

**Member Motion: Action on violence and harassment against elected representatives and public servants, and the coarsening of public discourse, as proposed by Councillor Lees**

**Full Council, 7 December 2021**

This Council notes the recent killing of Sir David Amess MP and passes on its heartfelt condolences to his family, friends and colleagues. This was both a personal tragedy and a heavy blow to the local and wider Essex community, and several Uttlesford councillors have lost a friend.

Council believes that this killing reflects, as does that of Jo Cox MP and other attacks on UK politicians and their staff before, that there has been an increase in harassment, intimidation, threats and violence against those elected to serve in public office, irrespective of political party, as well as those staff who have chosen careers in public service. This has been occurring at all levels of government, including local government, and including incidents of violence and harassment here in Uttlesford.

Council further notes the coarsening of public discourse over the years, accelerated more recently online and on social media in particular. We believe that this hostile activity by keyboard warriors, often anonymous, exists on a continuum with physical attacks, creating an unacceptable and negative context that both puts elected officials and public servants at risk, as well as discouraging others from entering public life. This impacts not only those people directly, but also their families and friends.

It is wrong. It must stop.

Council reaffirms the duty of elected members to reflect on and demonstrate the highest standards ourselves in our own actions, words and debates. Council believes that vigorous political debate and the holding to account of office holders is of vital ongoing importance to our local democracy, but equally resolves to reflect on the temperature and tone of our own discourse, and to lead by example.

Council welcomes the actions of Essex Police and Uttlesford District Council staff over recent weeks in reviewing and refreshing safety assessments, and for enhancing measures proportionately, in reflection of the duty of care owed to elected representatives and staff alike.

Council believes that this latest tragedy demands not just words but further hard action.

Council therefore resolves:

- To instruct the chief executive to work with elected members, staff and external partners, particularly Essex Police, to carry out an annual assessment of safety and security of both elected representatives, council staff and the public we serve in the course of our work, and to present that

report, with actions taken and recommendations as appropriate, each year to full Council for debate.

- To task our Standards Committee, in addition (and separate to) their work considering individual complaints, to consider the standards of discourse in public debate locally focused on the Council, both by members of the public and amongst councillors ourselves, and to report annually with conclusions and recommendations as appropriate for part of the same annual debate.

**Proposed by:** Councillor Lees

**Seconded by:** Councillor Criscione