

SLCC – Model letter for councils to local MP. November 2022

Dear **(name of local MP)**,

On behalf of **(name of town or parish council)**, I am writing to ask for your help in addressing concerns about the bullying, harassment and intimidation of local town and parish councillors and their staff, all working in and for their communities. It echoes the growing issue around the safety of our MPs whose day-to-day work is made more difficult through incivility, online and in person abuse, stalking and even threats. Public servants, whether working nationally or locally, deserve protection from this.

At local level, this is an issue with significant impact. It is partly reflected in the low numbers of candidates, particularly females, stepping forward as local councillors, uncontested elections and, in some cases, a reluctance to take on public facing work for fear of abuse (e.g., attendance at councillor surgeries and meetings). With more than 10,000 town, parish and community councils (plus 735 in Wales) and with around 100,000 councillors, this worsening situation is magnified and clearly bad for democracy.

In the last 2 years, the high turnover of professional clerks working for local councils, (a clerk is the executive officer steering the council) is now heading towards a major recruitment and retention issue. Some clerks are experiencing not only casual abuse from the public as they run their councils but, sadly, in some documented cases, persistent incivility from the councillors they serve. Unlike most other employees, clerks have no recourse to this unacceptable behaviour and often, with little in the way of sanctions, the only option is to resign.

The National Association of Local Councils (NALC), One Voice Wales (OVC) and County Associations representing local councils and councillors in England and Wales as well as the Society of Local Council Clerks (SLCC), the professional body for clerks, have together recognised this. Investment has been made in a Civility & Respect Project which is coordinating a programme to support councillors and staff within our sector via training, good governance, clear policies and intervention processes. It is working to influence relevant legislation to combat online abuse, introduce sanctions and enhance the role of monitoring officers. It is also calling for the government to revisit the recommendations set out in the Committee on Standards in Public Life (CSPL) report on local government ethical standards.

This all sits alongside work being taken forward by the Local Government Association (LGA) including its Debate Not Hate campaign to promote civility in public life for councillors and staff working for principal councils.

It is now the subject of an Early Day Motion – Intimidation at community, parish and town councils. (EDM 611 – tabled on 23 November 2022, primary sponsor - Dr Julian Lewis, MP.)

Name of council would welcome your support and that of your fellow MPs in raising this important national issue via parliament and to join your fellow MPs in adding your signature to EDM 611.

Yours sincerely