

<b>Report to:</b>	Council	<b>Date of Meeting:</b>	Thursday 21 April 2022
<b>Subject:</b>	Sefton Council Policy on Dealing with the On-Line Abuse and Intimidation of Councillors		
<b>Report of:</b>	Chief Legal and Democratic Officer	<b>Wards Affected:</b>	(All Wards);
<b>Portfolio:</b>			
<b>Is this a Key Decision:</b>	No	<b>Included in Forward Plan:</b>	No
<b>Exempt / Confidential Report:</b>	No		

**Summary:**

The Council seeks to introduce a policy to assist members dealing with social media and to provide advice and assistance if they consider that they are being subjected to on-line abuse and intimidation.

**Recommendation(s):**

(1) That the policy is endorsed by Full Council.

**Reasons for the Recommendation(s):**

Social Media can be an effective tool to promote political views and activities/projects with which members are engaged. It can also however, present a minefield of delicate situations which can, if not managed correctly, place members at risk of abuse or at risk of breaching the code of conduct

**Alternative Options Considered and Rejected:** (including any Risk Implications)

None

**What will it cost and how will it be financed?**

**(A) Revenue Costs**

N/A

**(B) Capital Costs**

N/A

**Implications of the Proposals:**

<b>Resource Implications (Financial, IT, Staffing and Assets):</b>	
None	
<b>Legal Implications:</b>	
Legal implications are outlined within the draft policy.	
<b>Equality Implications:</b>	
There are no equality implications.	
<b>Climate Emergency Implications:</b>	
The recommendations within this report will	
Have a positive impact	N
Have a neutral impact	Y
Have a negative impact	N
The Author has undertaken the Climate Emergency training for report authors	Y

**Contribution to the Council's Core Purpose:**

Protect the most vulnerable: NA
Facilitate confident and resilient communities: NA
Commission, broker and provide core services: NA
Place – leadership and influencer: Becoming and serving as a councillor is a responsibility, a privilege and a hugely rewarding undertaking. The introduction of such a policy will help encourage people to become a councillor and will assist councillors in the performance of their duties.
Drivers of change and reform: NA
Facilitate sustainable economic prosperity: NA

Greater income for social investment: NA
Cleaner Greener NA

**What consultations have taken place on the proposals and when?**

**(A) Internal Consultations**

The Executive Director of Corporate Resources and Customer Services (FD6764) has been consulted and any comments have been incorporated into the report.

**(B) External Consultations**

None

**Implementation Date for the Decision**

Immediately following the Council meeting.

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**Appendices:**

- Sefton Council Policy on Dealing With the On-Line Abuse and Intimidation of Councillors

**Background Papers:**

There are no background papers available for inspection.

## **1. Introduction**

- 1.1 Becoming and serving as a councillor is a responsibility, a privilege and a hugely rewarding undertaking. However, 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. There is also the concern that the growth in public intimidation is putting people off standing as local councillors.
- 1.2 It is of course correct that those who do put themselves forward for public office, and who currently hold public office, should be subject to increased scrutiny and challenge, and that they should expect to be faced with sometimes very strong criticism. The public interest in a democracy of open discussion of matters of public concern does not denote 'open season' and there should be a bar beyond which such challenge and criticism is unacceptable, particularly where the basis of that challenge is devoid of factual substance.
- 1.3 Social Media can be an effective tool to promote political views and activities/projects with which members are engaged. It can also however, present a minefield of delicate situations which can, if not managed correctly, place members at risk of abuse or at risk of breaching the code of conduct.
- 1.4 There is also a darker side to social media which has increased over recent years. Malicious abuse, threats of violence and harassment are unfortunately, all too prevalent across virtual platforms.
- 1.5 The Council takes this situation very seriously and seeks to introduce a policy to assist members dealing with social media and to provide advice and assistance if they consider that they are being subjected to on-line abuse and intimidation.