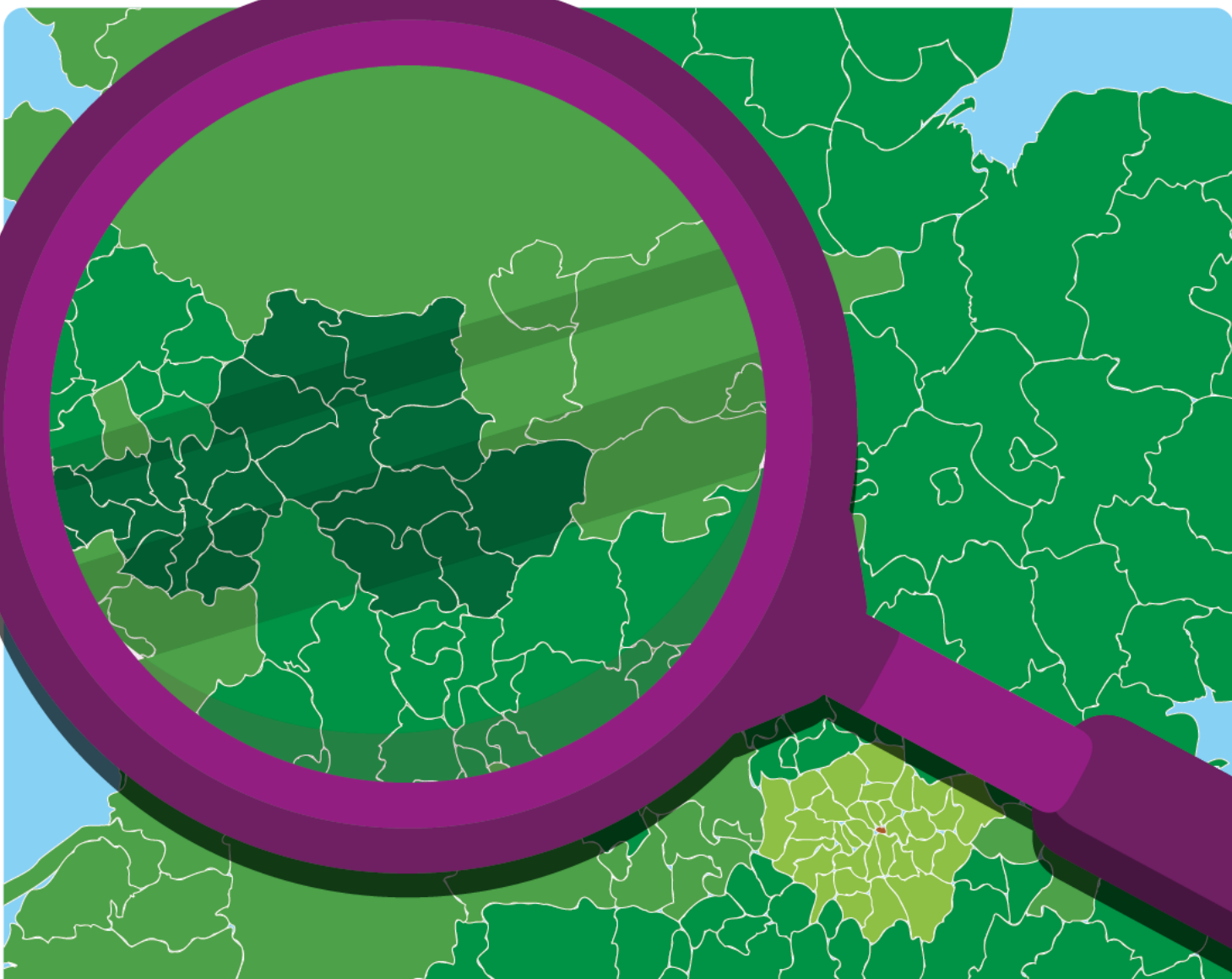


Debate Not Hate

Survey of councillors, August

2024



Research report

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Summary

Background

In August 2024, the Local Government Association (LGA) sent an online survey to all councillors in England and Wales to investigate the extent to which they had experienced abuse or intimidation due to their councillor role. This survey expanded on the 2023 Debate Not Hate survey, which explored how abuse and intimidation of councillors has changed compared to the 2022 Councillors' Census. A total of 1734 councillors responded to the 2024 survey – a response rate of 10 per cent – which was higher than the 5 per cent response rate in 2023. The responding councillors represented a wide cross-section of political affiliations and levels of experience.

Key findings

- **73 per cent** of respondents reported experiencing abuse or intimidation in the past 12 months. This was lower than the 2023 survey but remains in line with the 2022 Councillors' Census.
- **49 per cent** of respondents reported that abuse and intimidation had increased in the past 12 months.
- **57 per cent** of respondents reported that their authority's arrangements for protecting councillors were very or fairly effective.
- **23 per cent** of respondents had reported an incident of abuse or intimidation to the police.
- **22 per cent** of respondents had experienced a threat of violence due to their role, whilst **10 per cent** had experienced a threat of damage to their property, and **5 per cent** had experienced actual damage to property.
- **19 per cent** of respondents had experienced abuse or intimidation relating to a protected characteristic. Sex was the most commonly cited characteristic for which respondents had suffered abuse or intimidation.

Introduction

The Local Government Association launched its “Debate Not Hate” campaign in 2022 following rising concerns about abuse and intimidation in public life, including findings in the 2022 Councillors’ Census that seven in 10 councillors reported having experienced abuse or intimidation. The campaign aims to raise awareness of the damaging impact of intimidation on local democracy and lobby for changes to relevant legislation and improved protections for councillors.

The following survey was the second iteration of the Debate Not Hate survey – the first having taken place in June 2023 – and aimed to understand the extent to which abuse and intimidation has changed since both the 2022 Councillors’ Census and since last year’s iteration of the survey, as well as the nature of this abuse and intimidation in greater detail.

Methodology

The LGA’s Research and Information Team sent an online survey to all councillors of all political affiliations belonging to principal authorities in England and Wales. One councillor’s office requested a paper copy to be delivered to the councillor’s home address, and this was completed and returned via post. The survey was open for just over three weeks, from 5 August to 27 August 2024.

Of the 16,774 councillors invited to take part in the survey, a total of 1,734 responses were received – a response rate of 10 per cent. This level of response means that these respondents should not necessarily be taken to be widely representative of the views of all councillors. Rather, they are a snapshot of the views of this particular group of respondents.

