



Chloe Smith MP
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Dr Carolyn Wilkins OBE
Chief Executive/Accountable Officer
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By email: Carolyn.wilkins@oldham.gov.uk

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Dear Dr Wilkins,

Thank you for your letter of 13 January, about tackling harassment and abuse towards those in public life. I am grateful for your support and commitment to this issue.

Democracy is a cornerstone of British values. Having respectful, vibrant, and open debate is key to a healthy democracy. However, debate cannot be an excuse to cause harm or spread hatred, and a line is crossed when disagreement mutates into intimidation, violence or abuse. It is important we tackle this issue and ensure everyone can participate in our democracy freely.

Intimidation is a wide-ranging and complex issue. We are working across Government to ensure a consolidated approach with key stakeholders, including social media companies, the Police and prosecution authorities, political parties and public bodies like the Local Government Association.

We have removed the requirement for local government candidates to include their home address on the ballot paper. We have also committed to a new electoral offence of intimidating a candidate or campaigner during the run up to an election, either in person or online. As we review the intimidation of candidates and campaigners, we are also reviewing the existing offence of undue influence of voters, which aims to protect voters from improper influences to vote in a particular way, or not to vote at all.

Last year, the Government published the Online Harms White Paper, which sets out our plans for world-leading legislation to make the UK the safest place in the world to be online. The Government intends to establish in law a new duty of care on companies towards their users, overseen by an independent regulator with effective enforcement powers.

We must work together to challenge and report intimidating and abusive behaviour wherever it occurs. Channeling a culture of respect and inclusion should also be a priority for anyone involved in the democratic sphere and we must all lead by example.

Yours sincerely,

Chloe Smith

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