiry very carefully when I first became an MP and I think to make an accusation of
that kind stack up, you really do need to do it properly, rather than by just giving a casual judgment on it. Certainly, as we said a few moments ago, we feel that they should be investigated.

Q176 Toby Perkins: Obviously you were a senior member of the Liberal Democrats at the time that they went into coalition with the Conservatives. You have been the leader for the last few years, and I appreciate you are standing down shortly, but if in the future you were a senior member of the party at a time when the party was considering whether or not to go into coalition with the Conservative Party, if the party considered them to be institutionally Islamophobic, would that be something that you would consider as to whether or not you wanted to be in a coalition with them or would it not be a factor?

Sir Vince Cable: It would certainly be a relevant factor, but it was not something that emerged as an issue at that time. There are related issues, like how we pursue the Prevent strategy, which I was fairly closely involved with because I had overall responsibility for the universities and there was an attempt, if you remember, to put a statutory duty on universities, and I took the view that it infringed free speech. That is not directly related, but where issues of dealing with the Muslim community arose we dealt with them robustly. I do not think the accusation was ever made at the time when David Cameron was Prime Minister that there was institutional Islamophobia of such a scale that it prevented us working with them.

Q177 Toby Perkins: Potentially in the future, in terms of what we now know—even if you did not know it then—do you think it will be something that a future Liberal Democrat leader would have to consider at that moment?

Sir Vince Cable: Yes, it would, but not just Islamophobia. If any party was considered, if there was reasonable evidence, Islamophobic in its nature or anti-Semitic or prejudiced against any other group, we would be extremely reluctant to go into a partnership with them. I think that is a reasonable summary of where we are at.

Q178 Chair: To clarify, if you get a complaint about potential Islamophobia, what is the process?

Baroness Brinton: Anybody can report online. There is a complaints form online that also guides people through the flowchart. If they are a victim of that, as opposed to somebody who may just have seen it, they also have access to our pastoral care officer, who is not part of the discipline process but will support that person right the way through the process to make sure that they know exactly what is coming and will make sure that if they are particularly badly affected and evidence is taken they do not have to be in the same room as the person they are alleging has committed whatever it was. That then is processed. There is a decision about whether it needs to go to full investigation or whether it is very clear-cut or also whether mediation will resolve it. I think in the example we are talking about that is not the case, but the intention is
with very minor offences that make up the bulk they would go to
mediation and never require to go to a full panel.

Q179 **Chair:** Who decides?

**Baroness Brinton:** The lead adjudicator. We have a team of lead
adjudicators and they will process them and these are the people who are
legally qualified.

Q180 **Chair:** Are the lead adjudicators elected or are they chosen by the
leader? How are the lead adjudicators decided?

**Baroness Brinton:** They applied and were selected against criteria. They
are trained and our compliance manager and her unit run the processes
for them.

Q181 **Chair:** It is a job? It is a fully paid position?

**Baroness Brinton:** It is not paid.

Q182 **Chair:** It is not paid?

**Baroness Brinton:** They are members.

Q183 **Chair:** So they are members from all across the country who apply?

**Baroness Brinton:** Yes.

Q184 **Chair:** How are they then chosen? How do you decide one is going to get
it rather than somebody else?

**Baroness Brinton:** A panel, a sub-group of members of the board and
the three state parties work together to make sure, because we also have
to make sure that we are covering all three states, because we are a
federal party and that is important. The list of lead adjudicators is
approved by party conference. That happened in March and that will
happen on a regular basis as people change.

Q185 **Chair:** How is the panel that chooses them chosen?

**Baroness Brinton:** That is by nomination from members of the federal
board, again meeting various criteria. We want somebody who
understood what the training requirements are, what the skillset is,
somebody themselves who has legal experience, so that it is a balanced
panel.

Q186 **Chair:** The thing I am trying to understand is ultimately who chooses in
terms of the decision-making structure. I am slightly lost.

**Baroness Brinton:** It is this panel, which is a sub-group.

Q187 **Chair:** So the panel chooses your adjudicators. Your adjudicators have to
be trained. Just say again, the panel is chosen how?

**Baroness Brinton:** By the federal board.
Chair: By the federal board and the federal board is chosen how?

Baroness Brinton: A mixture. We are directly elected or elected by appointment from one of the federal parties. It is a range of about 35 people.

