




WhatsApp message row and a cease and desist letter as campaigning in the West Berkshire local council elections turns ugly

 By [Niki Hinman](#) [Local Democracy Reporter](#)

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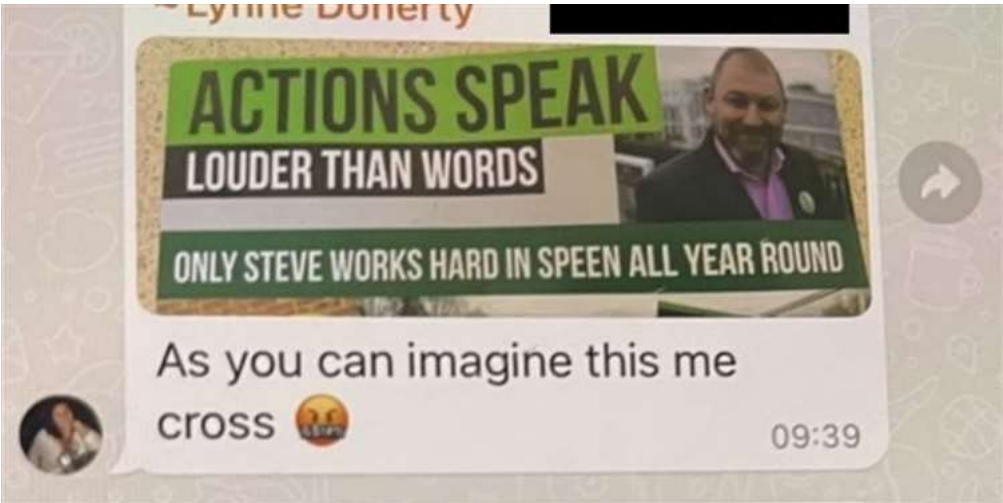




Campaigning in the West Berkshire local council elections has turned ugly.

A string of internal WhatsApp messages sent to the Conservative group call a Green Party councillor and candidate standing against the Tory leader "a poisonous little toad".

The string of messages then jokes about violence.



WhatsApp messages (62941612)

The current executive member for finance, councillor Ross MacKinnon (Con, Bradfield) sent the message referring to Steve Masters (Green, Speen).

