

## REPORT TO PICKMERE PARISH COUNCIL

4<sup>th</sup> October 2022

### AGENDA ITEM 9.2 – NALC CIVILITY AND RESPECT PROJECT

#### 1. Report

- 1.1 NALC have recently launched an initiative named CIVILITY AND RESPECT PROJECT. It introduces the initiative as follows:

*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.*

#### **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.*

### **PROJECT WORKSTREAMS**

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- *Training*
- *Governance*
- *Intervention*
- *Legislative*
- *Collaboration*
- *Enabling*

### **RESOURCES**

- *Bullying and harassment statement*
- *Code of Conduct*
- *Civility and Respect Continuum*
- *Dignity at Work policy*
- *Early Day Motion for Sanctions*
- *Newsletters*
- *Training programme*

#### **Training programme**

*One of the project's key aims is to deliver training packages to support councillors, clerks, and employees experiencing difficulties with bullying and harassment. We have worked with key partners to create a new series of*

*packages covering local council and councillor communications and engagement and are now pleased to share the first range of this training. Cost for attendance will be supplemented by the project, and they are being offered at a 50% discount to the full price until the end of 2022. We will schedule additional dates if we have a high demand for places.*

**Examples of Courses offered are:**

- ***Respectful Social Media — How to deal with attacks and negative engagement***

*The learning content, live workshop, and toolkits will enable participants to explore different methods and strategies for dealing with negative attacks on social media and ways in which they can keep control of our social media output. We will consider how we come across on social media as councils, as well as individually, what our personal ‘digital tone of voice’ sounds like, as well as considering our use of language and its role in positive two-way communication and explore the type of content we can post on social media, depending on our role. For councillors, we will provide suggested social media do’s and don’ts: how to be effective on social media, whilst bearing in mind issues around the Code of Conduct, for clerks and officers will explore how the council can de-mystify the role of the council and showcase its people to help pre-emptively deal with negative engagement and attacks.*

- ***Civility and respect — Uncovering the issues for the public sector -*** *Condescending comments, demeaning emails, disrupting meetings, reprimanding someone publicly, talking behind someone’s back, giving someone the silent treatment, not giving credit where credit is due, rolling eyes, and being yelled at, are regular occurrences for many councils. In this webinar, we talk about the issues we face in our council roles. We will then discuss the impact this has on the individuals involved and the organisation. Each webinar will give real situation scenarios and what to do in each of them.*

**1.2 Councils are invited to ‘Take 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 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*

1.3 Taking the Pledge implies that a certain amount of work will be required, for instance to review the Council's Code of Conduct, and in respect of training, and therefore members are asked if this is an initiative that they would wish to pursue, and if so how any related work might be undertaken/managed.

## **2 Recommendation**

2.1 That members note the report and consider appropriate action.

**Jack Steel**

**Clerk to the Parish Council**