

# Joint Statement of conduct by Elected Members

Adopted by Annual Council, May 2022

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## Introduction

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The Jo Cox Foundation and the Committee for Standards in Public Life have prepared the Joint Statement of Conduct, a high-level statement of principle which all political parties in Westminster have signed up to. The Joint Standard seeks to agree on a responsible framework for legitimate public debate and to help protect candidates during an election campaign. It sits alongside party codes of conduct and asks for minimum standards of behaviours expected at all times.

At a local level, Torbay Council also supports and expects high levels of conduct and has adopted the following Joint Statement for conduct of its members to sit alongside and support the Members' Code of Conduct and Local Protocols.

## The Joint Statement of Conduct

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1. Representative democracy is a central and valued characteristic of our way of life. We believe it is in the interests of us all for Parliament and Local Authority's to reflect the diverse population it serves so that decisions that impact the public reflect the realities of life in the UK. In recent years, intimidation (see Annex A) experienced by Parliamentary candidates and others in public life has increased and has threatened the diversity, integrity, and vibrancy of our democracy.
  2. This joint statement on conduct of Councillors (the Statement), Members' Code of Conduct and Local Protocols sets out the minimum standards of behaviour we expect from Councillors at all times.
  3. The Seven Principles of Public Life (the Nolan Principles) - selflessness, integrity, objectivity, accountability, openness, honesty and leadership - have long been the basis for ensuring high standards in public life. This is the context for the behaviours set out below.
  4. Councillors will aspire to:
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- a) take responsibility for setting an appropriate tone for campaigning and communication;
  - b) lead by example to encourage and foster constructive democratic debate and tolerance of other points of view; and
  - c) promote and defend the dignity of others, including political opponents, treating all people with courtesy and respect.
5. As a minimum, Councillors will not engage in intimidation by:
- a) using or threatening violence or other unlawful force;
  - b) damaging property or making threats to damage property;
  - c) engaging in bullying, harassment or victimisation, or unlawfully discriminating against another person or group;
  - d) using abusive or threatening words or behaviour, including the use of hateful or sexualised language or imagery;
  - e) making vexatious or malicious allegations of illegal or improper conduct; or
  - f) using violent metaphors or allusions to violence.
6. Councillors are expected to challenge unacceptable behaviour wherever it occurs.
7. Behaviour that falls within the unacceptable behaviour listed in this Statement will be dealt with under Torbay Council's Members Code of Conduct.
8. In some cases, including but not limited to offences against the person and damage to property, as well as credible threats of violence, the behaviour may be illegal. We will refer any breach of this Statement which appears to break the criminal law to the police

This statement was adopted by Annual Council in May 2022 and, on behalf of all Torbay's Councillors, we as the Council's political group leaders hereby sign this statement to demonstrate our joint commitment:

**Councillor Steve Darling**

Leader Liberal Democrat Group

**Councillor David Thomas**

Leader Conservative Group

**Councillor Robert Loxton**

Leader Independent Group

## What is intimidatory behaviour?

The 2017 Report of the Committee on Standards in Public Life, *Intimidation in Public Life*, interpreted intimidatory behaviour as: 'words and/or behaviour intended or likely to block or deter participation, which could reasonably lead to an individual wanting to withdraw from public life.'

1. Intimidation can include physical violence, threats of violence, damage to property, and abusive online and offline communications, amongst other behaviour. Sometimes, the collective impact of a number of individual actions can also be intimidatory, for example, co-ordinated social media attacks. A clear finding of Intimidation in Public Life is that intimidation is disproportionately likely to be directed towards women, those from ethnic and religious minorities, and LGBT candidates.
2. Robust political disagreement is part of the democratic process; highly personalised attacks are not. Intimidatory actions are not a way to apply legitimate political pressure. Instead, they are intended and likely to cause an individual to withdraw from a public space, including social media, public events, or from public life altogether. This can have the effect of limiting freedom of expression.