

Introducing the Civility and Respect Pledge

SLCC, NALC, and OVW 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.

There is no place for bullying, harassment, and intimidation within our sector and signing up to the Civility and Respect Pledge is one of the ways a council can demonstrate that it is committed to standing up to poor behaviour across our sector, and to demonstrating positive changes which support civil and respectful conduct.

By signing the Pledge, your council is agreeing that it 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 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 practice in the sector and aspire to being a role model / champion council e.g., via Local Council Award Scheme
- supports the continued lobbying for change in legislation to support the civility and respect, including sanctions for elected members where appropriate

We invite all councils to include an agenda item to review the statements and sign up to the Civility and Respect Pledge.



Figure 1 Blue dots represent Councils already signed up for C&R

Civility and Respect Pledge suggested agenda item:

To pass a resolution to sign up to the civility and respect pledge

Definition of Civility and Respect

Civility means politeness and courtesy in behaviour, speech, and in the written word.

Examples of ways in which you can show respect are by listening and paying attention to others, having consideration for other people's feelings, following protocols and rules, showing appreciation and thanks, and being kind.

The National Association of Local Councils (NALC), the Society of Local Council Clerks (SLCC), and One Voice Wales (OVW), 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.

By our council signing up to the civility and respect pledge we are demonstrating that our council is committed to treating councillors, clerks, employees, members of the public, representatives of partner organisations, and volunteers, with civility and respect in their role.

Signing up is a simple process, which requires councils to register and agree to the following statements:

Statement	Tick to agree
Our council has agreed that it will treat all councillors, clerk and all employees, members of the public, representatives of partner organisations, and volunteers, with civility and respect in their role.	
Our council has put in place a training programme for councillors and staff	
Our council has signed up to Code of Conduct for councillors	
Our council has good governance arrangements in place including, staff contracts, and a dignity at work policy.	
Our council will commit to seeking professional help in the early stages should civility and respect issues arise.	
Our council will commit to calling out bullying and harassment when it and when it happens.	
Our council will continue to learn from best practice in the sector and aspire to being a role model/champion council e.g., via the Local Council Award Scheme	
Our council supports the continued lobbying for the change in legislation to support the Civility and Respect Pledge, including sanctions for elected members where appropriate.	

Civility and Respect Pledge suggested agenda item:

To pass a resolution to sign up to the civility and respect pledge

CIVILITY AND RESPECT PROJECT



IN COLLABORATION WITH SLCC, NALC, OVW, COUNTY ASSOCIATIONS

ISSUE 6 | MARCH 2023



WELCOME TO THE CIVILITY AND RESPECT PROJECT NEWSLETTER

A WORD FROM NALC AND SLCC CHIEF EXECUTIVES

We are delighted that the number of councils signing up to the civility pledge is over 1,000, a tremendous start, and we encourage all councils to consider signing up to it.

We are continuing the work to look at those councils with chronic behavioral issues which can affect the performance and reputation of the council, and we are committed to continue working together to progress solutions in this critical area and build on the great work which has already been done.

COUNCILLORS RESPONSIBILITIES AS EMPLOYERS – PODCASTS

To help councillors better understand their responsibilities as employers we are working with council sector HR experts, Personnel Advice and Solutions Ltd, to produce a series of short videos, or podcasts, each 20-30 minutes long, which give practical guidance to councillors on critical topics such as building effective HR committees, recruitment, appraisals, staff absence and sickness.

The podcasts are a free resource, shared with county associations and One Voice Wales (OVW), and available via NALC and SLCC websites.

In the last newsletter, we shared the first two in the series of podcasts on the theme of councillors responsibilities as employers: [Podcast #1 — Building an effective personal committee - YouTube](#) and [Podcast #2 — Recruitment - YouTube](#).

This month we are happy to share the next in this series of podcasts:

Grievance Management

- Who do employees complain to, and who has the authority to deal with these situations?
- Investigating complaints informally
- Deciding whether the council can resolve the complaint
- Code of Conduct complaints against councillors
- Conducting a formal grievance and appeal hearing

Disciplinary Action

- Who has the right within the council to discipline staff?
- Conducting informal investigatory meetings
- Deciding how to support and encourage an employee to improve and overcome their conduct / performance issues in a fair and reasonable manner
- Deciding when to conduct formal disciplinary action
- Getting the formal process and paperwork right, including dismissal

Appraisals

- The purpose of appraisals
- Picking the correct appraisal form for your council
- How to prepare for the appraisal
- Asking the right questions in the right place and at the right time
- Action plans following appraisals
- Confidentiality

Sickness and Absence Management

- Understanding the legal position
- Objectively measuring absences
- Conducting reasonable investigations into chronic health issues
- Formal procedures to address the absences
- Making reasonable adjustments to accommodate people with disabilities at work
- Terminating employment through the capability procedure

The podcasts are an introduction to each subject. More information and training may be available from your county association and sometimes it is necessary to seek additional advice from a HR service provider with specialist local council knowledge.

