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Our Ref:
2024_04 Petition

Please Contact:
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01 May 2024

Councillor Chris Read, Leader of the Council
via email: maggi.clark@rotherham.gov.uk

Dear Councillor Read

Rotherham's Commitment to a Permanent Ceasefire and To Promote Peace in Palestine and in the Region – referred from the Council, 28 February 2024

I write to outline the recommendations from a sub-group of the Overview and Scrutiny Management Board, following its consideration of the above petition.

We met with representatives of the petitioners on 4 April 2024 to listen to their concerns and better understand the issues raised. We remain saddened at the events in Gaza and the wider region and reiterate the call for an immediate ceasefire and a lasting peace. As per the commitment made at February's Council meeting to respond to the petitioners prior to May's local election, the sub-group met with representatives on 30 April 2024 to outline its recommendations.

Our discussions have been constructive, and I thank the petitioners for their engagement and bringing the petition to the attention of the Council. We would not have reached our position without their input. I am also grateful to the Councillors for their thoughtful contributions and officers for their assistance and guidance.

We note that the sub-group were asked to consider points 3-8 of the petition as the first two points had been agreed by the Council. However, having listened to representations from the petitioners, our recommendation relating to the points 1 and 2 is outlined at 1). The recommendations arising from the remaining petition points are listed as recommendations 2) – 7).

***Publicly condemn the Israeli Government's human rights violations
Demand the UK Government call for a permanent ceasefire in Gaza***

Recommendation 1):

- i. That the Council is invited to issue a press release explaining the resolution agreed in the debate held on 28 February 2024.

Withdraw any associations with the Israeli Government

Recommendation 2):

- i. In the interests of transparency, the Council publishes details of whether the Council has formal associations with the Israeli government.

- ii. Requests that the Council reviews its contractual relations to establish if it has links with any of the companies named in the UN Human Rights Council's list as part of the Council's visible supply chain.
- iii. Notes the restrictions placed on local authorities in respect of the factors which they may take into account when procuring goods or services under Section 17 of the 1988 Local Government Act.

Prioritise human rights and equality in Rotherham's international relations, especially for the Palestinian people

Recommendation 3):

- i. The Council cannot implement this recommendation as it is stated in the petition as international relations fall to central rather local government.
- ii. Notes that the Council no longer has active twinning arrangements, and it is not recommended that these recommence.
- iii. The Council notes the strength of Rotherham's local communities in supporting communities in need around the world. This includes promoting values such as human rights and equality which the Council supports.

Engage in dialogue with residents to develop a strategy for ethical local policies, specifically not to support countries with illegal occupations or companies benefitting from such activities

Recommendation 4):

- i. That the Cabinet reiterates its commitment to its Ethical Procurement Policy and notes that the Council will always procure services in line with this Policy.
- ii. That the Council publishes an overview of its investments on its website.
- iii. That the Council requests that SY Pension Authority publishes its investments on its website.
- iv. Notes that the discretion of the Council to make ethical procurement decisions in respect of not supporting countries with illegal occupations or companies benefitting from such activities was removed under s.17 of the Local Government Act, 1988.
- v. To enable councils to reflect the concerns of the communities that they are elected to represent, that the Leader writes to the relevant Minister to a) request the repeal of those sections of the Local Government Act 1988 which prohibit councils from taking 'non-commercial considerations' into account when awarding contracts and b) in opposition to the Economic Activity of Public Bodies (Overseas Matters) Bill currently before Parliament.

Consider flag displays that better align with Rotherham communities' values, promote inclusivity and display the Palestinian flag

Recommendation 5):

- i. That the Council is requested to give approval to the display of the Palestinian flag as a gesture of solidarity to those in Gaza and the wider region who are affected by the conflict and support peace. This should coincide with the United Nation's International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People (29 November 2024).
- ii. That the community considers organising a visible gesture of solidarity to those in Gaza and the wider region who are affected by the conflict and support peace. For example, this could include inter-faith, sporting or cultural events.

- iii. That elected members are reminded that under the existing Flag Protocol, a motion to support a cause or campaign, which by implication will include the flying of a flag, can be submitted to Council for decision.

Honour its commitment to being an Anti-Racist Town

Recommendation 6):

- i. That the Overview and Scrutiny Management Board scrutinises how future Council Equalities Action Plans align with any relevant resolution outlined in the Anti-Racist Town motion, making recommendations for improvement as necessary.

Recognise that criticism of the Israeli Government does not equate to criticism of Judaism as noted by the IHRA definition of anti-Semitism

Recommendation 7):

- i. That no further action is taken in respect of adopting an alternative definition of anti-Semitism.
- ii. That the Council notes that it is able to consider motions that provide equivalent definitions which seek to ensure clarity in respect of the other faiths should it resolve to do so.

Other issues considered by the sub-group:

- i. The sub-group did not support the request to join or form a coalition with other local authorities or make a declaration against “Israeli Apartheid”.

It is the intention that the recommendations will be forwarded to OSMB for approval and then onto Cabinet for decision. However, in advance of the election, I wanted to give you notice of our deliberations before my term as Chair concludes.

The petitioners indicated that they wish to maintain a dialogue with the Council. They have also provided suggestions of how events or support can be facilitated. We committed to sharing these suggestions and append them to the report submitted to OSMB.

May I thank you for the support you have shown to OSMB over the term of my office and the constructive way you have engaged with us.

With my very best wishes for the future.

Yours sincerely,

Maggi Clark

Councillor Maggi Clark
Chair of Overview and Scrutiny Management Board