HOUSE OF COMMONS

Home Affairs Committee

Oral evidence: Hate Crime and its Violent Consequences, HC 70

Tuesday 15 October 2019

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Watch the meeting

Members present: Yvette Cooper (Chair); Toby Perkins; Douglas Ross.

Questions 1024-1056

Witnesses

I: Catherine Anderson, CEO, The Jo Cox Foundation, Lord Jonathan Evans of Weardale, Chair, Committee on Standards in Public Life, Kim Leadbeater, Ambassador, The Jo Cox Foundation, and Jane Ramsey, Independent Member, Committee on Standards in Public Life.

Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Catherine Anderson, Lord Jonathan Evans of Weardale, Kim Leadbeater and Jane Ramsey.

Q1024 **Chair:** Welcome, everyone, to this sitting of the Home Affairs Committee as part of our ongoing inquiry into rising hate crime in this country. We have been looking at both hate crime itself and concerns about rising hatred more widely and its impact on social cohesion, all of which we would like to ask you about today. May I start by asking each of you to say which organisation you represent and tell us about some of the work you are doing in this area?

Kim Leadbeater: My name is Kim Leadbeater. I am Jo Cox's sister, and I now work as an ambassador for the Jo Cox Foundation.

Catherine Anderson: I am Catherine Anderson, chief executive of the Jo Cox Foundation. We are working very closely with the Committee on Standards in Public Life to help convene the joint code of conduct for political parties, but we also do a huge amount on community cohesion up and down the UK through our Great Get Together initiative.

Lord Evans: I am Jonathan Evans. I am the Chair of the Committee on Standards in Public Life. We wrote a report on intimidation in public life under my predecessor in 2017. Although we do not have responsibility for implementation of our recommendations, we are continuing to take an

active interest and working with the Jo Cox Foundation, particularly on collaboration with the political parties on a joint code.

Jane Ramsey: I am Jane Ramsey, an independent member of the Committee on Standards in Public Life. I led on the production of the report on intimidation in public life, which others have mentioned, and I am the lead member on following up—in particular the joint work we are doing on the joint standard for political parties with the Jo Cox Foundation.

Q1025 **Chair:** May I start by asking for your response to the figures out today showing a 10% increase in recorded hate crime? How far do you think that is affected by changes to reporting, and how far do you think it reflects a growing problem in society? By the way, do not feel the need to answer every question; come in wherever appropriate.

Lord Evans: May I say one or two things? In terms of the Committee, the research that we did leading up to the report that was published in 2017 demonstrated very clearly, from our point of view, that there was an increase over recent years in intimidation in public life generally, which was why we were asked by the then Prime Minister to make that report. We have not taken any formal evidence since the publication of the report, but we are involved in a lot of different conversations with groups who are interested in this, with individual Members, individuals in public life and so on, so we haven't got firm evidence, but the 10% increase seems to us to be indicative of at least a continuing problem since 2017. It is quite difficult to say whether there has been an increase in it, but I don't think that there is any evidence that this has got any better since we reported in 2017.

Catherine Anderson: I would add that the figures this morning aren't all that surprising, although it is a smaller rise than we saw last year—which I think was around 17%. We are not experts in the reporting element, but I think that there is no question but that reporting procedures are improving. We have heard that from our colleagues in the Met and in constabularies across the country. The real concern for us is how do we stop that? We saw a doubling in the number of hate crimes being reported in just the five years up to 2018, so the trajectory seems to be upwards, and the question in the work that we are doing is how do we actually stem that rising tide?

Kim Leadbeater: Absolutely. We also have to look at how we can make whole-society changes to make a difference. What we do through Jo's foundation is to take a very top-down and bottom-up approach. A lot of the stuff we are doing down in Parliament, working with politicians, is really important, but we are also doing a lot of work at a grassroots level on how to improve communities and looking at issues around cohesion, segregation, knife crime and various other important ones. The way to succeed is to join all that thinking together. That is why the work that we are doing on a standard of conduct for politicians is important. Hopefully, by getting all the major political parties to sign up to that standard, there will be a knock-on effect on the rest of society and communities up and down the country.

Q1026 **Chair:** We want to come on to the work that you have done on the code, and some of the issues around public life, but to start we will stay more broadly on some of the wider social cohesion issues. We have seen rises in disability hate crime, homophobic hate crime and different strands. What do you think is driving the rise in vitriol and hatred?

Kim Leadbeater: I think there is frustration across the country, with people feeling disillusioned and disengaged. That is where the link back to politics comes—people feel that they do not have a say in things, they feel frustrated and angry, and the easiest thing to do when you feel that way is to blame "the other", someone who is not like you, for your own frustrations, whether that is around the economy, or what's going on in your town, city or village. That feeds into dislike and animosity towards people who are not like you. That is what we have to change. We have disconnected communities, where people do not have the sense of belonging and the sense of identity that people used to have if you go back 50 years and beyond. There is something around the infrastructure of communities that needs to be addressed, but there is also this top-level stuff about the nature of our discourse in public life, in Parliament and elsewhere that needs to change. The role of the media and of social media needs to be looked at. Until we start to take a holistic approach by looking at all these different organisations and influences within society, hate crime in towns and villages will not get any better, whether that is about disability or LGBT, or about racism, as we saw with the horrendous scenes at the England game last night. This holistic approach is what is called for, and whatever the foundation can do to be part of that is what we are very keen to do.

Jane Ramsey: We took some evidence on this for the report, but obviously that is two years ago. Nick Robinson, the BBC reporter, talked about the first time he had experienced it as a reporter at any scale, and it was during the Scottish referendum, when he was political editor at the BBC. He felt that it had moved, that something around identity and identity politics, rather than party politics, being a way of expressing people's views had somehow come to the fore. In retrospect, he realised, "That was the first time I experienced that", and I think that a number of broadcasters and journalists whom we interviewed have experienced that since. There was something around identity, which was obviously not the main part of our report, that might be worth further work on what impact that has had. It is certainly the case that we know that local councillors experience it; it is MPs, and we are interested in the joint code of conduct standard happening before the general election, but this is also around others in politics, not only MPs. As I say, we have had evidence that the same sort of intimidation happens to those candidates and elected politicians in local government.

We also heard evidence in the 2017 report that others in public life are affected by this rise in hate, and the way that people express themselves more fiercely and in an intimidatory way, not simply through genuine, lively political discourse or disagreement. You will remember there have been a number of cases with children where parents objected to hospital

treatment for their children, or proposed changes to the treatment, and then there have been huge crowds outside hospitals threatening and intimidating the doctors and nurses who look after those patients. It is a bigger picture than politics, although obviously some of the intimidation that MPs experience is the most high profile.

Q1027 **Chair:** How much of this is being fuelled by, or increasing because of, the online networks that we have now?

