
**Report of Helen Bradley, Director of Legal and Democratic Services
and Monitoring Officer**

Electoral division(s) affected:

None

Purpose of the Report

- 1 To provide an update to Members on suggested recommendations following the Civility in Public Life Workshop delivered by the Local Government Association's (LGA) and the Association of North East Councils (ANEC) and;
- 2 To inform Members of a recommendation following the Civility in Public Life webinar delivered by the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny (CfGS).

Executive summary

- 3 On 12 March 2024 the LGA and ANEC delivered a workshop on the Civility in Public Life. The Senior Lawyer for Commercial and Corporate Governance attended the workshop along with the Portfolio Holder for Children and Young People and other senior officers and elected members from the North East region. The focus of the workshop was to share good practice and to discuss opportunities to tackle the abuse and intimidation of councillors.
- 4 As part of the workshop following the round table activities, the Senior Lawyer for Commercial and Corporate Governance and the Portfolio Holder for Children and Young People discussed proposals which could be considered by the Council to further tackle abuse and intimidation of councillors.
- 5 In addition, on 18 March 2024 the CfGS delivered a webinar on the topic of Civility in Public Life which was also attended by the Senior Lawyer for Commercial and Corporate Governance.

Recommendation(s)

- 6 The Standards Committee are asked to:
 - a) Note the report;

- b) Request that the Director of Legal and Democratic Services reviews the data in relation to Member's use of the Potentially Violent Persons Register and considers how to raise awareness of the Register amongst Members.
- c) Request that the Director of Legal and Democratic Services circulate the resources recommended by the Civility in Public Life workshop to all Members;
- d) Request that the Director of Legal and Democratic Services consult the Group Leaders in relation to the proposal that they attend Standards Committee on an annual basis to discuss the steps they are taking to ensure high standards of conduct amongst their groups.

Background

- 7 At the last Standards Committee on 7 March 2024, Members were advised by the Senior Lawyer for Commercial and Corporate Governance that she would be attending the workshop on the Civility in Public Life and, that she would update the Committee Members of any outcomes following that workshop.

Civility in Public Life Workshop delivered by the LGA and ANAC

- 8 The LGA and ANEC invited one member and one officer from each North East council to participate in an in person workshop on 12 March 2024 which shared challenges, good practice and discussed opportunities to tackle abuse and intimidation of councillors.
- 9 The workshop included roundtable sessions and group work focussing on three key parts. The three topics which were discussed are summarised as follows:

a) Opportunities directly within local authority influence.

- Ideas around prevention and support, incident management and aftercare and resilience were discussed. A number of suggestions were also made such as engagement with local police, ensuring clear processes are in place when issues arise and offering counselling support to elected members.

b) Areas local authorities are seeking to influence.

- Partnerships – Including influencing public perception of councillors and the tone of acceptable engagement, working with social media companies to address the current issues, and working with the police to reach a shared understanding on ‘Operation Bridger’.
- Political Groups – Looking at the role of political groups and supporting election candidates and councillors during induction, providing welfare and mentors, securing agreement that attendance to training sessions is mandatory and a commitment to ‘role model behaviours’.
- Legislative Change – To lobby for changes to the standards regime such as sanctions and suspension periods.
- LGA - To create resources for councils to support them in self-assessing councillor safety and wellbeing, including good practice from across the sector.

c) Existing support, resources and good practice.

- Signposting to existing support.

- 10 A full list of the existing support and resources available to all Members can be found in Appendix 2. The Committee is recommended to request that the Director of Legal and Democratic Services circulate the list to all Members.
- 11 As part of the session, it was recommended that the officer and member who attended, agree some immediate actions to implement following the workshop.
- 12 The following recommendations were discussed as options for consideration:
- Officers to undertake a review of the corporate member training programme to identify what is done as part of the induction and what refresher training is carried out with a view to review and identify any training gaps/ improvements that can be made ahead of the 2025 local elections.
 - Work with Group Leaders to suggest implementation of a peer support programme following the 2025 local elections and any by-elections.
 - Consider offering a refresher training on all matters every 18 months.
 - Undertake work with the senior officer for Health and Safety to obtain data on member access/use of the Potentially Violent Persons Register and consider whether, if numbers are low, additional signposting is needed or a briefing session offered to members on the system and how/when to use it.
 - Following member induction, a proactive approach to be taken by member services to make checks on Councillors on any areas they feel they need additional support on.
- 13 The Council's Member Development Programme is under review in preparation for the elections in May 2025 and Member Services are in regular contact with Members and are able to identify and address Members support needs. It is suggested that the Director of Legal and Democratic Services reviews the data in relation to the Potentially Violent Persons Register and consider appropriate actions to raise awareness of it amongst Members.

