

Press release: Intimidation in Public Life: Committee publishes report

The independent Committee, which advises the Prime Minister on standards of conduct across public life, has made a package of recommendations to address the threats and intimidation experienced by Parliamentary candidates and others. The recommendations include:

This level of vile and threatening behaviour, albeit by a minority of people, against those standing for public office is unacceptable in a healthy democracy. We cannot get to a point where people are put off standing, retreat from debate, and even fear for their lives as a result of their engagement in politics. This is not about protecting elites or stifling debate, it is about ensuring we have a vigorous democracy in which participants engage in a responsible way which recognises others' rights to participate and to hold different points of view.

The increasing scale and intensity of this issue demands a serious response. We are not alone in believing that more must be done to combat online behaviour in particular and we have been persuaded that the time has come for the government to legislate to shift the liability for illegal content online towards social media companies, and to consult on the introduction of a new electoral offence.

We believe that the parties themselves must show greater leadership. They must call out members who engage in this appalling behaviour, and make sure appropriate sanctions are imposed swiftly and consistently. They have an important duty of care to their candidates, members and supporters. Intimidation takes place across the political spectrum, both in terms of those engaging in and those receiving intimidation. The leadership of political parties must recognise this.

We have heard evidence that intimidatory behaviour can stem from our current political culture, with low levels of trust in politicians and a feeling of frustration and alienation by some people. Against that backdrop, it is down to all in public life to play their part in restoring and protecting our public political culture by setting a tone which respects the right of every individual to participate and does not, however inadvertently, open a door to intimidation.

Many of the recommendations we are making today are not limited solely to election periods but will have wider relevance across our public life.