

# Harassment, Abuse and Intimidation of Councillors: Task and Finish Group – Final Report

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## 1. Chair's Foreword

It has been my responsibility to chair the Task and Finish Group established to scrutinise the growing issue of harassment, abuse and intimidation faced by Elected Members of Cheshire East Council. This report is the culmination of months of dedicated work, collaboration, and consultation, and I am pleased to present its findings and recommendations to the Corporate Policy Committee.

The decision to form this group stemmed from a shared recognition across the Corporate Policy Committee and the council's Elected Members that unacceptable behaviours directed at councillors are becoming increasingly common, undermining democratic engagement and, in some cases, threatening the safety and wellbeing of those who serve their communities. Our work was driven by a clear aim: to understand the scale and nature of the problem and to identify practical, meaningful steps to support and protect our Members.

Through a comprehensive Member survey, we heard directly from councillors about their experiences. Some of the findings from the survey are alarming — over a third had considered stepping down due to abuse, and a significant majority had experienced harassment, particularly online. These findings emphasised the urgency of our work and the need for a robust, coordinated response.

The group engaged with a wide range of stakeholders, including Cheshire Police, the Police and Crime Commissioner, council officers, and external safety experts. We examined best practices from other authorities and aligned our work with the Local Government Association's "Debate Not Hate" campaign. Our recommendations include the introduction of a formal incident reporting process, the appointment of a Nominated Officer for councillor safety, the development of a comprehensive Councillor Safety Protocol, and the provision of lone working devices and targeted training. We also propose the creation of a Member Champion for Councillor Safety, an advocate to ensure these issues remain visible and prioritised. Importantly, we have sought to embed a culture of zero tolerance towards abuse and intimidation, recognising that councillor wellbeing was fundamental to a healthy, functioning democracy.

I would like to thank my fellow Task and Finish Group Members for their commitment and insight, and the officers who supported our work with professionalism and care. I hope this report serves not only as a call to action but also as a foundation for lasting change, ensuring that all councillors can serve their communities with confidence, dignity and safety.



**Councillor Fiona Wilson**

Chair of the Harassment, Intimidation and Abuse of Councillors Task and Finish Group

## **2.0 Introduction, Background and Membership**

- 2.1 The Corporate Policy Committee, at its meeting on [28 November 2024](#), recognised the increasing levels of harassment, intimidation and abuse being experienced by councillors. While debate and expressing different views is part of a healthy representative democracy, Members agreed that these unacceptable behaviours undermined the key democratic principles of free speech, debate and engagement, and sometimes posed a risk to councillors' safety. The Corporate Policy Committee agreed that:
- 2.2 *'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'.*
- 2.3 Following the meeting of the Corporate Policy Committee, it was agreed that this should be an area of scrutiny that should be undertaken by a Task and Finish Group (T&F Group). It was proposed that the T&F Group be established, and this was formally ratified by the Corporate Policy Committee on 6 February 2025.
- 2.4 Councillors are local leaders and champions, bridging the gap between residents and local government. Becoming and serving as a councillor is a huge privilege and responsibility, but it also means councillors are very visible and often easily accessible to residents. A pressing concern facing those in public office is the increasing levels of intimidation, harassment and abuse they can experience.
- 2.5 The T&F Group, as set out below, was established and initiated its work in January 2025. The T&F Group sought to review the levels of harassment, abuse and intimidation of Cheshire East Members and identify support that could be provided.



**Councillor Fiona Wilson (Chair)**



**Left to right: Councillors N Cook, E Hall (Vice Chair), H Moss, J Snowball.**

**Supported by:**

Katie Small, Democratic Services Manager  
Nikki Bishop, Democratic Services Officer

### **3.0 Terms of Reference: Aim of the Review**

- 3.1 To review the increasing levels of harassment, intimidation and abuse faced by Elected Members in the course of their work and identify what support could be put in place for assisting Elected Members.

### **4.0 Objectives**

- 4.1 During the review, the T&F Group determined that it would seek to:

- Objective 1: Identify Member concerns in relation to harassment, intimidation and abuse in the course of their work as an Elected Member.
- Objective 2: Investigate actions taken by other local authorities and partner agencies (including Cheshire Police and the Police and Crime Commissioner) and the external support available.
- Objective 3: Identify how risks could be mitigated and how Members could be supported in the event of harassment, intimidation and abuse.

