

CIVILITY AND RESPECT PROJECT



IN COLLABORATION WITH SLCC, NALC, OVW, COUNTY ASSOCIATIONS

ISSUE 2 | FEBRUARY 2022



WELCOME TO THE CIVILITY AND RESPECT PROJECT NEWSLETTER

A MESSAGE FROM THE SPONSORS

'Representatives from across our sector are working really hard on this joint initiative and we are delighted that progress is being made.'

Civility and respect is a priority. We encourage you to place at the top of the agenda within your councils that bullying and harassment should not be tolerated and where it does occur, it should be called out.'

Jonathan Owen, Chief Executive NALC

Rob Smith, Chief Executive SLCC

PROJECT UPDATE

Lots of work has been happening behind the scenes over the last few months, here is a quick summary:

- ✓ Workstream leads have been appointed and cross-organisational teams are working jointly on solutions
- ✓ Dedicated webpages set up on the National Association of Local Councils (NALC) and Society of Local Council Clerks (SLCC) websites
- ✓ Research to identify best practices has been completed including:
 - Workshops with county officers
 - Workshops with SLCC branch representatives and clerks
 - Discussions with industry experts
 - Survey distributed to county officers
 - Surveys distributed to SLCC branch representatives and members
- ✓ A cross-organisational agreement has been reached on the approach to nationwide training related to civility and respect
- ✓ Contact has been made with external organisations and overseas counterparts with a view to sharing best practice
- ✓ Articles in LCR and The Clerk (March edition)
- ✓ Attendance at several webinars including SLCC [Practitioners' Conference](#)

Next Steps

We are in the process of analysing all the information gathered and are prioritising the needs to allow us to put together practical tools and support to address ongoing problems in our sector relating to civility and respect.

CODE OF CONDUCT

One of the critical issues already identified by the project is the Code of Conduct produced by the Local Government Association (LGA) in 2021 has not been widely adopted. The Civility and Respect project has endorsed the LGA model Code of Conduct (and the guidance notes which aim to promote understanding and consistency of approach towards the code).

The code is a template for councils to adopt in whole or with amendments - to take into account local circumstances.

The code and guidance have been designed to protect our democratic role, encourage good conduct, and safeguard the public's trust and confidence in the role of councillor in local government.

While it sets out the minimum standards of behaviour expected, together with the guidance, it is designed to encourage councillors to model the high standards expected of councillors, to be mutually respectful even if they have personal or political differences, to provide a personal check and balance, and to set out the type of conduct that could lead to complaints being made of behaviour falling below the standards expected of councillors and in breach of the code. It is also to protect councillors, the public, local authority officers and the reputation of local government.

The templates can be found on the [SLCC website](#) and [NALC website](#)



EARLY DAY MOTION FOR SANCTIONS

An early day motion (EDM) has been registered by an MP calling for the government to establish an appropriate and effective sanctions mechanism to deal with local councillors who have been found guilty of bullying and harassment following an independent investigation. The MP was alerted to the issue when an ALCC* member contacted him with regards to the behaviour she had suffered.

*The Association of Local Council Clerks (ALCC) is the independent trade union for clerks.

What are EDMs?

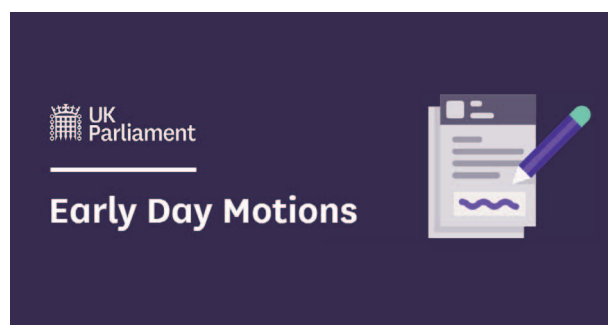
EDMs are motions submitted for debate in the House of Commons for which no day has been fixed. Whilst few are debated, many attract a great deal of public interest and media coverage.

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 that support this EDM, the more likely it is to get discussed in parliament. Please either table an agenda item to pass a resolution to write to your MP asking that they back this motion and have it discussed in parliament or write to your MP as an individual. [Click here to view the EDM](#). The drive to improve standards in our sector is being included as a topic on NALCs lobby day on 23rd March, so it is a great time to support lobby day with a letter to your MP.

