

CIVILITY AND RESPECT PROJECT



IN COLLABORATION WITH SLCC, NALC, OVW, COUNTY ASSOCIATIONS

ISSUE 5 | NOVEMBER 2022



WELCOME TO THE CIVILITY AND RESPECT PROJECT NEWSLETTER

A WORD FROM NALC AND SLCC CHIEF EXECUTIVES

Over 500 councils have now signed up to the civility pledge. This is a great start and we encourage all councils to consider signing up to the pledge and joining the cultural change which has been started.

There are many more resources being worked on which will be shared with you over the next few months including sector specific guidance of the code of conduct, on demand e-learning modules, and a guide for addressing conflict.

We recognise there is still more to do but together we can address poor behaviour, and ultimately retain councillors and staff.

RESPECTFUL SOCIAL MEDIA

Social media is a simple, quick and effective way of communicating. It allows a user to reach whole communities at the click of a button, perfect for community engagement. Councils and councillors can constructively engage with communities rather than simply broadcasting information. But unfortunately, in a small number of cases, councillors and councils can experience online abuse. Social media can become a place where individuals resort to abusive behaviour, such as, aggressive language, threats, trolling, and bullying. Building up your following on social media is harder if there is a small number of angry voices which dominate.

We have worked in collaboration with Breakthrough Communications to develop a new guide to social media for councils, officers, and councillors to actively address the issues of civility and respect on social media. It is designed to guide you through the challenges of social media for local councils from handling trolling to legitimate challenge and scrutiny, from smear campaigns to politics.

The guide will help you to use positive language and tone in order to better shape the conversation and increase engagement, to find common ground and engage with a variety of views. There is also help on escalating issues, deleting and moderating comments, blocking abusive users, reporting online abuse and legal matters to the police or social media platform, and deciding when it is time to get off of social media.

Download the guide [Respectful Social Media guide](#)

UPDATE ON THE LEGISLATION WORKSTREAM PROGRESS

Work continues around raising the profile of the Civility & Respect project amongst parliamentarians. No opportunity is missed by SLCC or NALC to include this issue as part of briefings with MPs, government departments and their civil servants. Thanks to recent efforts, including those made by clerks and local councillors through letters to their local MPs, we are starting to see the beginnings of increased awareness. Dr Julian Lewis, MP has offered to sponsor a second Early Day Motion in the House of Commons and several MPs have approached us offering to help promote the project to fellow parliamentarians.

Poor behaviour by employees can be dealt with through employment law, but when elected individuals choose not to abide by codes of conduct and civility pledges and won't desist in their poor behaviour, there is little recourse for those who are suffering. Yes, if a law is broken, the police can become involved, but most poor behaviour is not a crime under law. It is a widespread problem with poor standards affecting not just clerks suffering at the hands of elected individuals, but councillors and other employees in both local and principal councils. Better standards of behaviour are needed for all those in public life. The backing of SLCC, NALC, OVW, County Associations and ALCC in getting a second motion back in front of MPs will be key. It is time to try again.

The commitment shown by Dr Lewis to help use parliamentary processes to introduce debate for tougher sanctions for poor standards of behaviour in our sector is very welcome. If you would like to contact your MP to raise the civility issue we have designed template letters which can be personalised to add context and influence. [NALC Template letter](#) and [SLCC template letter](#)

COUNCILLORS RESPONSIBILITIES AS EMPLOYERS



It was apparent from our research that one of the key areas which challenges relationships between councillors and clerks is the council's responsibility as employer for the clerk. Councils which support and value their staff are better able to deliver their objectives and adapt to changing needs or priorities. Whether the council employs a single member of staff for a few hours a week, or a large and varied team of individuals, good employment practice from recruitment through to support and development is key to achieving the best outcomes for your council and your communities. NALC offer a publication - **Good Councillors Guide to Being a Good Employer** - which is available to members and provides vital guidance for councils as employers.



PODCASTS

However, we recognise that a blended approach is often needed to share vital information, so to help councillors 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 will be a free resource, shared with county associations and One Voice Wales, and available via NALC and SLCC websites. The first 2 videos covering the following topics have now been released and are available here: **Councillors Responsibilities As Employers - Podcast 1 - YouTube** and **Councillors Responsibilities As Employers Podcast 2 - YouTube**.

Building an Effective HR Committee

- Who is best suited to be on the committee?
- Effective Terms of Reference
- Having the right contacts
- Statutory requirements for effective line management

Look out for further podcasts in the NALC and SLCC news bulletins over the next few weeks.

Recruitment

- Deciding who in the council is responsible for recruitment
- Drafting the person specification
- Designing the job advert around the needs of the council
- Objective/non-discriminatory selection criteria
- Asking the right questions, in the right place at the right time
- Using objective and measurable methods to select the right person
- Entitlement to work in the UK and Inductions

RECRUITMENT MANUAL

We have also finalised a **Recruitment Manual** which is designed to provide comprehensive support for councillors in their recruitment of the clerk, but can be adapted for the recruitment of any staff.