Lord Evans: The evidence that was taken by the Committee indicated that that was a factor, because it is much easier to make your voice heard than it was 20 years ago when you had to write a letter or whatever. It is instantaneous; it is also anonymous, and there is a sort of—you get the echo chamber effect where people see others doing this, and therefore they feel empowered to do it themselves. That is undoubtedly a facilitating factor in making this happen, which is why some of the recommendations that we made in 2017 were aimed specifically at the social media companies on the basis of the holistic approach. It is not just a question of politicians or security officials; it is a question of the way in which we operate as a society, and social media has undoubtedly had an impact on the way that people communicate and make their views known and, indeed, form their views.

Q1028 **Chair:** How worried are you, and how worried are you about the directions and trends in what is happening?

Catherine Anderson: We are extremely worried, which is why we are trying to accelerate this work in particular. We are particularly worried for people's safety; that is the immediate concern. With a potentially very imminent general election, we are very concerned about increases in incidences of direct physical attacks. We know that in the MEP and local elections earlier this year, we saw an increase in actual physical attacks, often against women candidates.

We are also very worried about the importance of language and the offline consequences of the language that we are seeing online, as you referred to, and we cannot really quantify or predict the nature of that threat, but we know that it is a threat. We are very concerned about the future impact of this on our public life, because in the end we are deterring good people from standing and entering into politics. One of the main reasons for this joint standard that we hope will filter not just through public life but into the wider society is that, in the end, this threatens our democracy because of the diversity and vibrancy that we want to see in our public life and the people we want to attract into it.

Kim Leadbeater: It is very difficult for me to be objective in terms of how great a threat there is to anybody else, but one of the things that drives me and drives my parents and many of my friends and family to keep going is that we do not want any other family to experience what we have had to experience, and indeed continue to experience every single day. Behind every politician and every public figure, there is a family, staff, friends and people who are affected, and they face abuse every single day.

We have to do everything we can, and I am proud to do that in Jo's name, to stop any other family having to go through what we have been through.

It worries me, as Catherine said, that we are losing good people from public life. I have had lots of conversations with politicians across the political system since Jo was killed, across the Brexit debate and divide, who are scared. They are really scared, and their reality is that they are getting horrendous messages, whether that is in their inbox, on social media, or going to the supermarket to do their shopping. That is their reality, and I do not want to be accused of scaremongering, but I am not. These conversations are real, and often it is not just the politicians themselves who face the abuse and intimidation; it's their staff, and it's their families. We all have to take responsibility for that. Equally, I am not sitting here as a cheerleader for politicians. Politicians have to take their role and their responsibility. That is why I find it very upsetting when we see some of the scenes that we have seen recently in Parliament of bad behaviour, again across the political spectrum.

I was looking at the Nolan principles on the train on the way down here this morning. Where is the integrity? Where is the honesty? Where is the openness? Those seven key principles are lacking sometimes. We all need to take responsibility, but that has to come across the board, across the political spectrum. That is why the standard that we are proposing is a really important move towards changing things.

Jane Ramsey: I absolutely agree with everything that Kim has just said. From the Committee's point of view, what we think would particularly help in this space is the leadership of all the political parties, in Westminster and beyond. Leadership is one of the seven Nolan principles in public life. We want to see them explicitly saying that we support this work on a joint standard, and disseminate it fully throughout the political parties, so that we are ready when the next election is called for all candidates and all party activists to know that there is a shared code across the political spectrum that they are going to follow to try to reduce hatred and intimidation.

As well as the human cost that Kim personifies by being here, and people in the room obviously knew Jo Cox as well, we took evidence from other members of this Committee—I think we took evidence from you as well—that the human cost of attacks, abuse and intimidation on families and staff, as you movingly said Kim, is absolute. That came across loud and clear in 2017. All the evidence that we hear suggests, anecdotally, that it is even worse now, but the impact and the threat to democracy, which I don't know whether Jonathan wants to talk about a bit more, is very real. We have heard MPs say that they do not wish to stand again. They know many other, particularly women, potential candidates across the political spectrum who will not stand because they fear for themselves and their families. We even heard occasions of people saying that they know of MPs who are going to change their vote over Brexit because of fear of intimidation that they have experienced, for them and their families. It is a really serious issue.

Lord Evans: All I would add to that, and I fully agree with everything that has been said, is that I am genuinely anxious and worried about this, and I am not a particularly anxious person, because I feel that we are dependent in a representative democracy on debate, freedom of speech and people feeling willing to say what they believe to be the case. By deterring people from coming into public life, by limiting debate, and particularly by putting so much pressure on some individuals that they change their vote, that is a really troubling situation to be in. With my previous hat on in the national security space, if we knew that there had been such pressure on Members of Parliament that they had been changing their vote, we would have seen that as a really serious national security issue if it had been another state doing it. This is not generally states doing it, but it has the effect of changing votes, and seems to be a seriously worrying phenomenon as far as democracy is concerned.

Q1029 **Toby Perkins:** It seems to me that, increasingly, politics is seen to be less about ideas and more about motives. Where previously political parties would disagree with one another about what was the best route forward, now what we hear is the suggestion that the policies of our opponents are because they are ill motivated. If you are against Brexit, it means you are not patriotic. If you are in favour of Brexit, it means you are stupid. We have seen a suggestion that the Tories only want to privatise the national health service so that they can sell it off to their friends, or the Labour party are pro-trade union because that is where their money comes from.

All of this is poisoning our dialogue. I think we have seen that in the three elections that I have been a Member of Parliament: 2010, 2015 and 2017. You have seen an escalation of that. It is no longer a discussion of whose ideas are best, but it is actually about those motivations that are in there. Politics always needs to evoke passion; it needs to make people care about the arguments that we are having. Where is that balance between creating passion and getting people to feel that their vote matters? We used to hear all the time the idea that it didn't matter who to vote for, it is all the same.

Despite what you said, Kim, there is in some ways a lot more engagement in politics now, but it can be quite an ugly one. Where does that balance between free speech, evoking passion, getting people to see this stuff cares, but still taking responsibility for the actions that people might take as a result of things you have said, even though that was not what you asked them to do? I will start with you, Kim.

Kim Leadbeater: It is very difficult, and you have highlighted the crux of the problem: who sets the moral compass of the nation around what is acceptable and what is not acceptable?

The first thing I would say is that we are huge advocates of the passionate, robust debate that you describe, as indeed was Jo. She would be the first one to fight for those rights and freedom of speech, and the fact that we live in a democracy. We are so lucky that we do live in a

country where we have those freedoms, which is hugely important. What is needed is just to take a step back and reset where those boundaries lie.

Without giving specific examples this morning, we have seen examples where, as a country, we can all agree that the boundaries have been overstepped. Again, I would say that there have been examples of that across the political spectrum, across the Brexit divide. What we must not now do is let this become a "he said, she said". I saw a lot of that after the events in Parliament a couple of weeks ago: "Yes, but so and so said this; and so and so said that and the other."

