

Al-Emaan Centre Political Policy 2024

Background

With the increasing intensity of the geo-political stage, especially around the Middle East and Gaza/Palestine, AEC Management has had to consider its political stance. Considerations include what as well as how we act and communicate, taking into account our service to the community, our status as a UK based charity and thinking of the potential short-, medium- and long-term consequences of our actions. After convening a Trustees meeting on Monday 13th of November 2023 it was decided that each action must be evaluated according to its benefit and a proposed policy should be considered. This document sets out a non-binding policy framework to support AEC Trustees, Management, staff and volunteers.

Internal Policy: Managing Political Issues for Al-Emaan Centre

Al-Emaan Centre is a registered charity and as such the Trustees are responsible for ensuring that the rules in relation to political activity and campaigning are followed. This applies to all staff, volunteers and activities undertaken in its name.

Relevant resources include:

Charity Commission for England and Wales

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/speaking-out-guidance-on-campaigning-and-political-activity-by-charities-cc9/speaking-out-guidance-on-campaigning-and-political-activity-by-charities>)

<https://www.charitycommissionni.org.uk/charity-essentials/charities-and-politics/>

<https://charitycommission.blog.gov.uk/2023/12/01/charity-commission-and-electoral-commission-chairs-share-advice-for-charities-engaging-in-public-debate/>

<https://www.ncvo.org.uk/help-and-guidance/running-a-charity/political-campaigning/>

Muslim Council of Britain (MCB): <https://mcb.org.uk/features/elections/>

Muslim Engagement and development: <https://www.mend.org.uk/>

The Muslim Vote: <https://themuslimvote.co.uk/>

1. Purpose and Scope

Define the purpose of the policy: to guide the mosque management in handling political matters in a manner consistent with the mosque's values and objectives and in accordance with the relevant guidance applicable to UK charities.

Clarify the scope: the policy applies to all Trustees, Management staff, volunteers, and representatives of the mosque.

Consideration: Acknowledge the unique role of mosques as religious institutions and the need to maintain community cohesion and religious integrity.

2. Principles

Based on the above resources, the following key principles apply:

Impartiality: Generally, the mosque remains neutral and does not align itself with any political party or candidate.

Non-partisanship: The mosque does not engage in activities that promote or oppose specific political parties or candidates.

Compliance: All activities must comply with relevant charity law, electoral law (with particular regard to regulated activities and the regulatory period), and regulatory requirements.

Consideration: Recognize the diverse political views within the congregation and the need to respect and accommodate these

Note that charities can support and oppose the policies of political parties, but this might affect perceptions of the AEC's independence.

If a party adopts a policy that aligns with a longstanding policy ask or the charitable purposes, there is unlikely to be any issue with welcoming that support and calling on other parties to adopt it.

If a party adopts a policy that the charity opposes, the policy may be criticised, but it must relate to the charitable purposes and the impact on the people the charity supports and undertake in an appropriate tone, constructive, based on evidence and consistent.

3. Activities

Education and Awareness: The mosque may provide educational materials or events to inform congregants about key political issues without expressing support for any particular party

Voter Registration: Encouraging congregants to register and participate in elections without endorsing any specific political party or candidate.

Non-partisan Advocacy: Engaging in advocacy efforts on issues relevant to the mosque's mission, ensuring activities do not favour one political party or candidates. However, should the Trustees or Management decide to hold political meeting e.g. hustings, for the purpose of educating the community they should ensure that main political parties are represented.

Avoidance of Partisan Events: The mosque refrains from hosting or participating in events that are partisan in nature, such as campaign rallies or fundraisers for political parties or candidates. However, the committee may consider requests for meetings from any individuals on a case-by-case basis.

Consideration: Ensure that political discussions or events within the mosque are conducted respectfully and in a manner that promotes unity and understanding among congregants.

4. Communications

Official Statements: Only designated spokespersons, usually the imam or a designated trustee, are authorized to make public statements on behalf of the mosque regarding political issues and public events.

Neutrality in Communication: Generally, communications from the mosque should be neutral and avoid expressing support for or opposition to any political party or candidate. This should be particularly the case during periods of elections.

Social Media Guidelines: Establish guidelines for mosque staff and volunteers regarding Al-Emaan Centre and personal, social media use to ensure they do not inadvertently associate the mosque with partisan views. Note that events are often streamed live, recorded, and available online. Trustees and Management should ensure that where necessary, these are edited in advance of posting externally. [An enhanced social medial policy may be required].

Consideration: Recognize the potential influence of religious leaders and ensure that their public statements (including during khutbah) are in line with the mosque's non-partisan stance.

Coordination with other groups – where appropriate, the Trustees and Management will consider joining with other groups in issuing statements of relevance to Muslims in the UK and worldwide e.g. MCB, SELKCOM, MAK, MINAB etc. The statements must reflect the AEC position, and if they are considered not to represent AEC or it's community then AEC should not put its name to the statement.

5. Monitoring and Enforcement

Regular Review: The policy will be reviewed periodically to ensure its effectiveness and relevance.

Training and Guidance: Ensure that key responsible individuals e.g. mosque Trustees, Management staff, and lead volunteers are aware and understand the policy.

