

Committee Name and Date of Committee Meeting

Standards and Ethics Committee – 09 November 2023

Report Title

Civility and Respect Pledge - Update

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 providing an update on the adoption of the Civility and Respect Pledge by local (Parish and Town) Councils.

Recommendations

1. That the Committee notes the content of the report in particular the adoption of the Civility in Respect Pledge by local councils in the Borough.

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 - Update

1. Background

- 1.1 Members will recall the report to the Standards and Ethics Committee in January 2023, in respect of the Civility in Respect Pledge (“the Pledge”). As set out in that report, the 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 At the meeting referred to above, the Committee felt that the Pledge was a very positive initiative. One of the recommendations of the previous meeting was that the Chair of the Committee write to all local councils in the Borough setting out the benefits of the Civility in Respect Pledge and encouraging all Parish Councils to sign up to the Pledge. As such letter from the Chair was sent to all local council clerks. Also at the previous Committee meeting a request was made that a report be brought back to the Committee after a suitable period with an update as to how many local councils had indeed signed up to the Pledge and their experience of the same. This report provides that update.

2. Key Issues

- 2.1 The number of local Councils who have signed up to the Pledge is set out below along with their views as to any effect this has had. The reasons for local councils not signing up are also set out. Any further views from the Committee as to any action which the Standards and Ethics Committee could take in relation to encouraging local Councils to sign up to the Pledge are welcomed.
- 2.2 There have been 12 responses received from the local council clerks, to the request for an update as to whether their local council had signed up to the Pledge and whether it was felt to have made any discernible difference to conduct and behaviour. Of those 12 responses, seven local councils had signed up to the Pledge and five had decided not to do so.
- 2.3 The reasons stated for not signing up to the Pledge were as follows:

“it was out to council and they did not see the need. We are a well run council and all are in accord with aims and goals of the parish council”

“Members couldn’t see any real difference between this pledge and the existing Code of Conduct. If the CoC had any weight behind it, i.e. to take meaningful action against councillors who behave outside the Code, there would be no need for this pledge.”

“No particular reason, other than our Councillors work quite well together and with myself as Clerk and this was not seen as a main priority”

“We haven’t adopted the civility and respect pledge as I was waiting for closure on the current complaints that are live with councillors conduct.”

“We deliberated “signing up” to the Civility and Respect Pledge but didn’t because Members believed they were already compliant with the high standards expected in the Council’s dealings with others and the service/accountability to the local community and others.

- 2.4 In respect of those local councils who have signed up to the Pledge the following comments were made:

“There has been no discernible difference as I had no real issues with the Council and both have good chairman who would support me.”

“No difference - no issues before or since”

“So far, I have not noticed any discernible change in behaviour from Councillors despite repeated reminders from myself.”

“No difference in behaviour at meetings. Under the radar bullying/coercion still occurs.”

- 2.5 Any further responses and comments received before the forthcoming meeting will be presented to the Committee at the meeting.
- 2.6 As stated in the previous report to Committee about the Pledge, it has also been discussed at the Parish Liaison Group. The Parish Liaison Officer (in Neighbourhoods Services) has provided support to Parish Councils in respect of the signing up to the Pledge, along with providing support on a more general level to both Clerks and Members.

3. Options considered and recommended proposal

- 3.1 The recommendations are set out above.

4. Consultation on Proposal

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

5. Timetable and Accountability for Implementing this Decision

- 5.1 N/A

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 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 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 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 None this.

13. Accountable Officer(s)

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