In addition, the following should be considered when interpreting the findings of this survey:

- Where tables and figures report the base, the description refers to the group of people who were asked the question. Please note that bases can vary throughout the survey.
- Throughout the report, percentages may not appear to add up to exactly 100 per cent due to rounding.
- Throughout the report, the term 'abuse' is used to describe abuse and intimidation.

Debate Not Hate Survey 2024

This section contains analysis of the full results from the survey.

Councillor profiling

Respondents were first asked to indicate the type of council of which they are a member. Respondents were able to select more than one option, as councillors are able to sit on more than one council. Only principle council members were invited to participate, however, respondents could indicate if they also sit on town, parish, or community councils. The full results are shown in Table 1, and demonstrate that the sample represented a broad range of council types, with the percentage of responses per council type broadly in line with the percentage of overall councillors per council type, noting a slight overrepresentation of county councillors.

Table 1: Council type

	Percentage of responses	Percentage of all councillors
District	42%	45%
County	18%	10%
London borough	9%	12%
Metropolitan borough	12%	14%
Unitary	22%	20%
Town council	14%	-
Parish/community council	9%	-
Other	1%	-

Base: all respondents (1734). Please note: respondents were able to select more than one option.

Respondents were then asked to indicate their political affiliation. As Table 2 shows, 39 per cent of respondents were affiliated with the Labour Party, which is broadly in line with the proportion of Labour councillors overall. Twenty-one per cent of respondents were affiliated with the Conservative Party, who comprise 28 per cent of all councillors, whilst 19 per cent of respondents were affiliated with the Liberal Democrats, who comprise 17 per cent of all councillors. Eight per cent of respondents were affiliated with the Green Party, comprising 5 per cent of councillors, whilst 1 per cent were affiliated with Plaid Cymru, in line with the overall proportion of Plaid Cymru councillors. Independent councillors and all other political groups comprise 13 per cent of all councillors, in line with their response rate to the survey. A handful of respondents were affiliated with Reform UK, however these amounted to less than half a per cent.

Table 2: Political affiliation

	Percentage of responses	Percentage of all councillors
Labour	39%	36%
Conservatives	21%	28%
Liberal Democrats	19%	17%
Green Party	8%	5%
Plaid Cymru	1%	1%
Independent and all other groups	13%	13%

Base: all respondents (1734).

Respondents were then asked how long they had been serving as a councillor. The survey was launched three months after a set of local elections (May 2024) and 12 per cent of respondents had been serving for less than a year or were newly elected in May 2024. Around a fifth of respondents had been serving for between one and two years (19 per cent), whilst a further fifth had been serving for between two and

five years (19 per cent). Half of all respondents (50 per cent) had been serving for five years or more. The full results are shown in Table 3.

Table 3: Length of time serving as a councillor

	Per cent
Less than one year / newly elected in May	12%
1 to <2 years	19%
2 to <5 years	19%
5 years or more	50%

Base: all respondents (1734).

Feeling at risk as a councillor

Respondents were asked how often, if at all, they felt personally at risk when fulfilling their role as councillor. This question was asked in the 2022 Councillors' Census, and both iterations of the Debate Not Hate survey. The results for all three years are shown in Table 4.

The table shows that in August 2024, 4 per cent of respondents reported feeling frequently personally at risk when fulfilling their role as councillor, representing a decrease of four percentage points compared to June 2023 but remaining in line with the 2022 Census. A quarter of respondents (27 per cent) reported feeling occasionally personally at risk in August 2024, compared to a third of respondents (33 per cent) in June 2023, and 24 per cent of respondents in 2022. A similar proportion of respondents reported feeling rarely at risk personally in August 2024 (43 per cent) as in June 2023 (41 per cent) and in 2022 (45 per cent). The proportion of respondents who reported that they never felt at risk increased from 18 per cent in June 2023 to 26 per cent in August 2024, but remains in line with the 2022 Census (27 per cent).

Table 4: How often, if at all, do you feel personally at risk when fulfilling your role as a councillor?

	2022 Councillors' Census	2023 survey	2024 survey
Some level of risk	73%	82%	74%
Frequently	4%	8%	4%
Occasionally	24%	33%	27%
Rarely	45%	41%	43%
Never	27%	18%	26%

Base: all respondents: 2022 (5055), 2023 (814), 2024 (1734).

Table 5 illustrates the impact of length of service on the level of personal risk felt by respondents. The results show that respondents who had been serving for five or more years were more likely to feel some level of personal risk, with more than three quarters (76 per cent) reporting that they feel personally at risk frequently, occasionally, or rarely when fulfilling their role as councillor, compared to two thirds (67 per cent) of respondents who had been serving for less than a year. The results suggest a correlation between length of service and likelihood to feel personally at risk, as the longer a respondent had been serving as a councillor, the more likely they are to feel some level of personal risk. The full breakdown by length of service is shown in Table 5.

Table 5: How often, if at all, do you feel personally at risk when fulfilling your role as a councillor? (2024 survey)

	Less than 1 year	Between 1 and 2 years	Between 2 and 5 years	5 or more years
Some level of risk	67%	70%	75%	76%
Frequently	4%	3%	5%	4%
Occasionally	20%	23%	28%	29%
Rarely	43%	44%	43%	43%
Never	33%	30%	25%	24%

Base: all respondents: less than 1 year (203), between 1 and 2 years (325), between 2 and 5 years (333), more than 5 years (873).

Support from the local authority

Respondents were then asked how effective or not they thought their authority’s arrangements were for protecting them whilst they fulfil their role as councillor. This question was also across all three surveys, and the results are shown in Table 6.

The table shows that compared to the 2023 survey, there has been an increase of 13 percentage points in the proportion of respondents reporting that their authority’s protection arrangements were very or fairly effective. In August 2024, 57 per cent of respondents reported that their authority’s protection arrangements were very or fairly effective, compared to 44 per cent in June 2023. There was also a decrease in the proportion of respondents reporting that the arrangements were not very or not at all effective; 17 per cent of respondents reported that the arrangements were not very effective in August 2024 compared to 25 per cent in June 2023, whilst the proportion reporting that their authority’s arrangements were not at all effective decreased from 15 per cent in June 2023 to 8 per cent in August 2024. Table 6 also compares these results with the Census, however the Census did not include a

“don’t know” option for this question, meaning that the results cannot be directly compared.

Table 6: How effective or not do you think are your authority’s arrangements for protecting you personally as you fulfil your role as a councillor?

	2022 Councillors’ Census	2023 survey	2024 survey
Very or fairly effective	64%	44%	57%
Very effective	15%	9%	14%
Fairly effective	49%	34%	43%
Not very effective	25%	25%	17%
Not at all effective	12%	15%	8%
Don’t know	-	17%	18%

Base: all respondents serving for at least a year: 2022 (5055), 2023 (654), 2024 (1531).