We could go on like that all day long but we get to a point, as we do with any situation or argument, where it doesn't matter who started it, somebody needs to finish it. There needs to be a point where we draw a line under what has been said and done before and we reset the bar. I guess that's what we are doing with this standard of conduct. We are saying, "Okay, let's put this out there as some parameters and guidance." Only by implementing those parameters will things change.

I think you are absolutely right. No one wants to stifle robust debate. Gosh, it is so important. I used to watch Parliament TV when Jo was on it, and I still watch it now, in a bittersweet way. I think it is really important that we see those things going on. What I have also seen are debates that take place in a really civilised, respectful manner, with passion, with enthusiasm, so it can be done. It absolutely can be done; we just need to make sure that that is the norm.

Catherine Anderson: I completely agree with Kim. I think Jo was particularly an exponent of the idea that political disagreement and personal kindness and amiability can and should coexist. The whole idea that we can disagree agreeably is something that we have done brilliantly in this country, right up until, dare I say it, 2016.

I would say that we also need to create more of a culture in and around Parliament, but wider, where we call one another out when we encounter language and ideas that we think are on the extremes and are incredibly unhelpful. There are three particular things that our draft standard calls on party members to do, and that includes elected officials. That is to set the tone and take responsibility for setting that tone; to lead by example but also, not just to defend the dignity of those on their own side but defend the dignity of their opponents as well.

I think that will restore a huge amount of faith in politics and public life, when we know that politicians have never been held in lower regard, and that is incredibly worrying and damaging.

Lord Evans: One of the Nolan principles is leadership. In this area you are pointing to exactly the right problem, which is that you do want robust debate but you don't want intimidation and abuse, and the line between them. You can be too nostalgic about the tone of public debate in the past. I can think of plenty of opportune times when there have been personalised attacks, et cetera.

Nevertheless, we do seem to have changed the tone over the past five years. I think that abuse and intimidation is where we need to draw the line. With that, there is a leadership issue. We wrote an open letter about a month ago, highlighting the responsibility of everybody in a leadership position in public life to live up to the Nolan principles. I think that is important. It is true of any organisation: the tone from the top gives people the kind of feel as to where the permission is. If that is not clear from those who have leading positions in public life, then people will take that as sort of a permission to go in directions they should not be allowed to go in. Therefore, leadership here is the critical issue.

Q1030 **Toby Perkins:** Can I ask you a question, Jane? You may want to respond to those points as well, but it seems to me that we are talking about the role of social media and particularly the role of the mainstream media in this. When something happens like what happened to Jo, of course everyone is appalled by it; no one saw that coming and no one in any way recognises a link between their behaviour and what then happened.

However, if you look at things that may be on the path towards that, there was a video recently of someone filming themselves opening the door to a Labour party canvasser and kind of screaming in his face, and telling him that he was representing a traitor and a terrorist sympathiser. We've seen people promoting videos of people throwing vegetables and eggs at the Prime Minister, or promoting videos of people chucking milkshakes over politicians.

At what point do we recognise that an acceptance of breaking down what we would normally have accepted as unacceptable, such as low-level vandalism or extreme rudeness, is a path then to thinking that other things, which we would be horrified to see happen, were, if not inevitable, then at least, maybe, things that actions could not be taken to prevent?

What can you say about the role of social media and mainstream media in promoting the idea that attacking politicians, or even volunteers who represent politicians, in a non-physical way is acceptable, and about the link between that and the more serious things that we are subsequently seeing?

Jane Ramsey: I will ask Jonathan to comment about the link between physical violence and threats of violence, because it was the security and the police who have talked about how they differentiate between threat and risk.

However, turning to your first section, about the role of social media and mainstream media, a lot of the recommendations that we made following our extensive evidence gathering in the 2017 report—including from social media companies—demonstrates that the way that people engaged in public life feel able to engage is absolutely affected by the role of social media. Obviously, for lots of people engaged in, say, political public life—whether local councillors, would-be MPs or MPs—social media provides an amazing opportunity to reach out to many more people than before, in a different way and an interactive way.

The trouble is, as you all know, that when you have things like dogpiling, that can feel very threatening, and we know that people with particular protected characteristics—whether they are women or black and minority ethnic candidates, or they have a disability or are LGBT—are likely to experience more intense and greater volumes of attack and abuse on social media, which can readily turn into intimidation.

We differentiated between abuse and intimidation in the report, because we felt that intimidation is something, and we have got our definition, that will actually affect how you operate in public life—whether you want to withdraw, or whether you feel that you don't want to stand, and all that. We have a specific definition, which is a higher standard than "mere" abuse—although abuse is horrible. However, a lot of abuse in a sustained way turns into intimidation. We know that on social media.

I will come on to talk about how we felt that social media companies responded, if you wish, but I think this Committee will be totally unsurprised—given your recent hearings this year with social media companies—that your experience will not have been that different to our experience, in terms of the companies' response, with some exceptions.

The role of mainstream media was interesting, because we definitely received evidence from MPs and candidates in the 2017 election that if there was negative, inflammatory language used in articles in mainstream media, it led to direct, huge amounts of dogpiling on social media, which was very disturbing. Social media needs addressing, and we recognise that that would be a concerted effort. We as the Committee on Standards in Public Life could not say to Twitter, Google and social media, "We think you should do this, this and this," although we did. We recognise that it would need an alliance and a coalition, particularly led by the Government and therefore involving Government Departments such as DCMS and the Cabinet Office, and Committees such as yourselves as well. Parliament is behind really shifting the liability for content and how it is dealt with in terms of hate speech and abuse and intimidation of people in public life—shifting the liability from social media companies that say, "We are not publishers; we are merely a platform for this material. We don't curate it, and we don't censor it." Obviously, censorship is another thing. We are powerful advocates and supporters of freedom of speech, but not where it causes intimidation that means that people withdraw from democracy and Parliament, or that they won't stand. We made certain recommendations. Twitter and Google did not really engage with us particularly, but Twitter did.

Toby Perkins: Sorry, you said Twitter twice.

Jane Ramsey: Google didn't engage with us much on YouTube; Facebook more so. Twitter was somewhere in the middle. Facebook came back to us last year and said that they were going to be enacting our recommendation that there should be an election pop-up shop to support candidates, because it was clear in the 2017 election—it being a snap election—that there was very little preparation for candidates, and so sitting MPs who were standing again got a reasonable amount of support

and advice from Facebook, but new candidates got nothing. According to Facebook, that is in train and will be happening, although we have not actually seen written confirmation that they intend to do that. It might be something that you would want to pursue—what do Facebook and Twitter propose in an election period, knowing what the 2017 election was like? You are absolutely right: there is a link. I think my colleagues have spoken about that.