CfGS Civility in Public Life Webinar

- 14 The CfGS delivered a webinar on the Civility in Public Life on 18 March 2024 which was attended by the Senior Lawyer for Commercial and Corporate Governance.
- 15 The webinar, which was supported by the LGA, reviewed the management of behaviour and conduct in formal council meetings with the aim to tackle how positive and negative behaviours can have an impact on council meetings.
- 16 During the webinar a suggestion was proposed by the LGA that Group Leaders of Political Parties attend the Standards Committee of their relevant authorities quarterly, to discuss the actions they are taking within their groups regarding party discipline and civility.
- 17 If this recommendation was implemented, the Group Leaders would be required to attend every meeting of the Committee. However, the Committee may wish to consider whether to invite the Group Leaders on an annual basis. If the Committee is minded to consider this approach, it is suggested that the Director of Legal and Democratic Services consults the Group Leaders in relation to the proposal.

Background papers

- None

Other useful documents

- None

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Appendix 1: Implications

Legal Implications

There are no specific legal implications arising from this report. The issues referred to in this report will assist the Council in complying with its obligations under section 27 of the Localism Act 2011 to promote and maintain high standards of conduct.

Finance

No Implications.

Consultation

No Implications.

Equality and Diversity / Public Sector Equality Duty

No Implications.

Climate Change

No Implications.

Human Rights

There are no direct Human Rights implications arising out of the report. However, when considering allegations of abuse and intimidation, it is necessary to consider a balance between protecting Councillor's from harassment and complying with Article 10 – Freedom of Expression of the European Convention of Human Rights.

Crime and Disorder

Incidents of abuse and intimidation may amount to criminal behaviour. The proposals within the report may reduce incidents of abuse and intimidation and therefore have a positive impact on crime and disorder.

Staffing

No Implications.

Accommodation

No Implications.

Risk

No Implications.

Procurement

No Implications.

Appendix 2: Civility in Public Life: Signposting Support, Resources and Good Practice

LGA Resources:

- [Debate Not Hate: Ending abuse in public life](#) (July 2023): this report provides good practice advice and guidance relating to how councils can approach the issues of abuse of councillors by the public. This report has several good practice case studies attached.
- [Debate Not Hate: Campaign toolkit](#) (November 2022): this toolkit provides resources for councillors and councils, including assets and templates, template letters, and the DNH model motion.
- [LGA Civility training offer](#): the LGA is grant funded by DLUHC to provide national events and local workshops on issues including personal safety, online safety, managing aggression and managing conflict in meetings for councillors in England. You can access more information on the website and email Jo.Kibble@local.gov.uk to access this offer for the 2024/25 period.
- [LGA Councillor standards support](#): the LGA provides a range of resources around councillor conduct and standards, including our Model councillor code of conduct, code of conduct guidance, and guidance for MOs conducting complaints processes. We are shortly due to complete a project setting out guidance for standards (or equivalent) committee members and a complementary training packages, which will also sit on this page.
- [LGA Handling abuse and intimidation councillor support](#): the LGA Handling abuse and intimidation hub provides advice and resources to councillors, including our Seven principles for safer canvassing guide, Councillors guide to handling harassment, abuse and intimidation, Digital citizenship guide, Social media guidance for councillors and Councillor workbook on conflict resolution.

Other Resources:

- [The Suzy Lamplugh Trust](#) has a website with useful and practical guidance on issues such as transport safety, dealing with aggression, internet safety, personal alarms, running safety and safety at home.

- [The National Stalking Helpline](#): Practical advice and information to anyone who is currently or previously has been affected by harassment or stalking.
- [Paladin](#): Strategic advocacy to high-risk victims of stalking and establish a network of victims who have endured stalking, providing mutual support and empowerment.
- [Protection Against Stalking](#) works jointly with relevant agencies to increase awareness of stalking and harassment to ensure victims receive protection and help to rebuild their lives and live free of fear.
- [Fix the Glitch](#): this charity focuses on ending online abuse and championing digital citizenship. They focus on Black women and marginalised people through awareness, advocacy, action and anchoring. They have free resources on being an Online Active Bystander, Documenting Online Abuse, Dealing with digital threats to democracy, and toolkits on address online gender-based violence.
- [Full fact](#): this charity focuses on challenging false and misleading claims online. They provide fact checking of high profile stories and research around high quality information.
- [Joint Guidance for candidates in Elections](#): this is a joint guidance from the NPCC, The Electoral Commission, the CPS and College of Policing, it is due for an updated to include up to date examples and reference to new legislation.