



Council

Thursday, 13 July 2023

LGA Debate not Hate Campaign

Report of the Monitoring Officer

**Cabinet Portfolio Holder for Transformation, Leisure, and Wellbeing,
Councillor J Wheeler**

1. Purpose of report

- 1.1. This report seeks to inform Council of the Local Government Association (LGA) Debate not Hate campaign, specifically, the outcomes of the research carried out in 2021, and the recommendations made to Local Government, and other partners, as a result of this work.
- 1.2. A report about the Debate not Hate campaign has been considered by Cabinet, which recommended that Council endorses and supports the LGA campaign as set out below.

2. Recommendation

It is RECOMMENDED that Council endorses and supports the LGA campaign by signing the online Debate not Hate public statement.

3. Reasons for Recommendation

Abuse and intimidation are unacceptable behaviours and serve to silence democratic voices and deter people from engaging with politics. As a Council, we should support our councillors in whatever ways we can, working with our partners to stamp out unacceptable behaviours.

4. Supporting Information

- 4.1. Councillors are at the centre of local democracy; they are elected from amongst their local community and form a vital link between councils and residents. It is a privilege and responsibility to be elected to public office. However, increasing levels of abuse and intimidation in political and public discourse are negatively impacting politicians and democracy at local and national levels.
- 4.2. There is a considerable volume of evidence of the impact of abuse, intimidation, and aggression at a national level, including extreme incidents such as the murder of Jo Cox MP and Sir David Amess MP.

- 4.3. To understand the impacts on local government and councillors, the LGA launched a call for evidence of abuse and intimidation of councillors in October 2021. Respondents were asked to set out their personal experiences of abuse and intimidation as councillors or candidates, or abuse of councillors they had witnessed. The LGA report sets out the findings and recommendations for the future of local democracy. One headline finding from the report was that seven in ten councillors reported experiencing abuse and intimidation in the previous 12-month period. A link to the report and its full conclusions and recommendations is available to view at the Appendix of this report.
- 4.4. The report recommends that councils and other relevant partners should take greater responsibility for the safety and wellbeing of councillors and take a proactive approach to preventing and handling abuse and intimidation against councillors. This should include addressing the impacts of abuse on councillors' mental health and wellbeing and working in partnership with other agencies and councils to ensure that threats and risks to councillors' safety, and that of their families, are taken seriously.
- 4.5. Other recommendations of particular relevance to local councils are that Government should prioritise legislation to put it beyond doubt that councillors can withhold their home address from the public register of pecuniary interests.
- 4.6. Other proposals within the report include the recommendation that social media companies and internet service providers should acknowledge the democratic significance of local politicians and provide better and faster routes for councillors reporting abuse and misinformation online.
- 4.7. The report also makes recommendations around the role of the police and suggests replicating successful approaches taken with MPs or candidates during elections and providing a specialist Single Point of Contact for councillors in the local police force. Another approach suggested is having a Safety Liaison Officer (SLO) as is provided for journalists across many forces in England; SLOs oversee cases related to crime against journalists and intervene only when necessary.
- 4.8. There is currently no clear offer of support or leadership from the Government in relation to the safety of local councillors, despite serious incidents taking place in the last few years and concerns about the vulnerability of councillors and the impact of abuse on local democracy. This is in contrast to the centrally coordinated support provided to MPs in relation to abuse, harassment, and personal safety.
- 4.9. The LGA are calling on local government leaders, the Government and relevant partners like the police, political parties, and social media companies to come together through a government convened working group to produce and implement an Action Plan that addresses the abuse and intimidation of elected members and candidates and ensures their safety while they fulfil their democratic roles.

4.10. It is considered of significant importance, that as a Council we endorse the work that has been done so far by the LGA and the recommendations that have been made and be ready to consider and implement where appropriate any forthcoming Action Plan provisions around this very important issue

5. Alternative options considered and reasons for rejection

Council could decide not to endorse the Debate not Hate campaign by signing the public statement, but it is not considered that this would be an appropriate response. As a Council we should take responsibility for the safety and wellbeing of our elected councillors and take a proactive approach to preventing and handling abuse and intimidation against them.

6. Risks and Uncertainties

The risk to the Council if we do not sign up to support this campaign is both to our current councillors, our in-action could lead to incidents of abuse and intimidation against them, and future councillors in terms of what they are expected to endure

7. Implications

7.1. Financial Implications

There are no direct financial implications arising from the recommendations of this report.

7.2. Legal Implications

There are no direct legal implications arising from the recommendations of this report.

7.3. Equalities Implications

There are no direct equalities implications arising from the recommendations of this report.

7.4. Section 17 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 Implications

There are no direct Section 17 implications arising from the recommendations of this report.

8. Link to Corporate Priorities

Quality of Life	Our residents' quality of life is our first priority, signing up to this campaign will help to contribute to our aim of creating great, safe communities to live and work in
Efficient Services	This report does not contribute to this corporate priority.

Sustainable Growth	This report does not contribute to this corporate priority.
The Environment	This report does not contribute to this corporate priority.

9. Recommendation

It is RECOMMENDED that Council endorses and supports the LGA campaign by signing the online LGA Debate not Hate public statement.

For more information contact:	Gemma Dennis Monitoring Officer 0115 914 8584 gdennis@rushcliffe.gov.uk
Background papers available for Inspection:	None
List of appendices:	Appendix – Debate not Hate: The impact of abuse on local democracy LGA https://www.local.gov.uk/publications/debate-not-hate-impact-abuse-local-democracy