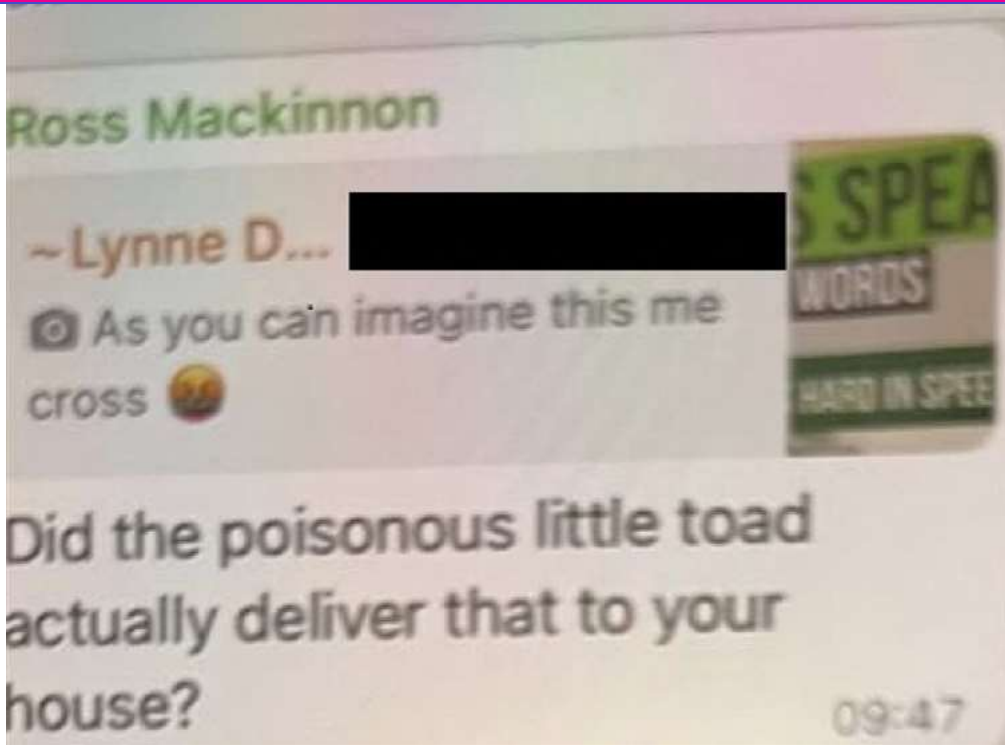
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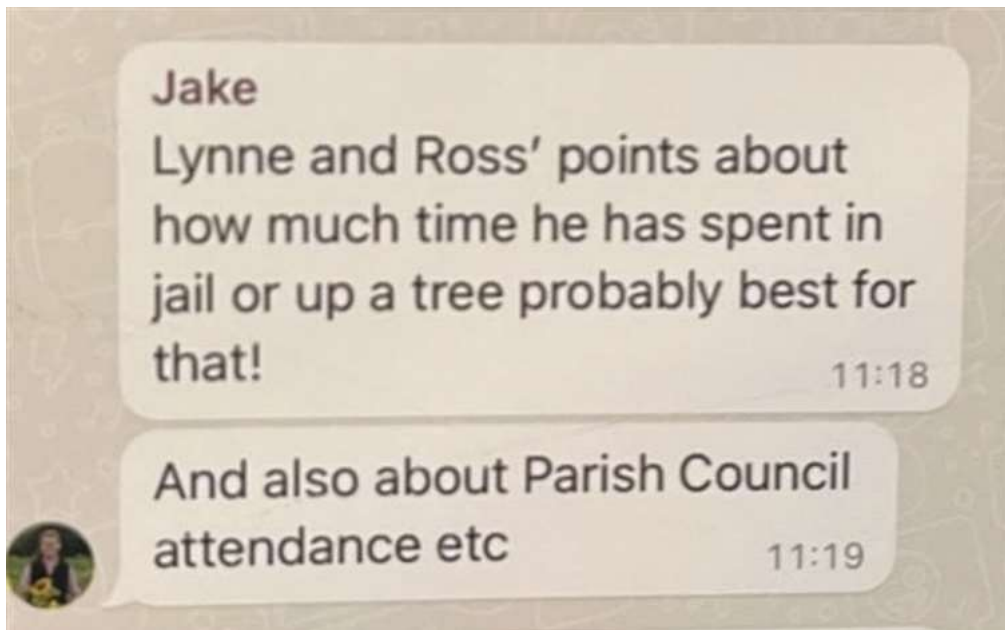
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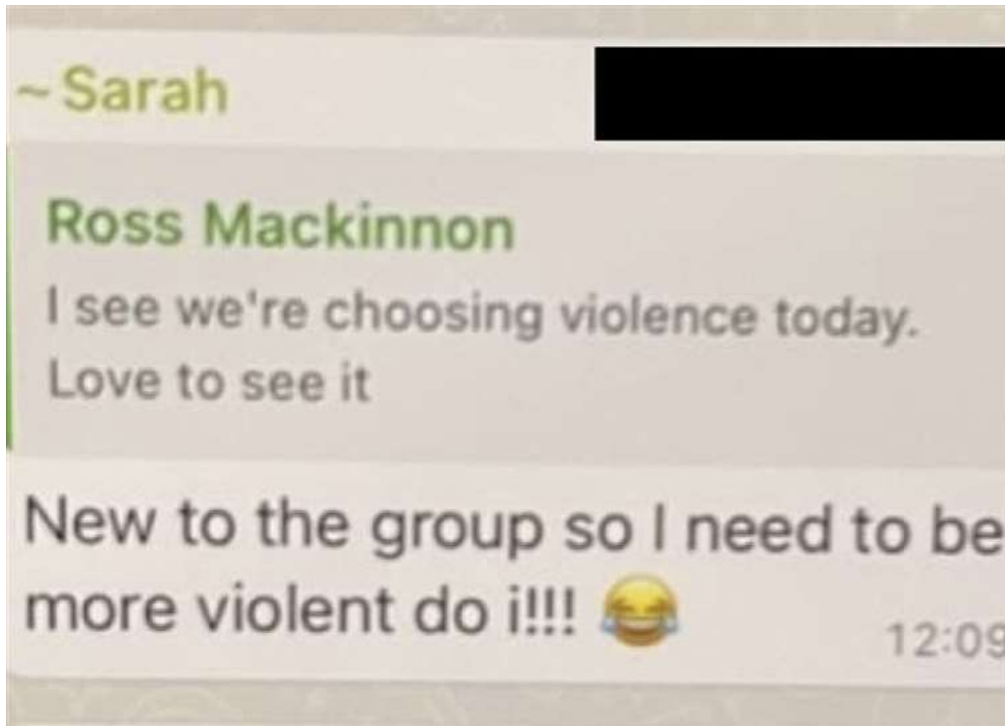
WhatsApp messages (62941681)

“Did the poisonous little toad actually deliver that to your house?” Mr Mackinnon asks in the same conversation which debates how best to use or retort to campaigning claims from opposition parties.