Table 7 illustrates the impact of length of service on respondents’ perception of their authority’s protection arrangements. The table shows that respondents who had been serving for five or more years were more likely to report that their authority’s arrangements for protection were very or fairly effective, compared to those who had been serving for less than five years. The shorter the length of service, the more likely the respondent was to be unsure how effective the arrangements were, with over a quarter (26 per cent) of respondents who had served for between one and two years unsure, compared to 14 per cent of those serving for five or more years. The full results for this breakdown are shown in Table 7.

Table 7: How effective or not do you think are your authority’s arrangements for protecting you personally as you fulfil your role as a councillor? (2024 survey)

	Between 1 and 2 years	Between 2 and 5 years	5 or more years
Very or fairly effective	53%	53%	60%
Very effective	13%	13%	15%
Fairly effective	39%	41%	45%
Not very effective	16%	19%	17%
Not at all effective	6%	7%	9%
Don't know	26%	20%	14%

Base: all respondents serving for at least a year: between 1 and 2 years (325), between 2 and 5 years (333), more than 5 years (873).

Abuse and intimidation during campaign periods

Respondents were asked how often, if at all, they experienced abuse or intimidation during this year’s election campaign periods. This related to experiences as both a candidate and as a campaigner, and across both the local elections in May and the general election in July.

The results show that of those respondents who participated in elections this year, almost three quarters (73 per cent) experienced some level of abuse or intimidation during the campaign period. This included 8 per cent who experienced abuse or intimidation frequently, 30 per cent who experienced abuse or intimidation occasionally, and 35 per cent who experienced it rarely. Twenty-seven per cent of respondents did not experience any abuse or intimidation during the campaign periods. The full results for this question are shown in Table 8.

Table 8: How often, if at all, did you experience abuse or intimidation during this year's local and/or general election campaign period?

	Per cent
Some level of abuse or intimidation (frequently, occasionally, or rarely)	73%
Frequently	8%
Occasionally	30%
Rarely	35%
Never	27%

Base: all respondents who took part in elections this year (1596).

This figure is broadly in line with last year, as 75 per cent of those who took part in elections in 2023 reported experiencing some level of abuse or intimidation during the campaign period. These figures have not however been directly compared, due to the fact that 2024 included both local elections and a general election, whereas 2023 only included local elections.

Abuse and intimidation over the last 12 months

Respondents who had served as a councillor for at least a year were then asked how often, if at all, they had experienced abuse or intimidation in their role as a councillor over the last 12 months prior to completing the survey. Similar to during the campaign periods, almost three quarters of respondents (73 per cent) reported that they had experienced some level of abuse or intimidation during the last 12 months, including 9 per cent who reported experiencing it frequently, 31 per cent who reported experiencing it occasionally, and 33 per cent who reported experiencing it rarely. This was in line with the 2022 Census, with 73 per cent reporting experiencing abuse either frequently, occasionally, or rarely, but lower than June 2023, with 81 per cent reporting experiencing some level of abuse or

intimidation over the 12 months prior to completing the survey. Just over a quarter of respondent councillors (27 per cent) had never experienced abuse or intimidation over the last 12 months, representing an eight percentage point increase from June 2023, but remaining in line with the 2022 Census. The full results for this question are shown in Table 9.

Table 9: Over the last 12 months, how often, if at all, have you experienced abuse or intimidation in your role as a councillor?

	2022 Councillors' Census	2023 survey	2024 survey
Some level of abuse or intimidation	73%	81%	73%
Frequently	10%	20%	9%
Occasionally	29%	34%	31%
Rarely	33%	27%	33%
Never	27%	19%	27%

Base: all respondents – 2022 (5055); all respondents serving for at least a year – 2023 (655), 2024 (1531).

Respondents who reported that they had experienced some level of abuse or intimidation in their capacity as councillor over the last 12 months were then asked how the volume of abuse or intimidation had changed over the past 12 months. The full results for this question are shown in Table 10 and Figure 1.

The table shows that almost half of respondents (49 per cent) who had experienced some level of abuse or intimidation over the past year reported that the abuse had increased in the past 12 months, including 14 per cent who reported that it had sharply increased. Forty-two per cent of respondents reported that the level of abuse had stayed about the same over the past 12 months, whilst 4 per cent reported that it

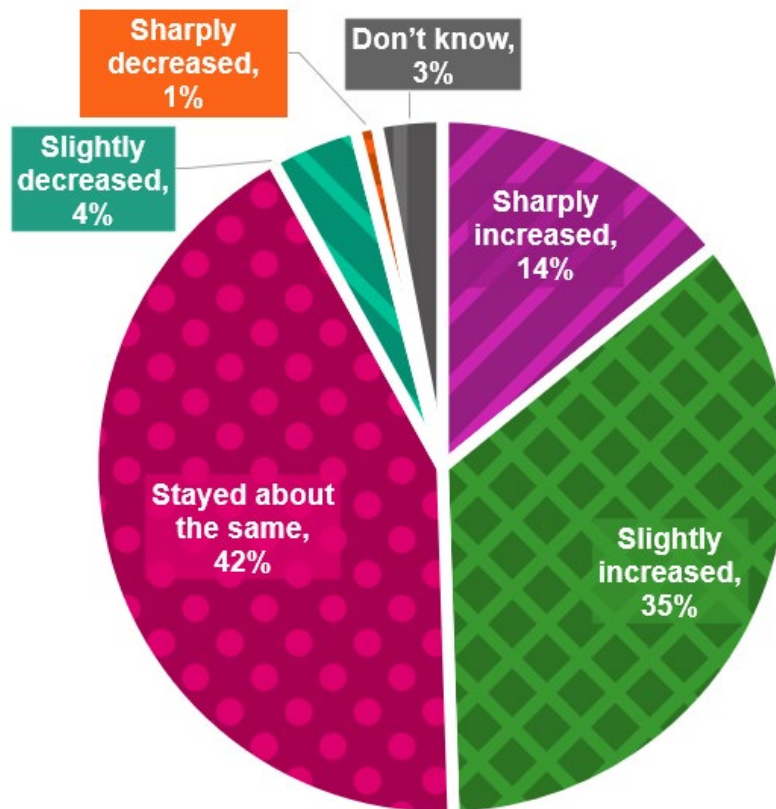
had slightly decreased, and 1 per cent reported that it had sharply decreased. Three per cent of respondents were unsure how the level of abuse had changed over the past year.

