

Speech: Intimidation and abuse threaten our democracy: article by Chris Skidmore

Our democracy is held up as an exemplar to countries worldwide. And this leading status has not come without its challenges – hundreds of years of democratic evolution has gone into forming the political system we know today. At the heart of this has always been an idea of fairness, integrity and that every voice matters equally.

That is why I have been so horrified to hear of the abuse and intimidation some of my colleagues, from all parties, faced when running as candidates in the recent election. Abuse has come from all sides, and is not the preserve of any particular party or faction.

It is abhorrent that politicians who are standing up for their local communities have to deal with this level of intimidation and bullying, aimed at silencing those people who stand as the voice of their communities.

We should all be able to work and express our views without fear of retribution. There is a clear difference between legitimate scrutiny of those running for public office by the press, public and political parties, and conduct which is fuelled by hate and personal abuse.

We don't shy away from robust debate, we welcome it – we are politicians after all and debate is what we live for. It's another thread that has run through our democracy and the House demonstrates how this plays a vital part in the formation of laws in our society.

However, in a Westminster Hall debate yesterday on this subject, it was clear that we have cross-party consensus for action on this issue.

At that debate, I announced that the Prime Minister has asked the [Committee for Standards in Public Life](#) to carry out a review. It will consider the recent cases of abuse and intimidation suffered by candidates including racist graffiti, trolling on social media and death threats. The Committee operates independently of government, regulators and politicians, and is well placed to conduct this review.

The Committee will consider what action needs to be taken to ensure the integrity of the democratic process. This is clearly an issue that has the potential to impact on people's wish to stand for office and therefore has a negative impact on standards in public life more broadly.

There is no place for the shocking abuse and accusations that we have seen designed to segregate people for their heritage or their views. We must all stand together on this issue because hate crime of any kind, from wherever it's from is completely unacceptable. It divides communities, destroys lives

and makes us all weaker.

We owe it to our democracy to make clear that intimidation and abuse has no part in our society – not only for candidates who stood at this recent election, but for future generations of men and women considering entering public office and standing for election.

No one must be deterred from playing their part in our democracy, which is why we must seek to end the corrosive effect abuse and intimidation has on actively discouraging future generations from standing as future representatives.