

New measures to protect candidates ahead of local elections

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Police will be better equipped to protect candidates from harassment and intimidation under new measures announced ahead of the local and devolved elections.

Police will be better equipped to protect candidates from abuse, intimidation, and violence under new measures announced ahead of the May local and devolved elections.

A new national police unit will be established this month to target offenders who threaten and harass election candidates ahead of the May elections. It will bring together specialist officers and intelligence experts to monitor reports of abuse from across the country — identifying repeat offenders and helping police forces build stronger cases against them. The unit builds on a system already in place to protect MPs, expanding protection to people standing for elected office.

It forms part of a raft of new measures to crackdown on the abuse of elected officials, set out by the Security Minister in Parliament today.

Candidates standing for election to the Welsh Senedd and Scottish Parliament will now receive the same dedicated police support as those contesting other elections, as Operation Ford is widened. A network of dedicated police officers remains in place in all forces across the country ready to support the local elections and provide security briefings for candidates.

New and strengthened guidance will also be issued to frontline officers, with greater clarity on how to respond to incidents involving politicians. To reinforce this, the Security Minister has written to the chair of the National Police Chief's Council to remind chief constables of the wide range of powers available and urged them not to hesitate to use them to protect candidates.

Security Minister Dan Jarvis said:

Harassment, intimidation, abuse, and violence are not acceptable political expression. We will never tolerate it, nor allow it to become the new normal.

This is a year-round task, but we're ramping up action ahead of local elections by putting in place protections and support for those campaigning, and ensuring any offenders face tough consequences.

To the public and those who serve them, protecting our democracy is a shared responsibility. We all must call out this abuse whenever and wherever we see it.

Assistant Chief Constable Mark Williams, Head of the National Police Coordination Centre (NPoCC) said:

We will not tolerate the intimidation and harassment of candidates or their supporters, whether in person or online. Police forces up and down the country will be working hard to detect and prevent crime, ensuring the democratic process is free from interference

of any kind.

A network of trained officers has been established to offer bespoke support and guidance to candidates. This will help minimise risk while campaigning and provide guidance on any online and social media concerns. A national operation has also been stood up to ensure forces are aligned and able to share the most up to date intelligence.

It is vital our elections are not undermined by criminality, and we will work with our partners to make sure we can respond to any incidents robustly and effectively.

Olivia Field, Chief Executive, The Jo Cox Foundation, said:

Elections are vital to the health of our democracy and must be conducted with respect. Abuse and intimidation towards candidates have serious consequences — discouraging strong candidates from standing and preventing others from participating fully because of safety concerns. We welcome measures to strengthen protections for election candidates.

Through our Jo Cox Civility Commission, we are calling on all political parties to enforce their codes of conduct and for candidates to model respectful behaviour. Everyone in public life has a responsibility to ensure that no one, whatever their beliefs, faces abuse or intimidation.

To crackdown on the unacceptable abuse that many have suffered online, government is engaging directly with social media platforms to strengthen online protections for candidates and elected representatives, ensuring unlawful abuse is passed to the police. Under the Online Safety Act, technology companies now have clear legal duties to identify, remove and prevent illegal content including threats.

The minister also urged elected representatives across national, local, and devolved levels to “stand together” against this growing threat and urged them to report it whenever it takes place. Doing so helps the police build a clearer picture of the perpetrators and their behaviour, and enables the police to intervene before anyone is harmed.

There has been a concerning rise in harassment of those in public office, with the Electoral Commission reporting that 55% of the candidates who stood in the last general election experienced some form of abuse or intimidation. A separate survey led by the Local Government Association in 2025, found that 7 in 10 councillors reported experiencing abuse or intimidation in the last year.

To ensure no one is deterred from representing their community or country because of fear, the Defending Democracy Taskforce is driving forward work across government to tackle the full range of threats to our democracy.

Under Operation Bridger, a dedicated superintendent is in place in all police forces to provide a point of contact for MPs when they are outside of the Parliamentary Estate. Meanwhile Operation Ford extends that support, providing all local representatives with a dedicated police officer to provide briefings on personal security to keep them safe during and after elections.

Landmark bills going through Parliament will introduce major new measures to crack down abusive behaviour and strengthen protections, including restricting protests outside the homes of public

office holders, tougher sentences for offences involving electoral intimidation, and removing the requirement for candidates acting as their own election agents to publish their home address. When passed, these new laws will ensure greater privacy and safety for those working in, or choosing to stand for, public office.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/new-measures-to-protect-candidates-ahead-of-local-elections>