Table 10: And thinking about the last 12 months, how has the volume of abuse and intimidation you have received in your role as a councillor changed?

	Per cent
It has sharply or slightly increased	49%
It has sharply increased	14%
It has slightly increased	35%
It has stayed about the same	42%
It has slightly decreased	4%
It has sharply decreased	1%
Don't know	3%

Base: all respondents serving for at least a year who had experienced some level of abuse over the past 12 months (1116).

Figure 1: How abuse and intimidation has changed over the last 12 months



Base: all respondents serving for at least a year who had experienced some level of abuse over the past 12 months (1116).

Respondents had the opportunity to provide further detail on how the volume of abuse or intimidation had changed in the last 12 months. A total of 852 respondents provided comments, which were grouped into common themes. The following themes emerged most frequently from respondents' comments, organised in descending order from the most common theme downwards:

- **Social media and online abuse.** Over a quarter of all comments mentioned social media, making it the most frequently mentioned factor in levels of abuse. Respondents explained that councillors are easily accessible by social media and that the anonymity of social media platforms

enables users to abuse councillors or spread disinformation without consequences. Some respondents reported that they had come off or reduced their use of social media and this had naturally led to a decrease of abuse online.

- **Political affiliation.** Political affiliation was cited as a significant driver of abuse, with many respondents citing that political opponents have become less tolerant of each other, and it has become more acceptable to abuse councillors simply for their political affiliation. Respondents noted that this type of abuse was received from both members of the public and from opposition councillors. Many respondents reported that election periods in particular are a time of heightened abuse, due to in-person and online campaigning activity which can increase the visibility and profile of political figures. A few respondents noted that the change in government of July 2024 contributed to the level of abuse faced due simply to political affiliation
- **Persistent perpetrators.** Many respondents cited that the abuse they received was led by one individual, or a handful of individuals, who had taken a personal dislike to the councillor. This led to sharply increasing or decreasing levels of abuse depending on the efforts of these individuals. In some cases, respondents said individuals were easier to deal with, while others said these individuals were persistent and they simply had to avoid contact with them.
- **International conflicts.** The conflict in Israel and Gaza was cited as a catalyst for abuse against councillors. For some, this was due to their party's stance on the conflict, whilst a few respondents cited public investment in arms as a source of abuse, and others cited related protests. Furthermore, some Jewish councillors reported an increase in antisemitic abuse linked to the conflict.
- **Councillors as public representatives.** Respondents reported a rise in abuse from residents linked to council performance and decisions. Some respondents highlighted that dissatisfaction with public services in the

context of the cost-of-living pressures and budget cuts led to abuse of individual councillors and that a lack of public understanding resulted in councils being unfairly blamed for central government's decisions. On the other hand, some respondents noted that abuse was often linked to specific council decisions which residents or political opponents disagreed with. Planning decisions were the most commonly cited example, but controversial Low Traffic Neighbourhoods (LTNs), parking policies, and decisions to house asylum seekers in the area were also mentioned.

- **Holding particular positions within the council.** Some respondents reported that abuse was exacerbated by holding a particular position within the council as they could become the face of the council's decisions, irrespective of their involvement. The planning committee was most frequently mentioned as a driver for abuse, for example, a planning committee member highlighted "clichéd remarks about brown envelopes and corruption". However other risky positions included licensing, scrutiny, or pension fund committees, as well as being leader or mayor of the council. Similarly, a few respondents noted that abuse decreased once they stepped down from this particular role.
- **Rise of extremism and increased polarisation.** Some respondents reported that a rise in extremist views and political polarisation had fuelled an increase in abuse. The topic of immigration and asylum seekers was most commonly cited as a driver of extremist views and irreconcilable polarisation, with some respondents noting the impact of the far-right riots which took place across the UK in August, whilst this survey was active.
- **General increased negative perception of politicians.** Some respondents noted that they have felt an increased general sense of hostility towards all political figures as a homogenised group. Some noted that this is reinforced by the mainstream media and the poor behaviour of national politicians linked to scandals, such as Party-Gate. Others reported receiving accusations of bribery and corruption. As one respondent noted, "people are

much more confident to make “you’re all the same” accusations and lump local government as the same as national”.

Involvement of the police

Respondents were asked if they had ever reported to the police an incident of abuse experienced in their capacity as councillor. Around one quarter of respondents (23 per cent) answered that they had reported an incident to the police, whilst around three quarters (76 per cent) had not. Two per cent of respondents did not wish to disclose whether or not they had reported an incident to the police. The full results for this question are shown in Table 11.

Table 11: Have you ever reported to the police an incident of abuse or intimidation you have experienced in your role as councillor?

	Per cent
Yes	23%
No	76%
Do not wish to say	2%

Base: all respondents (1724).

Experiences of damage and violence

Respondents were asked whether they themselves, or someone closely connected with them, had been the victim of a range of violent activities due to their role as councillor. The full results for this question can be seen in Table 12.

Of all respondents who answered this question, 10 per cent reported experiencing a threat of damage to their own property, whilst 5 per cent reported being a victim of actual damage to their own property. Five per cent of respondent councillors reported that someone closely connected to them had experienced a threat of

damage to their property, whilst 3 per cent of respondents reported that someone close to them suffered actual damage to their property, due to the respondent's role as councillor.

More than one in five (21 per cent) reported experiencing a threat of violence against themselves due to their role as councillor, whilst 3 per cent had been a victim of actual violence due to their role. Eight per cent reported experiencing a threat of violence against someone closely connected to them, whilst 1 per cent reported that someone close to them had been a victim of violence due to the respondent's role as councillor. Five per cent of respondent councillors had been a victim of a death threat, whilst 2 per cent of respondent councillors had had someone close to them receive a death threat due to the respondent's role as councillor.

Respondents had the opportunity to report other experiences not listed; 10 per cent of respondents reported another experience against themselves, and 3 per cent reported another experience against someone close to them. The following themes emerged most frequently from respondents' comments, organised in descending order from the most common theme downwards:

- Verbal abuse
- Online abuse
- Slander or libel against the councillor, including claimed slanderous accusations against the councillor to the police
- Abuse relating to protected characteristics, including racism
- Attempts to damage the councillor's reputation, through public impersonation or doxing (the publication of private information)
- Abusive emails
- Sexual harassment
- Abusive phone calls
- Stalking, or visits to home address

- Abusive letters or unpleasant items posted through the door
- Emotional abuse or social ostracisation
- Deliberate attack by an animal.

Table 12: Due to your role as councillor, have you or a person closely connected with you ever experienced any of the following?

