FLAG FLYING AND ILLUMINATION OF GUILDHALL

To:
Cabinet, 16th November 2026

Report by:
Sam Scharf, Director of Communities

Wards affected:
All

Director Approval: Director confirms that the report author has sought the advice of all appropriate colleagues and given due regard to that advice; that the equalities impacts and other implications of the recommended decisions have been assessed and accurately presented in the report; and that they are content for the report to be put to the Cabinet for decision.

1.	**Recommendations**
1.1	Cabinet should: • note the views expressed by different communities in relation to flying the Palestine Flag or illuminating the Guildhall on 29 November 2026 to mark the UN's International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People; and, • consider the officer assessment in section 4.3 when making any such decisions; in particular, that such actions could negatively impact community cohesion and risk undermining trust the Council has built with various faith and community groups.
2.	**Purpose and reason for the report**
2.1	To provide an officer assessment to inform the Cabinet about the impact of flying the Palestine Flag and illuminating the Guildhall on the 29th November 2026 to mark the UN's International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People.

3.	**Alternative options considered**
3.1	The officer assessment was recommended by the Civic Affairs and Audit committee on 5th October 2026.
4.	**Background and key issues**
4.1	Councillors have submitted public motions in November 2024 and February 2026 calling for the Council to fly the Palestinian flag to commemorate United Nations International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People. In November 2024, the Council agreed to fly the United Nations flag to mark that occasion. The Council's flag flying protocol falls within the remit of its Civic Affairs and Audit Committee. Following consideration by Civic Affairs and Audit Committee on 5 October 2026, officers were asked to undertake an assessment, to identify any impacts relating to the safety and wellbeing of residents, and that the assessment should be presented to Cabinet on 16 November. The Cabinet's recommendation would then be referred to Full Council on 26 November ahead of the UN Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People on 29 November 2026.
4.2	Scope of Officer Assessment The scope of the officer assessment was to identify any impacts relating to the safety and wellbeing of residents, regarding the decision whether to fly the Palestine flag and illuminate the Guildhall to commemorate the UN Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People on 29 November 2026. It was not within scope to consider the humanitarian or geopolitical issues related to the Palestine - Israel conflict. The Council's position on the conflict is set out in the 2024 motion on Palestine-Israel. In this motion the Council "called for an immediate ceasefire, the return of hostages, unfettered access for humanitarian aid, peace in the Middle East, international support for a two-State solution and the upholding of international law." The

	Council noted that "The International Court of Justice has ruled that there was a risk of irreparable harm to the Palestinian right to be protected from genocide". The Council committed to "investigate the implications of stopping banking with Barclays" and "to condemn all forms of Islamophobia and Antisemitism and work to champion a city free from hate, including in the Council's work to make Cambridge a City of Sanctuary."
4.3	Officer Assessment Officers reviewed hate crime data, reached out to different community and faiths leaders. Those individuals and organisations did so on the basis that their anonymity would be protected. The assessment focusses on perspectives provided in relation to flying the Palestinian flag and illuminating the Guildhall, and how these relate to community cohesion and feelings of safety. Crime data shows hate crime in Cambridge has risen since 2024, with 360 offences recorded that year and the rolling 12-month total to August 2026 around 11% higher than the previous 12 months. Racially motivated offences are the most common form of hate crime in Cambridge. Officers found that there is no single or shared community view on the proposals. Organisations noted that a range of perspectives exist within their own memberships and congregations, reflecting the complexity and sensitivity of the issue. Organisations contacted conveyed deep compassion for those affected by the conflict, expressed their heartfelt concern for the loss of life in Palestine and Israel and shared their hopes for peace in the Middle East. Some viewed flying the Palestinian flag and illuminating the Guildhall as an act of solidarity with the Palestinian people. Most with this view also challenged the effectiveness of this as a symbolic gesture, noting that it would not directly assist those affected by the conflict, nor would it contribute to peace building or create opportunities for dialogue and understanding locally.

	There were mixed opinions as to whether flying the Palestine flag and illuminating the Guildhall would support or compromise previous Council statements for a two-State solution. Whilst a small number felt that the proposal would not impact community cohesion, most organisations expressed concerns that the proposals could negatively affect community cohesion, increase fears of hate crime, and reduce feelings of safety amongst some residents. These concerns were linked to significant increased concerns of antisemitism locally, the rise in antisemitism nationally and to broader concerns about the growth of far-right activity and rhetoric. It was highlighted that visible civic actions related to international issues may be used by the far-right to reinforce narratives that local issues are being overlooked, potentially increasing risks for communities already experiencing racism and discrimination. Several organisations emphasised that Cambridge's strong culture of coexistence, mutual respect and positive relations between different communities are significant community assets. Concerns were expressed that the proposals could negatively impact community cohesion, risk the trust Council has built with faith and community groups and impact the Council's ability to support and enable community cohesion given its role under the 2010 Equality Acts Public Sector Equality Duty to foster good relations between different groups.
5.	**Council Vision**
5.1	This decision links to the Council's vision "One Cambridge Fair for All" and its statutory duties under the Equality Act 2010.
6.	**Consultation, engagement and communication**
6.1	*Summarised in the officer assessment (see section 4).*
7.	**Anticipated outcomes, benefits or impact**

7.1	That this report supports Cabinet to put forward a recommendation on whether to fly the Palestinian Flag and illuminate the Guildhall, to inform Councillor's decision at Full Council on 26 November 2026.
8.	**Implications**
8.1	**Relevant risks**
	Summarised in the officer assessment (see section 4).
	Local Government Reorganisation (LGR)
8.2	No LGR implications
	Financial Implications
8.3	*No financial implications*
	Legal Implications
8.4	*The Council's statutory duties under the Equality Act 2010 Public Sector Equality Duty are summarised in the officer assessment (see section 4).*
	Equalities and socio-economic Implications
8.5	*The officer assessment identified impacts for the protected characteristics of race and religion as summarised in section 4.*
	Net Zero Carbon, Climate Change and Environmental implications
8.6	*No Net Zero Carbon, Climate Change and Environmental implications*
	Procurement Implications
8.7	*No procurement implications*
	Community Safety Implications
8.8	*Summarised in the officer assessment (see section 4).*
9.	**Background documents**

9.1	*Full Council motion, November 2024* *Full Council motion, February 2026* Civic Affairs and Audit Committee, October 2026