

Report of Meeting of Board of Deputies of British Jews - Held on 26th July 2021

New Member Admissions

Applications were made by several organisations to be admitted to the Board and following detailed submissions, close questioning on their applications and votes by Deputies on 26th July, the following were admitted to the Board:-

1. GIFT
2. The Jewish Police Association
3. The Jewish Small Communities Network
4. Kisharon
5. Langdon

Entirely noncontroversial.

However, applications by two other bodies were rejected or failed to reach the 2/3 majority threshold. This process threw up divisions within the Board as Deputies divided along right wing and left-wing views that caused controversy which became the subject of public discussion in the Jewish press. Democracy in action often delivers unexpected results

The **Jewish News** provided extensive coverage:-

JCORE and Manchester Zionist group fail in bids to get on Board of Deputies

Concerns raised over the Jewish Council For Racial Equality's stance on IHRA and ZCC's alleged links to right-wing groups, as both failed to secure two-third of votes needed



Edie Friedman of JCORE speaking in a Parliamentary committee room.

The failure of the Jewish Council For Racial Equality to be elected as a member of the Board of Deputies has been greeted with fury and dismay amid the latest round of infighting between deputies.

Amid a renewal of tensions between deputies aligned to the left and right that came to the fore during recent presidential elections, the community's voice on refugees and the Zionist Central Council of Manchester (ZCC) failed to secure the two-thirds of votes necessary to join the Board at a meeting on Monday.

Langdon, Kisharon, Jewish Small Communities Network, the Jewish Police Association and GIFT were all admitted after securing over 90 percent backing.

It's understood that JCORE, which campaigns on issues around racial equality and justice for refugees, attracting 52 percent support after deputies opposed to its joining raised questions about its commitment to the IHRA definition of antisemitism. One Deputy later remarked that it was "farcical" to hear Jewish organisations being questioned over their commitment to fighting antisemitism.

In a statement on Tuesday, JCORE said it was "dismayed" by the result, which comes only months after the Board of Deputies received widespread acclaim for its landmark report on racial inclusivity in the community.

Adam Rose, Chair of JCORE, said: "It was extremely disappointing that certain deputies felt it appropriate to make misleading allegations, thus encouraging enough deputies to block JCORE's membership application.

"I was pleased that a majority of deputies backed JCORE's application for membership. JCORE will continue to work closely with the Board, with widespread support from across the Jewish community and beyond, to ensure that its work for good race relations and for the rights of refugees and asylum seekers continues."

Rose faced claims his organisation did not support IHRA from the Deputy Ric Cooper and that it had given "help to the enemies of the Jewish people."



Lord Dubs with campaigners for refugees in January, including Edie Friedman of JCORE

Rose responded by saying he did not know “on what basis you say we don’t support the IHRA definition” and said JCORE had “just never discussed this.”

The Deputy Gideon Smith intervened to say the majority of groups on the Board took no position on the IHRA definition.

The ZCC attracted 42 percent support, vowing immediately to apply again.

In Monday’s occasionally tense session, a number of young deputies pointed to claims of past associations between members of the ZCC and the far-right activist Stephen Yaxley-Lennon, also known as Tommy Robinson.

The ZCC’s Raymond Solomon confirmed on social media that Robinson had “approached” the group in the past – but added: “I challenge those people who voted today against the ZCC to provide any proof that the ZCC is a supporter of Robinson.” Addressing concerns the organisation had failed to condemn Robinson’s presence at a central London rally supporting Israel during its recent anti-terror operation against Hamas, he wrote: “The ZCC did not comment about Robinson’s appearance at the ZF event because the BOD and the ZF had already commented.”

Speakers including Joe Grabiner also pointed to lawyer Robert Festenstein, who is president of the ZCC, in expressing opposition.

After appearing in a video put out by Stephen Yaxley-Lennon – who is also known as Tommy Robinson – on YouTube in 2017, Festenstein denied that the far-right activist was his client. He said at the time: “I was interviewed by Mr Robinson in connection with a matter where I am instructed by a client who has a potential dispute with Sunderland City Council. Mr Robinson is not my client. I have no association with him.”

Asked by Grabiner how he could reassure deputies Tommy has nothing to do with the ZCC, Meehan responded: “There is no connection whatsoever between the ZCC and Tommy Robinson. We are totally appalled by the type of person he is.”

The Board President then intervened to bring up the fact that the ZCC had failed to condemn the presence of Robinson at a central London rally in support of Israel during the recent anti-terror operation against Hamas. Marie van der Zyl said there were “a lot of questions” about the group.



Marie van der Zyl

One Deputy, who asked not to be named, told Jewish News: “There was a sizeable rebellion against the ZCC being admitted from those on the more liberal wing of the Board.

“But it’s fair to say the ‘right’ showed they still hold plenty of clout after JCORE’s application to join was voted down.”

In a statement, Board Interim Chief Executive Michael Wegier said he welcomed the five new member organisations. He said: **“This brings the Board of Deputies up to 208 member organisations and synagogues making the organisation the key forum to discuss the issues of the day and giving us unparalleled legitimacy to speak on behalf of the community.”**

“While two organisations, JCORE and the Zionist Central Council, will be disappointed at being unable to achieve the two thirds majority set out in the Board of Deputies constitution, the result does not preclude these organisations re-applying at a later date. The demand to join our organisation and to be a part of the democratic representative organisation of Jews in the UK has never been stronger and there are plenty more applications to be considered.”

David Meehan, of the ZCC, addressed Monday’s meeting, said the group’s main objective was to “defend the democratic state of Israel” and that the ZCC were “inclusive and accepting.”

Joe Grabiner of Alyth synagogue, said some were “horrified” that the ZCC’s President Festenstein had appeared in the video with Tommy Robinson. He continued: “How are you able to reassure us Tommy Robinson has nothing to do with your organisation? And is there a connection between those two individuals and your organisation?”

Meehan responded by claiming: “There is no connection whatsoever between the ZCC and Tommy Robinson. We are totally appalled by the type of person he is.”

Divisional Committee Elections -25th July 2021

On less controversial matters, on 25th July applications were made by over 60 Deputies to join each of the 4 Divisions within the Board. The elections were held by an independent Election scrutiny company and conducted online. Each candidate published their manifesto and detailed their qualifications and experience. The Election was conducted under the Single Transferable Vote System.

The range of candidates was extraordinarily diverse and covered every region of the country, men and women, young and old, retired professionals, and young students, religious and non-religious, businessmen, political advisers and the LGBT community.

Some candidates represented small communities or organisations, others large established ones. All demonstrated strong commitment to the Objectives of the Board in the fields of support for Israel, resolute opposition to all forms of racism and the protection and promotion of all Jewish Communities across the UK.

In short, there was clear evidence of a surprising array of talent experience and commitment of Deputies both within and without the Jewish community. This provides the Board with feedback from its Deputies which gives the President a blend of authority and facilitates access to those Government institutions, NGO’s and media outlets with whom the Board engages on a daily basis.

The regular engagement of the Board with Government Ministers was interesting. By way of example, the previous week the Board had met with Education Minister Gavin Williamson to address anti-Semitism in schools, the need to educate Teaching Unions about an even handed and impartial approach to how the Israel Palestine issue is handled in the class room and the content of text books and teaching materials.

If Any Magen Avot member wishes to bring an issue to the attention of the BOD he or she can do so at any time.