	Against you	Against someone connected to you
Threat of damage to property	10%	5%
Actual damage to property	5%	3%
Threat of violence	22%	8%
Actual violence	3%	1%
Threat of death	5%	2%
Other, please write in	10%	3%

Base: all respondents (1617).

Protected characteristics

Protected characteristics are a list of characteristics for which it is against the law to discriminate against someone under the Equality Act 2010. Respondents were asked whether or not they had experienced abuse or intimidation relating to any protected characteristics in their role as a councillor. This also covered abuse relating to the perception that a protected characteristic applies to the respondent, regardless of whether or not it does. The full results are shown in Table 13.

The table shows that around one fifth of respondent councillors (19 per cent) had experienced abuse or intimidation relating to a protected characteristic, whilst three quarters (75 per cent) had not. Five per cent were unsure whether or not they had

experienced abuse or intimidation relating to a protected characteristic, whilst 1 per cent did not wish to disclose whether or not they had.

Table 13: In your role as councillor, have you ever received abuse or intimidation relating to any protected characteristics?

	Per cent
Yes	19%
No	75%
Don't know	5%
Do not wish to say	1%

Base: all respondents (1734).

Respondents who reported that they had experienced an incident relating to a protected characteristic had the opportunity to specify the characteristic(s). The full results from this question are shown in Table 14 and Figure 2.

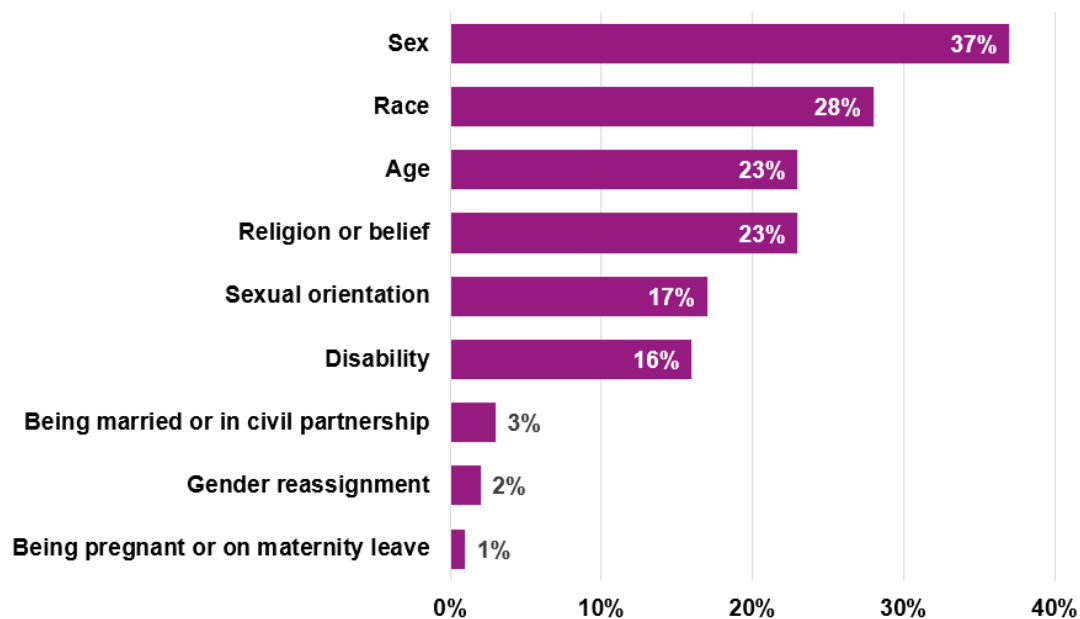
Sex was the most commonly cited protected characteristic for which respondents experienced abuse, with more than a third (37 per cent) reporting abuse related to this characteristic. This was followed by race, reported by 28 per cent of respondents who had experienced abuse relating to a protected characteristic. Twenty-three per cent reported receiving age-related abuse, and a further 23 per cent reported receiving abuse relating to their religion or belief. Seventeen per cent reported receiving abuse relating to their sexual orientation, whilst a similar proportion (16 per cent) reported receiving abuse relating to disability. Three per cent reported an experience relating to their status as married or in a civil partnership, whilst 2 per cent reported an abusive experience relating to gender reassignment, and 1 per cent reported an experience relating to being pregnant or on maternity leave. Two per cent of respondents did not wish to specify the characteristic.

Table 14: Which protected characteristic(s) was it related to?

	Per cent
Sex	37%
Race including colour, nationality, ethnic or national origin	28%
Age	23%
Religion or belief	23%
Sexual orientation	17%
Disability	16%
Being married or in a civil partnership	3%
Gender reassignment	2%
Being pregnant or on maternity leave	1%
Do not wish to say	2%

Base: all respondents who had experienced abuse or intimidation relating to a protected characteristic and answered the question (334). Please note: respondents were able to select more than one option.

Figure 2: Which protected characteristic(s) was it related to?



Base: all respondents who had experienced abuse or intimidation relating to a protected characteristic and answered the question (334).

Respondents then had the opportunity to provide any further detail on the abuse they experienced if they wished. A total of 170 respondents provided comments, which were grouped into common themes. The following themes emerged most frequently from respondents' comments, organised in descending order from the most common theme downwards:

- **Misogyny.** Around a third of comments elaborated on the issue of sex-based abuse, specifying that this was rooted in misogyny. Female councillors reported being undermined and belittled, shouted at and spoken over, criticised for their appearance, as well as experiencing sexualisation of their bodies, suffering name calling using female-specific insults, and physical intimidation from larger men. Female councillors also reported suffering unsolicited sexual advances, or the threat of sexual violence.

- **Racism and xenophobia.** Respondents emphasised that racism and xenophobia are still rife in politics, describing first-hand experiences of racist abuse they have received. One respondent also noted that they had suffered racism directed towards their spouse.
- **Age.** Abuse on the basis of age spanned both ends of the spectrum, with younger respondents reporting suffering abuse suggesting they were too inexperienced because of their age, whilst older respondents reported being called too old and out-of-touch to fulfil the role.
- **Intersectionality of protected characteristics.** Many comments emphasised the intersectionality of the protected characteristics, and how abuse often intensified for those councillors who identified with more than one characteristic.
- **Spreading untrue information.** Some respondents reported that lies or false accusations in relation to protected characteristics had been used as an abuse or intimidation tactic. This was largely in relation to sexual orientation, leaving the respondent vulnerable to homophobic abuse.
- **Social media.** Some respondents commented that activity that might constitute hate crime or illegal discrimination in other environments had apparently no consequences when perpetrated online.
- **Allegations of positive discrimination.** Some respondents reported that allegations of positive discrimination related to race, gender or disability have been used to belittle them and suggest that their success was not due to their own merit.
- **Bullying.** Some councillors reported that abuse based on protected characteristics often came from other councillors and formed part of a toxic bullying culture within the council.