Obviously, we want to support robust political debate; it is absolutely right and proper. But where it tips into intimidation and people wishing to withdraw from public life or feeling that their input into public life is being adversely affected—we spoke to people who have to have police protection to go out in public or go to meetings—it is horrific for them and their families. We took evidence from people who have had reporters go and deliberately knock on their door when they knew the parents were not around, to try to interview the children over the garden gate—totally unacceptable behaviours from all sorts of players in the media. We have made recommendations about each of those, and there has been some progress on quite a lot of them, but not as much progress as we would like. The two things that we would like to see progress on are political parties agreeing to the joint standard, because that also covers social media by party members and activists, and the new electoral law that we recommended the Government enact, which they agreed to, but unfortunately they said there was not parliamentary time in the last year to bring it on the statute book. That would have created a new offence of intimidation of candidates during an election.

Q1031 **Toby Perkins:** Can I invite someone from the Jo Cox Foundation to respond to that before Lord Evans?

Catherine Anderson: Perhaps I can comment on your point, which was really about offline attacks and rudeness and online harms. In terms of the offline element, I go back to my point about us as bystanders in the community being able to say to people, "How would you feel if that was your brother, sister or mother?" There is a legitimising of actions whereby people feel, perhaps out of fear for their own safety, that they cannot intervene. We need to work to create a culture where people can intervene better. On the online harms point, we are very interested in the behavioural element to break down the reward system in this dogpiling that you see. If someone says something abusive or intimidatory online and 20 or 30 people pile in and say how correct and how right they are, that is a system of reward. We can only really break that down not through blocking, muting or deleting, which I know are mechanisms that social media companies advocate, because they are only part of the solution. The true solution is where we can intervene on behaviour so that people stop, think, and decide not to act on whatever impulse is propelling them to be intimidating and abusive. I don't know if Kim wants to add to that.

Kim Leadbeater: I totally agree. Unfortunately, we are looking at a huge societal change, and social media is a massive part of that, in that we are trying to get behaviour change on a huge scale, and that is a massive

endeavour. That is why for me it will only happen if everybody signs up to it. It has to be, as I have said before, this holistic approach around politicians engaging, the police engaging, the media and social media organisations engaging, and even celebrities and sportspeople engaging in trying to change thinking and the way that we as a country engage online and offline. That is why the work of this Committee is so important as far as I am concerned.

Education, which I mentioned briefly before, is another key thing. We need to look at what we are teaching our children in schools around the use of social media. We need to look at how the social media companies can support education around young people. This affects so many layers of society, whether it's politicians or community-based issues, as I said earlier, in terms of knife crime, bullying or loneliness. There are so many issues. The disconnected communities that we have now need to change. That is why I would call upon all three sectors—private, public and voluntary—to work together. That is what a lot of the stuff that we are doing through Jo's foundation is about. We do the Great Get Together campaign on the anniversary of Jo's birthday. There might be a perception that this is about sitting down and having a cup of tea and a piece of cake together, but there is much more depth to it than that. It is about bringing people together across lines of difference, and trying to understand and listen to each other.

"Listening" is the other word that has not been mentioned this morning. People stopped listening because all they do is shout. Listening is not about waiting for your turn to speak; it's about listening to what the person is saying. We have stopped doing those things on many levels. With social media you don't need to listen, because all you do is type and put your opinions out there. It's a huge issue. We have a thing that Jo used to say: "Nothing is so big that it goes on the 'too difficult' pile." That is why I continue to work on this and it's probably why we are all in this room today: we have to try and make a change. But it has to be joined up, it has to be holistic and everybody has to buy into it.

Q1032 **Toby Perkins:** Lord Evans, in terms of the broader question of hate crime and its link to political extremism, can you tell us what you have seen and the extent to which it has changed in recent years?

Lord Evans: I do not have clear evidence or data on this. The Committee took evidence up to 2017 and my previous national security career finished many years before that, so these are purely impressionistic. There is no doubt that there are organised groups with extreme views who are also attracted to violence and intimidation. That was very clear, directly or indirectly, in things like the killing of Jo Cox. We see it on both sides of the political spectrum. There are the individual behaviours that people are involved in as individuals, but there are also groups who actively use this as a tool. The more recent case of Rosie Cooper is a good example of a far-right group who wanted to take forward their extreme views through violence. That is undoubtedly part of the picture here, although it is difficult to say how much of the problem is to do with organised groups. Some of it is, but not by any means all of it. I think that what the

Committee reported on was not principally to do with extremist groups organising for this purpose; it was about a wider behaviour.

Q1033 **Chair:** We heard some evidence from Neil Basu some time ago about how a potential rise in hate crime could end up making it easier to recruit into extremism, or could be a way of desensitising people and legitimising more extreme views. Do you think that is plausible?

Lord Evans: I think it is plausible, but I do not know because I am not close to those issues. It seems to be entirely plausible because, if you look back to what organisations such as al-Qaeda and IS were doing, there was a process of radicalisation. Part of that was exposure to extreme images and the normalisation of violence, so people no longer feel it is something exceptional or outside their experience. I suspect that process reduces people's inhibitions and may add trauma on them, but it means that things that otherwise would have been beyond their experience become conscionable.

I do not have detail on that in the way that Neil Basu would have, but it seems to be entirely plausible that if you wanted to take individuals for a political purpose and radicalise them towards violence, one of the ways is through that exposure and a process of escalation over time so that, at the end of it, they are willing to do things that they would not have considered at the beginning.

Q1034 **Chair:** So if you want to prevent rising far-right extremism, you should take seriously far-right hate crime issues as well.

Lord Evans: Yes. It is always very difficult to demonstrate where the threshold is between taking extreme positions and moving to organised violence. There has been a lot of research around that with regard to extreme Islamist groups. Common sense would suggest that if you start to see the world in extremely polarised ways, it is much easier to see others as the enemy and as people who need to be attacked, rather than as people who need to be debated with. I would cautious about seeing this as an automatic process—I am sure it is not—but equally, if you have individuals who are already of an extreme mindset, who are encouraged to see other people as the enemy and where violence is seen as acceptable, it is a relatively shorter step to promoting terrorist violence.

Q1035 **Douglas Ross:** Good morning. I was elected only in 2017, so sadly I never met Jo, unlike my Committee colleagues. However, a lot has been said so far about how we have heard recently that current MPs may not stand again or others may not put themselves forward for election. Ms Leadbeater, did Jo ever have concerns prior to standing for election or in her too-short period as an MP that she may not stand again, or do you think that things have got significantly worse since her death?

Kim Leadbeater: I think things have got significantly worse, without a doubt. When she was considering standing, we never talked about safety. I do not think it was an issue.

Douglas Ross: It wasn't in her consciousness at all.

Kim Leadbeater: No. She was very concerned about being a good mum and being an MP, which lots of women are, and lots of men are about being a good father. Parenting and being a politician is not an easy combination. We did not talk about safety. During the time that she was an MP, there were some cases where people said very distasteful things online. There were one or two incidents that I found out about after Jo had been killed, which were somewhat worrying. The vast majority of that was in the six months up to her murder and up to the EU referendum.

