

NEATH PORT TALBOT COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

DEMOCRATIC SERVICES COMMITTEE

3rd October 2022

Report of the Head of Legal and Democratic Services - Mr Craig Griffiths.

Matter for Information

Wards Affected:

All Wards

Councillor Safety and Wellbeing

Purpose of the Report

To provide the Democratic Services Committee with information on Councillor Safety and Wellbeing and the Local Government Association's (LGA) 'Debate not Hate' programme.

Background

Councillor safety has been part of the collective discussions and work of Local Authorities and the WLGA (Welsh Local Government Association) for the past few years both in terms of electoral planning, ethical framework/standards and diversity in democracy.

Many Councils have provided briefings, guidance and personal safety equipment where necessary. The first ever Fair Campaigns Pledge was signed by all leaders and endorsed by many councils (including Neath Port Talbot Council) and the option to remove councillors' home addresses has been introduced, whilst at the same time, there has been closer working with the police around councillor safety.

The Local Government Association (LGA) is also making calls to strengthen the Online Safety Bill where it comes to online abuse and online abuse of elected representatives.

In 2019, Leaders from the UK's four Local Government Associations agreed a jointly led programme of work to promote 'Civility in Public Life', following concerns about the impact the growing level of intimidation of councillors and the increasingly toxic nature of debate is having on the democracy of our country.

The next area of work is the LGA's 'Debate not Hate' (the impact of abuse on local democracy) programme. Even though the report makes recommendations mainly for English Councils, some have relevance in Wales and are linked to the 'Civility in Public Life' campaign.

They include:

- Considering ways that Councils can become more proactive in the safety and wellbeing of councillors
- LGA should continue to gather and disseminate good practice from across the sector, continue the Civility in Public Life programme and support Council's and Councillor's when these incidents occur.
- Police forces should work to improve the consistency of responses to abuse of and threats made against Councillors.
- Social Media companies and internet service providers should acknowledge the democratic significance of local politicians and provide better and faster routes for councillors reporting abuse and misinformation online.

The WLGA have suggested that a dedicated working group be convened to look at councillor safety and wellbeing, which would bring together and focus some of the wider discussions that are being held and officers and members will engage in such processes as and when they arise.

Future reports will be brought to Democratic Services Committee on this area of work as it progresses.

Financial Impact

No impact associated with this information report.

Integrated Impact Assessment

There is no requirement to undertake an Integrated Impact Assessment as this report is in relation to administrative matters only.

Workforce Impacts

No impact.

Risk Management

No impact.

Legal Powers

There are no specific legal powers relating to this report.

Valleys Communities Impacts:

There are no specific impacts for valley communities arising from this report.

Consultation

There is no requirement under the Constitution for external consultation on this item.

Recommendation

That the Democratic Services Committee note the update in relation to Councillor Safety and Wellbeing and discuss whether there are any additional matters they would wish to seek further reports on.

Reason for report

To note the update in relation to Councillor Safety and Wellbeing.

Officer Contacts

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