- Objective 4: Create a local protocol setting out a procedure, should a councillor feel they are being harassed, abused or intimidated.
- Objective 5: Identify how the Council can promote a culture of zero tolerance in relation to harassment, intimidation and abuse of councillors.

## 5.0 Methodology

### 5.1 Timeline of meetings, key activity and witnesses.

28 January 2025	The T&F Group met to undertake the initial review to agree its objectives and scope.
14 February 2025	Survey circulated to all Cheshire East Members to identify member concerns / types of harassment, abuse and intimidation.
17 March 2025	<p>The T&amp;F Group met to review the findings of the member survey circulated on Friday 14 February 2025 to all Elected Members.</p> <p>The Group also met with the Senior Member Development Officer (Cheshire East Council) to explore training options (both the current offer for Members and options for further training).</p> <p>The Group also discussed the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Member Incident Reporting Form and process.</li> <li>- Proposed recommendation to Corporate Policy to reaffirm the Council's support to the LGA Debate Not Hate Public Statement.</li> <li>- Role description for Member Champion: Councillor Safety.</li> <li>- Proposal to appoint a Nominated Officer to support Elected Members dealing with harassment, abuse and intimidation.</li> </ul>
23 April 2025	<p>The T&amp;F Group met with:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Cheshire Police, including the 'Force Elected Official Advisor for Cheshire'.</li> <li>- Police and Crime Commissioner</li> <li>- Head of Democratic Services (proposed Nominated Officer)</li> </ul> <p>At this meeting, the T&amp;F Group also explored lone working and options available for Members.</p>
15 May 2025	<p>The group met with and considered evidence and reports from:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Senior Member Development and Training Officer</li> <li>- A protection technology provider that specialises in lone working devices to receive a demonstration on lone working devices.</li> </ul>

3 July 2025	Chair of the T&F Group met with Democratic Services to develop the final report to Corporate Policy Committee.
3 July – 11 July 2025	The T&F Group reviewed and agreed the final report.
6 August 2025	The report to be presented to the Corporate Policy Committee.

## 6.0 Findings

6.1 The generally accepted [definitions](#) of harassment, intimidation and abuse are set out below (*taken from the Local Government Association (LGA) website*).

- **Abuse** - Words and/or behaviour that constitute abuse or mistreatment can include, but is not limited to, physical abuse, bullying, emotional abuse, unsolicited abusive communication, and harassment. It may be one-off or repeated.
- **Intimidation** - Words and/or behaviour intended or likely to block, influence, or deter participation in public debate or causing alarm or distress, which could lead to an individual wanting to withdraw from public life. It may be one-off or repeated behaviour.
- **Harassment** - The Protection from Harassment Act 1997 indicates that someone's actions amount to harassment when they make the victim feel distressed, humiliated, threatened or fearful of further violence. The main goal of harassment is to persuade victims either not to do something that they are entitled or required to do or to do something that they are not obliged to do.

## 6.2 LGA Debate Not Hate Campaign

6.2.1 The Local Government Association (LGA) launched a 'Debate Not Hate' [campaign](#), to help encourage civility in public life. The LGA produced a [report](#) with recommendations which range from legislative changes to protect councillors' privacy to creating a longer-term culture change to de-normalise abuse of politicians and other high-profile individuals. Whilst most of the recommendations arising were for the LGA and/or central government, the T&F Group considered the recommendation set out for local authorities, below:

6.2.2 ***Recommendation 1: Councils and relevant partners should take more responsibility to ensure the safety and wellbeing of councillors. Proactive steps should be taken to prevent abuse and intimidation towards councillors and take similar steps to handling cases. Councils should work with agencies to support councillors' mental health and address risks and threats directed at councillors.***

6.2.3 The LGA Debate Not Hate: ending abuse in public life for councillors' [publication](#) outlined how councils could better support councillors in handling incidents of

abuse, harassment and intimidation and identified a series of key principles for local authorities, which was supported by the T&F Group:

- 1.Zero-tolerance approach to abuse:** Establish and enforce a strict policy that clearly outlines expectations for interactions and promotes respectful debate.
- 2.Clarity of process and responsibility:** Clearly define the process for raising concerns and assign responsible individuals within the council to provide support to councillors.
- 3.Relationships with local police:** Proactively develop strong relationships with the police to enhance coordination and foster mutual understanding of abuse affecting councillors and the role of police in addressing it.
- 4.Tailored risk assessments:** Consider individual councillors' needs and proactively identify risks through dynamic and periodic risk assessments.
- 5. Prioritise councillor wellbeing:** Recognise and consider how your council can support councillor wellbeing and address the negative impacts of personal attacks and hurtful commentaries.

