

28<sup>th</sup> January 2022

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## **CIVILITY IN PUBLIC LIFE AND THE LOCAL ELECTIONS**

### **Purpose**

1. This paper updates members on the Civility in Public Life programme and seeks views on a potential Fair Campaigns Pledge.

### **Background**

2. WLGA Council received an update on Civility in Public Life as part of the Diversity in Democracy report in November 2021.
3. The WLGA continues to work with the LGA, COSLA and NILGA on the UK-wide Civility in Public Life campaign. Several of the current Councillor resources on the Civility in Public Life website, including the joint WLGA/LGA Social Media Guide and Guide to Handling Intimidation and Abuse are being updated, in readiness for new members following May's local elections.
4. WLGA Council members raised concerns about councillors' personal safety following the tragic murder of Sir David Amess MP last year. It was not possible to organize a proposed meeting of all leaders and the four Chief Constables before Christmas, however, the WLGA liaised with South Wales Police who lead on Gold Command matters relating to safety of elected representatives. South Wales Police developed a template letter for all Police Forces to distribute to all councillors in Wales with advice and local inspector contact details, should any concerns arise as well as links to useful guidance and resources.
5. The WLGA is also working with Data Cymru on a planned Exit Survey of councillors who decide to stand down at the elections; this survey will build on previous exit surveys and provides valuable information about why councillors decide to stand down and any specific issues, including abuse and intimidation, that may need to be explored further.
6. The WLGA is also supporting the work of the LGA in contributing to the Draft Online Safety Bill, which is currently being scrutinised in the UK Parliament. The Draft Bill is broadly welcomed and is of significant interest to councils, including abuse and intimidation and free speech.

### **Civility and the Local Elections**

7. WLGA Council members raised concerns about the risk of increased abuse and intimidation in the run-up to the local elections and it was proposed that the WLGA consider a 'Fair Campaigns' Pledge for local consideration, to outline a clear public

statement about expectations about respect and tone of political debate in the elections period.

8. A [series of infographics](#) for councillors and candidates (see Annex 1) have recently been produced through the Civility in Public Life campaign. These set out 'rules' and expected standards of debate on social media platforms and top tips on handling online abuse.
9. Following the discussion at Council, WLGA officials have been seeking informal views from political parties and researching previous election campaigns.
10. Political parties already have guidelines or codes of conduct for candidates and have internal disciplinary procedures. There is also an inter-party complaints resolution process in Wales to try to resolve any complaints about local party activity during election periods.
11. Serving councillors, who are seeking re-election, remain bound by the statutory Code of Conduct, which sets out high standards of conduct including treating others with respect and consideration and prohibiting bullying behaviour or harassment.
12. The Public Services Ombudsman has previously reported concerns that code of conduct complaints about councillors increase significantly in the run-up to the election and would be supportive of any efforts to encourage good behaviour and respect during elections.
13. Whilst serving councillors are bound by the code of conduct, other candidates are not and concerns have been previously raised that election campaigns are not always conducted 'on a level playing field' as a result.
14. Cardiff Council has sought to approach improving conduct around the elections campaign through wider promotion of the expectations of the code of conduct to candidates. Cardiff Council's Standards Committee meets regularly with the Council's Political Group Leaders and Whips; there has been agreement that Group Leaders would make their party candidates aware of the provisions of the Councillor Code of Conduct and ask them to comply with them to ensure a fair and honest election takes place without incorrect facts and personal insults being quoted. The Chair of the Standards Committee also intends to write to all candidates for election asking them to comply with the Code of Conduct and the Use of Social Media Principles, following close of nominations when the candidates are confirmed.
15. Local agreements around 'clean campaigns' or 'fair and respectful campaigns' have been agreed in previous elections, including in councils in England. The Jo Cox Foundation has previously developed a general "[joint statement on conduct of political party members](#)" and "[respectful campaign pledge](#)" which was used in the 2019 General Election. The WLGA is not aware of any previous local pledges within Wales.
16. Caerphilly County Borough Council's Group Leaders published a joint 'fair campaign' statement on 14<sup>th</sup> January 2022 (see Annex 2) setting out a pledge to:

“...participate in a fair election campaign which is based on positive campaigning and merit, rather than personal attacks and smears against individuals” and

“...encouraging all elected members and candidates in the forthcoming election to do the same. In addition, we will publicly ‘call out’ any such inappropriate behaviour and take a zero-tolerance approach to abuse.”

