

The Jo Cox Commission on Civility

Background

Abuse and intimidation of elected political representatives, and violence towards them, in both local and national government, is one of the biggest threats to our democracy in the UK.

In the last seven years, two sitting MPs have been murdered as they meet their constituents. Before that, it had been over 25 years since an MP was killed in the UK. MPs are regularly reporting death threats and threats of serious sexual violence to the police, and most have panic alarms in their offices and homes. In 2021, 70% of Members of the Scottish Parliament reported that they had feared for their safety since being elected, rising to 90% among female MSPs. The problem is not just limited to national politicians. Research conducted by the Local Government Association in 2022 showed that seven out of ten of local councillors had experienced abuse and intimidation in the last year.

This situation is having a detrimental impact on the make-up of our elected leaders. It is forcing those already elected to consider their positions and sometimes stand back from politics, and it is having an impact on the pipeline of future politicians. It has a significant impact on representation, with female politicians and those from minority ethnic backgrounds suffering the most abuse.

“Nobody in any job should have to put up with threats, aggressive emails, being shouted at in the street, sworn at on social media, nor have to install panic alarms at home,” - Heidi Allen MP in a letter to her constituents explaining why she was not seeking re-election, 2019

About the Jo Cox Commission on Civility

The reasons behind this growing problem are complex and implementing solutions will require concerted action across a number of different sectors - including social media firms, political parties, government and police forces.

The Jo Cox Foundation wants anyone, regardless of their background, to feel able to participate in our political discourse and be treated with respect and we're committed to finding and advocating for solutions to the issue of abuse and intimidation.

Recognising that the solutions to this issue come from many different sectors, we are launching the Jo Cox Commission on Civility to find practical ways to address the problem. With Baroness Gabby Bertin and Lord Vernon Coaker acting as co-chairs, the Commission will gather proposed solutions to the issue from experts across numerous sectors.

The Jo Cox Commission on Civility will play a catalytic role in tackling abuse and intimidation in political life in order to:

- Develop a robust and evidenced set of recommendations to tackle the issue;
- Advocate for the adoption of these recommendations;
- Raise awareness of the detrimental impact of abuse and intimidation in political life on individuals, our democracy, and our society;
- Deliver positive and lasting change to our public life.

How will the Commission work?

Launching in February 2023, the Commission will have two main phases:

- **A solutions gathering phase.** Taking place until the summer of 2023, this phase will focus on gathering suggestions for how to address the issue of abuse and intimidation. Using an open call, public sessions, 1-2-1 and group interviews, we will hear from a wide variety of individuals, groups and organisations across a number of sectors about practical ways to address this issue. Once collected, this data will be analysed, and recommendations will be put forward, both grouped according to sector, and divided into immediate, medium and long term solutions.
- **An advocacy phase.** Once the recommendations are published, the advocacy phase will begin and The Jo Cox Foundation and the Commission co-chairs will actively work (with partners) to push for their



adoption. Beginning in late 2023, this phase will continue through 2024.

About The Jo Cox Foundation

Jo Cox was a passionate campaigner, activist and humanitarian; a proud Yorkshire lass and internationalist; and a devoted mum, daughter, sister, wife, friend and MP.

The Jo Cox Foundation makes meaningful change on issues that Jo was passionate about. Like Jo, we believe that a kinder, fairer and more connected world is possible. Underpinning this belief is the understanding that we have more in common than that which divides us. As we work to make change, we follow Jo's example of collaborating with others and bringing people together to achieve more than we can alone.