### **6.3 Member Survey**

- 6.3.1 The T&F Group first met in January 2025 to agree its terms of reference and key objectives. The Group agreed that a starting point for its work would be to assess and review the current levels/types/frequency of harassment, abuse and intimidation. A member survey circulated to all Elected Members on 14 February 2025 was well responded to, with 55 out of 82 Elected Members completing (67% completion rate).
- 6.3.2 The full report with the survey results can be found at Appendix 1. However, the key responses noted by the T&F Group are noted below.
  - **35%** of respondents had considered **leaving their role as a Councillor** because of incidents of abuse, intimidation or harassment.
  - **43%** of respondents felt the **volume of abuse, intimidation and harassment** had **increased in the last 12 months**.
  - Over half of Councillors, **53%**, felt **council arrangements for protecting them personally were ineffective**.
  - **82%** of members had **experienced harassment, abuse and intimidation via social media**.
- 6.3.3 The T&F Group agreed that the findings of the survey provided further assurance of the need for further support. The T&F Group was disappointed and concerned to learn that a number of councillors had considered leaving their role due to harassment, abuse and intimidation and was motivated to identify a framework of



support that could be put in place to assist Members. The work of the T&F Group subsequently focussed upon achieving the objectives as set out earlier in this report and addressing the issues set out in the member survey results.

6.3.4 The disparities of the survey results 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. The full results of the LGA survey can be found [here](#), but the key highlights are summarised below.

- 56% of respondents had decided not to stand or are currently unsure about standing at the next elections. Of those, 26% reported that the possibility of abuse and/or intimidation had influenced their position on whether to stand.
- 21% of respondents had reported an incident of abuse or intimidation to the police, yet 30% of those felt the policing response had not addressed their concern at all.
- 72% of respondents reported experiencing abuse or intimidation due to their role as councillors in the last 12 months. Similarly, this was higher amongst women (78%).
- 73% reported feeling personally at risk when fulfilling their role as a councillor, which remained consistent with last year's LGA survey.

## **6.4 Incident Reporting**

6.4.1 The T&F Group identified, at an early stage in the process, that there was no formal procedure for logging and monitoring incidents of harassment, abuse and intimidation of councillors, internally. Based on the findings of the member survey, which highlighted that nearly half of respondents felt that the volume of harassment, abuse and intimidation had increased over the last 12 months, it was anticipated by the T&F Group that this figure could increase further as the use of social media and new online platforms continued to grow.

6.4.2 The member survey results also identified that some Members felt that the increase of harassment, abuse and intimidation was sometimes the result of public frustration relating to decision-making of the local authority. The T&F Group acknowledged this and the difficult decisions that the local authority and its committees had made and would continue to make over the next municipal year, and beyond, as the financial pressures facing the authority continued.

6.4.3 The T&F Group agreed that introducing a formal recording and monitoring process of incidents of harassment, abuse and intimidation of Members was important. It was noted that 53% of councillors who completed the survey felt that the council's arrangements for supporting Members were ineffective. The



introduction of the incident reporting form would seek to ensure that the council was aware of incidents and understood the issues facing councillors and assist officers in developing guidance, support and strategies to further support Members.

