

Public Report  
Standards and Ethics Committee

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**Committee Name and Date of Committee Meeting**

Standards and Ethics Committee – 19 January 2023

**Report Title**

Civility and Respect Pledge

**Is this a Key Decision and has it been included on the Forward Plan?**

No

**Strategic Director Approving Submission of the Report**

N/A

**Report Author(s)**

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**Ward(s) Affected**

Borough-Wide

**Report Summary**

A report regarding the Civility and Respect Pledge, its aims and objectives and the requirements for a Local Council to sign up to the Pledge.

**Recommendations**

1. That the Committee notes the content of the report and in particular the aims and objectives of the Civility in Respect Pledge and requirements for a local councils to sign up to the Civility and Respect Pledge.
2. That the Committee encourage all local councils in the Borough to sign up to the Civility in Respect Pledge.

**List of Appendices Included**

None

**Background Papers**

None

**Consideration by any other Council Committee, Scrutiny or Advisory Panel**

None

**Council Approval Required**

No

## Exempt from the Press and Public

No

## Civility and Respect Pledge

### 1. Background

- 1.1 The Civility and Respect Pledge is the response by the National Association of Local Councils (NALC) to the growing concerns about the impact bullying, harassment, and intimidation are having on local (parish and town) councils, councillors, clerks and council staff and the resulting effectiveness of local councils. As such NALC have stated that they believe now is the time to put civility and respect at the top of the agenda and start a culture change for the local council sector.
- 1.2 As stated on the NALC website, The Civility and Respect Pledge is being introduced because there is no place for bullying, harassment and intimidation within the local council sector. The pledge is stated to be easy for councils to sign up for and it will enable councils to demonstrate that they are committed to standing up to poor behaviour across the sector and to driving through positive changes which support civil and respectful conduct. NALC invite all councils to take the Civility and Respect Pledge.
- 1.3 The Mission Statement for the Civility in Respect Pledge is as follows:

#### **MISSION STATEMENT**

*Civility and respect should be at the heart of public life, and good governance is fundamental to ensuring an effective and well-functioning democracy at all levels.*

*The intimidation, abuse, bullying and harassment of councillors, clerks and council staff, in person or online, is unacceptable, whether by councillors, clerks, council staff, or public members.*

*This can prevent councils from functioning effectively, councillors from representing local people, discourage people from getting involved, including standing for election, and undermine public confidence and trust in local democracy.*

*NALC, county associations and OVW, as the membership organisations representing the first tier of local government in England and Wales, and the SLCC, as the professional body for clerks, are committed to working together to promote civility and respect in public life, good governance,*

*positive debate and supporting the well-being of councillors, professional officers and staff.*

*To that end, the Civility and Respect Working Group will be working to deliver tangible resources, actions and interventions in four main areas: providing councils with the tools to support good governance; lobbying to strengthen the standards regime and encouraging more people to get involved; training; and processes to intervene to provide support to struggling councils.*

1.4 By taking the Pledge the local council agrees that the council will treat councillors, clerks, employees, members of the public, and representatives of partner organisations and volunteers with civility and respect in their roles and that it:

- Has put in place a training programme for councillors and staff
- Has signed up to the Code of Conduct for councillors
- Has good governance arrangements in place including staff contracts and a dignity at work policy
- Will seek professional help at the early stages should civility and respect issues arise
- Will commit to calling out bullying and harassment if and when it happens
- Will continue to learn from best practices in the sector and aspire to be a role model/champion council through for example the local [Local Council Award Scheme](#)
- Supports the continued lobbying for change in legislation to support the Civility and Respect Pledge including sanctions for elected members where appropriate

1.5 The Working group referred to above has identified a number of changes and improvements considered vital to provide support to help reduce and manage the issues related to bullying and harassment in the local council sector. These factors have been organised into six work streams that will deliver on the mission statement. These work streams are the provision of training, help in relation to Governance arrangements, intervention strategies to assist struggling councils, lobbying in respect of legislative changes to the standards regime, collaborating with the LGA and Lawyers in Local Government (LLG) and enabling whereby bullying and harassment information and support is made available to clerks and councils.

1.6 A host of resources are also made available through the Civility in Respect Project to local councils including guidance around the Code of Conduct, specific statements for local councils website around bullying and harassment, further guidance in respect of HR matters, and resources and guidance covering governance, recruitment, Social Media and training.

- 1.7 Further information in respect of the Civility and Respect Pledge and ongoing Civility and Respect project are available on the NALC website at [www.nalc.gov.uk/our-work/civility-and-respect-project](http://www.nalc.gov.uk/our-work/civility-and-respect-project) and an online presentation in respect of the Civility and Respect Pledge and Project will be provided at the forthcoming meeting of the Committee.

## **2. Key Issues**

- 2.1 The substance of the Civility and Respect Pledge are set out above and with encouragement from the Committee, it is hoped that all local councils within the Borough will sign up to the Pledge.

## **3. Options considered and recommended proposal**

- 3.1 The recommendations are set out above.

## **4. Consultation on Proposal**

- 4.1 The Civility and Respect project has been discussed at the Parish Liaison group with local council representatives and this will provide an ongoing forum to promote the Pledge.

## **5. Timetable and Accountability for Implementing this Decision**

- 5.1 If the recommendations to the Committee are accepted, then contact will be made with all local councils to encourage them to sign up to the Civility in Respect Pledge within a week of the Committee meeting. Whether or not individual local councils do take the Pledge is a matter and decision for each Council. The number of local councils who sign up to the pledge will reported back to the Committee on a biannual basis.

## **6. Financial and Procurement Advice and Implications**

- 6.1 Any work undertaken by Legal Services in dealing with this matter is within the budget for Legal Services.

## **7. Legal Advice and Implications**

- 7.1 The Council and the Standards and Ethics Committee have a statutory duty to promote and maintain high standards of conduct, pursuant to the Localism Act 2011. The encouragement by the Committee for local councils to sign up to the Civility in Respect Pledge is an effective way for the Council to promote and maintain high standards of conduct.

## **8. Human Resources Advice and Implications**

- 8.1 None.

**9. Implications for Children and Young People and Vulnerable Adults**

9.1 None.

**10. Equalities and Human Rights Advice and Implications**

10.1 The aims and objectives of the Civility and Respect Pledge are consistent with treating everybody equally and ensuring that individuals in the local council sector are not subject to bullying and harassment.

**11. Implications for Partners**

11.1 The Civility and Respect Pledge is aimed at local councils and further engagement in respect of the Civility and Respect Pledge through the Parish Liaison Group will be undertaken.

**12. Risks and Mitigation**

12.1 There is a risk that local councils will not engage with the Civility and Respect Project and take the Pledge. The number of local councils signing up to the Pledge will be monitored and further encouragement and engagement will be provided by the Committee and the parish Liaison Group if necessary.

**13. Accountable Officer(s)**

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