

Jayne Bryant AS/MS

Ysgrifennydd y Cabinet dros Lywodraeth Leol, Tai a Chynllunio

Cabinet Secretary for Housing, Local Government and Planning



**Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government**

John Griffiths MS
Chair, Local Government and Housing Committee
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8 August 2024

Dear John

You met with my predecessor on 17 June to discuss abuse in politics, as members of the Local Government and Housing Committee were unable to attend the event held on 31 January.

I understand the June meeting was productive and there was agreement to provide the Committee with feedback from the event and to continue engagement on this issue.

This is a matter of interest to all members of the Senedd who are keen to address it and identify steps to prevent abuse where possible, and in circumstances where abuse has occurred, call out inappropriate behaviour and demonstrate it will not be tolerated.

It was unfortunate, but understandable, the Welsh Local Government Association's (WLGA) annual conference was cancelled this year, as tackling abuse in politics was on the agenda to be explored further, informed by the January event. We are currently working with the WLGA to agree alternative opportunities this year to undertake these discussions.

This is an important issue which threatens the stability of democracy, and I am keen to work with all parties, building on lived experience and ideas for change.

I look forward to a constructive and productive relationship with you and the Committee. In the meantime, I attach the information my predecessor committed to provide during your meeting.

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Rydym yn croesawu derbyn gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg. Byddwn yn ateb gohebiaeth a dderbynnir yn Gymraeg yn Gymraeg ac ni fydd gohebu yn Gymraeg yn arwain at oedi.

We welcome receiving correspondence in Welsh. Any correspondence received in Welsh will be answered in Welsh and corresponding in Welsh will not lead to a delay in responding.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jayne Bryant". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a large initial 'J' and 'B'.

Jayne Bryant AS/MS

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Cabinet Secretary for Housing, Local Government and Planning

Key points and themes from the Abuse in Politics Event – 31 January 2024

Key messages included, but were not restricted to the following:

- Something needs to be done to address the unacceptable behaviour that appears to be on the increase.
- Everyone and every organisation has an interest in this issue and a part to play in identifying solutions.
- Individuals prepared to participate in elected office, act on behalf of and represents others should be supported – regardless of whether their views on politics are shared.
- The need for a greater understanding about why the abuse happens – what part does the political agenda play, what are the external factors and where the line is drawn between healthy / robust debate and abusive behaviour.
- Tolerance is no longer an option. Priority must be to stop abuse, bullying, intimidation, and harassment being normalised.
- The need to focus and continue the momentum on this issue, including a whole system collaborative approach.

Key Themes following discussion.

1. Modelling good behaviour

- Agreement that all elected representatives, and especially those in political leadership roles, should model good behaviour and champion good robust respectful politics.
- That elected members should set the tone for others when creating cultures within politics that encourages others to want to participate in local democracy. There was particular emphasises on Councillor-on-Councillor behaviour.
- Need to look at shared learning at different levels of government, and how information about the standards required of elected members and candidates is communicated and re-enforced in a clear framework for standards committee.
- Greater emphasis on training and sharing of good practice.
- Review and refresh the support and guidance available to elected members about dealing with social media companies and press and broadcast media.

2. Underreporting instances of inappropriate behaviour and abuse

- the importance of knowing the scale of the problem and understanding the reporting process to ensure a consistent approach and synergy across levels of government.
- Encouraging a climate where individuals understand the importance and benefit of reporting unacceptable behaviour and are supported to do so.

3. Local Resolutions (escalation)

- the need to review existing processes to consider whether they remain fit for purpose in the current climate, in particular the sanctions available to address unacceptable behaviour and abuse and the impact of these sanctions in practice. In particular, whether there are gaps and / or barriers to the effectiveness of the current sanction's regime.
- Important to evaluate whether the role placed on political group leaders is having a positive impact on behaviour and what measures can be adopted in respect of independent members who are not part of a political group.

- The need to consider the support in respect of clerks of town and community councils – with one suggestion that they should be employed by principal councils and benefit from wider expertise and support.

4. Safety / managing risks.

- Review of safety measures for all tiers of government is needed, to understand what is currently in place and where there are gaps which could be addressed. This was considered a priority due to the proximity of the next set of elections.
- Attendees felt mandatory and properly resourced training should be developed for both elected representatives and their staff on preventing and addressing abuse.
- Recognised that there are impacts on mental health for individuals, family, and staff. But also recognising that people need to take personal responsibility for their safety and managing risks better.

5. Political literacy

There were positive reflections of the current curriculum in Wales and how primary and secondary schools deliver politics and democracy education. However, it was recognised the importance for education and engagement at all ages, especially around understanding the role of the politicians in the wider public. Proposed a review of what further can be done in this space.