17. A ‘Fair Campaign’ public statement of shared values is symbolic and would seek to set the tone and expectations of democratic debate in the run-up to the elections. A statement can only be agreed locally on a voluntary basis; although serving councillors are bound by the code of conduct, wider compliance with any voluntary pledge could be encouraged via ‘peer-pressure’ and informal local resolution rather than any formal processes.
18. A public statement, whilst making a clear public appeal for fairness and respect from all during the election, can only shape the conduct of candidates rather than prevent abuse and intimidation from any members of the public.
19. WLGA and LGA guidance (such as the infographics in Annex A) can however help candidates set expectations around public engagement with them during the campaign, particularly through their social media channels.
20. Caerphilly County Borough Council’s statement could be used as a model for adoption and adoption by group leaders, councillors and candidates locally. Councils may however prefer to adopt Cardiff Council’s approach, whereby the code of conduct is promoted via parties and groups as the standard by which their candidates should apply themselves during an election campaign.

## **Recommendation**

### **21. Members are asked:**

- 21.1 To consider the adoption and promotion of local ‘fair campaign’ pledges ahead of May’s local elections.**

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**Report cleared by Cllr Jane Mudd, WLGA Spokesperson for Equalities, Anti-Poverty and Migration**

**Author:** Daniel Hurford, Head of Policy  
**E-mail:** [daniel.hurford@wlga.gov.uk](mailto:daniel.hurford@wlga.gov.uk)

## Annex 1

### Social Media Rules of Engagement for use on candidate's social media platforms

**Rules of engagement**

**Welcome to my page,** which aims to communicate my activities as a candidate in our local elections.

If you wish to be a part of this online community, you must agree to abide by this code of digital engagement, which is designed to keep everyone safe.

**RULE 1**  
Debate and disagreement are welcome on this page, but only if expressed with courtesy, respect and politeness.

**RULE 2**  
Posts should not contain abuse, harassment, intimidation or threats of any form.

**RULE 3**  
Posts should not contain any form of discrimination – including racism, sexism, ageism, ableism, homophobia, transphobia or religious intolerance.

**RULE 4**  
Posts should not spread false or unverified information.

**RULE 5**  
For transparency reasons, users should not post anonymously.



If any of these rules are broken, page admins reserve the right to delete posts, block users and report content to the police if necessary.



It may not be possible to respond to all queries on this page due to time constraints - if you have specific enquiries or casework, please send directly to my official email.



For more information on the LGA's work on handling abuse on social media and digital citizenship visit: [www.local.gov.uk/civility-public-life](http://www.local.gov.uk/civility-public-life)

REF 43.5

**Rheolau ymgysylltu**

**Croeso i'm tudalen, sy'n bwriadu cyfathrebu fy ngweithgareddau fel ymgeisydd yn ein etholiadau lleol.**

Os ydych chi'n dymuno bod yn rhan o'r gymuned hon ar-lein, mae'n rhaid i chi llynu at y cod hwn o ymgysylltiad digidol, sydd wedi'i ddylunio i gadw pawb yn ddiogel.

**RHEOL 1**  
Croesewir trafodaeth ac anghytundeb ar y dudalen hon, os yw'n cael ei fynegi â chwrtieisi, parch a moesgarwch.

**RHEOL 2**  
Ni ddylai negeseuon gynnwys camdriniaeth, aflonyddwch, bethau i godi ofn neu fgyythiadau o unrhyw fath.

**RHEOL 3**  
Ni ddylai negeseuon gynnwys unrhyw fath o wahaniaethu – gan gynnwys rhagfarn ar sail hil, rhagfarn ar sail rhyw, anabledd, homofobia, transfobia neu anoddefgarwch o ran crefydd.

**RHEOL 4**  
Ni ddylai negeseuon ledaenu gwybodaeth anwir neu wyrddiadaeth heb ei dilysu.

**RHEOL 5**  
Er rhesymau tryloywder, ni ddylai defnyddwyr anfon negeseuon dienw.



Os yw unrhyw reol yn cael ei thorri, mae gweinyddwyr y dudalen yn cadw'r hawl i ddileu negeseuon, rhwystro defnyddwyr neu adrodd cynnwys i'r heddlu os oes angen.



