

CERIS HUMPHRIES STATEMENT TO CABINET – 11TH JULY 2024

I want to make it clear I'm speaking solely in a personal capacity. Also, that I do NOT live in one of the current Liveable Neighbourhood (LN) trial areas.

I would prefer to be making this statement at the Council meeting next week because I'm not talking about anybody in Cabinet. But there was no space so I'm here instead.

In the April Council meeting, Councillors unanimously resolved the Council should sign up to the LGA's Debate not Hate campaign. They noted increasing levels of toxicity in public and political discourse, and wanted to see prevention, support and responses to abuse and intimidation of local politicians improve to ensure councillors and officers feel safe and that councillors are able to continue representing their residents.

What the resolution left out was any consideration of the toxicity in treatment of members of the public by politicians. So I'm here to put that right.

How is it OK for any Councillor to engage in and use his position to widely promote a campaign that publicly and loudly points the finger of responsibility at residents for the existence of an Experimental Traffic Regulation Order (ETRO) that is the decision of a local council?

How is it OK for Parish Councillors to share with thousands of people such a campaign targeting residents?

How is it OK for these politicians to stand by and do nothing when the consequences of their actions play out in the residents they pointed at being harassed on line and accosted on the street, in Officers being subjected to horrendous abuse at public meetings and in road workers being abused in the street?

I hope B&NES has measures in place to support staff who are subjected to such hate and bullying – but how is it OK there is no support for the residents who are being subjected to bullying and harassment, often by unidentified individuals?

How is it OK for a Councillor in a Council meeting, without challenge, to make assertions about congestion and air pollution which are unsubstantiated and which he appears to lack the understanding to comment on, and to ask residents questions about data that it isn't their responsibility to know? How is it OK to gaslight residents who have in their own time come to express their own **personal** views to Council?

Councillors were correct to condemn the levels of toxicity in public and politics.

But your resolution didn't go far enough. A zero-tolerance approach to abuse should not just apply to councillors and officers but also to the way politicians treat others.

It is not enough to challenge the normalisation of intimidation and abuse only against councillors and officers. Residents engaging in good faith with council policies should be entitled to the same respect and support from Councillors.

All residents had the opportunity to participate in multiple phases of widely publicised consultation over a period of more than three years, as well as the current ETRO consultation phase.

Politicians should not be using members of the public who chose to participate as a political football because they chose to participate.

Politicians who do this need to be challenged.

I ask you to consider what more can be done to support residents who are being targeted as a result of such ill-considered political campaigns.