Contact at home

Respondents were asked if, due to their role as councillors, a member of the public had attended or threatened to attend their home in an intimidatory or inappropriate way. Twenty-two per cent of respondents reported that they had experienced intimidatory or inappropriate contact at their home by a member of the public; 9 per cent had experienced a threat, whilst 10 per cent had experienced an actual visit, and 6 per cent reported another form of intimidatory or inappropriate contact at home. Seventy-eight per cent of respondents had not had such an experience. One per cent were unsure whether or not they had experienced a threat of, or actual, visit at home. The full results for this question are shown in Table 15.

Table 15: In your role as councillor, have you ever had a member of the public attend, or threaten to attend, your home in a way that you considered intimidatory or inappropriate?

	Per cent
Yes – threat or actual contact at home	22%
Yes – threatened to attend my home	9%
Yes – attended my home	10%
Yes – other form of contact at home	6%
No	78%
Don't know	1%

Base: all respondents (1734). Please note: respondents were able to select more than one option.

Respondents who had experienced either a threat of or actual intimidatory or inappropriate contact at home by a member of the public were then asked to indicate who this contact was from. The full results for this question can be seen in Table 16.

Seventy per cent of respondents who had been contacted, or threatened to be contacted, at home in an intimidatory or inappropriate way reported that this had been from one person acting alone. Thirteen per cent reported that they had experienced this from more than one person, each acting alone, whilst 19 per cent reported that they had experienced this from a group of people acting together. Three per cent were unsure who the contact, or threat of contact, was from, whilst 6 per cent of respondents indicated another form of grouping.

These respondents had the opportunity to provide further detail, and the majority indicated that this was either not direct contact at home (i.e., by social media, telephone, or letter), or that they were unsure who had contacted them at home. Two respondents indicated that the contact had been from fellow councillors, whilst one indicated it had been from a candidate's relative. Two reported contact at home from public authorities (the police and social services), reportedly in response to a malicious claim against the councillor.

Table 16: And was this intimidatory or inappropriate contact at home from...

	Per cent
One person acting alone	70%
More than one person, each acting alone	13%
A group of people, acting together	19%
Other, please specify	6%
Don't know	3%

Base: all respondents who had had a member of the public contact them at home in some way (374). Please note: respondents were able to select more than one option.

Home address in public domain

Respondents were asked whether or not they had requested their home address be withheld from the public register of members' interests. More than half of all respondents (55 per cent) had not requested that their home address be withheld, whilst 43 per cent had requested this. Two per cent were unsure whether or not they had, whilst 1 per cent did not wish to disclose whether or not they had. The full results for this question are shown in Table 17.

Table 17: In your role as councillor, have you ever requested that your home address be withheld from the public register of interests?

	Per cent
Yes	43%
No	55%
Don't know	2%
Prefer not to say	1%

Base: all respondents (1734).

Respondents who had not requested the withholding of their home address were asked whether or not they were aware that their address could be withheld. The majority (85 per cent) reported that they were aware that their address could be withheld, whilst 15 per cent reported that they were unaware of this. The full results for this question are shown in Table 18.

Table 18: Were you aware that your home address could be withheld from the public register of interests?

	Per cent
Yes	85%
No	15%

Base: all respondents who had not yet requested the withholding of their home address, or were unsure/chose not to say (990).

Respondents who had requested the withholding of their home address were asked whether or not their request was successful. The majority (84 per cent) reported that their home address had been removed, whilst 6 per cent reported that their home address had not been removed. Ten per cent were unsure whether or not their address had been removed. The results for this question are shown in Table 19.

Table 19: And was your home address removed from the public register of interests?

	Per cent
Yes	84%
No	6%
Don't know	10%

Base: all respondents who had requested the withholding of their home address (741).

Respondents who reported that their request had not been successful had the opportunity to detail why their address had not been removed. A total of 44 respondents provided comments, and reasons included:

- Request not deemed necessary due to insufficient perceived threat

- Not the council’s policy to remove home addresses
- Error on behalf of the council (requested removal but not actioned, removed and then re-added at a later date)
- No reason given
- Pending removal.

Home modifications

Respondents were asked whether or not they had made modifications to their home since having been elected due to concerns about their safety as a councillor. One fifth of respondents (20 per cent) reported that they had made modifications to their home since becoming a councillor due to safety concerns, and a further 11 per cent of respondents felt they needed modifications despite having not made them. Two thirds of respondents (66 per cent) had not made modifications and felt they did not need them, whilst 3 per cent of respondents chose not to report whether or not they had made modifications. The full results for this question are shown in Table 20.

Table 20: Have you made modifications to your home security since becoming a councillor due to concerns you have about your security as an elected member?

	Per cent
Yes	20%
No – but I feel I need them	11%
No – but I do not feel I need them	66%
Prefer not to say	3%

Base: all respondents (1734).

Those who had not made modifications but felt that they needed to were then asked why they had not yet made them. More than half (53 per cent) reported that were

unsure what modifications they should get, whilst 38 per cent reported they could not afford them. Twenty-four per cent of respondents specified another reason for not yet making modifications, including:

- Not having the time to make modifications
- Being in the process of making modifications
- Not wanting, or family members not wanting, to live under surveillance or with security modifications
- Already had security measures in place prior to becoming a councillor
- Living in rental accommodation and not having the landlord's permission
- Layout or access routes to property meaning it is very difficult to implement effective security measures (e.g. drive exposed on all sides)
- Concerns about data security of CCTV software or camera doorbells
- Not believing that security measures would act as a deterrent
- Emphasis on the cost, feeling that this should be covered by council expenses.

One respondent reported that they would implement security measures if they were successful in being appointed to a more high-profile position within the council. The full results for this question can be seen in Table 21.

Table 21: Why have you not made modifications to your home security despite feeling you need to?

	Per cent
I am not sure what I should get	53%
I cannot afford them	38%
Other, please specify	24%

Base: all respondents who had not made modifications but feel they need them (183). Please note: respondents were able to select more than one option.

