

Notice of Motion submitted pursuant to Council Procedure Rule No. 5.27

To consider the following Notice of Motion proposed by Councillor A Cope, seconded by Councillor L Athwal, on behalf of the Green Group in relation to Debate not Hate:

Working cross-party, our Council will be encouraging respect and good debate on issues that matter to our residents both in and outside the Council, so that no councillor is expected to operate in a hostile working environment but can rely on standards of behaviour that are no different to those expected in other work settings.

- Sign up to the Debate Not Hate campaign on the LGA website;
- Write to the MPs for Tonbridge and Malling, and Chatham and Aylesford to ask them to support the campaign;
- Write to the Government to ask them to work with the LGA to develop and implement a plan to address abuse and intimidation of politicians;
- Ensure that every Member of this Council receives a copy of the Debate Not Hate campaign report;
- Take a zero-tolerance approach to abuse of councillors and officers;
- Ensure the council has a clear reporting mechanism which councillors can use to monitor and record incidents of harassment and abuse of councillors and officers;
- Regularly review the support available to councillors and officers in relation to abuse, intimidation and personal safety;
- Work with the local police to ensure there is a clear and joined-up mechanism for reporting threats and other concerns about the safety of councillors and their families and discuss the need to take a preventative approach that accounts for the specific risks that councillors face, as they do with other high-risk individuals like MPs.

Additional notes:

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.

Seven in 10 councillors in England reported experiencing abuse and intimidation over the last 12 months and councillors reported feeling that abuse, both in person and on-line, is becoming more common and increasing in severity.

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 undermines public trust in the democratic process.

The increasing levels of toxicity in public and political discourse is having a detrimental impact on local democracy and that prevention, support and responses to abuse and intimidation of local politicians must improve to ensure that councillors feel safe and able to continue representing their residents. This should be extended into the council chamber.

The motion will commit this council to challenge the normalisation of abuse against councillors and officers and uphold exemplary standards of public and political debate in all it does. It is non-political and will be equally beneficial to all Members of this council.

See: Debate Not Hate | Local Government Association
<https://www.local.gov.uk/about/campaigns/debate-not-hate>