

Choosing a Model Strategy

Whole-of-racism and single-issue approaches for Australian councils

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Summary

Australian councils are being asked to act on racism, and two model documents are now available to help them: Waverley Council's **Model Antisemitism Strategy for Local Councils** (2025), and the **Model Anti-Racism Strategy for Local Government** (2026).

The two documents share a practical, template-based approach. They differ in scope. The Waverley model addresses one form of racism. The Model Anti-Racism Strategy addresses racism against people of all backgrounds, including antisemitism, through a single framework.

This paper compares the two and sets out why a whole-of-racism strategy is the better starting point for most councils:

- **Most councils have no general anti-racism framework.** The Waverley model was designed to sit alongside Waverley's existing Cultural Diversity Strategy. Most councils do not have an equivalent strategy or policy.
- **Every community is treated the same way.** One definition and one response process apply to all communities, including Jewish communities.
- **It is aligned with the national framework.** It uses the Australian Human Rights Commission's definition of racism.
- **It avoids importing contested definitions**, while preserving any positions a council has already adopted.
- **It is costed, prioritised and measurable**, and works in every state and the Northern Territory.

1. Context

Dedicated council anti-racism strategies are rare in Australia. The Australian Human Rights Commission's 2024 mapping of government anti-racism programs found that local government tends not to see itself as responsible for addressing racism, and identified the City of Darebin as the only council with a dedicated anti-racism staff position. A national audit of council initiatives found that the most substantive local work is concentrated in a handful of councils, mainly in New South Wales and Victoria, with some activity in Tasmania and Queensland.

In November 2024, the Commission released the *National Anti-Racism Framework*, which recommends that governments fund local government to establish or improve local anti-racism initiatives informed by the Framework. In 2026, the NSW Government published guidelines and a template to help NSW councils prepare anti-racism strategies.

Waverley Council adopted Australia's first council strategy to combat antisemitism in March 2025, and released a version for other councils in August 2025.

The Model Anti-Racism Strategy for Local Government was developed in 2026 to give councils in every jurisdiction a complete, ready-to-adapt strategy covering all forms of racism.

2. The two models at a glance

	Waverley Model Antisemitism Strategy	Model Anti-Racism Strategy
Scope	Antisemitism	Racism in all its forms, including antisemitism
Communities covered	Jewish communities	All communities; the strategy names First Nations peoples, Jewish, Muslim, Arab and Palestinian, Asian (including Indian), African, and optionally Pasifika, migrant and refugee communities. Others can be added if applicable
Definition of racism	Not defined	Australian Human Rights Commission, <i>National Anti-Racism Framework</i> (2024)
Definition of specific forms	Presents the IHRA working definition of antisemitism, with its examples, as adopted by Waverley in 2021, and lists promoting the definition as an action	One common definition applying equally to every community; no named external definitions; council's previously adopted definitions and positions continue to apply
First Nations peoples	Acknowledgement and reconciliation statement	A dedicated pillar of 11 actions
Jurisdiction	Draws mainly on NSW legislation, NSW Police and NSW examples, with some state and territory placeholders	National; a state and territory reference table is provided
Structure	Background content; a prevention, early intervention, response and recovery framework; 31 actions across four focus areas; 15 community activity types	Six principles; six pillars; a menu of 75 actions; a four-step targeted response process
Costs	Not specified	Indicative cost band for every action
Priorities for different councils	Not specified	Every action rated for metropolitan, regional, and rural and remote councils
Measures	Review date; activity to measure community sentiment; six-monthly incident reporting	A measure for every action and an outcome indicator table with suggested targets
Data guidance	Placeholders for Census and incident data	Step-by-step ABS guide with table numbers; pre-filled national figures
Supporting material	Tips on developing local strategies; offer of advice from Waverley staff	Guideline, annotated action menu with examples from other councils, and a model council report

3. What the Waverley model does well

The Waverley model is a genuine contribution, and the Model Anti-Racism Strategy draws on several of its strengths:

- **It was first.** It gave councils a practical starting point at a time of acute concern in the Jewish community.
- **It is usable.** It provides copyable text and a clear structure that officers can adapt.
- **Its framework is sound.** Its prevention, early intervention, response and recovery model is used in the Model Anti-Racism Strategy to label every action.
- **It is realistic about council's role.** It recognises that councils are best placed to deliver generalist activities and should partner with specialist organisations for targeted work.
- **It is generous.** Waverley offers its staff's time to support other councils.

Waverley's own documents also point to a broader context. The strategy states that it aims to ensure there is no tolerance for antisemitism "and racism more generally", and that it should be read with Waverley's Cultural Diversity Strategy 2021–2031, which includes a focus area on racism.

4. Why a whole-of-racism strategy is the better starting point

4.1 Most councils lack the general framework the Waverley model assumes

The Waverley model was designed to complement an existing council-wide cultural diversity strategy. Most Australian councils have no equivalent. A council adopting a single-issue strategy without a general framework would have a detailed plan for one community and no plan for others.