- 6.4.4 Councillors who felt that the council's arrangements were ineffective reported a lack of awareness of the procedure for reporting incidents and a lack of feedback when incidents had been reported. Being aware of incidents and being able to monitor incidents to inform future decisions around the safety of councillors was a key priority for the T&F Group, and the Incident Reporting Form (Appendix 2) was developed in response to these concerns. The form was developed in consultation with the council's Health and Safety Team and colleagues from Cheshire Police who endorsed the final form that is presented to the Corporate Policy Committee for approval. The T&F Group agreed that the Incident Reporting Form should be used for non-emergency incidents, and that any emergency matters should be reported immediately to the Police. The internal Incident Reporting Form would not replace the need to report incidents to the Police.
- 6.4.5 The T&F Group recommend to the Corporate Policy Committee that the Incident Reporting Form (non-emergencies) (Appendix 2) be formally adopted, and that incident reports are subsequently logged on the council's incident reporting system.
- 6.4.6 The T&F Group considered what process should be followed upon completion of an incident form, agreeing that it was essential that the impacted councillor remained 'in control' throughout the process. It was agreed that, in the first instance, completed incident forms would be shared with the Council's Head of Democratic Services (proposed Nominated Officer as set out in paragraph 6.5) to review.
- 6.4.7 The Head of Democratic Services would review the incident details, and where appropriate/necessary, consult with officers such as the Monitoring Officer and potentially the Cheshire Constabulary Force Elected Official Advisor (FEOA – as set out in paragraph 6.6.4) on more serious and/or repeat incidents. The Head of Democratic Services would identify what support could be provided and outline potential next steps for the impacted councillor to consider. No action would be taken without the impacted councillor being consulted, and in agreement with the proposed course of action.
- 6.4.8 The T&F Group agreed that the action that would be taken would vary on a case-by-case basis, depending on the nature of the incident, the seriousness of it and the wishes of the impacted councillor. However, the formal recording of incidents sought to increase the council's awareness of the risks and impact of harassment, abuse and intimidation of councillors and allow officers to monitor and review key themes/trends to support more informed decision-making around the safety of councillors. Key themes/trends would be discussed in regular liaison meetings between the FEOA and Cheshire East Nominated Officer. This would also

respond positively to the LGA's recommendation for improved '*clarity of process*' for raising concerns.

## **6.5 Responsible Officer (Nominated Officer for councillors dealing with harassment, abuse and/or intimidation)**

- 6.5.1 The T&F Group considered the findings from the member survey which suggested that councillors felt that there was a lack of awareness of who to contact, internally, when faced with harassment, abuse and intimidation in the course of their work as an Elected Member. The LGA Debate Not Hate Guiding Principle 2, set out above (paragraph 6.2.3) recommended that local authorities assigned responsible individuals within the council to support councillors in order to improve both clarity and responsibility across the council.
- 6.5.2 It was clear to the T&F Group that the most appropriate officer to act as the 'Nominated Officer' for councillors dealing with harassment, abuse and/or intimidation would be the Head of Democratic Services – this also followed the same approach taken by other local authorities who had appointed a responsible officer – often referred to as the 'Nominated Officer'. The T&F Group agreed that the Head of Democratic Services was already a key contact for councillors providing advice, support and guidance on a wide range of issues and this naturally complemented their role working closely with Members.
- 6.5.3 Appointing the 'Nominated Officer' was felt by the T&F Group to provide Members with a clear understanding of who they should contact when faced with harassment, abuse and intimidation. The T&F Group developed a short role profile, setting out the responsibilities of the Nominated Officer (Appendix 3) which they recommend that the Corporate Policy Committee approve.

## **6.6 Partnership working with Cheshire Police**

- 6.6.1 The T&F Group identified inconsistencies in the responses to abuse, harassment and intimidation of councillors, reported to Cheshire Police. The member survey results identified that:

***“Police did not appear to treat incidents seriously”.***

***“The response was effective on some occasions but not on others”.***

- 6.6.2 The LGA Debate Not Hate Campaign also identified that police forces should work to improve the consistency of responses to abuse of and threats made against councillors and take a risk-based approach that accounts for the specific risks that councillors face, as they do with other high-risk individuals, such as MPs.
- 6.6.3 In response to the above, the T&F Group met with the Police and Crime Commissioner, a representative from Cheshire Police and the Force Elected Official Advisor (FEOA) for Cheshire. The T&F Group referred to the government's '[Defending Democracy Policing Protocol](#)' and sought clarity on the

role of the FEOAs. It was agreed amongst all present at the meeting that councillors held a unique position and that issues of harassment, abuse and intimidation needed to be treated seriously.