It is very difficult for me to be objective with something such as this, although I always try to be. I can talk about the conversations I have had since Jo was killed with people who have been in Parliament for a long time. The chair of the foundation, Jacquie Smith, who was Home Secretary, talks about how things could get a little bit distasteful and edgy when she was in Government, but absolutely nothing like it is now. It really has deteriorated. Lots of politicians have told me, often off the record because they do not want a fuss, about situations that they have found themselves in.

I did a documentary in June for ITV's "Tonight" programme where we looked at the wider issue of anger—the programme was entitled "Angry Britain". It looked at why people are so angry, going back to what you said, and why this is a broader problem. Again, politicians from across the political spectrum were facing abuse of all sorts of nastiness; but also, broader than that, it looked at families who are nothing to do with politics who have had abuse online, offline. So there is this broader thing, which is why I keep coming back to the idea of cultural change and societal change. But yes, the very real examples of people I have spoken to in public life resonate with me as much as any statistics or percentages do, and that is something that I think everybody should be aware of.

Q1036 **Douglas Ross:** As a Scottish MP, I lived through and was involved in the independence referendum campaign, and for some people it was great for democracy because we had this super-discussion, and we had a result that some people were happy with—others weren't. It was a terrible campaign for many of us to go through, and I think Nick Robinson has said publicly what he said to your commission about how he felt very intimidated. Ever since then, the BBC, if they go to any SNP event, or any yes event, face similar criticism. But could there be an element—I am just asking this as a question—that if you have been through something like the independence referendum, or indeed if you have been through the experiences that some people had in the Brexit/EU referendum, you almost become complacent? For a lot of the criticism I get on Twitter and social media on any given day, as soon as I see a yes logo, or independence, I know I am never going to convince that person. I know they are going to criticise me for absolutely everything I do. Is there an issue that sometimes politicians are too tolerant about what we put up with, and therefore it just encourages the problem to continue? I don't know if that is something you have experienced.

Kim Leadbeater: I think it has absolutely become normalised. Every MP I speak to, when you say, "How are things for you? How is the level of

abuse you face?", it is almost a given that that is part of the job, and that is what they have signed up for, which I think is wholly incorrect. But I think you are right: it has become normalised.

Jane Ramsey: There were many pieces of evidence that we found as we heard from people, including sitting MPs and former MPs, but one of the pieces of evidence that was actually upsetting for us, and we hadn't experienced it, was that MPs often were most affected by what had happened to their families—the abuse and intimidation. One former candidate had had photographs taken and put on the net of his grandchildren going to school, saying "We know where they go to school." It gives me goosebumps even now. It was absolutely awful, and I wasn't actually experiencing it. In Diane Abbott's office—not Diane herself; we took evidence from all of them—her chief of staff or lead person was saying, "I have my bowl of porridge in one hand, having breakfast as soon as I get in, and then I am just pressing the delete button, so that Diane doesn't have to see all the threats about her son or her life or knowing where she is going, or what they are going to do to her." These members of staff were saying it was very upsetting for them, but it was their daily life, and as we know, since we took evidence, it has got worse. I think the scale of it and the impact it has may be being normalised, but it is certainly still terrible—absolutely awful—and we do not think it should be normalised. I think that, obviously, specific threats of rape or knowing where your children live, and threats of violence, are things that can be potentially dealt with in the criminal system, and we know there have been a number of cases. But most of it doesn't quite reach that tipping point, but is enough to make someone extremely miserable, whether they are the MP or person in public life or a member of their staff or family.

Q1037 **Douglas Ross:** I want to pick up on the staff point in particular because, certainly as a Scottish MP, I have to be down here four days a week, so my staff are the frontline, and they are the ones who probably get most of the hassle and abuse. We had a protest outside my office when constituents, quite legitimately, felt that the decision to prorogue Parliament—which was never actually prorogued—was wrong, but that was all done at very short notice. I was not there and it was my staff who had to deal with it. They were having pictures taken of them inside the office. How much more do you think could be done to look at the effect not just on politicians, but on staff?

Lord Evans: I think it is important that we do realise that this isn't just about politicians; it does affect staff. It also affects other office holders—so non-elected office holders we have also had conversations with, who have also experienced quite a lot of abuse, and their staff in turn getting that. It is important to recognise that, to some extent, politicians in particular are in the firing line, but it is not just politicians; it is also other people who have a role in public life, of a variety of sorts. Those people obviously need as much support as anybody else, and their security requirements—when it actually gets to that point—are equally important. I agree with that point.

Q1038 **Douglas Ross:** Moving on, it has been discussed that there has been an

increase in the number of threats and negative comments towards politicians, particularly in the last couple of months, when the temperatures have certainly risen in the Chamber. At the same time, however, the viewing figures for Parliament TV have gone through the roof. How do you marry up the fact that that type of behaviour and some of the intemperate language increases the number of threats but also increases people's interest in politics more generally?

I might be wrong but, sadly, I do not think that hundreds of thousands of people are watching this Committee—12 o'clock on Wednesdays is when people are most likely to watch Parliament TV, for Prime Minister's questions. I do not think that reflects how we do our business throughout the week. It is when we are probably on our worst behaviour, yet that is when the public are most interested. Indeed, in recent days and weeks, when temperatures have been at their highest, the public have been most interested to watch. How do we marry up engagement and trying to get the public interested in politics, and behaving in a way that respects boundaries?

Catherine Anderson: That is a pretty tough question. I suspect that a lot of people like watching PMQs because they like venting their anger somewhere and it is an easy place to do that. Obviously, any increased engagement in our political system, our debate and our democratic institutions is a good thing. I think that there are even lots of opportunities to increase that, particularly with the refurbishment of Parliament. It goes right to the heart of the question about the accessibility of our MPs and the fact that we are so lucky in this country that people can go to their MP's surgery to talk to them. They can come to Central Lobby whenever they want and demand to see their elected representative.

At the same time, there is a distance that is fomenting a sort of anger, contempt and almost hatred of politicians. I certainly do not have the answer to that, but we feel pretty strongly that we are at a tipping point, that we have to act and that now is the time to send a strong message from Parliament. As Kim said, this is not about bashing MPs; it is about leading by example. Anyone with a role in public life has an incredible privilege and needs to lead by example. If we can turn that tide now—at this point where we will hopefully soon have some resolution over Brexit and can get back to debating other policies that affect us all—we can show that Parliament can live up to people's expectations of it. However, in one sentence, I do not have the answer to your question, unfortunately.

Kim Leadbeater: To be fair, I think that lots of people are watching, and it is excellent that Parliament TV has the best viewing figures that it has ever had. I read somewhere that applications to study politics at university are up as well, which is fantastic. That is excellent news all round.

