



MABLETHORPE & SUTTON TOWN COUNCIL

COMPASSION IN POLITICS POLICY

Intimidation in public life presents a threat to the very nature of representative democracy in the United Kingdom.

Growing concerns about the impact of an increasing level of public intimidation and toxicity of debate is clearly impacting on the country's democratic processes, particularly at local levels.

The ongoing intimidatory, bullying and abusive culture on behalf of those who represent their communities at all levels must be addressed in order to protect the diversity of public life, the way in which members of the public can engage with representative democracy, and our freedom to discuss and debate issues and interests.

While intimidation in public life is nothing new, the scale and intensity of intimidation is shaping public life in ways which is seriously impacting on local democracy. Social media has intensified incidents of this behaviour and has led to the direct intimidation of users.

Political parties have failed to show leadership in addressing intimidatory behaviours in the tone of political debate at all levels of Government.

In order to address the issue nationally, the Committee for Standards in Public Life engaged with national and sector specific stakeholders including (but not limited to) the National Association of Local Councils (NALC), the Local Government Association (LGA) and the Society of Local Council Clerks (SLCC) and produced a report in 2017.

Responding to these concerns and the above report, the LGA is leading on 'civility in public life' and a review of the model code of conduct.

The Seven Principles of Public Life (Nolan Principles)

The Principles of public life apply to anyone who works as a public office-holder, including those who are elected or appointed to public office. All public office-holders are both servants of the public and stewards of public resources.

Selflessness: Holders of public office should act solely in terms of the public interest.

Integrity: Holders of public office must avoid placing themselves under any obligation to people or organisations that might try inappropriately to influence them in their work. They should not act or take decisions in order to gain financial or other material benefits for themselves, their family, or their friends. They must declare any interests and relationships.

Objectivity: Holders of public office must act and take decisions impartially, fairly and on merit, using the best evidence and without discrimination or bias.

Accountability: Holders of public office are accountable to the public for their decisions and actions and must submit themselves to the scrutiny necessary to ensure this.

Openness: Holders of public office should act and take decisions in an open and transparent manner. Information should not be withheld from the public unless there are clear and lawful reasons for so doing.

Honesty: Holders of public office should be truthful.

Leadership: Holders of public office should exhibit these principles in their own behaviour. They should actively promote and robustly support the principles and be willing to challenge poor behaviour wherever it occurs.

In addition to and to complement the Seven Principles in Public Life, Mablethorpe & Sutton Town Council voluntarily adds the following principle:

Respect: Holders of public office will have due regard for the feelings, wishes and rights of others and embrace their abilities, qualities and achievements in order to promote and enhance the aims and service delivery of the Council.

Mablethorpe & Sutton Town Council acknowledges that no one in public life should engage in, condone or tolerate intimidatory behaviour and recognises those in public life must take responsibility to challenge and report such behaviour wherever and whenever it occurs.

Those in positions of power and leadership in public life:

- should seek to uphold high standards of conduct, adhering to the Seven Principles of Public Life, and help prevent a decline in public trust in political institutions through their own conduct;
- have a particular responsibility to consider how their tone is likely to shape public debate, and must not engage in political debate in a derogatory, dehumanising, or abusive way;
- must set and protect a tone in public discourse which is not dehumanising or derogatory, and which recognises the rights of others to participate in public life;
- have a responsibility not to use language which engenders hatred or hostility towards individuals because of their personal characteristics.

As a Quality Gold Council and in order to address this matter at a local level in a timely manner, Mablethorpe & Sutton Town Council acknowledges:

- Compassion has the power to change politics for good;
- Compassion is being edged out of the political debate and notes debate has become increasingly divisive and disrespectful;
- Healthy, respectful debate plays an important part in the democratic process and is essential for democracy to thrive;
- That no matter how passionately a person may feel on a subject matter there is **never** an excuse for a debate to become an argument or lead to personal, abusive or aggressive behaviour of any kind;
- That aggressive behaviour, name calling and ridiculing of other Members makes it difficult for some people to engage with debate or join in the democratic political process;
- That it will never have a truly democratic Corporate Body (Council) if the environment within the Chamber prohibits people from expressing their views comfortably without fear of abuse or aggressive reprisal;

- That all Members of Council should be mindful of the protected characteristics as defined by the Equality Act 2010;
- That all Members of the Council adhere to the Seven Principles in Public Life (Nolan Principles).

Elected Members and members of staff of Mablethorpe & Sutton Town Council **will**:

- create an environment where **everyone** feels safe, comfortable and able to participate in debate without fear of name calling, ridicule or personal insult during meetings, outside meetings or by social media or other platforms;
- listen to **all and alternative points of view** using appropriate and respectful language at all times;
- only speak** and address each other through the Chairman during meetings;
- never** use or tolerate heckling, booing, swearing or name calling or any [unwarranted] interjection **of any kind**;
- work to **create a positive and engaging atmosphere** in the Council chamber and all meetings;
- when representing the Town Council in all other arenas, have regard for and ensure they conduct themselves in a positive manner and within the spirit and content of this policy;
- and where any minor indiscretion occurs, take ownership of their actions or behaviours and publicly apologise accordingly at the earliest opportunity at a relevant meeting of the Authority.

This policy works in conjunction with all other adopted policies and procedures of the Town Council.

Sources of Information:

Committee on Standards in Public Life (2017) [online] Intimidation in Public Life, A Review
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/intimidation-in-public-life-a-review-by-the-committee-on-standards-in-public-life>

Local Government Association (2019) [online] Civility in public life and the review of the model code of conduct: <https://www.local.gov.uk/civility-public-life>