Efallai na fyddai'n bosibl ymateb i bob ymholaeth ar y dudalen hon oherwydd cyfngiadau amser – os oes gennych ymholaethau penodol neu waith achos, anfonwch eich neges i fy e-bost swyddogol.



I gael rhagor o wybodaeth am waith CLILC a'r Gymdeithas Llywodraeth Leol ar ymdrin â cham-drin ar gyfryngau cymdeithasol a dinasyddiaeth ddigidol ewch i [www.wlga.cymru/social-media-and-online-abuse](http://www.wlga.cymru/social-media-and-online-abuse)

REF 43.4

## Annex 2



### **Joint statement from the Leaders of the Labour, Plaid Cymru and the Independent groups of Caerphilly County Borough Council.**

Unfortunately, we are seeing an increasing number of councillors and candidates being subjected to abuse, threats and intimidation.

As well as being totally unacceptable, this behaviour undermines the principles of free speech, democratic engagement and debate.

We endeavour to treat everyone with courtesy, kindness and respect and, as Leaders of our respective political groups, we stand together to call for an end to abuse, intimidation and harassment of any kind.

This is particularly relevant as we enter the key period in the run up to the local government elections in May.

We pledge to participate in a fair election campaign which is based on positive campaigning and merit, rather than personal attacks and smears against individuals.

We encourage all elected members and candidates in the forthcoming election to do the same. In addition, we will publicly 'call out' any such inappropriate behaviour and take a zero-tolerance approach to abuse.

We all have the right to carry out our civic duties without fear of being attacked or abused. Any inappropriate behaviour, whether that be verbal, physical or in writing on social media, is totally unacceptable and action will be taken if deemed necessary.

Please be kind and fair in all that you say and do.

**Cllr Philippa Marsden, Leader of the Labour Group**

**Cllr Colin Mann, Leader of Plaid Cymru Group**

**Cllr Kevin Etheridge, Leader of the Independent Group**





**Datganiad ar y cyd gan arweinwyr grwpiau Llafur, Plaid Cymru ac Annibynnol Cyngor Bwrdeistref Sirol Caerffili.**

Gwaetha'r modd, rydyn ni'n gweld nifer gynyddol o gynghorwyr ac ymgeiswyr yn cael eu cam-drin, eu bygwth a'u dychryn.

Yn ogystal â bod yn gwbl annerbyniol, mae'r ymddygiad hwn yn tanseilio egwyddorion rhyddid barn, ymgysylltu democrataidd a thrafod.

Rydyn ni'n ymdrechu i drin pawb â chwrteisi, caredigrwydd a pharch ac, fel arweinwyr ein grwpiau gwleidyddol, rydyn ni'n sefyll gyda'n gilydd i alw am roi diwedd ar gam-drin, brawychu ac aflonyddu o unrhyw fath.

Mae hyn yn arbennig o berthnasol wrth i ni gychwyn ar y cyfnod allweddol cyn yr etholiadau llywodraeth leol ym mis Mai.

Rydyn ni'n addo cymryd rhan mewn ymgyrch etholiadol deg sy'n seiliedig ar ymgyrchu cadarnhaol a theilyngdod, yn hytrach nag ymosodiadau personol a difenwol yn erbyn unigolion.

Rydyn ni'n annog pob aelod etholedig ac ymgeisydd yn yr etholiad sydd ar y gweill i wneud yr un peth. Yn ogystal, byddwn ni'n amlinu'n gyhoeddus unrhyw ymddygiad amhriodol o'r fath ac ni fydd unrhyw oddefgarwch o ran cam-drin.

Mae gan bob un ohonom ni'r hawl i gyflawni ein dyletswyddau dinesig heb ofni ymosodiad neu gamdriniaeth. Mae unrhyw ymddygiad amhriodol – naill ai ar lafar, yn gorfforol neu'n ysgrifenedig ar y cyfryngau cymdeithasol – yn gwbl annerbyniol, a bydd camau'n cael eu cymryd os bydd angen.

Byddwch yn garedig ac yn deg ym mhopeth rydych chi'n ei ddweud ac yn ei wneud.

Y Cyngorydd Philippa Marsden, Arweinydd Grŵp Llafur

Y Cyngorydd Colin Mann, Arweinydd Grŵp Plaid Cymru

Y Cyngorydd Kevin Etheridge, Arweinydd Grŵp Annibynnol