4.2 Every community deserves the same protection

Racism affects many communities. In 2025, two in five people in Australia born in Africa or Asia reported experiencing discrimination in the previous 12 months (Scanlon Institute). The Call It Out register recorded 442 validated reports of racism against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in a single year. The *National Anti-Racism Framework* notes recent increases in both antisemitism and Islamophobia.

The Model Anti-Racism Strategy gives every community the same protection. Antisemitism is named explicitly. When racism rises against any community, council follows the same four steps: notice, listen, act and report. Actions such as safety checks for community places, public statements, targeted information and direct contact with community organisations are available to every community, including Jewish communities.

4.3 Consistency with the national framework

The Model Anti-Racism Strategy uses the Australian Human Rights Commission's definition of racism and reflects the *National Anti-Racism Framework's* emphasis on First Nations peoples. This gives councils a clear, nationally recognised foundation and positions them well for any future funding linked to the Framework.

4.4 Avoiding contested definitions

Definitions of particular forms of racism can be the subject of significant public debate. The IHRA working definition of antisemitism, and in particular its examples relating to the State of Israel, has been widely debated in Australia and internationally. Councils that adopt specific definitions may face contested debates that distract from practical action.

The Model Anti-Racism Strategy takes a different approach. It uses one common definition, generalised from the structure of the core definition in the Jerusalem Declaration on Antisemitism, so that the same test applies to every community. It notes, as an optional sentence, that criticism of a government is not in itself racism, but becomes racism when it targets people because of their background or faith. The strategy does not name or quote any external definition.

Importantly, **councils do not have to reverse earlier decisions**. Any policies, statements or positions a council has already adopted can be listed in the strategy and continue to apply.

4.5 Built to be delivered and to last

Strategies that rely on symbolic gestures can be reversed. In 2025, one Sydney council voted to remove the anti-racism street signs it had installed. The Model Anti-Racism Strategy is designed for durability:

- actions are embedded in council's existing planning and reporting cycle
- every action has a lead team, timeframe, cost band and measure
- actions are prioritised for councils of different sizes; a rural council adopting only the Essential actions commits to 18 actions, 16 of them at no additional cost
- progress is reported to Council every year.

4.6 National by design

The Waverley model draws mainly on NSW legislation and agencies. The Model Anti-Racism Strategy works in every state and the Northern Territory, with a reference table of each jurisdiction's laws, human rights bodies and council planning documents. Precedents are drawn from councils in New South Wales, Victoria, Queensland and Tasmania, as well as international examples.

5. For councils that already have, or are considering, an antisemitism strategy

Councils do not need to choose between recognising antisemitism and adopting a general strategy. The Model Anti-Racism Strategy:

- names antisemitism explicitly
- allows any previously adopted policies, statements or positions to be listed and to continue to apply (Section 3.3)
- provides a targeted response process that can be used whenever antisemitism, or any other form of racism, increases (Section 3.4)
- includes actions covering the same ground as the Waverley model's four focus areas.

Waverley focus area	Where it is covered in the Model Anti-Racism Strategy
Positioning council	Pillar 2 (Leading by example); Pillar 4 (Connected communities); Pillar 6 (Partnerships and advocacy)
Consolidating internal mechanisms	Pillar 5 (Reporting and responding): reporting information, incident records, response plan, safety checks
Internal engagement and capacity building	Pillar 2 (induction, training, frontline guidance); Pillar 3 (library collections, communications)
Engagement in local networks and specialist organisations	Pillar 6 (community contacts, Mayor's meetings, neighbouring councils, grants); Pillar 4 (education and campaigns)

6. Conclusion

Both models aim to make councils better at preventing and responding to hate. For most Australian councils, which have no general anti-racism framework, the Model Anti-Racism Strategy offers a more complete starting point: one strategy, one definition and one response process that protect every community, including Jewish communities, aligned with the national framework, costed, prioritised and built to last.

Sources

- Australian Human Rights Commission, *National Anti-Racism Framework: A roadmap to eliminating racism in Australia* (November 2024)
- Australian Human Rights Commission, *Mapping government anti-racism programs and policies* (July 2024)
- Waverley Council, *Model Antisemitism Strategy for Local Councils* (August 2025)
- Waverley Council, *Strategy to Combat Antisemitism* (adopted 18 March 2025)
- NSW Premier's Department, *Anti-Racism Strategy for NSW Local Government: Guidelines* (2026)
- Scanlon Institute, *Mapping Social Cohesion 2025*
- Jumbunna Institute (UTS), *Call It Out Annual Report 2024–25*
- Cumberland City Council, resolution to remove Racism Not Welcome signage (26 March 2025)
- Model Anti-Racism Strategy for Local Government and Guideline (2026)