

Joint Standards Committee

5 September 2018

Report of the Monitoring Officer

Intimidation in Public Life

Summary

1. This report advises Members on work undertaken by the Committee on Standards in Public Life in respect of intimidation in public life.

Background

2. In December 2017 the Committee on Standards in Public Life issued a report in respect of a review it conducted at the request of the Prime Minister. The remit of the Committee's work was to undertake a review on the intimidation of Parliamentary candidates in July 2017, considering the wider implications for public office-holders, and producing recommendations for action which could be taken in the short- and the long-term. The report is available here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/intimidation-in-public-life-a-review-by-the-committee-on-standards-in-public-life>
3. The review received a positive response from the Government in March 2018: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/government-response-to-the-committee-on-standards-in-public-life-review-of-intimidation-in-public-life>
4. The review identifies:

“Intimidation as words and/or behaviour intended or likely to block or deter participation, which could reasonably lead to an individual wanting to withdraw from public life

It says that this can include physical violence, threats of violence, damage to property, and abusive online and offline communications, amongst other activities. It notes that sometimes, the collective impact of a number of individual actions can also be intimidatory, for example where people become subject to co-ordinated social media attacks.

5. Key conclusions of the review were that:

- Intimidation in public life presents a threat to the very nature of representative democracy in the UK.
- While intimidation in public life is nothing new, the scale and intensity of intimidation is now shaping public life in ways which are a serious issue. Social media companies have been too slow in taking action on online intimidation to protect their users. The political parties have failed to show leadership in calling out intimidatory behaviour and changing the tone of political debate. Police authorities have shown inconsistency in supporting those facing illegal intimidatory activities, and electoral law is out of date on this issue.
- Intimidation also reflects broader issues with our public political culture. Those in public life must take responsibility for shaping that culture. They must take steps to ensure that their behaviour does not open the door for intimidation and work to build public trust in public life. They should uphold high ethical standards, and should never themselves engage in, incite or encourage derogatory or dehumanising political debate.

6. York is not immune to this. Members and Officers have been and are subject to intimidation. At the more extreme end there are examples in York of:

- Campaigns designed to attack individuals professionalism seeking to ensure their dismissal from office
- Unevidenced allegations of criminal behaviour
- Racist mail being received

- E-mails containing threats supported by graphic images of dead bodies
 - Sexualised threats
 - Instances of physical violence
7. The Committee made 33 recommendations. Those which may be of the most interest to the Committee are set out in Annex 1 together with some commentary indicating how the issues are being tackled in York and identifying those which the Committee may feel require further consideration or action.

Recommendations

8. Members are recommended to:
- 1) Consider the report and identify how the recommendations of the Review should be taken forward

Reason: To ensure that the can make an effective contribution to creating a culture in York where intimidator behaviour is unacceptable.

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**Report
Approved**



Date 24/0818

Wards Affected: *List wards or tick box to indicate all*

All

For further information please contact the author of the report

Annexes:

Annex 1 - Recommendations of the Committee on Standards in Public Life

Background Papers: None