Visit the NALC and SLCC civility webpages for links to these new podcasts - [CIVILITY AND RESPECT PROJECT \(nalc.gov.uk\)](#) and [SLCC | Civility & Respect Project](#)

E-LEARNING FOR EVERYONE

One of the key aims of the project has been to deliver training support for councillors, clerks, and employees who experience difficulties with bullying and harassment, and to start to address some of the causes of poor behaviour. We recognise that times and dates for webinars and training courses do not always suit the busy schedules of local council members and employees, and that a blended approach is often needed to share vital information.

E-learning enables councils to respond quickly to learners' needs, with flexibility and without having to organise physical training with fixed times and dates. SLCC and several county associations already offer a comprehensive range of e-learning options for clerks and councillors, and we are now pleased to be able to extend this further.

We are working with Nimble, online learning specialists, to enable councils access to a suite of engaging online learning at affordable prices which will be available to everyone across our sector. Nimble already work with some of the county associations to offer quality digital online training, and the portfolio of e-learning modules we have developed will either be available directly via your county association, or via NALC or SLCC.

The registration process is simple and will give you access to a bespoke range of e-learning designed specifically for the civility and respect project, but also to some extremely useful additional training modules covering subjects such as mental health awareness, personal safety and diversity and inclusivity.

If your county association is not listed on the drop down box at registration, please contact them to register.



CIVILITY AND RESPECT E-LEARNING MODULES - £16 PER MODULE

We have worked with internal and external partners to create several bespoke e-learning modules with the aims of increasing knowledge, enhancing skills and improving behaviours. We have also taken advantage of some of the Nimble modules which will effectively support councils wishing to address civility issues. Some of the e-learning modules available as part of the project are outlined here. For more information, or to register please use this link: < [Nimble e-learning](#) >

****If your council is paying for the training, please ensure you have their permission to pay for the training prior to registering****

Standards in Public Life (Author: South West County Associations)

This module is designed to support those elected or co-opted and/or working in local councils, to understand the principles of conduct expected of all councillors.

Councillors must abide by its own councils code of conduct, but this module is based upon national model guidance produced by Local Government Association and endorsed by both NALC and SLCC.

Respectful and Positive Social Media (Author: Breakthrough Communications)

This introductory e-learning module considers the opportunities and risks associated with social media from a civility and respect perspective. It explores a range of proactive and pre-emptive strategies councils and councillors can put in place to set themselves up for success. It also explores what to do if things go wrong and how to manage a range of scenarios from trolling to harassment and practical what steps you can take to protect yourselves and the council.

Leadership in Challenging Situations for Councils and Councillors (Author: Breakthrough Communications)

This introductory e-learning module will consider different leadership styles in the context of your role at the council, exploring which styles we personally 'default' to and which styles can work effectively for different situations. It also covers ideas on how to build, support and get the most from an effective and motivated team.

Personal Resilience for Councils and Councillors (Author: Breakthrough Communications)

This introductory e-learning module seeks to develop a better understanding of where our behaviour comes from and considers what resilience means for us in the context of our roles within the council. There will be opportunities to explore role-focused scenarios and consider how best to respond to them, utilising different strategies to deal with and manage a range of situations.

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Essentials

We all have the responsibility to treat others fairly and to foster a culture of equal opportunity, councils must embrace the principles of equality, diversity and inclusion, placing them at the heart of their policies and procedures.

Certain characteristics are protected by the equality law and both councillors and employees need to understand and abide by equality legislation. This course addresses threats to equality, and explores how you can promote fairness, diversity and inclusion in your council.

Stress Management Essentials

Most people experience stress from time to time, and this isn't necessarily bad; stress is a natural response, but prolonged periods of stress can be harmful. There are many ways in which employees can reduce or avoid stress, and if they are experiencing stress already, there are approaches they can follow to manage their stress most effectively.

This e-learning course includes a range of learning activities to help you recognise, manage and reduce stress.

MODEL GOVERNANCE DOCUMENTS



The Civility and Respect Project team have worked in partnership with Hoey Ainscough Associates Ltd to revise the Local Government Association (LGA) Code of Conduct Guidance to better reflect the needs of our sector. The revised guidance has been approved for use by NALC and SLCC and endorsed by LGA.

The LGA produced a revised code of conduct in December 2020, this was supported by a guidance document which they first circulated in July 2021. The supporting guidance was an incredibly useful document but was not specifically tailored to the nuances of parish councils. The civility and respect team have worked closely with Hoey Ainscough Associates Ltd, with the support of the LGA, to revise the guidance to specifically reflect the needs of and situations relevant to parish councils.

