

Bath & North East Somerset Council

MEETING	Policy Development & Scrutiny Panel	
MEETING DATE:	12 th May 2026	
TITLE:	Debate Not Hate Update 2026	
WARD:	All	
AN OPEN PUBLIC ITEM		
List of attachments to this report:		

1 THE ISSUE

- 1.1 This paper is to provide an update to Corporate Policy Development & Scrutiny (PDS) Panel on the actions since the Debate Not Hate motion agreed by Council on 14th March 2024.

2 RECOMMENDATION

The Panel / Committee is asked to;

- 2.1 **Note the update on the actions taken since May 2024.**
- 2.2 **Provide input and a steer on the proposed plans to provide further support for members and officers on their safety and wellbeing.**
- 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 Local Government Association's (LGA's) national Debate Not Hate campaign toolkit information, the motion included ten points of action, all of which have been addressed.

Examples from members and officers

- 3.2 During the Council meeting, councillors recounted their experiences of feeling threatened and intimidated by members of the public.
- 3.3 Since May 2024 there have been 317 reported incidents of violent, aggressive, and threatening behaviour towards officers. Breakdown by years.
- May 2024 – Apr 2025 – 163 incidents
May 2025 – Apr 2026 – 154 incidents
- 3.4 Since May 2024 there have been 4 reported incidents of violent, aggressive and threatening behaviour towards members.

Actions taken up to May 2024

- 3.5 **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.
- 3.6 **Press release:** The Council issued a press release ([here](#)) on 3rd April 2024 to share news of the Debate Not Hate campaign and to raise public awareness.
- 3.7 **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.
- 3.8 **Meeting with MP:** Group Leaders met with Wera Hobhouse MP on 12th 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.
- 3.9 **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.
- 3.10 **Standards Committee:** On 23rd April 2024, the Council's Standards Committee supported the Monitoring Officer's proposal to take a more understanding 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 26th April 2024 and since then 9 councillors have requested their addresses are withheld.
- 3.11 **Operation Ford;** An online briefing was held for Members by Operation FORD officers (Simon Bishop) on 17th April 2024. 13 Councillors attended.

Actions taken since May 2024

- 3.12 **Virtual briefing:** An online virtual briefing for all councillors was held on 19th June 2024 to provide further information on personal safety and lone working, (including technology available) online safety and signpost the resources, e-learning and support available. Avon and Somerset Police supported this initiative and Police Officer Will Ayliff participated in the briefing. It was recorded and shared for any that cannot make the date. Only one councillor attended the briefing. This briefing was timed to support the LGA
- 3.13 The briefing was timed to promote the LGA Guide to handling intimidation and the Councillor Safety Guidance
- 3.14 **Parish liaison:** This was included as an agenda item for the Parish liaison meeting on 26th June 2024 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 promote and publicise where possible, ensuring that there is a nominated officer to support member wellbeing.
- 3.16 **Member incident reporting:** There have been 4 formal reports of incidents of violent, aggressive, challenging or threatening behaviour reported by Elected Members since 2024 on the council's HWSB online incident reporting system. Incidents reported were verbal aggression or challenging behaviour in nature. Following feedback from a councillor in late 2025, a new "Initial Notification Form" was launched on 7th April 2026 to reduce the current reporting process into a short report form which is reviewed by the Health, Safety and Wellbeing team to identify next steps and the appropriate level of investigation required.
- 3.17 **Updates through Political Assistants:** Member safety is raised with Political Assistants at their quarterly meetings and Nick Hancock and Tracy Curtis (H&S) presented at their meeting on 5th November 2025.
- 3.18 **Police liaison:** Each elected member has a nominated police officer who is responsible for their ward area. Elected members are encouraged to report any incidents directly to their nominated officer to be found here: <https://www.avonandsomerset.police.uk/your-area/>. Police have also encouraged elected members to use the electronic reporting system here: <https://www.avonandsomerset.police.uk/report/>
- 3.19 **Operation Ford:** National and local policing are addressing elected member intimidation harassment and violence through Operation Ford. Avon and Somerset (Bath) police force have nominated a Force Elected Official Adviser (FEOA) who has formally contacted all local political parties to attend their group meetings with briefing on Operation Ford, to advise on intelligence collection plans, creation of intelligence logs and providing security briefings. The FEOA will escalate security initiatives especially around election time.
- 3.20 **HWSB Steering Committee:** As portfolio holder, Councillor Rigby attends the Council's quarterly Health, Safety and Wellbeing Steering Committee meetings chaired by the Chief Executive. This group receives reports and updates on incidents of violence and threatening behaviour towards officers and members.

Proposed future action

- 3.21 **Regular updates:** We will arrange regular email updates for all members and officers to remind them of all of the resources, information and support available. These updates will be when there is a need to share information.
- 3.22 **Communications:** We will also designate one specific day annually where we raise awareness through our communications of the work that we are doing.
- 3.23 **Annual report to PDS:** We will bring an update back to Corporate PDS in May each year to include the number of incidents reported by members and officers and any lessons learned.
- 3.24 **Specific session in Member Induction programme:** We will ensure that specific training is provided as part of the Member Induction programme following elections in May 2027.

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 It is recognised that elected members benefit from an enhanced level of protection in relation to freedom of expression in a political context under Article 10 of the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR), meaning that they are able to say things that would ordinarily be unacceptable and are also required to have a higher threshold of tolerance to criticism and comments. Whilst acknowledging this, and that the above Health and Safety duties do not relate to councillors as they are not employees, 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	<i>Cherry Bennett, Director of People & Change 01225 477203</i>
Background papers	Debate Not Hate motion to Council here
Please contact the report author if you need to access this report in an alternative format	