

Committee Name and Date of Committee Meeting

Standards and Ethics Committee – 11 September 2025

Report Title

Standards and Ethics Committee – Debate not Hate.

Is this a Key Decision and has it been included on the Forward Plan?

No

Strategic Director Approving Submission of the Report

N/A

Report Author(s)

Stuart Fletcher, Service Manager (Commercial and Property)
01709 823523
stuart.fletcher@rotherham.gov.uk

Ward(s) Affected

Borough-Wide

Report Summary

A report setting out the objectives of and the resources available to the Council and members through the LGA's Debate not Hate campaign.

Recommendations

1. That the Committee notes the content of the report.
2. That the Committee requests that individual councillors sign up to the public statement referred to at paragraph 2.3 of the report, and considers whether to recommend to Council the adoption of a Motion in the same terms.
3. That the Committee establish a Working Group to undertake the LGA self-assessment and report back to the Committee with its findings and recommendations.

List of Appendices Included

Appendix 1

Background Papers

None

Consideration by any other Council Committee, Scrutiny or Advisory Panel

None

Council Approval Required

No

**Exempt from the Press and Public
No**

Standards and Ethics Committee – Debate not Hate

1. Background

- 1.1 The Debate Not Hate campaign, launched by the Local Government Association (LGA), responds to the growing concern over abuse and intimidation faced by councillors across the UK. 7 in 10 councillors reported experiencing abuse or intimidation in the past year and over half were victims of misinformation. Clearly this has the potential to threaten local democracy and deter individuals from standing for election.
- 1.2 The campaign is part of the LGA's broader Civility in Public Life programme a report about which was brought to the last Standards and Ethics Committee meeting. The Debate not hate Campaign aims to raise public awareness of the role councillors play in their communities and encourage healthy and respectful debate in political and public discourse. It further seeks to improve responses and support mechanisms for councillors facing abuse and intimidation. Also as part of the campaign the LGA will lobby for legislative changes, including protections around councillors' personal information and stronger enforcement against abuse. The rationale and objectives of the LGA's Debate not hate campaign are fully set out at [Debate Not Hate | Local Government Association](#).

2. Key Issues

- 2.1 The LGA has recently published its latest Debate not Hate survey of councillors. The Key Findings from the 2025 Survey were that 70% of councillors experienced abuse or intimidation and over 50% were targeted by misinformation campaigns. Further it was found that abuse is increasingly online, but also occurs in person and through correspondence. It was found that the impact of this abuse can include mental health strain, reduced civic engagement, and withdrawal from public life. A full copy of the Survey is at Appendix 1 and can be accessed at [Debate Not Hate: Survey of councillors 2025 | Local Government Association](#)
- 2.2 The Debate Not Hate campaign is built around a set of strategic objectives designed to protect local democracy, support councillors, and foster a culture of respectful political discourse. The campaign's objectives include:
- 2.2.1. Raising Public Awareness of the Role of Councillors**
The campaign intends to promote understanding of the vital work councillors do in representing their communities and highlight the challenges councillors face, including the increasing levels of abuse and intimidation. The campaign also sets out to encourage public respect and appreciation for elected officials, regardless of political affiliation.

2.2.2. Encouraging Healthy and Respectful Debate

The campaign reinforces the principle that disagreement is a healthy part of democracy, but abuse is not. It will promote standards of civility in public discourse, both online and offline and support initiatives that foster constructive engagement between councillors and constituents.

2.2.3. Improving Support for Councillors Facing Abuse

The campaign provides councils with tools and guidance to assess and improve their support systems, by amongst other things encouraging the adoption of risk assessments, safety protocols, and mental health support for councillors. It also shares best practices and case studies to help councils respond effectively to incidents of abuse.

2.2.4. Lobbying for Legislative and Policy Change

The LGA will advocate for changes in legislation to better protect councillors, such as restricting the publication of councillors' home addresses and strengthening laws around harassment and online abuse. Further it will work with national government, police, and social media platforms to improve enforcement and accountability.

2.2.5. Empowering Councils and Councillors to take action

The intention of the campaign is to equip Councils with campaign toolkits, including social media assets, posters, and template letters. Further it provides self-assessment tools to evaluate current practices and encourage councillors and Councils to sign a public statement and publicly commit to tackling abuse. Further the campaign's work will try to assist with promoting cross-party collaboration to uphold shared values of respect and civility.

2.2.6. Building a Culture of Safety and Inclusion in Local Politics

The campaign also seeks to ensure that individuals from all backgrounds feel safe and welcome to stand for election and looks to address the disproportionate impact of abuse on underrepresented groups, including women, ethnic minorities, and younger councillors. This in itself will lead to fostering a more inclusive political environment where diverse voices can thrive.

- 2.3 As referred to above as part of the campaign, the LGA is asking that Councillors and Councils sign up to the "Public Statement" below. Individual Councillors can sign up at [Debate Not Hate – sign our public statement | Local Government Association](#) and if the Committee considered it appropriate for the Council to consider signing up to this statement by means of a Motion at full Council, it could make that Recommendation.

"The intimidation and abuse of councillors, in person or otherwise, undermines democracy; it can prevent elected members from representing the communities they serve, deter individuals from standing for election, and undermine public trust in democratic processes.

Seven in 10 councillors reported experiencing abuse and intimidation over the last 12 months and councillors reported feeling that abuse is becoming more common and increasing in severity.

Debating and disagreeing with one another has always been, and will continue to be, a healthy part of democracy. However, the right engagement matters and abuse and intimidation crosses the line into dangerous territory and has no place in politics.

We 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.”

2.4 As part of the campaign the LGA has developed a suite of resources to support councils and councillors including a Campaign Toolkit, which can be accessed at [Debate Not Hate: Campaign toolkit | Local Government Association](#). This toolkit provides guidance on promoting civility and responding to abuse through publicizing involvement with and support for the Debate not Hate campaign.

2.5 Further the campaign provides a Self-Assessment Toolkit to help councils evaluate practices and identify improvements. Although a number of the suggested practices are in place at the Council, it is recommended that the Committee establish a Working Group to systematically work through the self-assessment and ensure that any possible improvements are implemented. The campaign also provides a number of publications and other resources for Councillors, which it is suggested are considered as part of the Working Group and where appropriate circulated to members.

3. Options considered and recommended proposal

3.1 The only other option to the recommendations is that the Committee does not become involved with Debate not Hate campaign. This is not recommended as it would miss the opportunity for the Council to improve its systems in supporting councillors and demonstrating that it embraces the aims and objectives of the Debate not hate campaign.

4. Consultation on proposal

4.1 N/A

5. Timetable and Accountability for Implementing this Decision.

N/A

6. Financial and Procurement Advice and Implications

- 6.1 The officer time in dealing with this issue is met within existing Legal Services resources.

7. Legal Advice and Implications

- 7.1 The Council and the Standards and Ethics Committee have a statutory duty to promote and maintain high standards of conduct. The adoption of the recommendations as set out within this report, will contribute to the promotion and maintenance of high standards of conduct.

8. Human Resources Advice and Implications

None

9. Implications for Children and Young People and Vulnerable Adults

None

10. Equalities and Human Rights Advice and Implications

None

11. Implications for Partners

None

12. Risks and Mitigation

None

13. Accountable Officer(s)

Bal Nahal, Head of Legal Services

Report Author: Stuart Fletcher, Service Manager (Commercial and Property)
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