

1 Horse Guards Road
London
SW1A 2HQ

Tel: 020 7271 2948

E-mail: public@public-standards.gov.uk

The Rt Hon Theresa May MP
Prime Minister
10 Downing Street
London
SW1A 2AA

Dear 

Committee on
Standards in
Public Life

13 December 2017

Intimidation in Public Life: A Review by the Committee on Standards in Public Life

You asked the Committee in July to undertake a review into the issue of the abuse and intimidation experienced by Parliamentary candidates, including those who stood in the 2017 general election campaign. The Committee agreed and also considered the broader implications for other candidates for public office and public office holders. I now enclose a copy of the Committee on Standards in Public Life's report, *Intimidation in Public Life*, which was published today.

The increasing prevalence of intimidation in our public life, including of Parliamentary candidates at elections, should concern us all. There has been persistent, vile and shocking intimidatory behaviour, and it is clear that much of this is targeted at certain groups. In our report, we present a full body of evidence showing the extent and seriousness of the problem.

We make a number of recommendations to government. We have found that the widespread use of social media has been the most significant factor accelerating and enabling intimidatory behaviour in recent years. Yet, the social media companies have failed to do enough to tackle this behaviour on their platforms. Government should therefore bring forward legislation to shift the balance of liability for illegal content online to the social media companies. This will drive change in the way social media companies operate in combating illegal behaviour online in the UK.

Government should consult on the introduction of a new offence in electoral law of intimidating Parliamentary candidates and party campaigners. This would serve to highlight the seriousness of the issue, result in more appropriate sanctions, and serve as a deterrent to those specifically targeting Parliamentary candidates and their supporters.

We have found that the requirement for candidates standing for election as local councillors to publish their home address on the ballot paper has enabled intimidatory behaviour in some instances. There is an emerging cross party consensus for legislation to remove this requirement, which we recommend the government should bring forward.

We also make recommendations to the social media companies on tackling the issue of intimidation and abuse on their platforms. They should take down reported content as soon as possible, and publish their targets and performance data on their report and takedown processes. These requirements should be written into the code of practice for social media companies (required in Section 103 of the Digital Economy Act 2017). The Department for should also continue to work with international partners to promote international consensus on what constitutes hate crime and intimidation online.

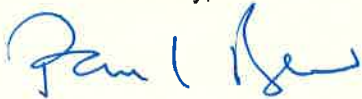
Selflessness | Integrity | Objectivity | Accountability | Openness | Honesty | Leadership

We also make recommendations to political parties, and all those in public life more broadly. Addressing this important issue in our public life will require a committed and concerned approach from a number of individuals and organisations.

We look forward to the government's response to this report, and will be monitoring progress on the implementation of our recommendations.

I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, the Home Secretary, and the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Paul Bew". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Paul" and the last name "Bew" clearly distinguishable.

Lord Bew
Chair