Q1039 **Douglas Ross:** I was speaking to a teacher at an event on Saturday, and he said that he has seen more interest in modern studies than ever before. It is almost a sexy subject now because we are watching it all the time on the news, but we are sometimes watching it for the wrong reasons. That is what I am getting at.

Kim Leadbeater: The point that I would make is this: what are people thinking while they are watching it? I was at an event on the Friday after that particularly distasteful performance in Parliament—I think it was the Wednesday evening—and every single person at the event came up to me and said various things: "They're all the same"; "They all need putting on a boat and shipping out of here"; "I don't want to listen to any of them, it's disgusting". They had watched but were not thinking, "Wow, this is fantastic. I am really proud of this country." They had watched with very different opinions. I think you are right; the engagement is really good, but what is it saying to people when the scenes that they watch are not always ones that we would be proud of?

Q1040 **Douglas Ross:** But they are not watching when we discuss an SI on something that is probably very important to them but does not have the same theatre. Sometimes I think that politicians play up to that because it gets a reaction, whether good or bad. When we work in Committee or speak in Westminster Hall, quite often debates are far more consensual, but they do not attract attention.

May I move on to the code? Looking through the proposal, I think that a lot of the behaviour that is listed as unacceptable is already unacceptable—it is illegal. A number of the points are things that I would expect to be arrested for if I did them in the campaign coming up. Is that not correct?

Jane Ramsey: I can answer that. Obviously, criminal behaviour will have potential criminal sanctions, but—

Q1041 **Douglas Ross:** Can I go through them? The use of threat and violence—I would be in trouble for that. If I damaged property, I would be in trouble. I think if I engaged in bullying, harassment or victimisation, I would be in trouble. Using abusive or threatening words or behaviour—there are laws at the moment that would see you punished for that.

Jane Ramsey: You are absolutely right. The joint standard of conduct that we recommended, although it is described slightly differently in our report, was agreed in 2017 but has not yet been agreed by the political parties.

It is twofold. One part of it is to have an all-encompassing, although brief, standard that would apply to all political parties, no matter what each political party's individual codes said. We did not want to try to interfere with individual political party codes; that is not the role of the Committee on Standards in Public Life, and it is not what the Jo Cox Foundation would want to do either. We found it slow-going trying to get the political parties to engage in joint work, for all the reasons you can imagine—they were busy, it is not what they normally do, they each have their own codes—but it is not clear to party members generally, across the board, what your own party will do if you breach various rules of your own party.

Q1042 **Douglas Ross:** I do want to come on to that in a minute, but my point was that a number of these behaviours that you have put as unacceptable are already illegal.

Jane Ramsey: At a high level they are, but they do not necessarily get dealt with.

Q1043 **Douglas Ross:** If I used violence or unlawful force, which is your first one, I would expect to be arrested. If I were violent towards my opponent or towards someone else in the election, I would expect to face sanctions, whether this code were in place or not.

Jane Ramsey: You are absolutely right. The point that I was going on to make, although perhaps not quickly enough, was that we learned from taking evidence that encapsulating things that might seem like motherhood and apple pie and/or completely obvious, but that do not seem to be for all members of all political parties, and having that in one place for parties to come together, to agree and work on together, would be beneficial in itself. That was the point. Obviously, it is stating things that would make you, me or anybody in this room think, "Of course that is what all political party members would do," but it is not always obvious to all political party members. Having it in one place, and having all parties signed up to it, seemed to be adding to clarity and transparency.

The second thing was that as parties and their leadership and representatives had to come together, there would be a process of recognising and sharing that would be beneficial in itself around the leadership space for political parties. That was the point of it.

What then happened was that although we convened meetings in this place, and senior representatives in leadership positions in the main parties in Westminster came, progress was incredibly slow. So we found it very helpful to work with the Jo Cox Foundation, which can do more of the outreach work with the political parties than the Committee can. That has given it added impetus.

We are now in a position where we would like, and we are ready for, each political party to say, "We will sign up to this, and we will do so before the next general election." We think that would be symbolically helpful and practically helpful, because it is really being very clear in raising and highlighting behaviours that are acceptable. The positive behaviours are outlined in sections 7 and 8, and the minimum is in section 9.

As you say, some of the examples are unlawful, but sometimes if people do things at the lower level of threatening violence, it does not end up with a criminal sanction, for lots of reasons. That is why we felt that it was important to restate the minimum for what is acceptable and unacceptable behaviour, as well as the positive things that will help and support civil discourse and democracy.

We have had formal confirmation in writing from Nicola Sturgeon of the SNP, and we have had positive noises—you might put that more elegantly than me, Catherine—from other parties, but we would really like some prioritisation on this. The reason for that is because it is important that parties lead this, not just the Government or the police. This is about our

political parties taking responsibility for standards in public life and the behaviour of their own members.

It was clear in the anecdotal evidence that has emerged since we took evidence on the report—although, I think it was also in the report—that within the Labour party and the Conservative party, for example, MPs were experiencing intimidatory behaviour from members of their own parties. It is not just Labour and Conservative MPs, but they particularly have talked to us about it. There is a really important leadership role for political parties and their leaders, and for MPs and candidates at the forthcoming election. We think that is really important, don't we Catherine?

Catherine Anderson: Can I just add that the joint standard does not supersede any existing internal party codes? As we all know, there are many of those, but they are varied. In preparing the language with us, the Committee did an incredible job going through all the internal party codes that exist, drawing out the commonalities of language, so that the working document could be in a style of language that parties already used. It makes specific reference to the internal party disciplinary procedures.

As Jane said, it is not intended to advantage or disadvantage any one party, but it is intended to set a higher-level statement of principle that sets out the minimum standards of behaviour that we all expect from our elected representatives and party members.

Q1044 **Douglas Ross:** Can I move on to the enforcement? It says that behaviour that breaches the unacceptable behaviour list and the joint standard will constitute grounds for disciplinary action under our party constitution. I read that to mean that if a Labour politician does something, and potentially a Liberal Democrat politician does the same thing and an SNP politician, activist or candidate and a Conservative do the same thing, the sanctions could be different. How do you address that?

Catherine Anderson: It is obviously a big question. You will have seen that we make a recommendation that parties should publish and collect data transparently and openly on their internal procedures and the complaints that they receive. I would go so far as to recommend that the Committee look at the potential for a third party to act as a clearing house for that information. At the moment, there is no central space to do that, not that we want to compare necessarily, but there should be effectively lodged open data around complaints that are made within parties and that are handled by the relevant code.

The enforcement of the code is incredibly important. The idea is not that it is a league table of which party behaves worst—that is not the point at all—but we do make a recommendation in the standard that, as a party member, if you sign up to the standard, one of the things you are calling on your leadership to do is to transparently and effectively collect that data on the complaints, the procedures and how it is handled. Jane, do you want to add something?

