

NORTH LINCOLNSHIRE COUNCIL

STANDARDS COMMITTEE

Debate Not Hate – The Impact of Abuse on Local Democracy

1. OBJECT AND KEY POINTS IN THIS REPORT

- 1.1 To update the Standards Committee on work arising from the recent Local Government Association (LGA) publication “Debate Not Hate” on preventing abuse and intimidation in public and political settings.
- 1.2 To inform the Standards Committee of the publication of the related LGA toolkit.

2. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

- 2.1 The Standards Committee considered a report on the LGA “Debate Not Hate” publication and campaign on 9 November 2022 (minute 434 refers), following long-standing concerns nationally about rising levels of abuse and intimidation, both online and in person, of elected politicians. Members requested that officers explore a number of options to further support and protect elected members.
- 2.2 This arose following the following recommendation within the LGA’s report
 - **Recommendation 1:** 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.
- 2.3 Following internal discussions, the following actions have now been implemented or are planned.

- A Dedicated system has been established within the Group Offices to record abusive, intimidatory or threatening communications. There is an option to pass these communications to Humberside Police's Single Point of Contact (SPOC) where required.
- Discussions continue to explore the possibility of the Confidential Counselling and Welfare Service being made available to the council's elected members, in line with staff. Members would be able to self-refer or be referred via Group Secretaries.
- Discussions continue with Humberside Police to ascertain the Force's response to **Recommendation 3** of the LGAs report which requires: "Police forces should work to improve the consistency of responses to abuse and threats made against councillors and take a risk-based approach that accounts for the specific risks that councillors face, as they do with other high-risk individuals, such as MPs. This should include identifying best practice in relation to councillor support and safety and sharing it across the country." To this end, the Monitoring Officer has extended an invitation to the Police designated SPOC to attend the next Committee to provide an update on such matters.

2.4 Members may consider further options for ensuring the safety and wellbeing of elected councillors. Some further possibilities are included in the associated LGA Toolkit (see <https://www.local.gov.uk/about/campaigns/debate-not-hate/debate-not-hate-campaign-toolkit>)

3. **OPTIONS FOR CONSIDERATION**

3.1 To note the steps taken, as set out in paragraph 2.3

3.2 To consider the LGA Toolkit, and further opportunities to support members.

4. **ANALYSIS OF OPTIONS**

4.1 Strengthening local arrangements to ensure the safety and wellbeing of all councillors would protect their wellbeing, as well as encourage respectful, inclusive local democracy and demonstrate compliance with the LGAs recommendations.

5. **FINANCIAL AND OTHER RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS (e.g., LEGAL, HR, PROPERTY, IT, COMMUNICATIONS etc.)**

5.1 There may be some financial or other resource implications arising from this report. However, it is likely that these will be minimal.

6. **OTHER RELEVANT IMPLICATIONS (e.g., CRIME AND DISORDER, EQUALITIES, COUNCIL PLAN, ENVIRONMENTAL, RISK etc.)**

6.1 Protecting and supporting councillors helps to strengthen local democracy and supports the Council's priority in enabling resilient and flourishing communities.

6.2 Abuse is often targeted at those with protected characteristics. Strengthening support enables the council to demonstrate and promote equality.

7. **OUTCOMES OF INTEGRATED IMPACT ASSESSMENT (IF APPLICABLE)**

7.1 Not applicable.

8. **OUTCOMES OF CONSULTATION AND CONFLICTS OF INTERESTS DECLARED**

8.1 The LGA consulted widely as part of their work. Details are included in the report. A previous report was considered by the Standards Committee on 9 November 2022.

8.2 No conflicts of interest have been identified arising from this report.

9. **RECOMMENDATION**

9.1 That the Standards Committee note the action taken in response to the LGAs publication "Debate not Hate".

9.2 That the Standards Committee consider the LGA Toolkit, making further recommendations as deemed appropriate.

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Background Papers used in the preparation of this report:

LGA – Hate not Debate - The Impact of Abuse on Local Democracy (2022) and Toolkit