

Rother District Council

Report to	-	Council
Date	-	20 February 2023
Subject	-	Motion to Council – Debate not Hate campaign

Motion submitted by Councillor Drayson, Chair of the Audit and Standards Committee

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 life in democratic processes.

This Council notes that increasing levels of toxicity in public and political discourse is having a detrimental impact of 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.

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 Local Government Association's (LGA) 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.

In addition, this Council resolves to:

- write to our local Members of Parliament to ask them to support the campaign;
- write to the Government to ask them to work with the LGA to develop and implement a plan to address abuse and intimidation of politicians;
- regularly review the support available to Councillors in relation to abuse and intimidation and Councillor safety through the Member Development Task Group;
- 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; and
- take a zero-tolerance approach to abuse of Councillors and officers in all forms of communication, be it at face-to-face meetings, at online or telephone meetings, in written communication; in verbal communication and in electronic and social media communication, posts, statements and comments.