WhatsApp messages (62941691)

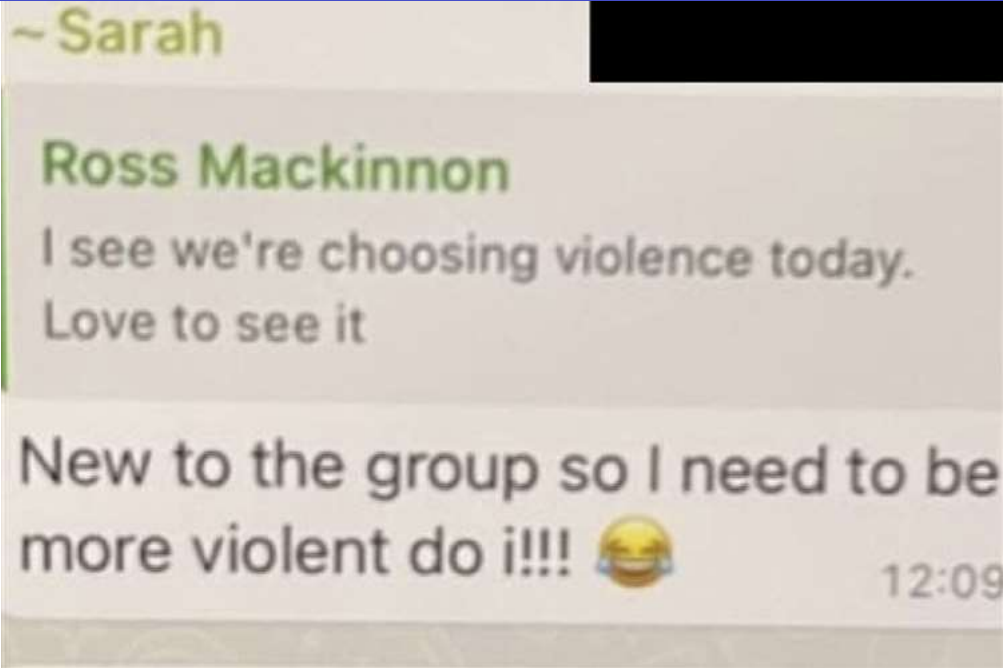
Further messages then allude to violence, with another message from Mr MacKinnon saying: “I see we’re choosing violence today. Love to see it.”



WhatsApp messages (62941720)

Followed by another from 'Sarah', who says: “New to the group so I need to be more violent do I?” It is followed by a laughing emoji.

This message is then followed by: “Hi Sarah, – fellow newbie here, but Ross is my husband so I’ve had the pleasure to meet many of the wonderful people on this chat already. We don’t all choose violence here but if you ever need back up we’ve got a few characters ready to do ... my husband for one.”