Sir Vince Cable: That is the overall governing body.

Baroness Brinton: Yes, it is the governing body.

Chair: If questions were raised about whether or not your panel was not representative or your board was not representative or that there was somehow, as a result of that, lack of sensitivity to particular issues, how would you handle that?

Baroness Brinton: We are held to account by our party conference, which is the party’s supreme decision-making body. People tend to know that our conference makes policy but they do not know that they approve certain positions like this. All our members are entitled to go to conference and to vote, to raise questions at conference and they can do that. They can also in between times come back to either me or their own chair of a state party and report if they have concerns and those are fed back.

Chair: What is the transparency in the process? If a complaint is made about serious Islamophobia and then somewhere along the way the adjudicator or the panel decides, “We do not think that is serious” or, “We think that apology is sufficient” or whatever, what is the level of transparency?

Baroness Brinton: The transparency certainly goes back to the complainant and there are discussions with the complainant and it can be closed down. There is an appeal process if they object to that. We tend not to circulate the detail of results of most of the complaints processes, but certainly any complainant would be aware of and involved and then able to make a decision to appeal if they wanted to.

Toby Perkins: You heard the evidence from the two witnesses earlier. One of the issues that was raised was specifically about the engagement of women from the Muslim community. Sir Vince mentioned previously that there is a recognition and a desire to do more within the party more generally to encourage more members of the Muslim community to join. Could you say a little bit about what practical steps that have taken and specifically what steps have been taken with regard to encouraging more Muslim women to join the Liberal Democrats?

Baroness Brinton: The Association of Liberal Democrat Councillors runs an emerging and future leaders group, which has specifically targeted young women—young BAME women—and within that young Muslim women as well. We also have a campaign for gender balance and a racial diversity campaign, with specific responsibility to encourage, bring forward and work with candidates—obviously women but also people
from BAME backgrounds, and for this purpose I would also include Muslims as well. We had run—and it is in abeyance at the moment—a leadership programme that specifically covered support for candidates from the four underrepresented groups as identified in the Equality Act and the Equality and Human Rights Commission guidance to political parties.

If I could make a plea to this Committee, the guidance to political parties is very frustrating in that while it is possible to have all-women shortlists and all-disabled shortlists, it is not possible to have all-BAME shortlists or all-LGBT shortlists, which means that that those parties that particularly want to make progress in those areas are hamstrung.

For us within our Muslim communities, we certainly work with other Muslim members to make sure that young people come forward. We have some outstanding young members in the Young Liberals who are doing exactly that and I am hopeful. We had one of our number elected as an MEP a fortnight ago and we certainly have some candidates in top target seats. Perhaps in a general election where we make gains rather than losses we will be able to see the benefits of that in the future.

Q192 **Toby Perkins:** If I may say, there are clearly many issues all parties face in terms of attracting more women into an engagement with politics, but the barriers and issues around Muslim women are different. I first invite you to consider whether what you have said is sufficient in terms of that particular group. In terms of the processes and practices that are followed by your Members of Parliament, by council leaders and other people engaging in the community, for example, would someone holding a meeting attempting to engage with purely a male audience in some Muslim areas be considered acceptable and best practice? If not, what sort of steps are you taking to ensure that specifically Muslim women feel that there is a role for them in the Liberal Democrats?

**Baroness Brinton:** I have been in that position myself as a candidate where I have been asked to address a mosque and I have been asked to address the men only and I asked then also to be able to go and talk with the women. I think that it is very much for us to show that we are there for the entire community and to work with them.

We have some excellent women Muslim councillors who act as role models and provide support for our other young women who are thinking about becoming candidates and then running for election, because you are right, there are some barriers. There is certainly unconscious bias. I do not think this is just a Liberal Democrats thing and we need to make sure that they are also empowered to deal with it.

One of the big things we have been doing as a party is asking others who have had unconscious bias training, who see things, to call them out. It is much easier if somebody else helps to call out something that is uncomfortable, asking about family arrangements, asking about dress, all of those things.
Toby Perkins: I appreciate the example that you have set when you were a candidate and recognise that, but is there anything more formal than that in terms of the guidance that you provide to Members of Parliament, to other people who on behalf of the Liberal Democrats engage with the Muslim community or the fact that you took this action on this occasion? If not, do you think more needs to be done?

