

Early Day Motion (Information from SLCC website)

Following the expiry of the first early day motion (EDM), Dr Julian Lewis, MP for New Forest East, has tabled another EDM calling on the Government to re-visit its response to the Committee on Standards in Public Life report on local government ethical standards including the introduction of tougher sanctions to deal with poor behaviour in local councils.

Members are urged to contact their local MPs and encourage them to sign this EDM.

Motion text

That this House expresses its support and appreciation for local community, parish and town councils which are the first tier of local government in England and Wales and play a vital role in our communities; notes with concern that whilst the vast majority of local councils are well run, there remain behavioural issues in a small minority of councils and by members of the public which involve bullying, intimidation and harassment of both councillors and their staff, as confirmed through a dedicated Civility and Respect project led by the National Association of Local Councils (NALC), Society of Local Council Clerks (SLCC), One Voice Wales (OVW), county associations of local councils, and also highlighted by the Association of Local Council Clerks (ALCC); further notes with concern this is leading to councillors and staff leaving the sector and is creating difficulties in recruiting to those roles; and calls on the Government to re-visit its response to the Committee on Standards in Public Life report on local government ethical standards and introduce the report's recommendations in full including tougher sanctions such as suspension for poorly behaving councillors.

What are EDMs?

EDMs are motions submitted for debate in the House of Commons for which no day has been fixed. Whilst few are debated, many attract a great deal of public interest and media coverage.

They are used to put on record the views of individual MPs or to draw attention to specific events or campaigns. By attracting the signatures of other MPs, they can be used to demonstrate the level of parliamentary support for a particular cause or point of view.

What can you do?

The more MP's who support this EDM, the more likely it is to get discussed in parliament. Please either table an agenda item to pass a resolution for your council to write to the local MP asking that they back this motion and have it discussed in parliament or write to your MP as an individual.

[Peter Bone MP has signed it but as yet Tom Pursglove is not listed.]

SLCC designed template letters which can be used to contact your MP on this issue:

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