

OPEN

Corporate Policy Committee

06 August 2025

Task and Finish Group: Harassment, Intimidation and Abuse of Councillors (Final Report)

Report of: Janet Witkowski, Acting Governance, Compliance and Monitoring Officer

Report Reference No: CPC/03/25-26

Ward(s) Affected: N/A

For Decision

Purpose of Report

- 1 This report introduces the Harassment, Intimidation and Abuse of Councillors Task and Finish Group's Final Report on its findings, conclusions and recommendations following its review.

Executive Summary

- 2 The Corporate Policy Committee, at its meeting on [28 November 2024](#), recognised the increasing levels of harassment, intimidation and abuse being experienced by councillors.
- 3 A Task and Finish Group (T&F Group) was established by the Corporate Policy Committee to consider the issue, and the impact upon Cheshire East councillors in the course of their work. The T&F Group's role was to identify additional support that could be put in place to assist Members.
- 4 The T&F Group's report is appended. Section 7 of the T&F Group report makes a number of recommendations to the Corporate Policy Committee as set out below.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Corporate Policy Committee is recommended to:

1. Note the findings of the Member Survey (Appendix 1).
2. Approve the Councillor Incident Reporting Form (non-emergencies) (Appendix 2).
3. Agree that the Head of Democratic Services be appointed as the Council's Nominated Officer for councillors dealing with harassment, abuse and intimidation and approve the supporting role description (Appendix 3).
4. Approve the Councillor Safety Protocol (Appendix 4) and note that this will be available on the Members Hub.
5. Agree that Cheshire East Council reaffirms its commitment and support to the principles of the LGA Debate Not Hate Public Statement.
6. Agree the role profile (Appendix 5) for the Member Champion: Councillor Safety and note that the Leader of the Council will appoint a Member to this role.
7. Agree that the proposed training, as set out in paragraph 6.12.7 of the T&F Group report, be added to the Member Training and Development Plan.
8. Agree that the principle of lone working devices being made available to those Members who wish to have one subject to the cost implications being considered and developed further by the Monitoring Officer and Section 151 Officer in consultation with the Chair and Vice Chair of the Corporate Policy Committee and Chair of the Task and Finish Group.
9. Subject to the resolution of recommendation 8, approve that the Acting Governance, Compliance and Monitoring Officer be given delegated authority to proceed with required procurement and contractual processes in consultation with the Chair and Vice Chair of the Corporate Policy Committee and the Chair of the Task and Finish Group.

Background

The Corporate Policy Committee at its meeting on 28 November 2024 agreed:

- 5 *'that a piece of work on harassment of councillors should be undertaken with an update reported back to Corporate Policy Committee in approx. six months. Members referred to a report recently prepared by the Local Government Association on this matter which would assist in exploring options available'.*
- 6 Following the meeting of the Corporate Policy Committee, it was agreed that this topic should be an area of scrutiny that would be undertaken by a Task and Finish Group.
- 7 Membership of the T&F Group comprised of Councillors:

- Fiona Wilson (Chair of the T&F Group), Emma Hall (Vice Chair of the T&F Group), Judy Snowball, Hannah Moss and Nicola Cook.
- 8 Throughout the review, the T&F Group agreed a number of objectives, as set out below:
- a. Identify Member concerns in relation to harassment, intimidation and abuse of councillors in the course of their work as an Elected Member.
 - b. Investigate actions taken by other local authorities and partner agencies (including Cheshire Police and the Police and Crime Commissioner) and the external support available.
 - c. Identify how risks could be mitigated and how Members could be supported in the event of harassment, intimidation and abuse.
 - d. Create a local protocol setting out the procedure, should a councillor feel they are being harassed, abused or intimidated.
 - e. Identify how the Council can promote a culture of “zero tolerance” in relation to harassment, intimidation and abuse of councillors.
- 9 The T&F Group was established in January 2025 and concluded its work in June 2025. A wide range of evidence was considered from a number of internal and external officers/partners, as summarised in the T&F Group’s final report.

Consultation and Engagement

- 10 There has been consultation and engagement with internal officers and external colleagues, including Cheshire Police and the Cheshire Police and Crime Commissioner on the T&F Group’s Final Report.

Reasons for Recommendations

- 11 Any recommendations resulting from the review of T&F Group into harassment, intimidation and abuse of councillors must be considered by the Corporate Policy Committee.
- 12 The T&F Group was established to consider the increasing levels of harassment, intimidation and abuse of councillors and the support provided to Members. The T&F Group’s findings and recommendations seek to ensure that Member wellbeing is taken seriously by the Council and the Council takes all possible steps to protect and support Elected Members.

