

Report to	Democratic Services Committee
Date of meeting	27 th November 2023
Lead Member / Officer	Julie Matthews, Lead Member for Corporate Policy and Equalities.
Head of Service	Catrin Roberts, Corporate Support Services People
Report author	Lisa Jones/Steve Price
Title	Measures to tackle intimidation against members.

1. What is the report about?

The report is about the measures the Council has put in place to support members suffering intimidation and to set out any further actions which could be put in place following the Committee's observations or recommendations.

2. What is the reason for making this report?

To consider endorsing a package of information and measures to support Councillors experiencing hostile, intimidatory, defamatory or violent behaviours due to carrying out their role as Councillors.

3. What are the Recommendations.

3.1 That members note the report and provide their observations on whether the measures are sufficient and provide any further direction or suggestions on support that could be put in place from their own and group's perspective.

3.2 That members consider the recommendation within the report that a single point of contact be provided to members and that the relevant officer is provided with appropriate training.

3.3 That the arrangements are piloted for a 12 month period with the item placed for review on the Democratic Services Committee' forward work programme.

3.4 In the event that this report and associated actions are agreed, that awareness of the support and framework is highlighted to members directly and by Group Leaders.

3.5 That all new members in the future receive information regarding this framework as part of the training programme and induction process.

4. Report details

4.1 The world is a very different and dynamic place in which Members operate today. The historical approaches of supporting members and they being left to deal with abuse alone and advised to 'get on with it, it's part of the job' are now outdated. The deaths of Jox Cox and David Amiss are a reminder that we should take harassment and abuse seriously and as a Council certain behaviours over a threshold will not be tolerated.

4.2 It is Welsh Government policy that attracting members from all walks of life is part of a 'Fairer Wales' and this report contributes to that so that individuals who may consider a life in politics but are put off as they do not want to be a target for abuse, can be assured that as far as possible, in the event they are experiencing personal abuse and intimidation, the Council has a framework in place that works in practice. This is particularly important if we are to attract a diverse membership.

4.3 The following measures have been or are recommended to be put in place:

- A Single Point of Contact (SPOC) be appointed from the existing workforce who will follow the framework attached at Schedule 1. What is clear from the discussions on how this framework could operate, is that there needs to be one person (or a known team) who are the central point of contact. The obvious areas where the skillset may be found are Corporate Health & Safety, HR, Public Protection or Democratic Services but there may be other services as well who have experience of working with members and external potentially contentious or volatile situations.
- A dedicated Members Welfare page is in the process of being finalised on the intranet. This will provide members with various resources on how to stay safe online and suggested scripts which they can copy in their response to residents.

- The Community Safety team being put on notice regarding the framework and that working closer with NWP on this area so they are aware that we putting a SPOC in place. There may be an opportunity to benefit from information or training.
- Group Leaders will be briefed on the framework and the new Members Welfare page and will be expected to cascade the initiative.

4.4 Attached at Schedule 1 is the simple and low cost guiding framework in which the SPOC shall operate whilst supporting the member with their concerns. The actions that are set out therein are not exclusive and no doubt as the framework is piloted this will evolve. The SPOC is not a substitute for the role of the Group Leader and any political party in providing support to their Councillors. It is the case that Members are not employees who are by law entitled to be protected from abuse and harassment in the workplace; however it is the Councils position that no one should be subject to such behaviour and that as a large organisation a proportionate framework should be put in place to enable all Members to carry out Council and Ward business without fear but also go about their personal life without restrictions.

5. How does the decision contribute to the Corporate Plan 2022 to 2027: The Denbighshire We Want?

The decision contributes to a fairer, safe and more equal Denbighshire as a Council where Councillors feel safe in going about their duties as Members and a Council that does not tolerate abuse or serious unacceptable behaviour.

This report has a neutral contribution to the Council becoming Net Carbon Zero and Ecologically Positive by 2030. More information on these two goals can be found within the Council's Climate and Ecological Change Strategy.

6. What will it cost and how will it affect other services?

There may be some cost to providing the relevant officer with training in order to be able to support a Member and we would expect there to be a low impact on that Officer's day job in carrying out the support and signposting needed, then assigning any activities to others.

7. What are the main conclusions of the Well-being Impact Assessment?

This is not required.

8. Chief Finance Officer Statement

It is appropriate that the Council has measures in place to support elected members suffering intimidation. Costs associated with the report are contained within existing budgets.

9. What risks are there and is there anything we can do to reduce them?

No identified risks in establishing the framework; there are greater risks to health and safety in not delivering some initiative.

10. Power to make the decision

Local Government and Elections Wales Act – general power of competence.