The creation and appointment to any post, let alone the most senior job in your organisation, is one of the most critical investments a council will make. The recruitment process presents legal requirements and key challenges in choosing the right person.



It is critical that everyone responsible for or involved in staff recruitment and selection meet the challenges through a planned and structured process, and are aware of and understand the key issues and best techniques to use. Awareness of the legal requirements, particularly the Equality Act 2010, the Data Protection Act 2018, and the Modern Slavery Act is also essential.

Whilst we recommend that all involved in recruitment and selection of staff undertake specific training, this manual will help you avoid some pitfalls that are present in recruiting, and provide guidance to give confidence to all involved that they are carrying out the process in a thorough, fair, objective and evidence-based way.

The manual is divided into fourteen key units from the initial requirement to fill a role, advertising, shortlisting, interviewing, appointment, induction through to probation. All units include both guidance and, where relevant, specimen documentation reflecting best practice which may be customised to suit your own council, duties and local circumstances as appropriate. Additional model letters and forms are included which are intended to give you the opportunity to customise them to suit your needs and circumstances.

The guide has been written in collaboration with the county associations and it will be available for members from county associations and One Voice Wales directly, but can also be accessed via SLCC and NALC members here: **SLCC | NALC**.

HR tools – getting relationships right from the start

MODEL GOVERNANCE DOCUMENTS

Continuing on the theme of relationships, our research has clearly indicated that a strong, constructive, and trusting relationship between councillors and officers is essential to the effective and efficient working of the Council.

The following is an extract from the Local Government Association guidance on the 2020 Model Councillor Code of Conduct:

“Both councillors and officers are servants of the public and are indispensable to one another. Together, they bring the critical skills, experience and knowledge required to manage an effective local authority.

At the heart of this relationship is the importance of mutual respect.

Councillor-officer relationships should be conducted in a positive and constructive way. Therefore, it is important that any dealings between councillors and officers should observe reasonable standards of courtesy, should show mutual appreciation of the importance of their respective roles and that neither party should seek to take unfair advantage of their position or seek to exert undue influence on the other party.”

The governance workstream have worked in collaboration with industry experts Hoey Ainscough Associates Ltd to develop two model documents to help guide councillors and officers in their relations with one another: The Councillor-Officer Protocol and Roles and Responsibilities.



COUNCILLOR-OFFICER PROTOCOL

The reputation and integrity of the council is significantly influenced by the effectiveness of councillors and the officer working together to support each other's roles. The aim is effective and professional working relationships characterised by mutual trust, respect and courtesy. The premise of the Councillor-Officer Protocol is to help build and maintain good working relationships between councillors and officers as they work together. It is intended to assist councillors and officers, in approaching some of the sensitive circumstances which arise in a challenging working environment.

The Protocol also seeks to reflect the principles underlying the Code of Conduct which applies to councillors and the employment terms and conditions of officers. The shared objective is to enhance and maintain the integrity (real and perceived) of local government.

The Protocol covers:

- The respective roles and responsibilities of the councillors and the officer;
- Relationships between councillors and officers;
- Where/who a councillor or an officer should go to if they have concerns;
- Who is responsible for making decisions.

ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES GUIDANCE

Councillors and officers have different but complementary roles. Councillors, as the democratically-elected representatives of their areas, are there to set the budget and strategic direction of the council and ensure that the community's priorities are identified and delivered. Individual councillors work together to serve the community and to help the council to make decisions on behalf of the local community. Councillors contribute to the work of the council by suggesting ideas, engaging in constructive debate and by responding to the needs and views of the community representing their constituents. Councillors comment on proposals to ensure the best outcome and vote to enable the council to make decisions. Councillors must accept the decisions of the council as a whole, even if they do not agree with it.

The primary responsibility of officers is to advise the council on whether its decisions are lawful and to recommend ways in which decisions can be implemented. To help with this, officers can be asked to research topics of concern to the council and provide unbiased information to help the council to make appropriate choices. Officers have a wide range of other responsibilities which should be set out in their job descriptions. Officers must recognise that the council is responsible for all decisions and that they take instructions from the council as a body. Officers are not answerable to any individual councillor – not even the chair.

The Roles and Responsibilities document expands on the guidance given in the protocol, gives practical examples and explains some of the 'grey' areas. It should be read alongside 'The Good Councillors Guide' and the Good Councillors series of publications published by NALC (<https://www.nalc.gov.uk/publications#the-good-councillor-s-guide>) and Model Councillor Officer Protocol.

Both documents are available to download on [NALC](#) and [SLCC](#) websites

UPDATE ON THE PLEDGE

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.



Over 500 councils across the country have now taken the Civility and Respect Pledge, which is a tremendous start. 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, REMEMBER THE CIVILITY AND RESPECT TRAINING IS OFFERED AT A SUPPLEMENTED COST UNTIL DECEMBER 2022

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****

Subsidised fee: £30

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****

Subsidised fee: £30

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****

Subsidised fee: £30

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](#)



IN COLLABORATION WITH SLCC, NALC, OVW, COUNTY ASSOCIATIONS