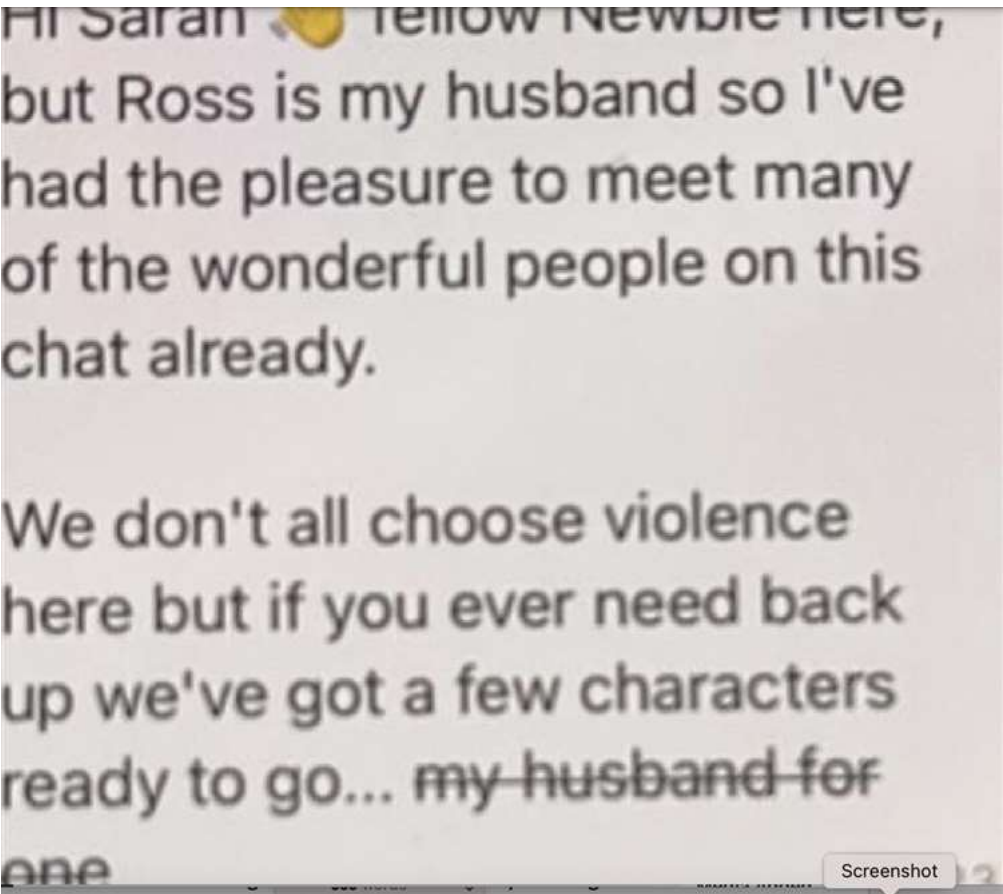


WhatsApp messages (62941720)

When approached for comment Mrs Doherty told the Newbury Weekly News: "Let me be absolutely clear: we do not, and never will, condone violence.

"The Conservatives I lead are conducting a fair and honest campaign. Our hope is that the other parties will act in the same way, and not resort to baseless political smears.

"I shan't say more as I never comment on group business: like every other member of the group, I am bound by group rules on confidentiality."



WhatsApp messages (62941743)

The Green Party leader in West Berkshire, Carolyne Culver (Green, Ridgeway), said: "I feel compelled to call this out publicly, in the interests of safeguarding and because I have no confidence in the leader of the council and no confidence in the ability of this council to deal with bullying and harassment.

"Last year the leader of the council proposed a motion about civility in public life. I urge her to act in the spirit of this motion."

She said that in recent months the chairman of West Berkshire Green Party had a complaint partially upheld regarding the behaviour of a Conservative councillor.

"This councillor was subsequently required to offer an apology to the same member of my group who has been targeted in the WhatsApp chat," she said.

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"I urge Conservative councillors and candidates in the WhatsApp group who participated in this discussion, or did not call people out when they made references to violence, to reflect upon this. I commend and thank those individuals who had the courage to come forward and speak out."

The Conservatives in West Berkshire have also sent a cease and desist letter to the Green Party to stop them using a photo of Mrs Doherty on their campaigning leaflets in the Speen ward.

They ask for the leaflet to be removed from distribution, saying the Green Party does not have the right to use the image, which is from West Berkshire Council's website, for political purposes.

The Greens say they are ignoring the letter.

Elections

Newbury

Niki Hinman Local Democracy Reporter

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RuralLife wrote:14/03/2023 13:30

I do hope that the Conservative party suspend their door knocking campaigns as I really would be alarmed if somebody that 'chooses violence' knocks on my door. I'm rather ashamed that West Berkshire is represented by a Conservative party that behaves like a local mafia group. They deserve to be swept away from any position of responsibility at the next local election.

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Anthony Paynter wrote:14/03/2023 12:23

If the local Green Party needs to find alternative imagery of Mrs Doherty for future flyers, I'd be more than happy to prepare a caricature...

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Anthony Paynter wrote:13/03/2023 23:53

Don't forget to vote in the local elections (take relevant photo ID) and send a message to these unpleasant Tory councillors.

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NewburyPeople wrote:13/03/2023 22:52

"We don't all choose violence" states Ross Mackinnon's wife casually implying that some do. It's either a sick joke or now a police matter.

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Ian Hall wrote:13/03/2023 20:22

I tried to get questions into the Executive Cycle , but the story broke at 2.00 pm and questions closed at 10.00 a.m

This patter of behaviour also seems in line with the treatment handed out to Claire Rowles.

I suspect this is just the tip of iceberg where bad practice is concerned

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NewburyPeople wrote:13/03/2023 19:57

The only thing that should cease and desist is the West Berkshire Conservative Party. Nasty, nasty, party and leadership.

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LivinginWestBerks wrote:13/03/2023 16:07

This language is horrific and the response from the leader is totally inadequate. If she is unable to condemn the councilors that used this language she should really step down from the role, and request the other councilors that threaten violence and use demeaning language to step down too. It makes you wonder what else is routinely acceptable in casual language amongst this appalling group of individuals.

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