

Voluntary principles on standards for political discourse

Our society is built on the fundamental values of democracy, human rights, equality, liberty and the rule of law. The effectiveness of our democracy depends on freedom of expression through political debates and campaigns which are open, robust and truthful.

The leaders and representatives of political parties, while naturally cherishing and defending their right to speak freely, also have a duty to conduct debate in a responsible manner, and to lead others in doing so.

We therefore call on all political parties to commit to ensuring that their members, whether as elected representatives, candidates or campaigners, refrain from any conduct which might reasonably be interpreted as:

- generating hostility, discrimination, prejudice or division;
- abusive or denigrating;
- promoting stereotypes; or
- using false, erroneous or misleading information,

in relation to any individual or group of people on the basis of their actual or perceived protected or other personal characteristics.*

This includes speeches, statements and published material, including words or images, through articles, social media activity, leaflets, broadcasts, posters or other materials, both during election campaigns and at other times.

The parties should ensure that, where complaints of any such conduct are made against party members, they are promptly and thoroughly investigated, and that those who are found to have failed to meet these expectations are subject to appropriate disciplinary procedures, according to party rules.

We also encourage the parties to make clear in their party rules that elected representatives must not discriminate in the way in which they represent the interests of all their constituents, and must take reasonable steps to use their positions to foster good relations between different groups.

* Relevant characteristics are found in the Equality Act 2010 (the protected characteristics are age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, and sexual orientation), the prohibition of discrimination in the European Convention on Human Rights (sex, race, colour, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, association with a national minority, property, birth or other status), and the criminal justice system's definition of hate crime (disability, race, religion or belief, sexual orientation or transgender status). Other personal characteristics against which individuals sometimes exhibit prejudice or hostility might include immigration status or being in receipt of social security.