**SUMMARY OF PROGRESS MADE AGAINST THE REPORT’S RECOMMENDATIONS**

**Government**

The government has made progress in a number of areas. [In 2019, they published their Online Harms White Paper, which established a new regulatory framework for online safety, including a statutory duty of care to make companies take more responsibility for the safety of their users.](https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/online-harms-white-paper/online-harms-white-paper) This will be backed up by an independent online harms regulator. The government has not committed to bringing forward legislation to shift the liability of illegal content online towards social media companies.

As per our recommendation, [the government consulted on the introduction of a new electoral offence of intimidation of candidates and campaigners during elections](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/799873/Protecting-the-Debate-Government-Response-2019.05.01.pdf). They have committed to legislating for this offence when parliamentary time allows. Similarly, the [government published legislation in 2018 to remove the requirement for candidates standing as local councillors to have their home addresses published on the ballot paper](https://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2018/1308/contents/made). These provisions came into force for the polls on 2 May 2019.

**Political parties**

In 2017, we found that political parties needed to do more to protect their candidates from intimidation – to show leadership in setting an appropriate tone for candidates and supporters; to tackle intimidatory behaviour undertaken by their members; and to provide support to their candidates who face intimidation during elections.

Political parties have made progress in a number of key areas, but there is still work to be done in others.

[All of the political parties represented in Westminster now have in place their own Code of Conduct, which sets out the minimum standards of behaviour expected of their members](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/841226/Review_of_political_parties__Codes_of_Conduct_July_2019.pdf). The party codes all prohibit bullying, harassment and unlawful discrimination – conduct that clearly falls within the scope of intimidation. Some of the codes list further categories of behaviour that will not be tolerated by parties, including victimisation, abuse and hateful language. Many of the codes explicitly refer to the positive behaviours expected by party members, including fairness, respect, tolerance and dignity, as well the expectation that members will challenge unacceptable behaviour where it occurs. This is a significant step forward.

Similarly, each party has in place its own internal disciplinary process for dealing with alleged breaches of the party’s code. A range of sanctions are included in those frameworks, including formal warning, suspension from party membership, prohibition from holding office or standing for election, and revocation of party membership. It is not clear to what extent parties enforce the full range of sanctions available to them to discipline intimidatory behaviour by their members. We would like to see all parties collecting data on the number of complaints against members for engaging in intimidation and the outcome of any disciplinary process resulting from these complaints.

[We have been working with the Jo Cox Foundation since 2019 on the recommendation that political parties work together to develop a joint code of conduct on intimidatory behaviour.](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/intimidation-in-public-life-joint-statement-on-conduct-of-political-party-members) That work has resulted in a high-level statement of principle outlining the minimum standards of behaviour that all party members should aspire to. We welcome support for the statement from the Labour Party, the Scottish National Party, the Liberal Democrats, Plaid Cymru, and the Green Party.

**Policing**

In 2017, we found that the approach taken on intimidation offences by local police forces was inconsistent. To that end, we recommended better training and guidance.

In line with our recommendation, [the National Police Chief’s Council published joint guidance with the Crown Prosecution Service, the College of Policing, and the Electoral Commission in 2019, about behaviour which candidates in elections may experience during a campaign which is likely to constitute a criminal offence.](https://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/sites/default/files/pdf_file/Joint-Guidance-for-Candidates-in-Elections.pdf) We were pleased to see that the guidance includes practical advice on how to protect yourself, as well as legal definitions and what might constitute a breach of criminal law.

We were also pleased to see that [the College of Policing has updated their Authorised Professional Practice for elections to include information on the Committee’s report, intimidation and the police’s responsibility to mitigate and investigate allegations related to intimidation](https://www.app.college.police.uk/app-content/policing-elections/).

**Social media**

In 2017, we found that social media had been the most significant factor enabling intimidation in recent years. We were concerned that not enough was being done by social media companies to proactively address intimidation online.

All three social media companies now have measures in place to protect their users from intimidation and harassment. These include policies and guidelines that are regularly reviewed and updated, mechanisms to identify and remove abusive content, and reporting channels for users to report content that violates their policies. They also all give users options to control the content they see and who they can interact with online. These include block, mute and safe search functions.

In line with our recommendation, all three companies now publish transparency data on reported content and takedowns. This is a significant step forward. Neither Twitter, Facebook or Google appear to publish data on the time it takes to remove reported content, however. This would help satisfy the Committee that social media companies are able to make decisions quickly and consistently on the takedown of intimidatory content.

All three companies established temporary election teams during the 2019 General Election to protect the integrity of election-related content and identify and respond more quickly to potential threats and challenges, including removing intimidatory content. We were pleased to see that Facebook has since established a permanent reporting channel for MPs to flag abusive or threatening content, which runs year round for sitting MPs and is extended for Parliamentary candidates during elections.

We were also pleased to see that all three companies shared bespoke election and safety resources with MPs, political parties and the government, ahead of the General Election.

We were disappointed to see that social media companies have not adequately revised their tools for users to escalate potential illegal online activity to the police. [We said in 2017 that general statements, such as “remember that you should contact local law enforcement if you ever feel threatened by something you see on Facebook”, do not help users to constructively engage with the police.](https://www.facebook.com/help/408955225828742) It remains our view that social media companies have a responsibility to advise their users about how to escalate any credible threats they receive.

**Press regulators**

Press regulators IPSO and Impress both wrote this year to update the Committee.

[It is clear that the Editors’ Code of Practice Committee, who oversee IPSO’s Code of Practice, acknowledge that intimidation is a problem for all those in public life, and that their Code is robust and protects individuals in a range of circumstances, including discrimination and harassment.](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/intimidation-in-public-life-letter-from-ipso) They have satisfied the Committee that editors exercise discretion for their own editorial content and language and that they are open to criticism and called to account by the public and those in public life. Editors must comply with the Code and the law. We were glad to hear that publishers are responsible for their freelancers’ work, which must also comply with the Code.

[We were pleased to see that Impress is currently undertaking a comprehensive review of their Standards Code, considering issues around discrimination, harassment, online threats and intimidation.](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/intimidation-in-public-life-letters-from-impress) They intend to publish a new version of the Code in July 2022.