- 6.6.4 The FEAO role included a dedicated named police officer contact for raising concerns and liaising on security concerns related to elected officials, including local councillors and candidates. The T&F Group was pleased to learn that Cheshire Police had appointed a FOEA, details of which can be found in the proposed Councillor Safety Protocol (Appendix 4, as referred to in Paragraph 6.7.2).
- 6.6.5 The T&F Group raised concerns in relation to the inconsistent approach that members felt was taken when incidents were reported to the police and sought clarity on the approach that should be taken when an incident occurred and what Members could expect in response.
- 6.6.6 Clarity upon the process which Members should follow was provided for the T&F Group, this detail is set out clearly in the proposed Councillor Safety Protocol (Appendix 4). The key messages from police colleagues are summarised below:
- Elected Members needed to continue to report incidents of harassment, abuse and intimidation regardless of the outcome of previous incident reporting.
  - Continued reporting of incidents could potentially change the approach and level of action that could be taken against potential offenders.
  - It was also highlighted that, particularly in relation to online abuse, Members should ensure that they collected as much evidence as possible – this could be in the form of screenshots, to assist with police investigations.
  - Police colleagues also suggested that when reporting incidents to Cheshire Police, Elected Members needed to clearly highlight that they were an Elected Member and that they felt the harassment, abuse and intimidation was a direct result of their democratic role.
- 6.6.7 Members of the T&F Group took the opportunity to raise concerns in relation to occasions when the response from the police had not been satisfactory, particularly when Members had been advised to consider stepping-down from their role as an Elected Member when faced with abuse, intimidation and harassment. It was agreed by the T&F Group and all police colleagues present at the meeting that this was not acceptable, and that this advice should not be given in response to councillors dealing with harassment, abuse and intimidation. Police colleagues committed to addressing this through their regular Operation Ford communications shared across the force.
- 6.6.8 Members of the T&F Group highlighted the difficulties some Members faced when reporting incidents to the police and these matters not being formally investigated as they did not reach the required 'threshold' or 'criteria' required. Members agreed that clarity on this area would be helpful for all Elected Members. Subsequently, the T&F Group agreed that briefings with the Force Elected Official Advisor from Cheshire Police would be beneficial and timely. These briefings have since been arranged and were held regularly throughout

May 2025 with reminders circulated to all Elected Members through the regular Members Bulletin. The T&F Group noted that not all Members were able to attend the sessions, and it is therefore proposed that additional briefings be arranged for those Members who had not yet met with the FEOA. Briefings with the FEOA would also form part of the Member Induction process.

- 6.6.9 The Group agreed that it was essential that the relationship between Cheshire Police and the Council continued to develop, and that the importance of councillor safety remained a priority. It was acknowledged that the use of social media was growing rapidly and fundamentally altering user behaviours. Understanding and keeping up with these changing behaviours was critical to ensuring that Elected Members were well prepared, and supported, in dealing with difficult and complex matters impacting them, particularly online. The T&F Group subsequently agreed that the proposed internal Nominated Officer and Force Elected Official Advisor should meet regularly to discuss the issue of harassment, abuse and intimidation of Elected Members to ensure strategies, protocols and support were adequate and continued to meet the needs of Elected Members. The T&F Group proposed that the Member Champion – Cllr Safety (paragraph 6.10) also attended these meetings. The above responds positively to the LGA Guiding Principle 3: ***‘Relationships with local police: Proactively develop strong relationships with the police to enhance coordination and foster mutual understanding of abuse affecting councillors and the role of police in addressing it’.***
- 6.6.10 The T&F Group sought clarity of the types of incidents that should be reported to the police. Police colleagues advised that reporting of incidents would ultimately fall to the individual involved/impacted. Offences of harassment, abuse and intimidation were emotive incidents, different individuals would react in different ways, and sometimes the same individual could react differently on some occasions than others. It was agreed, as a general rule, that the individual should consider how the incident made them feel and consider the motives of the potential offender. For example, a local resident making repeated queries about a local decision or policy and asking a number of questions about it from a genuine perspective, but becoming frustrated due to the outcome, this is significantly different to an individual repeatedly contacting a councillor for more spurious reasons and/or to make the councillor feel uncomfortable, which could involve sending regular abusive communications. In summary, councillors are encouraged to report any incident which makes them feel uncomfortable and/or concerned to the police.
- 6.7 Taking steps to support Cheshire East Members and developing a zero-tolerance approach to harassment, abuse and intimidation of councillors.**
- 6.7.1 The T&F Group agreed that the role of a councillor was rewarding, complex and challenging and that it was important that councillors had the right training, guidance and support. Evidence considered by the T&F Group highlighted a lack of understanding on steps that should be taken when an incident occurs, there was also a lack of understanding around the internal and external support available. The member survey results reported the following:

