

Agenda Item 35.

TITLE Jo Cox Civility Commission Report - No Place in Politics: tackling abuse and intimidation

FOR CONSIDERATION BY Standards Committee on 12 March 2024

WARD (All Wards);

LEAD OFFICER Chief Executive - Susan Parsonage

OUTCOME / BENEFITS TO THE COMMUNITY

Raising awareness of the issue of abuse and intimidation and identifying what further responses the Committee may wish to make to strengthen existing arrangements.

RECOMMENDATION

To note the report and agree any recommendations the Committee wishes to make to Council in response to the report.

SUMMARY OF REPORT

Councillor Sally Gurney requested that the Committee consider the recently published report by the Jo Cox Civility Commission titled, "No place in politics: tackling abuse and intimidation." The report is attached at Appendix 1.

A series of recommendations are made in the report which are directed towards different audiences including the Government, the Police, the Electoral Commission and Political Parties. However, three of the recommendations are specifically directed to local government as follows:-

1. Local authorities should improve risk planning for abuse at council meetings and other events, ensuring high risk events are properly resourced with trained security.
2. Councils should pass motions affirming principles to address abuse and model good behaviour, from the Local Government Association's Debate Not Hate toolkit or the National Association of Local Councils' (NALC) Civility and Respect Project.
3. Local authorities should ensure security and wellbeing resources are available to councillors. These should be clearly signposted, and there should be a dedicated point of contact for the escalation of any issues.

The Committee is asked to consider what further actions it may wish to recommend in response to the above.

Background

The Jo Cox Civility Commission was launched in February 2023. The Commission takes as its starting point a belief that abuse and intimidation is having a detrimental impact on democracy in the UK, but that addressing the issue is complex and requires action across multiple different sectors.

Analysis of Issues

The Commission has undertaken extensive research and interviews with a wide range of interested parties. The results of this were reported in their January 2024 report which is attached at Appendix 1.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE RECOMMENDATION

The Council faces unprecedented financial pressures as a result of; the longer term impact of the COVID-19 crisis, Brexit, the war in Ukraine and the general economic climate of rising prices and the increasing cost of debt. It is therefore imperative that Council resources are optimised and are focused on the vulnerable and on its highest priorities.

	How much will it Cost/ (Save)	Is there sufficient funding – if not quantify the Shortfall	Revenue or Capital?
Current Financial Year (Year 1)	£0	Yes	Revenue
Next Financial Year (Year 2)	£0	Yes	Revenue
Following Financial Year (Year 3)	£0	Yes	Revenue

Other financial information relevant to the Recommendation/Decision

None

Cross-Council Implications (how does this decision impact on other Council services, including properties and priorities?)

Impacts the work of all councillors and the safe delivery of services.

Public Sector Equality Duty

This is an information report. Therefore, an equalities assessment is not required for this report.

Climate Emergency – This Council has declared a climate emergency and is committed to playing as full a role as possible – leading by example as well as by exhortation – in achieving a carbon neutral Wokingham Borough by 2030

There are no specific impacts of the decision being made on the Council's carbon neutral objective.

Reasons for considering the report in Part 2

Not applicable.

List of Background Papers

Jo Cox Civility Commission report – No place in politics: tackling abuse and intimidation.

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