

## Appendix 1

# CIVILITY AND RESPECT PROJECT

## ABOUT

Throughout the sector, there are 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.

The National Association of Local Councils (NALC), One Voice Wales, the Society of Local Council Clerks (SLCC) and county associations have responded to this by setting up a Civility and Respect Working Group to oversee the Civility and Respect Project.

## CIVILITY AND RESPECT PLEDGE

NALC, SLCC, 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.

The Civility and Respect Pledge is being introduced because there is no place for bullying, harassment and intimidation within our sector. The pledge is 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 our sector and to driving through positive changes which support civil and respectful conduct.

We invite all councils to take the Civility and Respect Pledge.

### The Pledge

By signing the Pledge, your council is agreeing 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

## 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.

### 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.

### **Suggested Council agenda item:**

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.

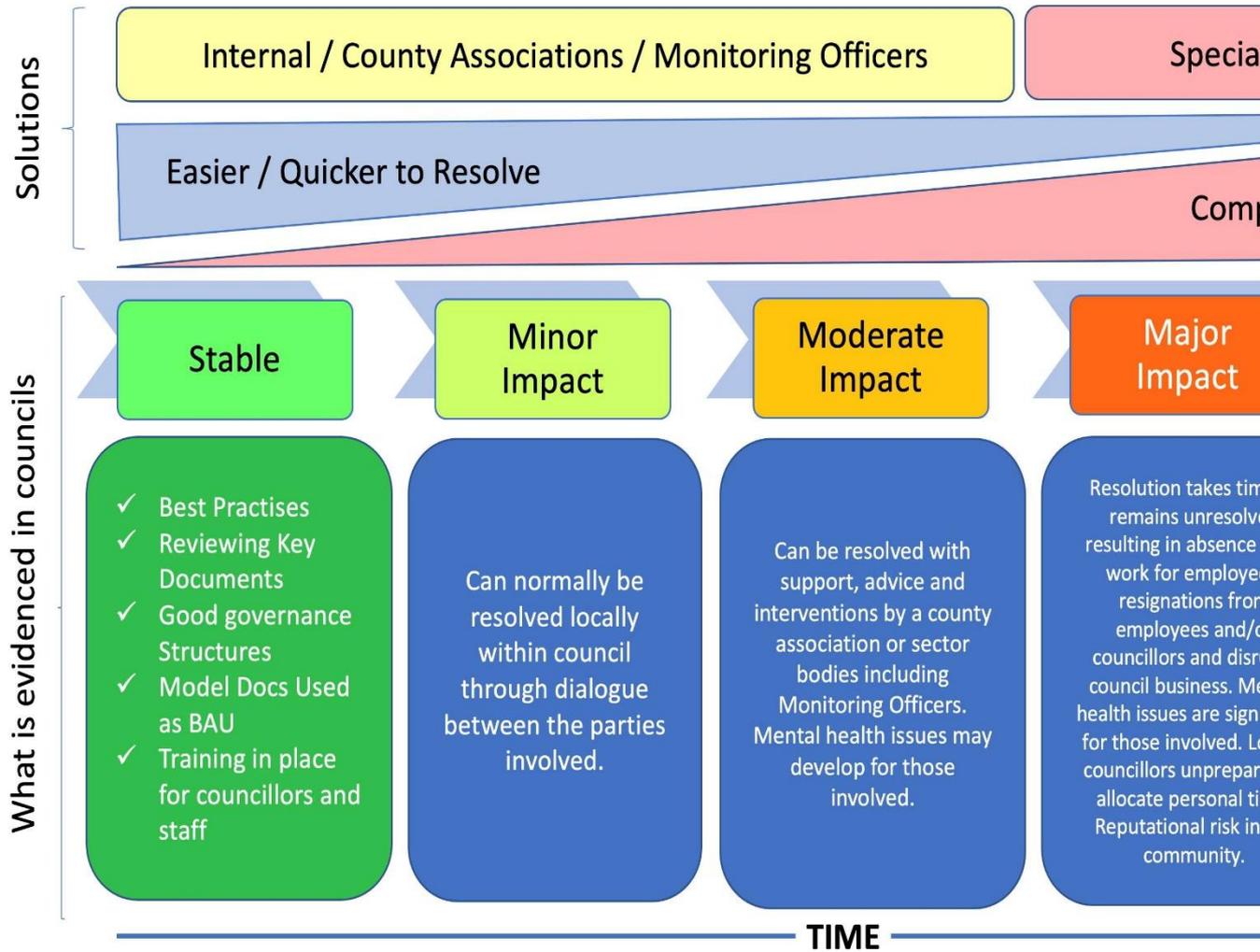
By our council signing up to the civility and respect pledge we are demonstrating that our council is committed to treating councillors, clerks, employees, members of the public, representatives of partner organisations, and volunteers, with civility and respect in their role.

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 if 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 Continuum**

The Civility and Respect Continuum illustrates how issues escalate over time. Our research has indicated that councils experiencing poor conduct or vexatious demands/complaints often experience problems repeatedly over a significant period of time. The longer an issue is permitted to continue, unaddressed, the more complex, time-consuming, and expensive the resolution becomes. This can eventually result in damage to the reputation of the council and health issues for those involved eventually ending with multiple resignations of both staff and councillors. Councils that have up-to-date policies and procedures, well-trained councillors and employees can often manage and mediate issues with or without advice and support from county associations and/or monitoring officers. Where councils become overwhelmed or fail to draw upon the resources available, matters can escalate and come under significant strain and pressure. In these situations, the solutions are often beyond the existing support offered and invariably best resolved by third parties, a costly and time-consuming challenge.



The project is identifying solutions to support councillors, officers, councils, and county officers at every stage of the civility continuum, however, whilst governance and training solutions may help with minor and moderate issues, the options for support at the major end of the scale become more limited. Support from monitoring officers and county associations may provide resolution in some instances but often issues have become too complex to resolve without costly interventions from specialist third parties. Every attempt should be made to prevent escalation by addressing potential behavioural issues as soon as they arise, calling out bullying and harassment at the earliest opportunity and standing up for civil and respectful behaviour.

If the issues within a council have escalated to critical, then the options for resolution are still further limited, with costly external resolution and legal support often being required to reach resolutions. Potential action/intervention at this stage is being piloted with a town council struggling with chronic issues. It is being overseen by the joint NALC/SLCC Internal Development Board. If the solution proves successful it may be possible to expand the support programme but much depends on the councils' willingness to make a positive change. Early intervention to head off chronic issues is a far more effective mechanism to handle poor behaviour.

The Dignity at Work policy is the first of a series of new or revised governance documents which are being developed by the project team. The documents have been reviewed by a focus group made up of clerks, councillors, monitoring officers, and county associations.

The Dignity at Work policy will replace any previous bullying and harassment policy. It encompasses behaviours beyond bullying and harassment and zero-tolerance to deal with concerns before they escalate. It has been produced with supporting guidance because it is essential that any commitment to the policy is applied in practice.

The wording has been suggested to demonstrate a council's commitment to promoting dignity and respect where they have signed up to the [Civility and Respect Pledge](#). Councils who have not signed up for this are requested to consider making this pledge which is based on basic behaviours and expectations of all council representatives to create workplaces that allow people to maintain their dignity at all times.