Jane Ramsey: First of all, this is a draft. That is why we don't want it going anywhere else; we wouldn't want the political parties to say, "Well, you have already agreed it all before we have actually had a chance to contribute." That is why we are keen for them to get on with it and prioritise it.

Douglas Ross: Hopefully this meeting will encourage that. Certainly, I feel very grateful.

Jane Ramsey: Yes, I am very pleased that I have landed that point. Thank you very much.

On sanctions, we recognised that that would be tricky, which is why it is definitely not for us as the Committee on Standards in Public Life, or indeed for the Jo Cox Foundation, to impose rules on sanctions on political parties. We think that the important Nolan principle, on openness and transparency, should be fulfilled. As a Committee, we think that political parties should be moving towards publishing data about how many complaints there have been and how they have been dealt with, obviously anonymously and in a format that is not hugely onerous. That openness and transparency will give confidence to other political parties and to all party members that things are out in the open—if not details, statistics on how things are being dealt with.

On sanctions, the people sitting behind me from the secretariat of the Committee on Standards in Public Life do a huge amount of the work that the Committee undertakes. They did a literature review of the codes, constitutions and rule books of all political parties in Westminster—not a task that I would take on lightly—and there are strong similarities between the main political parties. On a number of occasions we have spoken directly to Plaid Cymru, the SNP, the Labour party, Conservatives, and the Liberal Democrats.

The only party we have not spoken to—we think they have been too busy to come to our meetings—has been the DUP. Everyone else has engaged with us and knows which way we think the conversation is going. We need to engage with them, either from a leadership point of view or with their representatives, and talk about the draft—what works and what does not—and come to some common standard and agreement in that space. Notwithstanding the differences in codes, the intention and spirit of this is sufficiently clear, and we should be pushing at an open door.

Lord Evans: If the parties decided as their joint standard that they wanted a single disciplinary process, we would welcome that because it would be a strong signal. In the meetings we have had, however, I don't think we have detected an enthusiasm by the parties to try to do that, and the parties are not configured, in terms of arrangements, for working with each other. That is not surprising, but we have had to help that process, to some extent through the Committee, and now with the help of the Jo Cox Foundation.

Q1045 **Douglas Ross:** Should this code be agreed before the forthcoming

general election and be widely publicised—we want people to know it is there—is there any potential for political opponents to use it against each other for their own political reasons? It could be a case of, "Douglas Ross has been reported for breaching this code", knowing full well that that gets a story in the local paper and that the investigation probably will not take place until after the election. Even if it does, the outcome—which will hopefully be positive—will get a wee sidebar, whereas the other story would get the front page of the local papers.

Lord Evans: Yes, I think that is highly likely. We have also been doing work on local government standards, and one issue is that those have been used politically. Obviously, it is a net zero-sum game if you are all working to a single standard.

Jane Ramsey: I recognise that is a risk, but lots of people—most people in political parties—will be a member of that party because they want to do good. They are doing it from the route of civic responsibility. Most people will not do that. There will be some people in political parties who want to use the code like that, but that should not stop us or political parties trying to do the right thing. The Committee has made a suite of recommendations in its report, many of which have been introduced. We would like the Government to introduce a new law to combat intimidation during elections. In the meantime, given the interest in politics that you have described, it is important that political parties have a clear code that they can share and use. This is part of a suite of things, but everyone has a role to play, including political parties.

Q1046 **Chair:** You referred to an analysis of the different codes within parties. Has any of that been made public? Is there a case for making any of it public?

Jane Ramsey: That question has not come up. In the spirit of complying with the Nolan principles we publish our meetings and papers, so I do not see any reason why we should not publish that analysis. Let me just glance behind me—*[Interruption.]* Yes, we would be happy to do that.

Q1047 **Chair:** That would be very helpful for us, not least because we have been looking at issues such as Islamophobia and its implications for political parties, and we previously looked at antisemitism and its implications for political parties. Lord Evans, you spoke earlier about the importance of leadership. If you are honest, do you think that we are seeing the kind of leadership that we need at the moment?

Lord Evans: On the particular issue of the standard, I do not think that the parties have been beating a path to our door. That would suggest that this is not top of people's priorities at the moment, which worries me. If you look at the overall tone of public debate—this is not aimed at any one party—it is not evident that ensuring the tone of debate is a high priority at the moment for a number of people in leadership roles.

Q1048 **Chair:** In terms of how long this has been brewing, going back to the questions about the different causes, you referred to some of the issues around the Scottish referendum. I first wrote an article about rising vitriol

online towards women in politics in the autumn of 2015. You can go back to 2012, when Julia Gillard in Australia was bombarded with viral emails with abuse and threats. When we had the event last year for women parliamentarians from all over the world, they reported from all sorts of different countries the level of either physical threats, harassment or online threats that they were experiencing.

To what extent is this happening much more widely and to what extent is the way in which the Brexit debate has been conducted part of it? I ask that partly because this morning I tweeted, in response to the hate crime figures, that we were holding this evidence session and I could quickly see in the timeline responses saying, "Get Brexit done" or "Stop Brexit". From both sides of the argument, people were suggesting that that is the way to solve hate crimes, which have gone up substantially for people with disabilities or transgender hate crime and so on. I am just interested in how far you see the interaction between the rising hatred and the Brexit debate, and how far you see it as something that is wider and has been going on for longer.

Catherine Anderson: My view is that we are in danger of seeing this too much in isolation, not only as a country, but in the context of Brexit. As you say, this did not happen overnight in June 2016, but something certainly accelerated thereafter. There is a lot to be said for Jonathan's point that polarisation around a binary issue—whether it is Brexit, privatisation of the NHS or Scottish independence—tends to see people coalescing on the extremes, and we know that those are the sorts of people who are more inclined to engage in the further ends of the spectrum of abuse and intimidation.

I am interested in how we sit within Europe. There have been two political assassinations in Germany that I know of this year alone. We refer to Jo's murder as an incident that happened some 25 years after the previous political assassination in this country, yet we are seeing political assassinations across Europe, which are being linked to the rise of extremism and polarisation. We have a duty to look at ourselves within that wider context. However, I do see a chink of hope that when we get beyond Brexit, we can hopefully return to the robust debate that we had before, and we can look at the other issues and variables here, not only the variable of Brexit.

Kim Leadbeater: I would agree. It is part of a wider problem. The problems that we have in this country are not unique to us at all. I have been contacted by journalists from Australia and various countries across Europe, who have been experiencing similar issues and have asked me to speak about Jo, so I think it is part of a broader problem. Again, I think Brexit has potentially created some problems, but it has also provided an environment where problems that already existed can be discussed and talked about more. Some of that goes back to the stuff I was talking about earlier, where we were looking at the breakdown of communities and lots of issues around that, whether related to the economy or to young people and identity and belonging and all those deeper-level things.

