



Report ABPC/22/09

To: Aldington and Bonnington Parish Council.

Date: 3 October 2022

Status: Public Report

Subject: Civility and Respect

1. **SUMMARY:**

This report brings to the Parish Council's attention work that has been carried out into Civility and Respect in the local council sector.

2. **REASON FOR RECOMMENDATION.**

The Parish Council is asked to consider signing up for the Civility and Respect Pledge to treat other councillors, clerks, all employees, members of the public, representatives of partner organisations and volunteers with civility and respect in their roles.

3. **RECOMMENDATIONS:**

1. **To receive and note Report ABPC/22/09.**
2. **To receive and adopt the revised Dignity at Work Policy**
3. **To Sign the Civility and Respect Pledge**

4. **INTRODUCTION:**

The Committee on Standards in Public Life (CSPL) was established in 1994 and is an advisory non-departmental body of the UK Government. Its remit is to advise the Prime Minister on ethical standards of public life and the promotion of the Code of Conduct called the Seven Principles of Public Life, better known as the 'Nolan Principles'.

In January 2019, the CSPL published their review of Local Government Ethical Standards. It included 25 recommendations which affected all tiers of local government.

The review reflected the significant role the SLCC had taken and the significance of the research commissioned in the discussions and formal consultations which formulated the report. It covered a wide range of ethical issues across all tiers of local government.

Its findings in relation to local councils included:

- Parish Councils are highly dependent on the skills, experience and support of clerks – it found evidence of substantial difficulties where clerks are inexperienced, untrained, feel isolated and/or there is poor member behaviour.
- 15% of parish councils experience serious behaviour issues, 5% are effectively dysfunctional as a result of them
- Parish councils should report complaints, not the clerk
- Some Monitoring Officers decline or lack resources to provide advice or accept parish complaints
- Variation in parish codes is a burden on the principal authority and confusing for dual hatted members
- Parish councils can ignore sanctions recommended by principal authority hearing
- Parish councils can take lawful protective steps short of sanctions.

In 2017, SLCC commissioned Hoey Ainscough Associates Ltd to conduct an extensive piece of research to support a report on the state of standards and behaviour in the sector. The report included the first evidence-based data on the subject.

At the time of the report, the profession had an average turnover rate of between 25% - 30%. This is disproportionately high (the average UK employee turnover rate is 12% - 15%). Further, the report indicated that this was not so much a reflection of the abilities of the officer involved, but how they are treated.

5. **DIGNITY AT WORK POLICY:**

The Society of Local Council Clerks have issued a model Dignity at Work Policy which reflects the findings of the Committee on Standards in Public Life. This is recommended for adoption in replacement for the current policy.

6. **THE 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 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.	

7. **CONTACT OFFICER AND BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS.**

If you have any queries about this report please contact the Responsible Financial Officer of the Council Tel.: 07928453208 or email: clerk@abpc.org.uk prior to the meeting.