

TITLE OF REPORT: **Quarterly Standards Update**

REPORT OF: **Mike Barker, Strategic Director, Corporate
Services and Governance**

Purpose of the Report

1. To provide a quarterly update to the Audit and Standards Committee highlighting national and local standards issues.
 2. To ensure Members are aware of national reviews and consultations which may be relevant to their role.
 3. To identify whether further training is required for Members.
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Committee on Standards in Public Life

Intimidation in Public Life - review of political parties' codes of conduct

1. In 2019 the Committee undertook a review of political parties' codes of conduct, resulting in the publication of their review in October. It was hoped this would bring parties together to agree a common approach to tackling intimidation and abuse during election campaigns.
2. The report provides a foundation for creating a Joint Standard owned by the political parties holding seats in Parliament, which will contain a shared understanding of the minimum standards of behaviour expected from all party members. This builds upon one of the Committee's recommendations from the 2019 report on Intimidation in Public Life.
3. The intention is that behaviour that breaches the unacceptable behaviour described in the Joint Standard will constitute grounds for disciplinary action under each party's disciplinary framework.
4. The headlines within the report cover:
 - a. Prohibiting intimidation, harassment and abusive behaviour
 - b. Protecting the debate
 - c. Treating people with fairness, respect and dignity
 - d. Responsibility for challenging unacceptable behaviour
 - e. Linking with existing party disciplinary process – being clear about the repercussions
 - f. Reporting illegal behaviour to the police
5. The 4 page report can be found at:
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/intimidation-in-public-life-review-of-political-parties-codes-of-conduct>

6. In November 2019 the Committee published a letter sent to candidates from all political parties ahead of the general election. This was undertaken jointly with the Jo Cox Foundation.
7. The letter highlighted the Joint Standard document referred to above, noting the minimum standards of behaviour expected from all political party members, sitting alongside existing political parties' codes of conduct.
8. The letter can be viewed at:
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/intimidation-in-public-life-letter-to-political-parties-on-election-pledge>

Webcast

9. The Committee has issued a short video (1:36m) explaining their role, which can be viewed at:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1QX1AcgRURs>

Minutes of Committee meetings:

10. Transparency data; Committee on Standards in Public Life 270th meeting on Thursday 19 September 2019: agenda and minutes:
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/committee-on-standards-in-public-life-270th-meeting-on-thursday-19-september-2019-agenda-and-minutes>

Cabinet Office

11. On 5 November 2019 Oliver Dowden MP provided a written Ministerial Statement to parliament providing an update on the Government's actions to tackle intimidation in public life, further to the Committee's report published last year.
12. Prosecution guidance has been published which sets out the wide range of areas in which intimidation can be prosecuted under existing law, complemented by guidance to the police from the National Police Chiefs Council.
13. The CPS guidance can be found at:
Responding to intimidating behaviour: [Information for Parliamentarians](#).
The National Police Chiefs Council (NPCC), CPS, College of Policing and Electoral Commission have also issued [Joint Guidance for Candidates in Elections](#), which is distributed by the Electoral Commission.
14. The Minister also highlighted the legislative change whereby candidates in local government elections are no longer required to publish their address on ballot papers.
15. The Ministerial Statement can be viewed at:
<https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/update-on-tackling-intimidation-in-public-life>

Local Government Association

16. The LGA is working closely with a number of other organisations to co-ordinate a programme of work entitled "Civility in Public Life", aimed at:
 - articulating good standards for anyone engaging in public and political discourse

- understand the scale and impact of intimidation and abusive behaviour on our membership organisations, and develop recommendations for achieving positive debate and public decision-making on a local level
 - to support our members and all democratically elected local representatives in addressing intimidation and abuse, so they deliver the best on behalf of their communities
17. The LGA together with the Welsh LGA has published a guide detailing practical steps councillors and councils can take to protect themselves as a person in a public position.
 18. The guide provides general advice on handling intimidation as well as specific situations, for example intimidation over the telephone and at ward surgeries.
 19. This 32 page guide can be found at:
https://www.local.gov.uk/sites/default/files/documents/Full%20word%20english%20version%20guide%20for%20councillors%20on%20handling%20intimidation_FINAL.pdf

Future Updates

A Standards Update will be provided on a quarterly basis to the Standards and Audit Committee.

It is noted that the content of the Update will vary depending on the local and national picture that that time.

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