

CIVILITY AND RESPECT PROJECT



IN COLLABORATION WITH SLCC, NALC, OVW, COUNTY ASSOCIATIONS

ISSUE 9 | APRIL 2024



Take the pledge



WELCOME TO THE CIVILITY AND RESPECT PROJECT NEWSLETTER



IMPROVEMENT AND DEVELOPMENT BOARD (IDB) WORKSHOP 20 FEBRUARY 2024

Civility & Respect now sits within the remit of the IDB which has been innovatively re-shaped to take this forward, ensuring that it remains at the core of business. Its new Chair is James Alexander. James works for the Local Government Association (LGA) and has considerable experience in local governance. His first meeting was a workshop to agree what would be the key areas of work for the IDB in 2024. The membership of the Board is made up of representatives of the National Association of Local Councils (NALC), the Society of Local Council Clerks (SLCC), the County Associations of Local Councils (CALCs), and the Local Government Association (LGA).

The IDB decided that they would set up four taskforces which would have broad but relevant membership (not exclusive to IDB members). The four taskforces agreed by the IDB were Civility and Respect; Intervention; Workforce; and Data. The taskforces would be task and finish groups which would make recommendations to the IDB. The nature of the tasks would mean that some taskforces might only need to meet a few times whereas others would have a much longer term. As tasks are completed the IDB will identify new subjects that would benefit from being looked into by a task and finish taskforce with relevant membership and terms of reference.

The IDB meets again on 23 May 2024 and will be asked to agree the proposals for membership and Terms of Reference for the taskforces. The taskforces will then be set up with the aim to meet ASAP after the 23 May. Experts in the role of data in improvement and development will attend this meeting to advise on the scope/terms of reference of the data taskforce.

The Civility and Respect IDB Taskforce will follow on from Phase 1. It will make recommendations to IDB on how to continue and improve on the work done to-date; liaise with the Jo Cox Civility Commission and others; identify opportunities and make recommendations for further improvements and developments.

The Intervention IDB Taskforce will look at critical failures and make recommendations on how best to address them with the aim to turnaround the Council that is in critical failure. The schematic below on critical impact is taken from the Phase 1 Civility and Respect continuum. In the last few years there have been two critical failures one of which was significantly about a loss of confidence from local people and staffing issues and the other was a critical financial failure. The experience gained from these failures will inform the thinking of the Intervention Taskforce.



Critical Impact

Defined on the Continuum as:

- Resignations of multiple employees and Councillors
- Repeated significant expense to settle employment disputes
- Career changing impact for employees
- Councils unable to recruit and replace officers or retain them
- Reputational risk for Council within the region and potentially on a national scale

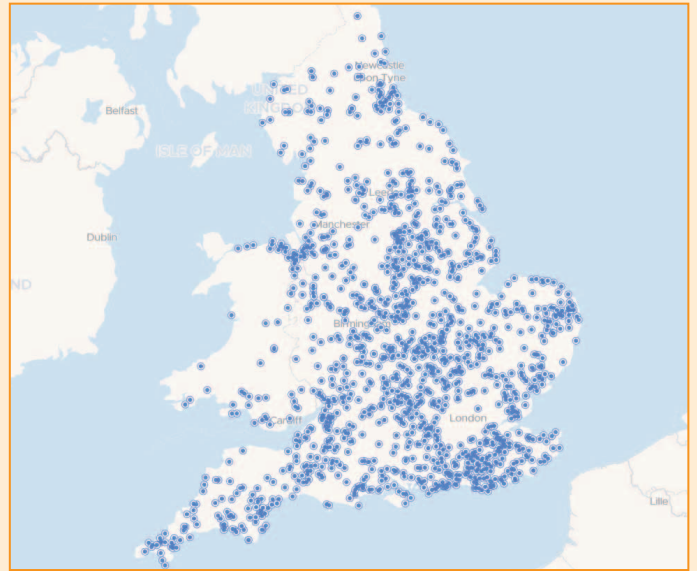
Critical Impact

Resignations of multiple employees and/or councillors, repeated significant expense to settle employment disputes, career changing impact for employees, councils unable to recruit and replace officers or retain them. Reputational risk for council within the region and potentially on national scale.

