

Council – 31 January 2024

Liberal Democrats Group Amendment to motion 7a – Debate Not Hate

This Council believes that:

1. Debating and disagreement is a fundamental part of a healthy democracy, and that this should always be done with respect;
2. It is a privilege to be elected to public office and comes with the responsibility of representing everyone, regardless of how they voted and anyone, regardless of their background or political affiliation, should feel safe to become a councillor and be proud to represent their community.
3. **The sharp rise in hate-speech towards those in public life since 2016 – notably during the 2019 General Election – is not a random event. It is the result of deliberate choices made by a series of populist leaders, who have utilised party-political contacts in media which they control, as well as the platform of elected office, to drive multiple wedges between communities for political gain.**

This Council notes that:

1. The Local Government Association (LGA) has amassed a considerable volume of evidence and personal accounts of the impact of abuse, intimidation, and aggression at a national level. The research showed that seven in 10 councillors reported experiencing abuse and intimidation over the last 12 months and councillors reported feeling that abuse is becoming more common and increasing in severity;
2. If left to continue, this negative and unacceptable behaviour can prevent elected members from representing the communities they serve, deter individuals from standing for election and undermine local democracy.
3. **The normalisation of hate-speech and intolerance that the ‘Debate Not Hate’ report references has consequences for our residents as well, leading to members of marginalised groups feeling unsafe and unwelcome in their own community.**

This Council further notes that:

1. The LGA has launched its “Debate Not Hate” campaign, which aims to raise public awareness of the role of councillors in their communities, encourage healthy debate and improve the responses and support for local politicians facing abuse and intimidation;

2. This research outlines seven recommendations that Councils, the LGA, police forces, the Government and social media companies should take to improve the environment for current and prospective councillors, ranging from protecting privacy to creating a long-term culture change that de-normalises the abuse of politicians and other high-profile individuals;
3. This campaign has received support from across the political spectrum, as well as representatives from bodies such as the National Association of Local Councils, Compassion in Politics, the Local Government Information Unit and the National Hate Crime Awareness Week.

The Council resolves to:

1. Endorse the LGA Debate Not Hate campaign and call on all political groups to sign the public statement;
2. Support the LGA's proposal for a national working group to produce and implement an action plan that addresses the abuse and intimidation of elected members and candidates and ensures their safety while they fulfil their democratic roles;
3. Assess how it can take greater responsibility for the safety and wellbeing of its members, taking a proactive approach to preventing and handling abuse and intimidation and addressing the impacts of abuse on mental health and wellbeing;
4. **Ask Group Leaders to write to the leadership of the four parties represented on Trafford Council informing them of the councils' support for this motion and calling on them to approach this general election year in the spirit of the recommendations made in the 'Debate Not Hate' report.**

Councillors agree to continually promote diversity and inclusion ahead of the next Local Elections and beyond, including diversity of thought – publicly condemning politically fuelled abusive behaviour.