

**1 Horse Guards Road**

**London**

**SW1A 2HQ**

 **Thursday 10 September 2020**

**Tel: 020 7271 2685**

**Email:** **public@public-standards.gov.uk**

**Kirsten Oswald MP**

**SNP Deputy Westminster Leader**

Dear Kirsten Oswald MP,

**Intimidation in Public Life: Statement of Conduct**

I hope you are well.

We write jointly as Chairs of The Jo Cox Foundation and the Committee on Standards in Public Life (CSPL), to update you on our ongoing work on a Statement of Conduct for political parties.

A Statement of Conduct, formally termed Joint Standard, was a key recommendation in CSPL’s [*Intimidation in Public Life Review*](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/666927/6.3637_CO_v6_061217_Web3.1__2_.pdf)(December 2017), whereby ‘*political parties should work together to develop a joint code of conduct on intimidatory behaviour*’.

Our work to date has evolved through close collaboration with your designated party representatives, and draws on the language of existing Westminster party codes. Throughout the drafting process, we have taken on board your concerns and suggested amendments, resulting in the attached draft, which has been stripped back to a higher-level statement based on the Nolan Principles.

We want to emphasise that the proposed Statement of Conduct is not intended to supersede or replace existing individual party codes of conduct or disciplinary procedures and it does not set down new rules. Rather, it aims to complement them by acting as a high-level statement of principle outlining the minimum standards of behaviour that all party members should aspire to.

The Statement sends a powerful and positive message to the electorate. By uniting to support these basic standards of behaviour, we act together to reinforce positive norms, and set an example to wider society, helping to strengthen trust in our democracy and institutions. This is particularly important as political parties begin to prepare for the upcoming local elections in May 2021.

We would like to confirm all party support for the draft Statement by 31 October 2020. The reason for this deadline is twofold - first, CSPL is currently reviewing progress against the recommendations made in the report and will be publishing an update by the end of the year. We also intend to publish the Statement at that point. And second, as noted above, we would like to see the Statement in place in good time for the 2021 local elections, as a statement of intent for the behaviour we would all expect to see.

We hope you are able to agree to support this Statement and look forward to hearing from you. If you would like to discuss any aspect of the draft, please contact Catherine Anderson at catherine@jocoxfoundation.org.

Yours sincerely,



Jacqui Smith

**The Rt Hon. Jacqui Smith, Chair, The Jo Cox Foundation**



Jonathan Evans

**Lord Evans of Weardale KCB DL, Chair, Committee on Standards in Public Life**

# **Statement on conduct of political party members**

1. Representative democracy is a central and valued characteristic of our national life. We believe it is in the interests of us all for Parliament to reflect the diverse population it serves so that decisions that impact the public reflect the realities of life in the UK. In recent years, intimidation[[1]](#footnote-1) experienced by Parliamentary candidates and others in public life has increased and has threatened the diversity, integrity, and vibrancy of our democracy.
2. The statement on conduct of party members (the Statement) sets out the minimum standards of behaviour we expect from our party members at all times.
3. The Seven Principles of Public Life (the Nolan Principles) - selflessness, integrity, objectivity, accountability, openness, honesty and leadership - have long been the basis for ensuring high standards in public life. This is the context for the behaviours set out below.
4. Our party members will aspire to:
	1. take responsibility for setting an appropriate tone for campaigning and communication;
	2. lead by example to encourage and foster constructive democratic debate and tolerance of other points of view; and
	3. promote and defend the dignity of others, including political opponents, treating all people with courtesy and respect.
5. As a minimum, our party members will not engage in intimidation by:
	1. using or threatening violence or other unlawful force;
	2. damaging property or making threats to damage property;
	3. engaging in bullying, harassment or victimisation, or unlawfully discriminating against another person or group;
	4. using abusive or threatening words or behaviour, including the use of hateful or sexualised language or imagery;
	5. making vexatious or malicious allegations of illegal or improper conduct or;
	6. using violent metaphors or allusions to violence.
6. Our party members are expected to challenge unacceptable behaviour wherever it occurs.
7. Behaviour that falls within the unacceptable behaviour listed in the Statement will be dealt with under our party disciplinary processes.
8. In some cases, including but not limited to offences against the person and damage to property, as well as credible threats of violence, the behaviour may be illegal.  We will refer any breach of the Statement which appears to break the criminal law to the police.

**Annex A**

**What is intimidatory behaviour?**

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| The 2017 Report of the Committee on Standards in Public Life, [Intimidation in Public Life](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/intimidation-in-public-life-a-review-by-the-committee-on-standards-in-public-life), interpreted intimidatory behaviour as: *‘words and/or behaviour intended or likely to block or deter participation, which could reasonably lead to an individual wanting to withdraw from public life.’* |

1. Intimidation can include physical violence, threats of violence, damage to property, and abusive online and offline communications, amongst other behaviour. Sometimes, the collective impact of a number of individual actions can also be intimidatory, for example, co-ordinated social media attacks. A clear finding of *Intimidation in Public Life* is that intimidation is disproportionately likely to be directed towards women, those from ethnic and religious minorities, and LGBT candidates.
2. Robust political disagreement is part of the democratic process, highly personalised attacks are not. Intimidatory actions are not a way to apply legitimate political pressure. Instead, they are intended and likely to cause an individual to withdraw from a public space, including social media, public events, or from public life altogether. This can have the effect of limiting freedom of expression.

1. See Annex A [↑](#footnote-ref-1)