

Immediate Release

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SDLP refers Communities Minister to Standards Commissioner

SDLP Leader of the Opposition Matthew O’Toole MLA has referred Communities Minister Gordon Lyons to the Assembly’s Standards Commissioner.

It comes after a social media post identifying a leisure centre in Larne as being used to host those impacted by racist attacks in the area. The leisure centre was later attacked.

The South Belfast MLA Mr O’Toole said:

“The disgraceful attacks we have witnessed in recent days have followed months of inflammatory rhetoric around immigration from politicians, including in Assembly and Council motions designed to stoke fear and division.

“The DUP and others have irresponsibly conflated so-called 'legitimate concerns' with appalling racially fuelled violence which has terrorised families with children.

“Even after homes and cars have been set alight and families forced to flee, some politicians still refuse to condemn these racist attacks without qualification. That failure of leadership reached a dangerous new low when the communities minister, who has statutory responsibility for the Housing Executive, publicly identified a leisure centre being used to support displaced families, just hours before it was attacked.

“The SDLP believes this was a clear breach of the Ministerial Code and his obligation to act in the interests of all people in Northern Ireland. We have therefore referred Minister Lyons to the Standards Commissioner for investigation. These matters are of the utmost seriousness and if Gordon Lyons and his party cannot see that, he cannot remain as Minister.

“These events have traumatised families and appalled communities across the North. The politicians who created this climate of hate cannot now disown its consequences. It is our responsibility to offer leadership, reassurance and solidarity and to say clearly that Northern Ireland is home to all who live here.”

ENDS