Respondents who had made modifications were asked about the modifications that they had made. Of those who had made security modifications, the most common was installing CCTV or other cameras, indicated by 59 per cent of respondents, followed by a camera doorbell, indicated by 49 per cent of respondents, and security lights, indicated by 47 per cent of respondents. Twenty-one per cent had installed new locks, whilst 14 per cent had installed an external post box, and a further 14 per cent had flagged their home address for police response. Nine per cent had installed a panic button or panic alarm. Three per cent of respondents chose not to indicate which modifications they had made, whilst twelve per cent of respondents indicated another modification not on this list. Other modifications specified included:

- Reinforcing external security, including higher fences or electric gates
- Installing a house alarm
- Installing better locks or locking doors when inside
- Getting a dog
- Dummy CCTV
- Having lighting on a timer setting, to appear at home when out
- Protective window covering.

The full results for this question are shown in Table 22.

Table 22: What modifications have you made?

	Per cent
CCTV or other cameras	59%
Camera doorbell	49%
Security lights	47%
New locks	21%
Installed an external post box	14%
Home address flagged for police response	14%
Panic button/alarm	9%
Other, please specify	12%
Prefer not to say	3%

Base: all respondents who had made modifications (350). Please note: respondents were able to select more than one response.

Awareness of the Debate Not Hate campaign

Respondents were asked whether or not they were aware of the LGA's Debate Not Hate campaign, or its slogan, prior to completing the survey. Half of all respondents (50 per cent) reported that they were aware of the campaign, whilst a similar but slightly smaller proportion (48 per cent) reported that they were not aware. Two per cent of respondents were unsure whether or not they had heard of the campaign or its slogan. The results for this question are shown in Table 23.

Table 23: Before this survey, had you heard of the Debate Not Hate campaign, or its slogan, “the right engagement matters”?

	Per cent
Yes	50%
No	48%
Don't know	2%

Base: all respondents (1734).

Further comments

Respondents were asked to provide any comments about the safety of councillors, or civility in public life more generally. A total of 840 respondents provided comments, which were grouped into common themes. The following themes emerged most frequently from respondents' comments, organised in descending order from the most common theme downwards:

- Social media and online abuse.** Social media and the prevalence of online abuse were dominant themes in comments across the 2023 and 2024 surveys, with respondents emphasising that anonymity online makes it difficult for abusers to face consequences. Furthermore, social media is seen to facilitate proliferations of mis- and disinformation, which can exacerbate abuse. Some respondents noted that they no longer use social media due to the abuse faced or moderate their use to avoid engaging in conflict. As one respondent commented, “I think more needs to be done [...] with sanctions being brought against platforms who refuse to take action against threats and disinformation”.
- Personal and democratic impact of abuse.** Many respondents gave accounts of abuse that they personally, a fellow councillor, or someone close to them had suffered due to their role as councillor. Some

respondents reported that they regret standing for office or are considering standing down due to these experiences, highlighting the impact of abuse on victims, and the barrier to being a councillor that abuse can create.

- **Need for better support for councillors.** In light of the abuse faced, many comments expressed the need for better support for councillors from both the police and the council. This was also a frequently mentioned theme in last year's iteration of the survey. Respondents recalled anecdotes in which their reports of abuse or intimidation were not taken seriously by either the police or the council, even in cases where apparent criminal behaviour had taken place. As one respondent warned, "this is an important issue which councils should take seriously otherwise we risk limiting the people who are prepared to stand for election".
- **Comparison to protection measures for MPs.** Some respondents highlighted that councillors are not offered the same level of personal protection as MPs and called for equal access for councillors. Examples of protection measures included personal panic alarms and home security reinforcements reportedly provided to MPs at public expense, whereas councillors would have to fund this themselves.
- **Effective personal safety training needed.** Some councillors expressed that there is a need for an effective program of personal safety training for councillors. Suggestions for topics included personal safety when holding surgeries, when travelling to and from engagements, and when visiting residents in the community. Safety measures suggested by respondents included holding surgeries with other councillors to avoid being alone at public engagements, setting up a separate business email address and phone number, and exercising caution when promoting their public engagements if their home address is in the public domain. A few respondents reported that they had received effective training from their council and praised the impact of this in helping them manage and limit abuse.

- **Abuse relating to protected characteristics.** Some respondents noted that abuse is often targeted towards councillors due to their protected characteristics. This also emerged in the comments of last year's survey, revealing that this remains an issue. Female councillors reported feeling unsafe when carrying out their role due to sex-based abuse, and some respondents noted that having more than one protected characteristic can compound the level of abuse received. A few male councillors reported that although they had no personal experience of abuse, they had witnessed their female colleagues suffer this, emphasising its prevalence. As one female councillor noted, "I feel that if I had been a man, I would not have faced the same level of abuse".
- **Impact of specific events.** Some respondents flagged that abuse they received was sometimes linked to certain national or international events. The most frequent example cited was the war in Israel and Gaza, with respondents receiving abuse due to their party's, or their own, stance on the conflict. Other examples included the UK riots of summer 2024 (coinciding with the fieldwork of this survey), the Grenfell Tower tragedy, Brexit, and the COVID pandemic.
- **Insufficient public understanding of local government.** Some respondents expressed that there is a lack of understanding of local government and the role of the councillor. Respondents explained that this can fuel abuse as some residents overestimate the power councillors hold and confuse the responsibilities of local and central government, leading to councillors being blamed for national decisions over which they have no influence. Some respondents also reported that residents overestimate the remuneration councillors receive, believing that it is a full-time job. One councillor commented that "there seems to be an ignorance and indifference to how councils and government/parliament work – something I feel could be addressed in schools".

- **Negative perception of politicians.** In addition to the lack of understanding of the role of councillor, some comments described that there is a general sense of negativity and distrust towards politicians at a local and national level, which can generate abuse. This also emerged in comments last year, however a few respondents reported that the atmosphere feels increasingly hostile. As one councillor reported, “there is so much anger towards elected members” who are seen as an “elitist group who are completely out of touch for ordinary people and make decisions that benefit themselves”.
- **Abuse received from other councillors.** Many comments flagged the abuse and intimidation that happens between councillors themselves, which was another recurrent theme from last year. Respondents explained that this largely occurs between opposing political parties and can be face to face during council meetings or on social media. Some respondents also noted that abuse and intimidation can be a tactic used during elections to impact a candidate’s chances of gaining office, whilst other respondents complained that abuse and intimidation between councillors is not taken seriously by the council. One councillor emphasised that “the relationship between different parties is much more heated than public to politicians. More work is needed to make debates less personal”.
- **Need for healthy debate in public life.** Some respondents commented that debate is an important part of public life, and that a certain level of disagreement and argument should be expected when taking on the role of councillor. Such comments emphasised that public access to councillors is important, and protection measures should not come at the expense of legitimate challenge and debate. As one councillor reported, “I think that debates are good for democracy and accountability, however personal abuse is unacceptable”.