1490 LOCAL COUNCILS HAVE NOW SIGNED THE CIVILITY AND RESPECT PLEDGE

Towns and villages are demonstrably and immeasurably improved by what local council councillors, clerks and other employees do in their communities day in and day out. The pledge is a public declaration that in what they do, town, parish and community councils are committed to civility and respect. It outlines what they do/will do as part of that commitment. Research has found that taking a voluntary pledge of this nature can impact (for the better) on behaviour and cooperation.

If your council has not yet signed-up to the pledge they can find out more about it at www.nalc.gov.uk/our-work/civility-and-respect-project.



Toxic Behaviour in the Workplace (Webinar by Worknest)

178 people (councillors and employees) joined the webinar and 78% found it helpful. The questions raised were varied and covered conduct issues relating to the manager and members of staff as well as conduct issues relating to councillors and between councillors. Frustration was expressed about the limitations of the Code of Conduct for councillors. Issues between managers and staff are largely governed by good and proven employment practices. In the last resort they would be governed by employment legislation. However, for councillors this is much more complex. It will often involve being investigated by Monitoring Officers who have no recourse to sanctions. The conclusion was that the challenge is how you agree to disagree in a way that is “good”.

Good Councillors Guide 2024

A review and rewrite of the Good Councillors Guide has been completed and it is now with the designers. The goal is to launch the 2024 version of the Guide on 13 May 2024, so it is available in a timely way for new Councillors following elections in May 2024. It shall be free to download. The Good Councillors Guide 2024 is an important document designed to help new Councillors understand the importance of their role and how to be the best Councillor they can be. The Guide draws attention to how important it is that Councillors also read the “Good Councillors Guide to Employment 2023” so they understand their responsibilities as employers.

Jo Cox Civility Commission

The recent Jo Cox Civility Commission Report “No place in politics: tackling abuse and intimidation” www.jocoxfoundation.org/our-work/respectful-politics/commission/ reinforces the message that civility and respect is not just an issue for local town, parish and community councils but for all levels of central and local government.

This report was launched at the House of Commons on 24 January 2024. The report included the recommendation that “Councils (in local government) should pass motions affirming principles to address abuse and model good behaviour” and specifically referred local government councillors to the Civility and Respect Resources and The Civility and Respect Pledge as examples of good practice.

The Jo Cox Civility Commission is also planning to work with the new IDB taskforce on how some of their recommendations for improvements and developments could make a difference to the issues affecting civility and respect in local town and parish councils. They also want to discuss (amongst other things) how local councils could play a role in promoting political literacy in local schools and raise awareness of the role played by councillors and other representatives.

BBC Investigative Research

In early February, the BBC published the outcome of its investigation about the public abuse, harassment and intimidation of local government councillors and staff across all tiers of government. NALC and SLCC gave input to the BBC and welcomed the research, which found that as well as these behaviours affecting the wellbeing of individuals and their families, they undermine the effectiveness and governance of councils and impact local communities and frontline services. The research also featured in a [Newsnight](#) programme on 5 February.

SLCC Practitioners' Conference 31/1/24

The Civility and Respect Project Manager was delighted to be invited to join the [Practitioners' Conference](#). She gave an update at one of the workshops on the work that had been/was being done to improve civility and respect.



Upcoming Webinars

SLCC is hosting a series of webinars focusing on civility and respect topics. These sessions delve into real-life scenarios, offering insights on how to effectively address and navigate challenging situations as they arise:

24 September - Civility and Respect: Uncovering the Issues For the Public Sector

1 October - Civility and Respect: Personal Resilience and Self-Protection

[Click here to view the full series](#)

In Conversation with Breakthrough Communications are live, best practice webinars designed exclusively for parish and town council clerks, officers and councillors. "Civility and Respect in Action - Best Practice Council Communications" is the latest of their 'In Conversation with...!' webinars. It is a unique opportunity to engage with communication experts and councillors in a roundtable discussion about promoting civility and respect through council communications, particularly on social media platforms.

4 July - Civility and Respect in Action - Best Practice Council Communications

[Click here to find out more](#)

Consultation

On 25 March 2024, the independent Committee on Standards in Public Life announced that it will be carrying out a new review looking at accountability within public bodies and the importance of acting on early warning signs. The Committee has published the **Terms of Reference** for this project and will carry out an **open consultation** as part of its evidence gathering. The Committee expects to publish a report with best practice for public sector organisations in Spring 2025.

We would like to encourage everyone to submit their individual responses to the consultation but we'd also be grateful for your participation in completing the SLCC and NALC snapshot survey's available on their websites which will contribute to their formal responses.