

## **Motion for Time Limited Debate – Protecting Kent from hostile election interference**

Proposer: Mr Antony Hook

Seconder: Mr Chris Passmore

### **Council notes:**

1. It is well documented that states hostile to the UK and other democratic countries have in recent years sought to interfere with democratic processes in the UK and many other western countries.
2. These efforts have often been sponsored by or organised by autocratic regimes such as Russia and China and frequently involve the promotion of false information and abuse of candidates and campaigners, often using false social media accounts (sometimes to dox, bully or harass candidates and campaigners) or attempts to hack into the computer systems of elected officials and institutions.
3. There is also some domestically produced false information and deliberately unreliable sources.
4. The aim of these hostile actors is not simply to influence election outcomes in favour of candidates or parties who will be sympathetic to autocratic regimes but to spread general mistrust of elections and elected institutions with a view to undermining those institutions and our democratic society in the long-term
5. This problem has become more acute since the barbaric Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 which Kent County Council has wholeheartedly condemned and shown solidarity with the people of Ukraine.
6. Members of Kent County Council have noticed the organised use of fake social media accounts in the recent general election, which may have foreign or domestic origins.
7. Recent work within Kent County Council to improve members' and staff's awareness of hacking and other IT threats and ability to avoid falling victim to such threats.
8. In May 2025, there are significant local elections in England including the Kent County Council election, twenty other county council elections, nine unitary authority elections, one new combined county authority election and two new mayoral elections, the Scilly Isles Council election and the City of London Corporation elections.

### **Council believes:**

1. Democracy requires elections based on healthy competition of ideas and candidates using communications based on true information.
2. All of us who care about democracy have a responsibility to do what we can to resist efforts to spread false information and undermine public faith in the basic concept of democracy and elected institutions.

3. We should not complacently assume that hostile actors will only be active in this regard during national elections.
4. As part of their agenda to undermine democracy by sowing mistrust it is possible that hostile actors will try to spread false information, use hacking, false accounts and other nefarious acts in relation to any public elections including local and large area elections.

**Council requests the administration to:**

1. Continue work to improve the council's resilience against hacking and other cyber threats through appropriate training for members and staff and any other steps that can reasonably be taken.
2. Arrange for appropriate officers to work on developing communications to help people in Kent to be discerning between reliable and false information sources.
3. Appropriately involve members in this work while ensuring the party-political neutrality of any public or internal council communications.
4. Communicate with other local councils in the UK, organs of local government outside the UK who we have good relationships with, and the national government to share best practice and ideas about how to deal with this issue.