Brexit didn't create those problems, but it certainly hasn't helped. I think it has exacerbated some of the issues we face in our communities up and down the country. When you put that in the mix with the anonymity of social media and the problems of social media, you have got a toxic cocktail where we end up in the situation we are in now. Someone needs to remove that cocktail and step back a little bit. That is the purpose of the standard we are trying to set and, hopefully, the purpose of the Committee today.

Q1049 **Chair:** In that wider context, Brexit is the most contested issue we are currently dealing with, but it may be a different issue in 12 months' time or two years' time. In those circumstances, do you think that the language used, on whatever the contested issue is—be it Brexit or something else—matters? Some of the issues raised have been about the use of war language such as "betrayal", which I have seen on both sides of the debate, along with use of "traitors," "collaborators," "coup" and all that kind of language. Is there a responsibility to dial down that kind of language in these contested circumstances?

Lord Evans: The point you make about context is really important. It doesn't seem to me that one should be forbidden from ever using a war analogy to talk about politics—those have been going on for generations. The question is of having an eye to the context within which you are making a public statement, of whatever sort, and therefore taking responsibility and leadership for it. Therefore, it is quite difficult to say that this sort of language is always wrong, but it is right that if you are in a leadership position of whatever sort, you should think about the context and the way in which what you say will be received as well as what it was that you may have been trying to transmit.

Q1050 **Chair:** Finally, going back to the code and the action that is needed, when did you last hear from any of the other political parties?

Catherine Anderson: Literally this morning. I have a meeting coming up this afternoon.

Q1051 **Chair:** With one of the parties or all of them?

Catherine Anderson: The Committee, prior to our involvement, had held group meetings, and there were not many of them because, as you can imagine, it was so difficult to get all the party reps in one place at the same time. So the foundation has now taken on the negotiating role of this piece of work and we are meeting with the parties individually. We are seeing, I think, three different party reps this week, and as Jane said, I want to reinforce our call to the leaders of all parties to commit in principle to the idea of a joint standard, and particularly to having a joint standard in place before the next election. That is incredibly important, because we know there are very legitimate fears being raised about campaigning and canvassing in the winter and in the dark in particular. There are very real concerns about people's safety and their staff and their families. We would like the party leadership to do whatever they can to accelerate the process that we are in the middle of.

Jane Ramsey: In the conversations we had here—we convened a couple of roundtables here before the Jo Cox Foundation was involved—which were very helpful, we had people like Ian Lavery for the Labour party, and we spoke to Brandon Lewis or his representative as the then Conservative party chairman, as well as Baroness Sal Brinton, who has been extremely active and supportive. Ditto the deputy leader of the SNP and Plaid Cymru. They have been supportive in those meetings. What is happening is it is not being signed off.

Our view as a Committee was that we needed the most senior leadership positions in the respective political parties to give authority, gravitas and weight to the importance of this work, but the difficulty is that those people are tremendously busy. So it is about finding the right route, which obviously Catherine and the Jo Cox team are brilliant at doing, but it would still be very helpful to have the political party leaders—the Prime Minister, Jeremy Corbyn, Jo Swinson and so on. Nicola Sturgeon has already signed on behalf of the SNP nationally, even though she is not down in Westminster, and the SNP has been very co-operative and helpful in Westminster as well. We would like to see from the big political parties, particularly Labour and the Conservatives, because our sense is that the Liberal Democrats are almost there, and hear it loud and clear that they may well want to work on the wording of the draft, but they are going to commit to doing that in a really official way.

Q1052 **Chair:** In your Jo Cox Foundation engagement, are you reaching senior people in the parties?

Catherine Anderson: We are, but we want it to happen quicker. We are doing what we can to expedite that, as I have said. We are talking about a matter of days or weeks, not months. This is the time to get the standard locked in. Just to say again, this does not supersede any existing codes. There is nothing in the standard that any moderate, right-minded, right-thinking person would disagree with, so we are hopeful that we can get it locked in fairly quickly.

Kim Leadbeater: We have a huge amount of support from politicians—Back-Bench politicians and high-profile politicians—across the political spectrum. We have had a lot of communication with them over the past couple of weeks and there is a huge amount of support across the House.

Q1053 **Chair:** You said that you have also engaged with Plaid, the Brexit party and the Green party and so on as well.

Jane Ramsey: We have with the Green party and Change UK, which is smaller than it was when we were originally talking to it, but none the less—with all the parties in Westminster. We have not had direct talks with the Brexit party because we have been looking at parties in Westminster, but when the standard is agreed, the plan is to share it with all the other political parties that stand candidates in the forthcoming election beforehand and ask them to sign it too.

Q1054 **Chair:** If you are focusing on it in anticipation of a general election, do you not need to reach all possible organisations that might or that

traditionally put up candidates in elections?

Jane Ramsey: We would. It was a timing thing, because we have taken all the political parties that I have just mentioned through a process since 2017, with various meetings. That has been, not an onerous process, but a time-consuming process. We felt that it would slow matters down to then say, "Come and join in the draft". What we expect and hope, however, is that they will sign up if everybody else has.

Q1055 **Chair:** In terms of the wider responsibility, clearly there is a responsibility on political parties and political leaders. What do you think is the wider responsibility on everybody else—people in public life? I do not mean about reporting news, but in terms of comment and the climate of debate.

Lord Evans: The point made clearly by Kim earlier was that this is not a one-institution problem. This is an issue that needs to be addressed holistically. That is part of the reason why the recommendations that we made related to the police, to political parties, to the media and to a whole variety of different aspects. This is not something where we switch the switch and it will change. Overall, we have been relatively encouraged by the response to the recommendations that we have had in principle, although in practice things have not moved as fast as they might have done. That is true at the political level and at the Government level, who have not legislated although they have said that they will, and it is true of the social media companies, which have given gently positive signals but nothing quite as far developed as could have been the case over a three-year period, or two-year period since we reported.

Catherine Anderson: Could I refer back to something that Kim said at the beginning to conclude? This is very much a top-down, bottom-up, all-round issue. The combination of prejudice against minorities in particular, or marginalised groups, and a mistrust of politics, politicians and people in public life, is a toxic combination. Together, that lowers our resilience when we deal with hate crimes and extremism, which is the environment that we are operating in at the moment. I will finish by directing the Committee to a warning that was issued last week by a charity that Jo worked with, and that we worked with, called Protection Approaches, which is tackling identity-based violence here and abroad. It calls on us all to think about how our local communities are addressing it and to think about the impacts of hate crime and extremism on community cohesion up and down our country. We need to remember to link this back to our neighbourhoods and our localities every step of the way.

Q1056 **Chair:** Thank you very much for the evidence that you have given and, far more so, for the work that you are doing on this and the leadership that you are all showing on it, which is immensely important in terms of the threat of it poisoning our democracy and the much wider and deeper threat of it undermining our social cohesion. We are very grateful, particularly to you, Kim. We first started looking at this after Jo was killed. She is in our thoughts every day.

Kim Leadbeater: Thank you very much.