

West Lothian Council awards £1,000 grant to new Jo Cox Foundation

West Lothian Council has agreed to make a £1,000 donation to a charity set up in the name of Jo Cox, the MP who was murdered by an extremist.

The charity aims to highlight the need for civility in public life and promote measures to protect those elected to public office from abuse, intimidation and violence.

Lib Dem councillor for Linlithgow Sally Pattle congratulated the council for supporting the charity and called for a suggested £500 donation to be doubled.

Councillor Pattle told fellow members of the council's Executive that they had to do everything they could to tackle the growing intolerance in public life.

All local authorities have been asked to contribute to the fledgling charity which has been formed off the back of the Jo Cox Civility Commission which was set up at the start of the year to tackle the abuse and intimidation of elected representatives.

Councillor Pattle told the meeting she was delighted to see the paper coming before councillors and added: "We have all taken the responsibility for representing our communities. That gives us a responsibility to use our language well.

“We should be paying reference to the fact that if people hear us use derogatory or inflammatory language in this chamber then those terms will become normalised, and we will hear them in our communities.

“We also run the risk of becoming targets both online and offline abuse. No-one can deny the fact that the temperature is rising both in political discourse and beyond. The UK has had riots in the summer, and we can see what’s happening now in the US.”

Councillor Pattle added: “I have received letters accusing me of being a Quisling [an abusive term taken from the name of a Nazi collaborator in the 1940s Norwegian government] or a traitor.”

She said that the growth of social media meant that on-one was immune to violent language, threats or intimidation, and said the days of contacting the local newspaper editor and asking them to “dial down” inflammatory coverage had disappeared because of social media. This represents a threat to local democracy

The councillor told members: “I think, if we are going to attract good candidates to represent us in public life, particularly women, then we need to hold ourselves to a higher standard.

“I think we should be giving more money because the work they are doing is so important and beneficial to our political discourse.”

Council leader Lawrence Fitzpatrick said that all local authorities in Scotland had been asked for a contribution to the charity of between £500 to £1,000. CoSLA, the local authorities’ umbrella organisation, had also agreed to support the Foundation. He proposed adding another £500 to the suggested donation, which was seconded by Councillor Pattle.

Jo Cox. was a Labour MP for Batley and Spen in Yorkshire when was murdered by a white supremacist outside a building where she was about to hold a constituency surgery in 2016.

In a letter to the council Su Moore from the Jo Cox Foundation said: "In January 2024 we launched our call to action with 28 recommendations for how this growing threat to our democracy can be addressed.

"Since then, we have worked tirelessly with key partners, including the Electoral Commission, COSLA and the Police to ensure our recommendations are adopted.

"In particular, the Home Office commitment to expand the dedicated resources in each police force to support elected representatives, and to include, for the first time, within this provision for local councillors, responds directly to one of our recommendations.

"We are a small charity, so anything that you can commit in terms of financial support will make a real difference in ensuring that we at The Jo Cox Foundation can build on our work to date and make a lasting difference in tackling abuse and intimidation of elected representatives."

By Stuart Sommerville Local Democracy Reporter