Annex A: Questionnaire

Thank you for taking the time to complete this survey.

All responses will be treated confidentially. Information will be aggregated, and no individual or authority will be identified in any publications without your consent. Identifiable information may be used internally within the LGA but will only be held and processed in accordance with our privacy statement. We are undertaking this survey to aid the legitimate interests of the LGA in supporting and representing authorities.

You are in control of any personal data that you have provided to us in your response. You can contact us at all times to have your information changed or deleted.

1. Please amend the details we have on record if necessary. If you are a member of more than one council, please only complete this survey once.

- Name
- Authority
- Email address

2. Please indicate the type of council(s) of which you are a member. Select all that apply

- District council
- County council
- Unitary council
- London borough

- Metropolitan borough
- Town council
- Parish/community council
- Other, please specify

3. What is your political affiliation as a councillor?

- Conservatives
- Green Party
- Independent (including Residents' Association)
- Labour
- Liberal Democrats
- Plaid Cymru
- Reform UK
- Other (please specify)

4. How long have you been serving as a councillor?

- Less than one year / newly elected in May
- 1 to <2 years
- 2 to <5 years
- 5 years or more

5. How often, if at all, do you feel at risk personally when fulfilling your role as a councillor?

- Frequently
- Occasionally
- Rarely
- Never

Ask those who have been serving for at least a year:

6. How effective or not do you think are your authority's arrangements for protecting you personally as you fulfil your role as a councillor?

- Very effective
- Fairly effective
- Not very effective
- Not at all effective
- Don't know

The following questions relate to whether you have experienced abuse or intimidation in your role as a councillor and/or as a candidate or campaigner at the most recent local and/or general electoral period.

These terms are defined as follows:

Abuse – words and/or behaviour that constitute abuse or mistreatment can include, but is not limited to, physical abuse, bullying, emotional abuse, unsolicited abusive communication, and harassment. It may be one-off or repeated.

Intimidation – words and/or behaviour intended or likely to block, influence, or deter participation in public debate or causing alarm or distress, which could lead to an individual wanting to withdraw from public life. It may be one-off or repeated behaviour.

7. How often, if at all, did you experience abuse or intimidation during this year's local and/or general election campaign period?

- Frequently
- Occasionally
- Rarely
- Never
- Not applicable – I did not take part in elections this year

Ask those who have been serving for at least a year:

8. Over the last twelve months, how often, if at all, have you experienced abuse or intimidation in your role as a councillor?

- Frequently
- Occasionally
- Rarely
- Never

Show to respondents who answered rarely, frequently or occasionally at Q8:

9. And thinking about the last twelve months, how has the volume of abuse and intimidation you have received in your role as a councillor changed?

- It has sharply increased

- It has slightly increased
- It has stayed about the same
- It has slightly decreased
- It has sharply decreased
- Don't know

10. Please give reasons for your answer.

11. Have you ever reported to the police an incident of abuse or intimidation you have experienced in your role as a councillor?

- Yes
- No
- Do not wish to say

12. Due to your role as a councillor, have you or a person closely connected with you ever experienced any of the following?

For the purposes of this question, a person closely connected with you could be your immediate or extended family, your partner, or a close friend.

- Threat of damage to property
- Actual damage to property
- Threat of violence
- Actual violence

- Threat of death
- Other, please write in
- None of the above

- Against you
- Against a person closely connected with you

Protected characteristics are a list of characteristics, for which it is against the law to discriminate against someone under the Equality Act 2010. The protected characteristics are:

- age
- being married or in a civil partnership
- being pregnant or on maternity leave
- disability
- gender reassignment
- race including colour, nationality, ethnic or national origin
- religion or belief
- sex
- sexual orientation

More information about protected characteristics can be found on the [Gov.UK Discrimination rights webpage](#).

13. In your role as councillor, have you ever received abuse or intimidation relating to any of the protected characteristics above?

This also includes abuse and intimidation relating to the perception that a protected characteristic applies to you, regardless of whether or not it does.

- Yes
- No
- Don't know
- Do not wish to say

Ask those who had received abuse/intimidation relating to a protected characteristic:

14. Which protected characteristic(s) was it related to? Select all that apply.

- age
- being married or in a civil partnership
- being pregnant or on maternity leave
- disability
- gender reassignment
- race including colour, nationality, ethnic or national origin
- religion or belief
- sex
- sexual orientation
- Do not wish to say

15. If you would like to share more details about your experience(s), please use the space below.

16. In your role as councillor, have you ever had a member of the public attend your home or threaten to attend your home in a way that you considered intimidating or inappropriate? Select all that apply.

- Yes – threatened to attend my home
- Yes – attended my home
- Yes – other form of contact at home
- No
- Don't know

Shown to respondents who answer yes (threat / actual / other) at Q16

17. And was this...

- One person acting alone
- More than one person, each acting alone
- A group of people, acting together
- Other, please specify
- Don't know

18. In your role as councillor, have you ever requested that your home address be withheld from the public register of interests?

- Yes
- No
- Don't know
- Prefer not to say

Ask if respondent had not explicitly requested the withholding of their address

19. Were you aware that your home address could be withheld from the public register of interests?

- Yes
- No

20. And was your home address removed from the public register of interests?

- Yes
- No
- Don't know

Ask if home address was not removed:

21. Why was your home address not removed?

22. Have you made modifications to your home security since becoming a councillor due to concerns you have about your security as an elected member?

- Yes
- No – But I feel I need them
- No – I do not feel I need them
- Prefer not to say

Ask respondents who answered No – But I feel I need them:

23. Why have you not made modifications to your home security despite feeling you need to? Select all that apply

- I cannot afford them
- I am not sure what I should get
- Other, detail:

Ask respondents who had made modifications:

24. What modifications have you made? Select all that apply

- Security lights
- Camera doorbell
- CCTV or other cameras
- New locks
- Panic button/alarm
- Installed an external post box
- Home address flagged for police response
- Other, please specify
- Prefer not to say

25. The LGA's Debate Not Hate campaign aims to raise public awareness of the role of councillors and provides support for local politicians facing abuse and intimidation. Before this survey, had you heard of the Debate Not Hate campaign, or its slogan, "the right engagement matters"?

- Yes
- No
- Don't know

26. Please use the space below to tell us anything more you'd like to about the safety of councillors, or civility in public life more generally.

27. Please tick the box below if you would like to be involved in future work related to this area and/or the contents of this survey.

I would like to be involved in further work

Many thanks for taking the time to complete this survey. You are in control of any personal data that you have provided to us in your response. You can contact us at all times to have your information changed or deleted.



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