Reporting Mechanism: Ensure that should any issues arise that this is raised with the Trustees and Management as soon as practical and reviewed and the next Trustee meeting.

6. Consequences of Breach:

Reputational Risk: Emphasize the potential damage to the mosque's reputation and community trust that could result from engaging in partisan political activities.

Consideration: Recognise the significance of mosques as community hubs and the importance of maintaining trust and credibility within the community, internally and externally.

Disciplinary Action: The trustees reserve the right to issue reminders and warnings and other disciplinary actions.

Appendix 1

Al-Emaan Centre Charitable Objects from the Charity Commission website is as follows:

To advance the Islamic religion for the benefit of the public, in particular but without limitation through the holding of prayer meetings, establishment of religious places, producing and/or distributing literature on the Islamic religion to enlighten others about Islam.

As a comparison, the Lewisham Islamic Centre Charitable Objects are as follows:

THE OBJECTS OF THE LIC ("THE OBJECTS") ARE THROUGHOUT THE WORLD AND MORE PARTICULARLY IN THE LONDON BOROUGH OF LEWISHAM AND IN THE UNITED KINGDOM: (A) THE ADVANCEMENT OF THE FAITH AND RELIGIOUS PRACTICES OF ISLAM IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE QURAN AND THE SUNNAH AMONGST MUSLIMS IN PARTICULAR AND MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC IN GENERAL; (B) THE ADVANCEMENT OF EDUCATION FOR THE PUBLIC BENEFIT CONCERNING THE TEACHINGS AND PRACTICES OF ISLAM; (C) THE ADVANCEMENT OF GENERAL EDUCATION FOR THE PUBLIC BENEFIT; (D) THE PROVISION OF RECREATIONAL FACILITIES AND ACTIVITIES IN THE INTERESTS OF SOCIAL WELFARE WITH THE OBJECT OF IMPROVING THE CONDITIONS OF LIFE FOR THOSE PERSONS IN NEED OF SUCH FACILITIES AND ACTIVITIES; (E) THE RELIEF OF POVERTY, SICKNESS AND SUFFERING OF ANY PERSONS WHO ARE IN NEED IRRESPECTIVE OF THEIR NATIONALITY, RACE, ETHNIC ORIGIN AND RELIGIOUS BELIEFS; (F) THE ADVANCEMENT OF BOTH RELIGIOUS AND RACIAL HARMONY FOR THE BENEFIT OF THE PUBLIC BY: (I) PROMOTING KNOWLEDGE OF AND MUTUAL UNDERSTANDING BETWEEN DIFFERENT RELIGIOUS AND RACIAL GROUPS; (II) ADVANCING EDUCATION AND RAISING AWARENESS ABOUT DIFFERENT RELIGIOUS AND RACIAL GROUPS IN ORDER TO PROMOTE GOOD RELATIONS BETWEEN PERSONS BELONGING TO DIFFERENT RELIGIOUS AND RACIAL GROUPS; (III) WORKING TOWARDS THE ELIMINATION OF DISCRIMINATION ON THE GROUNDS OF RELIGION AND RACE; AND (G) THE ADVANCEMENT OF SUCH OTHER CHARITABLE OBJECTS FOR THE PUBLIC BENEFIT (ACCORDING TO THE LAW OF ENGLAND AND WALES) AS THE TRUSTEES MAY FROM TIME TO TIME THINK FIT, PROVIDED ALWAYS THAT THESE ARE IN HARMONY WITH THE QURAN AND THE SUNNAH.

Appendix 2

Scenario 1:

What stance and position do Al-Emaan Centre Trustees and Management take regarding the atrocities in Gaza and other places where Muslims are affected?

There should be no restrictions on Al-Emaan Centre raising awareness and education of the situation of Muslims and others, supporting the legitimate charitable efforts to alleviate suffering, praying for those suffering injustice and allying with others who seek to lobby for policy change (including attendance at lawful protests). Trustees and Management will be mindful of associated legislation limiting activities and expression and may seek external guidance and to provide advice to the community in relation to this.

Note that this is based on the interpretation of “without limitation” in the current charitable objects above whereas LIC objects provides a clearer basis for engagement activities.

Scenario 2:

During the general election period, a prospective Member of Parliament would like to address the community during Jummah to explain his party's policies, encourage them to vote, fundraise and distribute leaflets.

To agree to this would be in breach of the above policies of political impartiality and should be rejected. Should the trustees wish to encourage active political engagement it should consider generic voter participation, educating the community on the political process, specifically as it pertains to the Muslim community and/or inform them of the position of the wider political parties (e.g. through hustings, national/local groups e.g. MCB, MEND, SELKCOM).

Scenario 3:

The local councillor would like to meet with the Trustees and Management to discuss recent issues in relation to the Borough and complaints about the mosque.

The Trustees and Management should be clear about the agenda for the meeting and understand the councillor's objectives before agreeing to the meeting. In general, there should be no objections to meeting the councillor to establish and maintain good relations, inform the councillor of the mosque activities, and understand any concerns. Formal meetings should be minuted and any follow up agreed communicated promptly.

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