

Ending abuse in public  
life

*Supporting councillors  
to prevent and  
handle abuse*

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# Rationale

- ▶ 46% of councillors experienced some form of abuse, harassment and intimidation (2019).
- ▶ Young, ethnic minority and councillors with disability are significantly more likely to be targeted.
- ▶ Concerns about the impact an increasing level of public intimidation is having on our country's democratic processes.

# Safety

## Structure

- Structure something **external** to political actors that shape their behaviour.
- **Institutions, parties, supporting organizations...**

## Agency

- What actors do / capacity
- **Training, guidelines, rules of engagement**

Agency:  
Online  
resources  
for  
councillors

## **Councillors' guide to handling harassment, abuse and intimidation**

- Practical steps for protection.

## **Improving digital citizenship: A practical guide for councillors**

- Rules for engagement
- Guidelines for dealing with online abuse
- Guide to avoid spreading mis and disinformation
- Code of conduct

## **Civility in public life**

- Good standards for anyone engaging in public and political discourse

# Structure

HOW CAN WE  
BETTER  
SUPPORT  
COUNCILLORS  
?

BROADER  
SOCIAL  
SYSTEMS AND  
INSTITUTIONS

# Project methodology

## Mixed methods

- Interviews
- Focus groups
- Workshops
- Desk research

## Focus

- Councillors
- Supporting officers
- Third sector organisations
- Police
- Other key stakeholders

# Guiding principles to help councils support councillors



**Zero-tolerance approach to abuse**



**Clarity of process and responsibility**



**Relationships with local police**



**Tailored risk assessments**



**Prioritise councillor wellbeing**

# Recommendations

## Provide

- Clear guidance to online service providers to mitigate online abuse, considering elected members' experiences.

## Establish

- Consistent police guidance to address abuse and harassment of elected members, including dedicated monitoring and support.

## Expand

- The Defending Democracy Programme to include the safety and well-being of locally elected politicians.



Thank you!

@SofiaColMar

RESEARCH FINDINGS  
AND CHALLENGES

# Appendix

# Findings

## Communication:

- Charities, NGOs and organisations have knowledge but they do not reach the audience
- Local communities have different challenges.
- Involve people in discussions around HAI

## Definitions

- Hate crime, stalking and harassment are contemplated in law. But there is a difference with low level abuse, not always defined
- Not much legal resources to deal with the later

## Police response

- Police do not always have the resources and training to act quickly and efficiently
- Variation in experiences due to the way police in England is structured and funded
- Informality in reporting

# Challenges

## Challenge 1

***Councillors feel vulnerable to abuse and ill-equipped or supported to handle it***

Councillors are informed of their risk but have limited knowledge of tools for effective conflict resolution and aftercare.

## Challenge 2

***Lack of clear process around reporting, and councillors don't know who to turn to when an incident occurs.***

There is limited understanding about the role and help that supporting officers can provide.

## Challenge 3

***Poor engagement and response from the police to abuse and harassment of councillors.***

Threshold to report to police is unclear. Some police forces are sympathetic, some others are not or consider low-risk abuse as something insignificant.

Limited advice tailored for elected officers in local politics and lack of understanding of why they need special measures