

Bath & North East Somerset Council

MEETING:	Policy Development & Scrutiny Panel	
MEETING DATE:	14 th May 2024	
TITLE:	Debate Not Hate Update	
WARD:	All	
AN OPEN PUBLIC ITEM		
List of attachments to this report: Letter to Chief Constable Sarah Crew		

1 THE ISSUE

- 1.1 This paper is to provide an update to Corporate PDS Panel on the actions taken so far and proposed actions on the recent Debate Not Hate motion agreed by Council on 14th March 2024.

2 RECOMMENDATION

The Panel is asked to;

- 2.1 Note the actions taken so far.
- 2.2 Provide input and a steer on the proposed plans to provide further support for members and officers on their safety and wellbeing whilst undertaking council business.
- 2.3 Agree to take further reports and recommendations following a regular review of support available to members and officers in respect of abuse, intimidation and safety.

3 THE REPORT

Motion agreed at full Council meeting

- 3.1 On 14th March 2024, the Council unanimously agreed the Debate Not Hate motion proposed by Councillor Lesley Mansell. The full debate can be found [here](#). Based on the LGA's national Debate Not Hate campaign toolkit information, the motion included ten points of action for the council to take.

Examples from members and officers

- 3.2 During the Council meeting, councillors recounted their experiences of being threatened and intimidated by members of the public. We have also since collected additional reports of threatening and abusive behaviour (13 in total) and these have been shared with members.
- 3.3 In work undertaken by council officers in 2021 and 2022, numerous examples of threatening and abusive behaviour towards officers were captured in a report. This included one officer being threatened with a hammer, another being followed home, multiple incidents of abusive language and threats made to staff answering the telephone in customer facing roles (such as parking and housing) and waste and recycling crew members reporting members of the public shouting abuse and driving at them whilst they were undertaking their work. From April 2023 to March 2024 139 incidents were captured on the council's incident reporting system.

Actions taken far

- 3.4 **Public statement:** The council has signed the LGA's Debate Not Hate public statement [here](#) which aims to raise public awareness of the role of councillors in local communities, encourage healthy debate and improve the response to and support for those in public life facing abuse and intimidation.
- 3.5 **Press release:** The council issued a press release ([here](#)) on 3 April 2024 to share news of the Debate Not Hate campaign and to raise public awareness.
- 3.6 **Letter to Ministers:** At the end of March, a cross party letter was sent to local MPs asking them to support the campaign and to the Government to ask it to work with the LGA to develop and implement a plan to address abuse and intimidation of people working and holding office in local government.
- 3.7 **Meeting with MP:** Group Leaders met with Wera Hobhouse MP on 12 April 2024 to discuss these issues. She has since raised the issue in parliament (see [here](#)) and has issued her own press release. She has also written to Chief Constable Sarah Crew at Avon and Somerset Police to request further support from local police.
- 3.8 **Policy:** The council launched a Violence, Aggression and Threatening Behaviour (Staff Safety) Policy ([here](#)) in April 2023 covering both members and officers. This was underpinned by work carried out through focus groups and analysis in 2022. A set of powerful campaign messaging was launched as part of this campaign and have been used by the council on posters and on social media ([here](#)). A new Health & Safety incident reporting system ([here](#)) was also launched at the same time. Further work to promote both of these is needed.
- 3.9 **Standards Committee:** On 23 April 2024, the Council's Standards Committee supported the Monitoring Officer's proposal to take a more sympathetic approach to requests by members to withhold from publication their home address, as a sensitive interest, where that member has concerns about violence or intimidation. Further information was circulated to members and co-opted members on the 26 April 2024.

Proposed future actions

- 3.10 **Virtual briefing:** We will hold an online, virtual briefing for all councillors in June to provide further information on personal safety and lone working, (including technology available) online safety and signpost the resources, e-learning and support available. It will be recorded and shared for any that cannot make the date.
- 3.11 **Regular updates:** We will arrange quarterly email updates for all members and officers to remind them of all of the resources, information and support available.
- 3.12 **Communications:** We will build on the LGA's Debate Not Hate communications toolkit to develop resources similar to those developed for the Violence and Aggression campaign highlighted above. We will also designate one specific day annually where we raise awareness through our communications of the work that we are doing.
- 3.13 **Police liaison:** We will follow up on Wera Hobhouse's letter to the Chief Constable and raise issues at the fortnightly meeting with our Neighbourhood Policing team. We will also raise with Community Safety Partnership colleagues.
- 3.14 **Parish liaison:** This will be put forward as an agenda item for the Parish liaison meeting on 26th June to raise awareness and highlight support and resources available.
- 3.15 **Wellbeing:** We have in place a wide range of resources to support officer and member wellbeing, and we will promote and publicise these further in the briefings and updates, ensuring that there is a nominated officer to support member wellbeing.

4 STATUTORY CONSIDERATIONS

- 4.1 Legal duties fall under The Health and Safety at Work Act 1974 (HASWA), Management of Health & Safety at Work Regulations 1999 (MHSW), The Reporting of Injuries, Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations 2013 (RIDDOR) and the Safety Representatives and Safety Committees Regulations 1977 (as amended) and Health and Safety (Consultation with Staff) Regulations 1996 (as amended) and the Crime and Disorder Act 1998. These frameworks require that the council ensure, so far as is reasonably practicable, the health, safety and welfare of staff at work.
- 4.2 Although the above Health and Safety duties do not relate to councillors as they are not staff, the council is clearly committed, through this piece of work and more generally, to protect and maintain the health, safety and wellbeing of its councillors.

5 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS (FINANCE, PROPERTY, PEOPLE)

- 5.1 There are no significant resource implications as a result of these proposed actions.

6 RISK MANAGEMENT

6.1 A risk assessment related to the issue and recommendations has been undertaken, in compliance with the Council's decision making risk management guidance.

7 EQUALITIES

7.1 An Equality Impact Assessment has not been undertaken relating to this work. It should be noted that abuse and intimidation can happen to any councillors and we have heard of the impact of abusive and threatening behaviour towards both male and female councillors, of a variety of ages and from every political group.

7.2 We will monitor the incidents and reports of abusive and threatening behaviour to see if any protected characteristic group is affected more or less than any other.

8 CLIMATE CHANGE

8.1 N/A

9 OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED

9.1 N/A

10 CONSULTATION

10.1 The actions in this report have been developed by a small group of officers from across the Resources Directorate with support from Political Assistants.

10.2 The S151 Officer and Monitoring Officer have cleared this report for circulation.

Contact person	Cherry Bennett, Director of People & Change 01225 477203
Background papers	Debate Not Hate motion to Council here Letter to S Crew
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