

**COUNCIL
25 MAY 2023**

PUBLIC DOCUMENT

TITLE OF REPORT: NOTICE OF MOTIONS UNDER STANDING ORDER 4.8.12

The following urgent motion has been submitted, due notice of which has been given in accordance with Standing Order 4.8.12. This has been agreed under 14.6.5 (a)(iv) of the Council Constitution by the Managing Director as an urgent motion which could not reasonably wait until the next ordinary Full Council meeting.

To be moved by Councillor Clare Billing and seconded by Councillor Amy Allen:

“The intimidation and abuse of councillors, in person or otherwise, undermines democracy; preventing elected members from representing the communities they serve, deterring individuals from standing for election, and undermining public faith in democratic processes.

This council notes that increasing levels of toxicity in public and political discourse is having a detrimental impact on local democracy and that prevention, support and responses to abuse and intimidation of local politicians must improve to ensure councillors feel safe and able to continue representing their residents.

In particular, the act of arson that was committed in recent months outside the front door of Council Offices has led to a heightened unease from councillors. This comes after several members have had threats to their safety from members of the public, online and in person, along with incitement to violence.

The personal safety of members of this Council, and that of their families, must be taken seriously.

To ensure this is the case, members request and require that political and officer leadership of the council remove councillor addresses from public viewing. It is appreciated that this may require some wider legal work, but in principle, it is agreed that this work must be undertaken.

We note that s.29 of the Localism Act 2011 states:

(1) The monitoring officer of a relevant authority must establish and maintain a register of interests of members and co-opted members of the authority.

(2) Subject to the provisions of this Chapter, it is for a relevant authority to determine what is to be entered in the authority's register.

...

(5) The monitoring officer of a relevant authority other than a parish council must secure—
(a) that a copy of the authority's register is available for inspection at a place in the authority's area at all reasonable hours, and
(b) that the register is published on the authority's website.

s.32 of the Act says:

(1) Subsections (2) and (3) apply where—

(a) a member or co-opted member of a relevant authority has an interest (whether or not a disclosable pecuniary interest), and

(b) the nature of the interest is such that the member or co-opted member, and the authority's monitoring officer, consider that disclosure of the details of the interest could lead to the member or co-opted member, or a person connected with the member or co-opted member, being subject to violence or intimidation.

(2) If the interest is entered in the authority's register, copies of the register that are made available for inspection, and any published version of the register, must not include details of the interest (but may state that the member or co-opted member has an interest the details of which are withheld under this subsection).

(3) If section 31(2) applies in relation to the interest, that provision is to be read as requiring the member or co-opted member to disclose not the interest but merely the fact that the member or co-opted member has a disclosable pecuniary interest in the matter concerned.

Property owned by members, and their homes, are clearly items in which they hold a pecuniary interest. And so must be included and published in the Council's Register of Interest, meaning they will always be accessible to the public – even if we remove them from the councillor's directory.

By contrast, in 2008 MPs successfully passed legislation meaning their home address and travel plans are no longer legally required to be published. The debate in the house, following a campaign by Julian Lewis, was led by Harriet Harman, and mirrored much of what has been set out in this preamble.

This council therefore commits to challenge the normalisation of abuse against councillors and officers and uphold exemplary standards of public and political debate in all it does.

The council further agrees to sign up to the LGA's Debate Not Hate campaign. The campaign aims to raise public awareness of the role of councillors in local communities, encourage healthy debate and improve the response to and support those in public life facing abuse and intimidation.

Equally, the staff and contractors working for this Council should be free to go about their duties without fear of threat and intimidation. The recent assault on a member of our waste team is not acceptable. This Council puts people first and will not tolerate abuse of any kind. We appreciate at times services may fall below the standards residents are reasonably entitled to expect. This is why we have a robust complaints procedure where residents can raise concerns, and we will work with them to ensure services are delivered to a high standard.

In addition, this council resolves to:

- Remove councillor addresses from the councillor directory (but maintain the entry in the Declaration of Pecuniary Interests until such time as legislative change is effected)
- Write to the local Member of Parliament to ask them to support the campaign **[a template letter is available on request, email debatenohate@local.gov.uk]**
- Write to the Government to ask them to work with the LGA to develop and implement a plan to address abuse and intimidation of all politicians **[a template letter is available on request, email debatenohate@local.gov.uk]**
- Work with MPs and the LGA to bring about legislative change giving councillors and their families the same protection as MPs

- Ensure the council has a clear reporting mechanism which councillors can use to monitor and record incidents of harassment and abuse of councillors and officers
- Regularly review the support available to councillors in relation to abuse and intimidation and councillor safety
- Work with the local police to ensure there is a clear and joined-up mechanism for reporting threats and other concerns about the safety of councillors and their families and discuss the need to take a preventative approach that accounts for the specific risks that councillors face, as they do with other high-risk individuals, like MPs
- Take a zero-tolerance approach to abuse of councillors and officers. Where such occurs, this Council will robustly condemn acts of intimidation and violence against our staff, contractors and councillors.”