We've designed template letters ([SLCC](#) and [NALC](#)) which you can use to contact your MP on this issue. You may like to personalise it with an introduction and signature and if appropriate, the inclusion of any personal experiences that will help add context and influence.



DEFINITION OF CIVILITY

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 Civility and Respect Project has endorsed the LGA model Code of Conduct. It asks that councils, members, and officers pledge to:

1. Treat other councillors and members of the public with civility
2. Treat council employees, representatives of partner organisations, and those volunteering for the council with civility and respecting the role that they play

Civility	Incivility
Going out of your way to help someone	'Humorous' put-downs, eye rolling, heavy sarcasm, derogatory remarks, ridiculing or demeaning others
Acknowledging your mistakes and making appropriate amends	Overbearing or intimidating levels of supervision
Saying please and thank you	Interrupting conversations or meetings, or rude or angry outbursts in meetings
Using a positive tone of voice	Shouting, phone slamming, fist pounding, spitting, throwing objects
Apologising when you do something that offends someone	Chipping away at someone's self-esteem through constant slights
Refusing to participate in gossip	Ignoring others and their opinions or their attempts to contribute to discussions
Showing respect for other people's feelings and opinions	Addressing people in an unprofessional manner

HANDLING ONLINE ABUSE

The councillors' guide to handling intimidation has been developed by the LGA and the Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA) in conjunction with councils, councillors, and other council representative organisations. It includes a section on handling online abuse, and is summarised in ten easy steps to follow:

1. **Set expectations** – point people to your **rules of engagement** (see below) and apply these consistently
2. **Lead by example** – do not post comments that could be considered abusive. Avoid posting false or unverified information
3. **Consider content** – some content will be more controversial than others. Consider before posting how you will manage engagement with this, for example only engaging in comments on the policy itself or directing people to consultation documents
4. **Defuse conflict** – waiting to respond can take the heat out of situations, as can reframing your own language
5. **Know when to step back** – remember you do not have to engage with abusive or threatening behaviour. You can set the record straight with factual information if you wish, but you can step away when you want to
6. **Protect your privacy** – set different passwords for different accounts. Do not post information that can allow people to identify your whereabouts outside of official council business
7. **Understand privacy settings** – there are a range of settings to help you manage who can see or comment on your posts
8. **Get and give support** – where you feel able, provide support to fellow councillors online, and reach out to colleagues and your council for support where needed
9. **Record abuse** – screenshot comments and keep a record of abusive or threatening communications
10. **Report serious issues** – if you feel unable to deal with online abuse yourself or have any concerns about your safety, report this to your council or the police

SOCIAL MEDIA - RULES OF ENGAGEMENT

These rules are designed to give all users a clear 'code' by which they should operate, with consequences for users who fail to abide by them.

The **infographics** can be pinned to the social media profile of a councillor. The rules of engagement should include:

- a) A clear message with regards to the aim of the forum, page or account
- b) Acknowledgement of terms and conditions of participation
- c) Rules of participation
- d) Consequences for rule-breaking
- e) Information about what users can expect in terms of responses and or preferred form of contact



Rules of engagement

Welcome to my page, which aims to communicate my activities as a councillor.

If you wish to be a part of this online community, you must agree to abide by this code of digital engagement, which is designed to keep everyone safe.

RULE 1
Debate and disagreement are welcome on this page, but only if expressed with courtesy, respect and politeness.

RULE 2
Posts should not contain abuse, harassment, intimidation or threats of any form.

RULE 3
Posts should not contain any form of discrimination – including racism, sexism, ageism, ableism, homophobia, transphobia or religious intolerance.

RULE 4
Posts should not spread false or unverified information.

RULE 5
For transparency reasons, users should not post anonymously.

If any of these rules are broken, page admins reserve the right to delete posts, block users and report content to the police if necessary.

It may not be possible to respond to all queries on this page due to time constraints - if you have specific enquiries or casework, please send directly to my official email.

Logos: Local Government Association, WLGA, nilga, COSLA

For more information on the LGA's work on handling abuse on social media and digital citizenship visit: www.local.gov.uk/civility-public-life

REF 43.4

More information to support councillors in handling online abuse is available on the **LGA website**

AND FINALLY.....

The LGA 'Civility in Public Life Call for Evidence: Abuse and Intimidation of Councillors' is still open for councillors to report experiences and emerging trends around abuse and intimidation.

Search for Civility in Public Life on the LGA website to find out more and **complete the survey**