

Four Nations Civility in Public Life statement

21 October 2025

Local communities thrive when everyone feels safe, included and valued. However, we are increasingly troubled by threats and violence against councillors and officers. Protecting the safety and wellbeing of all is paramount to maintaining a vibrant, representative local government.

Some councillors are being exposed to high volumes of vitriolic abuse, personal attacks and misinformation online, pushing them out of public life and creating a negative effect on democratic participation. Debate and free speech, including criticism, are cornerstones of a healthy democracy, and social media is a powerful tool for connection when exercised with mutual respect and responsibility.

However, the intimidation, abuse and harassment of people in public office, whether in person, online or by other means, poses a serious and real threat to local democracy. These behaviours prevent officers and councillors from fulfilling their roles, deter dedicated community representatives from standing for election and erode public trust in democratic institutions and processes.

We recognise that to effect change, those in public life have a responsibility to model positive behaviours, which add value to and strengthen local democracy. Robust debate, disagreement and legitimate scrutiny are vital, but abuse, intimidation, threats and harassment are unacceptable.

Across our four nations, COSLA, LGA, NILGA and WLGA reaffirm our commitment to promoting Civility in Public Life. We stand united in fostering constructive dialogue, countering harmful disinformation, and supporting councils so that they can serve their communities with confidence and dignity.

“We call on the UK Government to collaborate with the devolved governments, local government associations and the police to establish formal arrangements that address the abuse and intimidation of everyone in public life, whether officers, candidates or elected politicians. These new arrangements should aim to coordinate existing initiatives, resource new solutions and security mitigations and facilitate information sharing between agencies.”