***“There was a lack of clarity about the reporting protocol. Councillors stated there was a lack of awareness about existing procedures and protocols for protection”.***

- 6.7.2 A Councillor Safety Protocol (Appendix 4) has been developed by the T&F Group in recognition of the increasing issue of harassment, abuse and intimidation faced by councillors. The purpose of the protocol is to ensure the safety and wellbeing of Members. The protocol outlines preventative measures and procedures to address potential risks, and help decrease the likelihood of experiencing harassment, abuse and intimidation, ultimately allowing Members to carry out their duties more effectively and confidently. The Cheshire Police FEOA had been consulted upon and inputted into the final protocol.
- 6.7.3 The protocol aims to bring together a wide range of information, contacts and guidance into one document for councillors and sets out a number of helpful internal and external resources. It is proposed that the Corporate Policy Committee agree the Councillor Safety Protocol and that this be made available on the Members Hub and be integrated into the induction process.
- 6.7.4 The T&F Group hoped that members would find that the proposed protocol empowered them to take proactive steps to protect themselves and respond appropriately when faced with harassment, abuse and intimidation and that adoption of the protocol fostered a culture of safety and respect within the local authority by setting clear expectations for behaviour and providing mechanisms for addressing safety concerns. This responds positively to the LGA recommendation that *“local authorities adopt a zero-tolerance approach to abuse”* and achieves the T&F Groups Objective 4 *“to create a local protocol setting out a procedure, should a councillor feel they are being harassed, abused or intimidated”*.
- 6.7.5 It was acknowledged by the T&F Group that this protocol would be an evolving piece of work that would need to be regularly reviewed. Many factors including, technology advancement, online habits and interactions changes, new social media platforms emerging and changes to legislation would dictate that the protocol would need to evolve to address future emerging risks and issues.

#### **6.8 Impact on mental health and support for councillors**

- 6.8.1 The T&F Group was concerned with the response from the member survey that suggested that:

***“35% of respondents had considered leaving their role as a Councillor because of incidents of abuse, intimidation or harassment”.***

***“The stress and abuse faced by Councillors have had a significant impact on their mental health, leading some to consider resigning”.***

- 6.8.2 The T&F Group considered what support was available and could be made available for councillors who were struggling with experiences of harassment, abuse and intimidation and was pleased to learn that the Employee Assistance Programme (EAP) for staff, was accessible for councillors to use, free of charge. This also came at no additional cost to the council. The proposed safety protocol



sets out how Members can access the EAP system. The T&F Group agreed that this should be included in the protocol to raise awareness of this valuable support available for Members.

- 6.8.3 The EAP system was provided by Vita Health Group and is free to use, providing a confidential assistance service to help manage, reduce and overcome the impact of life issues which individuals may experience from time to time, both within work and their personal life.

## **6.9 LGA Debate Not Hate: Public Statement**

- 6.9.1 The T&F Group considered in detail the work of the LGA Debate Not Hate Campaign, including the 'Debate Not Hate Public Statement' which called upon on local authorities, government and relevant partners including police and social media companies, to come together through a government convened working group to produce and implement an action plan that addressed the abuse and intimidation of Elected Members and candidates and ensured the safety of Members whilst fulfilling their democratic roles.
- 6.9.2 Councillors, MPs and local authorities were asked to sign the LGA's public statement. Over 800 councillors and 65 plus local authorities had signed up to the public statement to date. Full Council, in October 2022, supported a [Notice of Motion](#) which proposed that Cheshire East Council should sign the Public Statement.
- 6.9.3 The T&F Group agreed that the Corporate Policy Committee should reaffirm its continued support and commitment to the principles of the [public statement](#) to voice its support to the proposed establishment of the government-led working group to work towards raising public awareness of the role of councillors in their communities, encourage healthy debate and improve the responses and support for local politicians facing abuse and intimidation. Via the Members Bulletin, all councillors had been encouraged to sign the public statement individually.