The guidance covers:

- The general principles of councillor conduct
- Application of the model councillors code of conduct
- General obligations under the code including:
 - Respect
 - Bullying & harassment
 - Discrimination
 - Impartiality
 - Mis-use of position
- Protecting the reputation of the council including:
 - Declarations of interest
 - Bias and pre-determination

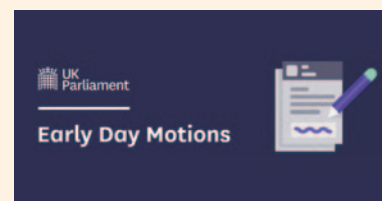
Download the guidance <[Code of conduct guidance](#)>

SECOND EARLY DAY MOTION RELEASED

Dr Julian Lewis, MP for New Forest East, has tabled another early day motion (EDM) calling on the government to re-visit its response to the Committee on Standards in Public Life report on local government ethical standards including the introduction of tougher sanctions to deal with poor behaviour in local councils.

Members are being urged to contact their local MPs and encourage them to sign this EDM. At the time of writing 25 MP's have already pledged their support for it.

[Click here to read the EDM.](#)



What are EDMs?

EDMs are motions submitted for debate in the House of Commons for which no day has been fixed. Whilst few are debated, many attract a great deal of public interest and media coverage.

They are used to put on record the views of individual MPs or to draw attention to specific events or campaigns. By attracting the signatures of other MPs, they can be used to demonstrate the level of parliamentary support for a particular cause or point of view.

What can you do?

The more MP's who support this EDM, the more likely it is to get discussed in parliament. Please either table an agenda item to pass a resolution for your council to write to the local MP asking that they back this motion and have it discussed in parliament or write to your MP as an individual – you do not need council approval to write as an individual.

We've designed template letters which you can use to contact your MP on this issue and hope that you will take the time to support us with this very important and worthwhile campaign so that we can start to make a change. You may like to amend or personalise it with an introduction and sign off and if appropriate, the inclusion of any personal experiences will help to add context and influence.

[Click here to view the template letter for clerks to MP.](#)

[Click here to view the template letter for councils to MP.](#)

Please add a motion to your next agenda to ask for the support of your MP.

UPDATE ON THE PLEDGE

At the time of writing over 1,000 councils have now signed up to the pledge – a tremendous start and we hope that many more councils do the same. We have now launched a pledge counter so you can easily see the amount of support across our sector.

There is no place for bullying, harassment, and intimidation within our sector and signing up to the Civility and Respect Pledge is one of the ways a council can demonstrate that it is committed to addressing bullying and harassment across our sector, and to demonstrate positive changes which support civil and respectful conduct.

The pledge is voluntary, but it is a way for the entire council to make a public statement of intent to establish that it is committed to standing up to poor behaviour across our sector. The pledge is underpinned by certain behaviours which demonstrate some of the positive actions supportive of civil and respectful conduct, for example actively calling out bullying and harassment when it happens rather than a passive response and ignoring it. The pledge is relevant even if all current councillors and officers behave with dignity and respect, it's also about standing up to members of the public who may abuse councillors as well as officers; about presenting a united front; publicly agreeing that there is no place for poor behaviour in our sector; and empowering the council to stand up to bullies, whoever they are. Sometimes all it takes is one controversial planning application, an unpopular decision or one new councillor to change the atmosphere for the council and the pledge is about stating upfront how the council will handle poor behaviour if it happens.

If your council are still considering it, or haven't yet discussed it, the civility and respect project team have now released a video to inform councils about the project and pledge. The video features Linda Larter (Chief Executive for Sevenoaks Town Council, former President of SLCC) and Sue Baxter (Vice President of NALC, councillor for Wythall Parish Council) who share their views on what the pledge means and why we are asking all councils to sign up to it [Pledge video](#).

We invite all councils to include an agenda item to review the statements and sign up to the Civility and Respect Pledge. Click to take the pledge: [SLCC](#) | [NALC](#).

There is also an example agenda item with suggested wording to help: [Pledge agenda wording](#)



...AND FINALLY, THE CIVILITY AND RESPECT TRAINING EVENTS ARE STILL AVAILABLE



Breakthrough Communication, experts in the field of training for local councils have created **a suite of bespoke workshops and resource packs** for local council clerks, officers, and councillors as part of the Civility and Respect Project.

Each package comprises useful guides and custom-designed toolkits as well as access to on-demand and live virtual training events.

****Resilience and Emotional Intelligence - What it means in practice for clerks and council officers****

Develop a better understanding of where our behaviour comes from and what resilience means in the context your role. Consider strategies to manage and deal with different situations effectively and receive a useful resource pack for building your own resilience and emotional intelligence.

****Leadership in Challenging Situations - Dealing with challenging situations and working with others effectively****

Consider a range of role-focused challenging situations, how we can work with others more effectively, different leadership styles and approaches in the context of your role, how to build support and get the most from an effective and motivated team.

****Respectful Social Media — How to deal with attacks and negative engagement****

Explore different methods and strategies for pre-empting and dealing with negative attacks on social media and ways in which you can keep control of social media output. Consider personal 'digital tone of voice', explore our use of language and its role in positive two-way communication, as well as discussing the type of content we can post on social media.

Please visit our dedicated civility and respect pages for lots more information and support

[SLCC](#) | [Civility and Respect Project](#) and [NALC](#) | [Civility and Respect Project](#)



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