

22 FEBRUARY 2021

Open letter to attendees of Society of Local Council Clerks practitioners' conference

Dear Colleagues,

**Re. Civility in public life**

Ahead of the Society of Local Council Clerks (SLCC) practitioners' conference this week, I wanted to write to you, officer to officer, to again thank you for all your hard work during the most difficult year many of us will have experienced, and to wish you a very successful event.

As the chairman of the National Association of Local Councils (NALC), Cllr Sue Baxter, wrote in her New Year [open letter](#), the last year has seen the local (parish and town) council sector demonstrate its relevance more than ever before, with the potential to become even more important as we build back better and work together to make the case for a strengthened role for local councils, including through a potential devolution white paper later this year.

Many of the issues you are discussing this week – such as mindfulness and self-care, training and qualifications, using social media, community engagement, tackling the climate emergency, and the invaluable networking opportunities – will I am sure help provide you with the tools needed to support this parish renaissance.

However, one of the things getting in the way of the sector's success is poor behaviour, especially bullying. Whether that is by councillors, officers, or the increasing abuse from members of the public, in particular on social media.

Bullying of any description is simply not acceptable in our sector and it is high time we stamped it out. We will need to work together to do that and to press the government to introduce changes to the standards regime including meaningful sanctions to help deal with the worst perpetrators.

This is something that will require a collective endeavour to sort out and I hope that the recent letters from [NALC](#) and now the [Society of Local Council Clerks](#) (SLCC) to the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, in which we both press again for stronger sanctions and action on

the recommendations of the Committee on Standards in Public Life, will bear fruit and we will see the problem recognised and addressed nationally. Sanctions are needed to underpin the new national member code of conduct which has been developed by the Local Government Association with input from the sector.

But it is also something we are working on together on the ground to resolve. Whether that's through the work county associations and SLCC branches do to support the most difficult councils and councillors. Through the work we do together nationally through the Improvement and Development Board to provide training for councillors and clerks, with the majority delivered locally. Through the Certificate in Local Council Administration and degree level qualifications and the 800 or so councils working to higher standards through the Local Council Award Scheme. Or through the range of resources we make available including the Good Councillor Guides, template human resources policies, and other toolkits and supporting material. And last but not least, through the work we're doing together to promote diversity in the sector and in particular the [Make A Change](#) campaign to encourage more people to stand for election, which you'll be hearing more about on Thursday from my NALC colleagues Chris Borg and Claire Goldfinch, and Sarah Mason from the Cornwall Association of Local Councils.

Of course there is so much more we need to do together. Which is why I look forward to seeing the full results of SLCC's most recent survey and bringing together the respective leadership teams of SLCC and NALC to not only consider those findings and our work to date, but also prepare and resource an action plan to promote civility in public life.

Have a great conference.

Yours sincerely,



Dr Jonathan Owen  
Chief Executive  
National Association of Local Councils