## **6.10 Member Champion: Councillor Safety**

- 6.10.1 When reviewing steps taken by other local authorities in raising the profile and awareness of harassment, abuse and intimidation of councillors, some local authorities had appointed a Member Champion for Councillor Safety. This was something that the T&F Group strongly agreed should be adopted by the council as part of its work to develop a framework to support Members and increase the awareness of both the levels and impact of harassment of Elected Members.
- 6.10.2 The T&F Group considered what the role of the Champion would be and agreed a role description, as set out in Appendix 5 for the Corporate Policy Committee to consider.
- 6.10.3 It was agreed that this role would be key in raising the profile of councillor safety issues and advocating for better engagement with key partners, including Cheshire Police. The adoption of the Member Champion role would seek to ensure that Members were more informed and had a key Member to contact in relation to their safety.

- 6.10.4 The T&F Group agreed that appointing an Elected Member Champion for Councillor Safety would provide a visible and dedicated advocate for the wellbeing and protection of Councillors. This role would ensure that safety concerns were consistently represented at a strategic level, helping to embed a culture of zero tolerance toward harassment and abuse of Elected Members.

## **6.11 Lone Working**

- 6.11.1 Cheshire East Council has 82 councillors, representing 52 Wards, across the Borough. The nature of the councillor role means that councillors often carry out activities alone, sometimes in environments that may be unfamiliar to them. Working alone can make a councillor vulnerable to, and increase the likelihood of, violent or aggressive incidents.
- 6.11.2 The Member Survey results indicated that harassment, abuse and intimidation had risen in the last 12 months and was anticipated to increase further. Whilst online abuse was acknowledged as a growing issue for Members throughout the survey, some Members had also experienced face-face abuse, which had on occasions involved individuals visiting Elected Members homes and subsequently becoming abusive. The T&F Group was motivated to identify measures to improve lone working for Members that would give Members the confidence to fulfil their role with more ease and focus.
- 6.11.3 The T&F Group met with representatives from a large people protection organisation to receive more information and a demonstration on the use of personal safety devices, similar to those used by some employees across the council.
- 6.11.4 The T&F Group agreed that the lone-working personal safety devices provided a number of benefits, as summarised below.
- Discreet and easy to access in an emergency device.
  - 24/7 emergency alert functions that would help councillors.
  - 24/7 alarm receiving centre allowing two-way chat.
  - Long battery life with real time location Wi-Fi and GPS tracking.
  - Allow councillors to have peace of mind and a sense of reassurance.
  - “Check in” feature that allowed councillors to record short messages – providing information about their location and activity to inform any subsequent alerts.
  - Conversations could be recorded when activated, allowing emergency services to assess what level of response was needed. The recording could also provide valuable evidence if action was required.
- 6.11.5 The T&F Group recommends that the Corporate Policy Committee agree to the principle of making lone working devices available to Members who wished to have one, subject to a further consideration of the financial implications/options available being developed further by the Monitoring Officer and S151 Officer, in consultation



with the Chair and Vice Chair of the Corporate Policy Committee and Chair of the Task and Finish Group.

6.11.6 The T&F Group acknowledged that not every Member would feel the need to carry a security device with them but for those that did it would provide significant reassurance and peace of mind. This would further support the T&F Group objective to promote a culture of zero-tolerance of harassment, abuse and intimidation of Members.

6.11.7 The T&G Group propose that, subject to Corporate Policy Committee approval of the principle of lone working devices being available for Members, officers seek clarity via a Member survey on the number of Elected Members wishing to have a personal-safety device. At this point, clarity on the procurement processes and costs could be further developed in consultation with the Chair and Vice Chair of the Corporate Policy Committee and the Chair of the T&F Group.

<b>Devices</b>	<b>Approx costs for 2-year contract (in the region of)</b>	<b>Approx costs for 4-year contract (in the region of)</b>
82	£15k	£24k
41	£7.5k	£12k
20	£4k	£4k

## **6.12 Training for Councillors**

6.12.1 The T&F Group met with the Senior Member Training and Development Officer to understand existing and future training opportunities for Members to help Members pre-empt, navigate and deescalate tensions when challenging issues created passionate responses in the community.

