

## DEBATE NOT HATE CAMPAIGN

**Summary:** In 2022, the Local Government Association (LGA) launched the 'Debate not Hate' Campaign aimed at raising public awareness of the role of councillors in their communities, encouraging healthy debate and improving the responses and support for local politicians facing abuse and intimidation.

**Conclusions:** With the Local Elections coming up in May 2023, North Norfolk District Council commits to ensuring that anyone, regardless of their background or political affiliation feels safe to become a councillor and proud to represent their community. By supporting the 'Debate not Hate' campaign, members can work together to encourage healthy debate and officers can provide support for councillors facing abuse and intimidation.

**Recommendations:**

1. To note 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.
2. The Council therefore commits to the following:
  - a. To support the 'Debate not Hate' campaign
  - b. To work together, across the political groups to promote and uphold high standards of civil behaviour in public and political debate
  - c. To establish a reporting mechanism to record and monitor incidents of harassment and abuse
  - d. To work with officers to ensure that support is provide to councillors who are experiencing intimidation and abuse
  - e. That the Standards Committee will review this on an annual basis and will work with the Monitoring Officer to address and challenge ongoing issues and key concerns.

**Reasons for Recommendations:** The 'Debate not Hate' 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.

## LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS AS REQUIRED BY LAW

*(Papers relied on to write the report, which do not contain exempt information and which are not published elsewhere)*

LGA Debate not Hate campaign
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Cabinet Member(s) Cllr T Adams	Ward(s) affected All
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### 1. Introduction and background

- 1.1 In 2022, the LGA Census of Councillors found that 7 out of 10 councillors had experienced abuse and intimidation during the previous year.
- 1.2 The intimidation and abuse of councillors, in person or otherwise, undermines democracy; prevents elected members from representing the communities they serve, deters individuals from standing for election, and undermines public life in democratic processes.
- 1.1 With the Local Elections taking place on 4<sup>th</sup> May 2023, North Norfolk District Council wants to ensure that anyone, regardless of their background or political affiliation, feels safe to become a councillor and proud to represent their community.
- 1.2 Therefore, the Council wants to commit to supporting the 'Debate not Hate' campaign and members are urged to work together across the political groups, to challenge the normalisation of abuse against councillors and officers and to upholding exemplary standards of civil behaviour in public and political debate.
- 1.3 Officers will work with members to ensure that they feel safe and able to continue representing their residents. A clear reporting mechanism will be put in place to record and monitor any incidents of harassment and abuse and a summary will be presented to the Standards Committee annually so that the Committee can review the support available to councillors and work with the Monitoring Officer to address any ongoing issues and key concerns.

### 2 Financial and Resource Implications

There is no cost to signing up to the campaign and we the Council will be able to access free resources, including a digital toolkit which will enhance the support that can be offered to members.

### **3 Legal Implications**

By signing up to the Debate not Hate campaign, the Council can ensure that members are fully supported when faced with harassment and intimidation. There are no legal implications of signing up.

### **4 Risks**

The risks in not signing up to the campaign or not supporting members who face harassment are that reduced numbers of people choose to stand for election and that members do not feel safe in their role and may choose to stand down early.

### **5 Impact on Climate Change**

The campaign is run digitally and there is limited impact on climate change or the Council's carbon footprint.

### **6 Equality and Diversity**

The Debate not Hate campaign is aimed at ensuring everyone feels safe to stand for election as a councillor and to represent their community, regardless of their background.

### **7 Section 17 Crime and Disorder considerations**

Not applicable – although the campaign is aimed at reducing any disorder or disruption around political campaigning and/or public meetings

### **8 Conclusion**

North Norfolk District Council is committed to ensuring that anyone, regardless of the background or political affiliation feels safe to become a councillor and proud to represent their community. By supporting the 'Debate not Hate' campaign, members can work together to encourage healthy debate and officers can provide support for councillors facing abuse and intimidation.

#### **Recommendations:**

1. To note 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.
2. The Council therefore commits to the following:
  - a. To support the 'Debate not Hate' campaign
  - b. To work together, across the political groups to promote and uphold high standards of civil behaviour during public and political debate
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  - d. To work with officers to ensure that support is provided to councillors who are experiencing intimidation and abuse
  - e. That the Standards Committee will review this on an annual basis and will work with the Monitoring Officer to address and challenge ongoing issues and key concerns.