Other Options Considered

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Option	Impact	Risk
Do nothing	Elected Members continue to feel at risk in their roles as levels of harassment, intimidation and abuse continue.	<p>If the issue of harassment, intimidation and abuse of councillors continues this may prevent future potential candidates from standing in future elections.</p> <p>Keeping Elected Members safe is essential to upholding the integrity and effectiveness of democratic governance. Ensuring their safety allows them to perform their duties without fear of intimidation, harassment, or harm, which is vital for maintaining open, transparent, and accountable leadership.</p>

Implications and Comments

Monitoring Officer/Legal/Governance

- 14 The Council is expected to provide support for the safety of its Elected Members. In adopting the above recommendations, the Council is ensuring that the support is in place. Failure to take steps to protect members could result in criticism against the Council.

Section 151 Officer/Finance

Lone working devices

- 15 The costs of the lone-working devices is subject to the number of Elected Members that wish to have one. It is proposed that, subject to committee approval, that Members are asked to confirm via a survey if they require a lone-working device. For 82 devices this could be in the region of £15,280 for a two-year period. For 41 devices this could be in the region of £7,640 for a two-year period, and for 20 devices this could be in the region of £3,954 for a two-year period.
- 16 There is no revenue budget available to meet the costs of lone working devices to Elected Members. If the principle is agreed, a budget pressure would be placed on the Council budget and would require an adjustment to the Medium-Term Financial Strategy. Cost implications would need to be further developed and considered by the S151 Officer and Monitoring Officer in consultation with the Chair and Vice Chair of the Corporate Policy Committee and the Chair of the Task and Finish Group.

- 17 Full Council has set its budget for 2025/26. As the costs outlined for lone-working devices do not have a budget, the additional expenditure must be contained within budgets in the costs of democracy, or alternative solutions that mitigate the identified lone working risks developed through the Council's Digital Programme that leverage technologies already budgeted for.
- 18 No Committee has the authority to overspend its budget, as set out in the Constitution.

Training

- 19 In relation to the training courses referred to within the T&F Group report, the Healthier Debate training course has already been included in the 'Member Training and Development Plan' which was considered and approved by the Audit and Governance Committee on 28 July 2025.
- 20 The 'Conflict De-escalation training' is however not included in the proposed Member Training and Development Plan considered by the Audit and Governance Committee. If approved by the committee, a one-off pressure of up to £7,560 would be placed on the Council budget for 2025-26, and this would require an adjustment to the Medium-Term Financial Strategy (MTFS).
- 21 The costs of four Elected Members completing the 'Mental Health First Aider' course are approx. £565 (approx. £141 per person). This training is not included in the Member Training and Development Plan and would form a pressure on the 2025/26 budget. Additional costs would only be incurred as and when a Member who had qualified needed to be replaced, and a new Member trained.

Human Resources

- 22 Although this is not a staffing matter per se, all Elected Members can access the Council's Employee Assistance Programme. This is included in our current provision and any Elected Member wishing to access support can do so. Contact details for the programme can be obtained from HR and within the proposed Councillor Safety Protocol.

Risk Management

- 23 If the issue of harassment, intimidation and abuse of councillors continues to grow and is left unaddressed by the Council, it risks councillors resigning from their positions and may prevent future potential candidates from standing in future elections.

Impact on other Committees

24 There are no direct implications for other committees.

Policy

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Commitment 2: Improving health and wellbeing	Commitment 3: An effective and enabling council
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Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

- 26 The Member Survey results highlighted that 41% of female respondents reported feeling personally at risk when fulfilling their roles as Elected Members, compared to 4% of male respondents. Additionally, 55% of female Members reported experiencing abuse, intimidation, or harassment, versus 42% of males.
- 27 These disparities are echoed in broader national data published by the Local Government Association in their findings from the [2025 Debate Not Hate Survey results](#). The results show that women and councillors with disabilities are more likely than men to leave their roles due to harassment, bullying, and intimidation. These trends highlight the need for targeted support to ensure a safer environment for all councillors.

Other Implications

28 There are no other implications.

Consultation

Name of Consultee	Post held	Date sent	Date returned
<i>Statutory Officer (or deputy):</i>			
Ashley Hughes	S151 Officer	24/06/25	02/07/25
Brian Reed	On behalf of the Monitoring Officer	30/06/25	02/07/25
<i>Legal and Finance</i>			
Steve Reading	Finance Manager	16/06/25	24/06/25
Louise Price	Principal Lawyer	16/06/25	23/06/25

<i>Other Consultees:</i>			
Karen Grave	Director of People and Customer Experience	24/06/25	02/07/25
Michael Moore	Head of Communications	24/06/25	30/06/25
Corporate Leadership Team (CLT)		09/07/25	For information.

Access to Information	
Contact Officer:	Brian Reed, Head of Democratic Services Brian.reed@cheshireeast.gov.uk
Appendices:	Task and Finish Group Final Report Appendix 1: Member Survey Results Appendix 2: Incident Reporting Form Appendix 3: Role Profile: Nominated Officer Appendix 4: Councillor Safety Protocol Appendix 5: Role Profile – Member Champion Councillor Safety
Background Papers:	None.