

CIVILITY IN PUBLIC LIFE POLICY

The intimidation and abuse of Councillors, in person or otherwise, undermines democracy; it can prevent members from representing the communities they serve, prevent individuals from standing for election and undermine the democratic processes.

These harmful behaviours, whether occurring towards, between or by elected members are entirely unacceptable.

Chrishall Parish Council is committed to promoting Civility in Public Life; it encourages positive debate and supports the wellbeing of its elected members, volunteers and employee(s)

There are growing concerns about the impact an increasing level of public intimidation and toxicity of debate is having on our community's democratic processes.

Public intimidation is defined as "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".

This includes discriminatory, physical, psychological and verbal actions such as: physical attacks; being stalked, followed or loitered around; threats of harm; distribution of misinformation; character assassination; inappropriate emails, letters, phone calls and communications on social media; sexual harassment or sexual assault; and other threatening behaviours.

Key points:

- Councillors are encouraged to keep a record of any intimidatory communication or behaviour
- It will consider the context, content and frequency of communications and behaviours, and action can be taken retroactively
- Contact with unknown or anonymous individuals will be undertaken with care
- Councillors are encouraged to speak out against harassment and intimidation of others and address any inappropriate and disrespectful behaviour, where they feel safe to do so, with the aim of discouraging others from accepting such behaviours

Below are a suggested set of actions that a Councillor / volunteer/ employee could undertake if they believed they are being subjected to intimidation:

- Make sure that your immediate safety is not at risk. Make sure you are safe.
- If possible, record or diarise the encounter or communication. In the case of an email or letter you can copy or save it. A telephone call or face-to-face discussion and social media incident could be written in a diary as soon as possible after the event, recorded, screen-shot or saved. You can also take photos of damage or a computer screen. Even if this is the first or only incident, others may also have been subjected to intimidation and a collective record is important if future action is going to be taken. It is also important that incidents relating to the same individual or individuals should be recorded as

such evidence could be critical if the matter gives rise to a criminal prosecution.

- Raise the incident with a view to discussing it or obtaining support from Chrishall Parish Council. This will also help you establish if others have been subjected to the same or similar intimidation.
- If a serious potential crime has occurred, it is advisable to formally report it to the council and to the Police, particularly in the context of a serious threat to life or anticipated violence.
- If you are concerned about your personal safety, raise this with the council and the police so that there is a record of the impact the incident is having and review your own security and personal safety. This could include your personal or work activities and those of your family.
- Under the Health and Safety at Work Act, Chrishall Parish Council has a duty to safeguard staff against potentially violent persons. Although councillors are not employees in the legal sense, Chrishall Parish Council will treat them as such in this instance and will enable the councillor to ascertain if the individual or individuals who have intimidated them is on a Police Violent Persons register and, if not, ensure that that their name is added.
- Every situation will be different, and it will need a personal judgement about whether it is worthwhile to pursue the incident, ignore it or politely acknowledge.
- If the letters, phone calls, social media communications or emails continue, further steps may need to be considered such as advising the individual that such abuse will result in a referral to the Police and the stopping of further correspondence

Chrishall Parish Council agrees that it will:

1. Ensure that complaints made of harassment or bullying made by a Councillor, a Parish Council volunteer or the Clerk are fully investigated by the full Parish Council.
2. A written report kept on file regarding what happened, and how to proceed, including potential sanctions against the perpetrator if they use any Council owned facility.
3. Ensure a separate list is kept to ensure that perpetrators are identified to Councillors who may have to deal with them in the future, and are thus as well prepared as possible.
4. Communicate with the perpetrator the decision of the Council.
5. Advise the Police if investigations result in a decision that a crime has been committed.
6. Ensure that the Councillor, volunteer or the Clerk are correctly supported including mental health support.

It is important to remind the community that the role of Parish Councillor, Parish Volunteer or Clerk must not be confused with the person.

Councillors must ensure that all communication on Parish Council matters go through the Clerk as the Proper Officer of the Council