



## Report to Standards Committee

**Subject:** Bullying and Intimidation of elected Members

**Date:** 12 March 2020

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### 1. Purpose of the Report

To update Standards Committee in relation to:

- a) responses received from councillors about bullying and intimidation experienced; and
- b) the actions the Government, CSPL and LGA have taken to tackle intimidation in public life.

### Recommendations

THAT:

- 1) the actions by the Government, CSPL and LGA to tackle intimidation in public life is noted; and
- 2) the LGA Councillors' guide to handling intimidation is circulated to all Members

### 2. Background

- 2.1 When considering the Committee on Standards Life (CSPL) report on Ethical Standards in Public Life, the Standards Committee also made an additional recommendation, to explore support which can be put in place for elected Members who are suffering bullying and intimidation. It was agreed that the Monitoring Officer should write to all Borough and Parish Councillors requesting evidence of specific examples of bullying, intimidation or threats they have experienced.
- 2.2 The Monitoring Officer has received three written responses from Gedling Borough Councillors which indicated some form of intimidation. A summary of the behaviour experienced is set out below. All other responses received confirmed no such behaviour had been experienced.

- Councillor A was subject to trolling on Twitter by a couple of residents between October 2018 and January 2019. The behaviour resulted in the councillor consider withdrawing from the 2019 election and also stopped them from participating in a couple of community events.
- The comments were made via the councillor's private twitter account and as a result, they have largely stopped using twitter despite it being a private account.
- Councillor B states the only time they have felt physically threatened was when handing out leaflets in Arnold town centre during the EU Referendum in 2016. For the first and only time they contacted the Police to make them aware of a further leafleting session in another area just in case anything happened. In actual fact the response was fine so there was nothing to report.
- Councillor C has not been bullied but has been verbally abused on social media and in person. They are always mindful of how the role as an elected member has an effect on their family.

One written response has been received from a parish councillor suggesting bullying behaviour from fellow parish councillors.

- 2.3 The responses received provide no evidence of widespread bullying, intimidation or threats against borough or parish councillors in the borough.
- 2.4 Since the last meeting of Standards Committee, the Cabinet Office issued a Ministerial Statement ahead of the General Election to provide an update on the actions the Government has taken to tackle intimidation in public life. This includes:
  - working to publish new CPS guidance on the laws on intimidation, and the wide range of areas in which intimidation can be prosecuted under existing laws. This has been complemented by guidance to the police from the National Police Chiefs Council.
  - passing legislation to remove the requirements for candidates running for local government, parish council, and local mayoral elections, to have their addresses on their ballot papers.
  - writing to Local Authority Chief Executives, to raise awareness about the sensitive interest provisions in the Localism Act 2011.
  - consulting on an Internet Safety Strategy Green paper which sets out a range of legislative and non-legislative measures detailing how the government will tackle online harms and set clear responsibilities for tech companies to keep UK citizens safe.
  - writing to social media companies asking them to work together during this election to provide clear advice to candidates about what content breaches

their terms and conditions, where to report suspected breaches and what they can expect once a report has been made.

- 2.5 In addition, the CSPL has published a review of the codes of conduct of political parties holding seats in Parliament. This provides a foundation for creating a Joint Standard owned by the political parties, which will contain a shared understanding of the minimum standards of behaviour expected from all party members.
- 2.6 Recognising the growing concerns about the impact an increasing level of public intimidation, the Local Government Association (LGA) has been working closely with the LGAs in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland to coordinate a programme of work entitled 'Civility in public life', primarily aimed at:
  - Articulating good standards for anyone engaging in public and political discourse.
  - Understand the scale and impact of intimidation and abusive behaviour on our membership organisations, and develop recommendations for achieving positive debate and public decision-making on a local level.
  - To support our members and all democratically elected local representatives in addressing intimidation.

As part of this work and recognising the growing need among councillors for support related to intimidation, the LGA has produced a Councillors' guide to handling intimidation, which is attached at Appendix 1. The guide covers topics such as how to handle abuse, both face-to-face, letters or online, and the legal and practical remedies, including the nature of the criminal offences involved.

### **3. Proposal**

- 3.1 It is proposed that Standards Committee note the update on the actions the Government, CSPL and LGA have taken to tackle intimidation in public life.
- 3.2 It is also proposed that the LGA Councillors' guide to handling intimidation is circulated to all Members. However given that the responses received by the Monitoring Officer provide no evidence of widespread bullying, intimidation or threats against borough or parish councillors in the borough, it proposed that no additional measures are currently required to support victims. In the event that Standards Committee considers that further support is required recommendations may be made to the relevant portfolio holder.

### **4. Resources Implications**

None.

### **5. Appendices**

Appendix 1 – LGA Councillors' guide to handling intimidation

## **6. Background papers**

Report of the Committee on Standards in Public Life

Intimidation in Public Life - A Review by the Committee on Standards in Public Life

[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/666927/6.3637\\_CO\\_v6\\_061217\\_Web3.1\\_2.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/666927/6.3637_CO_v6_061217_Web3.1_2.pdf)

Ministerial Statement – Update on tackling intimidation in public life

<https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/update-on-tackling-intimidation-in-public-life>

CSPL review of the codes of conduct of political parties holding seats in Parliament

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/intimidation-in-public-life-review-of-political-parties-codes-of-conduct>