Dear **(name of local MP),**

As a **town/parish/community clerk**, working for **name of town, parish or community council**, I am writing to you in a personal capacityto draw your attention togrowing concerns about the bullying, harassment and intimidation of local town and parish councillors and their staff, all working in and for their communities. This is clearly an issue at all levels of government and one that affects our MPs whose day-to-day work is made more difficult through incivility, online and in person abuse, stalking and even threats. As public servants, we deserve protection from this.

At a local level, this lack of civility and respect is an issue with significant impact. It is partly reflected in the low numbers of candidates, particularly females, stepping forward as local councillors, uncontested elections and, in some cases, a reluctance to take on public facing work for fear of abuse (e.g., attendance at councillor surgeries and meetings). With more than 10,000 town, parish and community councils (plus 735 in Wales) and with around 100,000 councillors, this worsening situation is magnified and clearly bad for democracy.

In all of this, I’d like to highlight the effect on staff working in local councils, particularly for clerks. (A clerk is the executive officer steering the council, whether in a large city or town council or a small parish council). In the last 2 years, the high turnover of professional clerks is now heading towards a major recruitment and retention issue. Some are experiencing not only casual abuse from the public as they run their councils but, sadly, in some documented cases, persistent incivility from the councillors they serve. Unlike most other employees, clerks have no recourse to this unacceptable behaviour and often, with little in the way of sanctions, the only option is to resign.

The Society of Local Council Clerks (SLCC), the professional membership body for clerks, as well as the National Association of Local Councils (NALC), One Voice Wales (OVC) and County Associations representing local councils and councillors in England and Wales, have all recognised this. Investment has been made in a Civility & Respect Project which is coordinating a programme to support councillors and staff within our sector via training, good governance, clear policies and intervention processes. It will also work to influence relevant legislation to combat online abuse, introduce sanctions and enhance the role of monitoring officers. It is also calling for the government to revisit the recommendations set out in the Committee on Standards in Public Life (CSPL) report on local government ethical standards.

This is now the subject of an Early Day Motion – Intimidation at community, parish and town councils. (EDM 611 – tabled on 23 November 2022, primary sponsor - Dr Julian Lewis, MP.)

I would welcome your support in raising this important national issue affecting local town and parish councils via parliament and, as a clerk, I encourage you to join your fellow MPs in adding your signature to EDM 611.

Yours sincerely