6.12.2 The T&F Group considered a wide range of training, both internal and external and recommend the following to the Corporate Policy Committee, to approve.

6.12.3 The T&F Group noted that a refreshed Member Training and Development Plan was considered and approved by the Audit and Governance Committee at its meeting in July 2025. The T&F Group strongly supported the proposed plan, and the training opportunities identified for Members.

6.12.4 Alongside the refreshed Member Training and Development Plan, the T&F Group considered further opportunities that would equip Members with the skills and knowledge to better prepare themselves when dealing with incidents of harassment, abuse and intimidation.

6.12.5 To manage budgets effectively, the T&F Group advocated the use of the online resources, workbooks and e-learning provided by the LGA and the council's Learning Lounge. It was proposed that links to the LGA courses on facilitation and conflict resolution, handling intimidation, stress management and personal resilience be included on the Councillor Hub and that emotional intelligence, neuro-diversity and

sexual harassment e-learning modules be added to the induction programme for Members hosted on the Learning Lounge.

- 6.12.6 Whilst being mindful of the financial position of the council, the T&F Group considered that some external support was essential to be able to provide a comprehensive package of support. The T&F Group therefore propose that the Corporate Policy Committee approve the training, as set out below, which together with the online resources above, would be added to the Member Training and Development Plan. The financial implications are set out within the officer covering report.

6.12.7

	Type of training	Approx. costs
1	<p>Conflict De-escalation (external training)</p> <p>(covering personal safety skills for councillors, help equip Members with the right skills to handle harassment, abuse and intimidation).</p>	£7,560 (this covers four 90-minute sessions).
2.	<p>Healthier Debate (external training)</p> <p>(aims of the course are to empower people to build relationship and support colleagues in having open and honest conversations. Themes covered: successful listening, empathy, understanding other perspectives and having confidence to challenge appropriately from own perspective).</p>	<p>£5,500 for two sessions.</p> <p>Note: this is already included in the Member Training and Development Plan, however the inclusion of this training is strongly supported by the T&amp;F Group. This training is highlighted for information and does not require approval from the Corporate Policy Committee.</p>
3.	<p>Mental Health First Aider Training (external training)</p> <p>The T&amp;F Group propose that 1 Elected Member from each Political Group (1 Cons: 1 Lab: 1 Ind: 1 NGI) is nominated to complete this external training.</p> <p>Training an Elected Member as a Mental Health First Aider provides a vital peer support resource within the council, helping to foster a culture of openness, empathy, and early intervention. This role enables the trained Member to recognise signs of mental distress among colleagues, offer initial support, and guide individuals toward appropriate</p>	<p>£141.33 per person (£565.32 for four places – typically a 2-day course)</p> <p>Costs for training new Members would only be incurred as and when one of the nominated four trained Members needed to be replaced.</p>

	professional help. It also signals the council's commitment to mental health and wellbeing, reducing stigma and encouraging others to seek support when needed.	
4.	E-Leaning Courses: Emotional Intelligence / Neurodiversity / Sexual Harassment (internal training)	No costs.  This resource already exists. The T&F Group recommend that this be made available for Elected Members.

## 7.0 Recommendations

That the Corporate Policy Committee:

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 made 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 set out in paragraph 6.12.7 of this report be approved and 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 the 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.

## **8.0 Conclusion**

- 8.1 The T&F felt that endorsement of the recommendations outlined in the report were vital to ensuring the safety and wellbeing of Elected Members within Cheshire East Council. By addressing the growing concerns around harassment, intimidation, and abuse, the council would demonstrate a proactive commitment to fostering a respectful and secure environment for its Members. Implementation of these measures—including improved reporting mechanisms, dedicated support roles, safety protocols, and targeted training, would not only protect current Members but also encourage future participation in local democracy. These actions reflect the council's broader values of inclusion, accountability, and effective governance.

## **9.0 Background Documents**

- 9.1 Key documents referenced during the review or to assist in the forming of this final report have been hyperlinked through the report.

## **10.0 Additional Information / Contact Information**

- 10.1 Any questions relating to this report should be directed to the following:

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