
Councillors' guide to handling intimidation

Practical steps that you and your council can undertake to protect yourself as a person in a public position.



About

The LGA and the **Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA)** recognise the growing need among councillors for support related to intimidation, and have jointly developed this resource following advice from both councils, councillors, other council representative organisations, as well as national organisations such as the Suzy Lamplugh Trust and National Counter Terrorism Security Organisation.

The guide covers topics such as how to handle abuse, both face-to-face, letters or online, and the legal and practical remedies, including the nature of the criminal offences involved and will be continuously updated with the latest advice and information available.

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Becoming and serving as a councillor is a responsibility, a privilege and a hugely rewarding undertaking. But we are aware that an increasing number of councillors and candidates are being subjected to abuse, threats and public intimidation, undermining the principles of free speech, democratic engagement and debate. The growth of social media has provided an additional and largely anonymous route for individuals and groups to engage in such activity.

We are also aware that the growth in public intimidation is putting people off standing as local councillors. This is of concern to us as an organisation representing local government, as we want to encourage more people to stand as councillors as part of our **Be a Councillor** campaign. We need a numerous and diverse set of candidates and councillors to represent our numerous and diverse local communities, ensuring that local decision making is robust and well-informed.

This guide is not designed to alarm, but to suggest some steps you and your council can undertake to protect yourself as a person in a public position, and how to respond should an incident occur.

In this guide we define public intimidation as “words and/or behaviour intended or likely to block or deter participation in public debate, which could lead to an individual wanting to withdraw from public life”.

While debate and having different views is all part of a healthy democracy; abuse, public intimidation and threats are designed to undermine democratic decision making by generating fear in those who represent it. There is existing legislation designed to protect not only councillors but the general public as a whole, and this guide provides some advice on it.

We are aware that due to the scale and nature of public intimidation, many police forces feel under-resourced and unable to tackle it. However, if public intimidation is taking place and a crime has been committed it is important that it is recorded and reported so that the scale and nature of the issue can be better understood. In addition to producing this guide, the LGA is planning further guidance on this site to support your council operations. We will continue to work with national government and other agencies to address the issue of public intimidation and its impact on local democracy.

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Please note that this guide does not take the place of legal advice or personalised advice from the police on offences or personal security. If you are concerned about your personal safety or security as a result of abuse, harassment or intimidation, do contact your local police force.

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General advice on handling intimidation

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Councillors and social media

Handling abuse on social media

What does the law say?

Advice for supporting councillors

Basics on communicating with residents, colleagues and officers

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