Baroness Brinton: Not specifically for Muslims, but we do provide specific guidance for working in different communities from one’s own. We all have a lack of knowledge that can turn into unconscious bias, so we do offer that. When Sarah Teather was an MP she led our work in that among parliamentarians and we are still doing that today.

Kate Green: If I can follow up on a couple of things you said in answer to earlier questions, first of all, I am sorry because you explained this and I did not pick it up. Is it a single complaints and disciplinary system covering all protected characteristics or is it as you were describing to the Chair specifically in relation to—

Baroness Brinton: It is. It is a single disciplinary system. It is not just about protected characteristics. It is about everything, so it covers bullying, harassment, a row about which candidate might take priority over another in a list system when there has been a row between them and complaints happen. It is absolutely everything and that is one of the reasons why it is quite difficult to pull out just cases about Islamophobia because it is not always obvious. It will be in the future, but it has not been in the past.

Kate Green: As in other political parties it is a self-regulating system. Do you think that first of all your members and secondly the wider public have confidence in political parties self-regulating?

Baroness Brinton: I think because our members had to approve this new system and we consulted on it over two election periods before we implemented it, it was discussed and debated at conference and then it came back in a revised form that was then approved by a two-thirds majority, the members understand that they have been heavily involved in it. The proof will be in how it develops. We automatically build reviews into our discipline system because the moment anything gets stuck in a rut you can start to miss things, so that is built in, helped by the fact that our committees are obviously re-elected every period, so all policies have to be reviewed. That will include the definition of Islamophobia and it will include the definition of IHRA, so as a new committee comes in they have to look at all of those different things.

Kate Green: Is that an internal review or does it engage with external non-party stakeholders?

Baroness Brinton: We have done. I cannot speak for the future, but we certainly have done before we accepted this definition here.

Kate Green: You mentioned that you do not have data on your
Baroness Brinton: We now have a voluntary system, but we are told we cannot insist on asking all our members to give us all their diversity data and I think that is one of the frustrations, that I cannot give you those data. All I can do is to tell you those who have responded voluntarily with that. Candidates are a different matter, in that we can ask candidates, because we collect data, but as I say, we have not specifically pulled out religious affiliation in the past.

Kate Green: Finally, I would like to ask you something about your adoption of the definition. You have given us a comprehensive description of how you have adopted it in internal party processes, but of course the definition is not just about how political parties manage their own activities. We heard evidence a few weeks ago from Assistant Commissioner Neil Basu and from Assistant Commissioner Martin Hewitt from the National Police Chiefs Council suggesting that they had concerns that the definition would act as a brake on policing, counter-terrorism policing, and it would be difficult for officers to operate on the ground. I assume the Liberal Democrats are a party that aspires to return to government. Does it concern you that very senior police officers gave that advice to the Committee?

Baroness Brinton: I have read the evidence. I am not a policing expert so I cannot comment on that, but I do think that what we are talking about here is not just about how political parties manage their own activities. It is not about terrorism. Frankly, we need to be able to recognise what is going on broadly in society and not accept this definition because of a very specific issue about terrorism would really concern me. Sir Vince has already referred to the overlap with Prevent, which I think has led to cause for concern in our party, because it is important that whatever arrangements happen between the criminal justice system, the police and the Muslim community, it needs to be bought into by all parties. If this definition does not help the police then you may have to look at it again. I think I would regret that.

Sir Vince Cable: My understanding was that the Metropolitan Police had indicated they were happy with the definition or at least did not consider it a problem in policing responsibilities.

Chair: Thank you very much for the evidence that you have given. It would be helpful to have any further facts and figures that you have around your complaints process, the number of complaints and also around the numbers of councillors and so on as well. It would also be helpful, because I do not want to be misunderstanding some of the questions I was asking about how the panels were selected and who chooses and so on, if you were able to give us a very simple written explanation of who it is that takes the decisions when a complaint about Islamophobia is raised with the party, who takes appeal decisions and so
on and then about the transparency of the process. That would be tremendously helpful as well. Thank you very much for your evidence and your time this afternoon.