Committee Name and Date of Committee Meeting
Standards and Ethics Committee - 12th November 2026

Report Title
LGA Debate Not Hate Survey 2026: Councillor Safety, Abuse and Intimidation

Is this a Key Decision and has it been included on the Forward Plan?
No

Strategic Director Approving Submission of the Report
N/A

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Ward(s) Affected
Borough-Wide

Report Summary
This report presents the principal findings of the Local Government Association Debate Not Hate Survey 2026 and considers their significance for the Standards and Ethics Committee and the effective operation of local democracy. It identifies the continuing importance of councillor safety, respectful democratic engagement and effective arrangements for reporting and responding to abuse and intimidation.

Recommendations
That the Committee:

(1) notes the findings of the LGA Debate Not Hate Survey 2026

List of Appendices Included

Appendix 1 – LGA Magazine Article (Oct/Nov edition)

Appendix 2 - Local Government Association, Debate Not Hate: Survey of councillors across all four UK nations 2026 Debate Not Hate: Survey of councillors across all four UK nations 2026.

Background Papers
Local Government Association website: LGA survey: Over three-quarters of councillors report feeling at personal risk while fulfilling their elected role.

Consideration by any other Council Committee, Scrutiny or Advisory Panel
None

Council Approval Required
No

Exempt from the Press and Public
No

LGA Debate Not Hate Survey 2026: Councillor Safety, Abuse and Intimidation

1. Background

1.1 The Local Government Association (LGA) published the fourth annual Debate Not Hate survey on 18 September 2026. The survey was open from 17 June to 8 July 2026 and, for the first time, covered principal authority councillors across England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland.

1.2 The survey received 1,503 responses from approximately 18,350 councillors, representing an overall response rate of 8%. The LGA expressly cautions that the findings are a snapshot of the responding group and should not necessarily be treated as representative of all councillors. The results nevertheless provide a significant national evidence base about councillors' reported experiences of personal risk, abuse and intimidation. An article which appeared in the LGA Magazine (Oct/Nov edition) about the findings of the survey is at Appendix 1, and the full survey is at Appendix 2.

2. Key Issues

2.1 The principal finding is that abuse and intimidation remain widespread. Seventy-eight per cent of respondents reported feeling at least some level of personal risk while fulfilling their role, and 75% reported experiencing some level of abuse or intimidation during the preceding 12 months.

2.2 More than half of respondents (52%) considered that abuse and intimidation had increased sharply or slightly over the preceding 12 months. The proportion was higher among respondents in England at 55%, compared with 41% in Wales and 36% in Scotland.

2.3 The survey also records serious threats. Twenty-six per cent of respondents reported having received threats of violence and 7% reported receiving a death threat. In England, 74% of councillors responding to the relevant question reported some level of abuse or intimidation during the 2026 local election campaign..

2.4 The reported effects extend beyond individual incidents. Thirty-five per cent of respondents had made, or felt they needed to make, security modifications to their home because of safety concerns arising from their role. Among respondents who were undecided about standing again or had decided not to stand, 30% said that the possibility of abuse or intimidation had influenced that decision.

3. Options considered and recommended proposal

3.1 The survey provides important evidence about the effect of abuse and intimidation on councillor safety, participation and confidence in local democracy. It reinforces the importance of maintaining high standards of conduct and of distinguishing clearly between legitimate criticism, scrutiny and robust political debate, which must remain protected, and behaviour involving abuse, intimidation, harassment or threats.

4. Consultation on proposal

4.1 No consultation has been undertaken in relation to this report, which presents the findings of the national LGA survey for the Committee's consideration.

5. Timetable and Accountability for Implementing this Decision

5.1 No specific implementation timetable arises from the recommendation to note the survey findings. The work undertaken arising out of the Committee's Debate not Hate Working Group will be undertaken over the next 12 months and reports will be brought back to the Committee in this regard over that period.

6. Financial and Procurement Advice and Implications

6.1 There are no financial implications arising out of the recommendations within this report.

7. Legal Advice and Implications

7.1 Sections 27 and 28 of the Localism Act 2011 provide the statutory basis for the Council's duty to promote and maintain high standards of conduct, adopt a code of conduct and maintain arrangements for dealing with allegations that members have failed to comply with that code. The survey does not itself create additional legal duties, but it is relevant evidence for the Council's governance, risk and Member-support arrangements.

8. Human Resources Advice and Implications

8.1 None.

9. Implications for Children and Young People and Vulnerable Adults

9.1 No direct implications for children and young people or vulnerable adults arise from noting the survey.

10. Equalities and Human Rights Advice and Implications

10.1 The survey reports particularly high levels of perceived risk among female, ethnic minority, LGBT+ and disabled councillors, with more than 85% in those groups reporting some level of personal risk. Continued work should therefore

be inclusive and accessible, recognising that abuse may be targeted or experienced disproportionately.

11. Implications for Partners

11.1 South Yorkshire Police and Operation Ford are important partners in this context. The survey reports that awareness of Force Elected Official Advisers in England and Wales increased to 56%, and 74% of those who had engaged with an adviser or Operation Ford found the engagement very or fairly useful.

12. Risks and Mitigation

12.1 The principal risks are that abuse becomes normalised, incidents are under-reported, Members do not access available support, partnership responses do not meet expectations, and sustained hostility deters people from standing or remaining in elected office. Mitigation of these issues should include visible leadership, repeated communications, accessible support and reporting routes, corporate recording and thematic review, training, evidence retention, effective police liaison and periodic assurance reporting to the Committee.

13. Accountable Officer(s)

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