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Ethics Committee

15 December 2022

**Name of Cabinet Member:**

N/A - Ethics Committee

**Director Approving Submission of the report:**

Chief Legal Officer

**Ward(s) affected:**

None

**Title:** Civility in Public Life and Digital Citizenship Update

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**Is this a key decision?**

No

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**Executive Summary:**

The Ethics Committee has been monitoring the work of the Local Government Association (LGA) programme around Civility in Public Life and Digital Citizenship. This work is in response to the increasing concern about intimidation and toxicity of debate and the impact this has been having on democratic processes. A report was last provided to the Committee on 29 September 2022.

This work remains part of the Committee's Work Programme and this report is to provide an update of the local response.

**Recommendations:**

The Ethics Committee is recommended to:

1. Note the work undertaken by the Local Government Association on their Debate Not hate campaign;
2. Note the work that has been undertaken locally in respect of the Council's "Debate Not Hate" Campaign promoting Civility in Public Life and Digital Citizenship; and

3. Request that this item remains on the work programme of the Ethics Committee for continued review.

**List of Appendices included:**

- (A) Debate Not Hate Public Statement – including endorsement of the Ethics Committee (at the bottom)

**Other useful background papers can be found at the following web addresses:**

- Local Government Association’s “Debate Not Hate public statement”:  
<https://www.local.gov.uk/about/campaigns/debate-not-hate/debate-not-hate-sign-our-public-statement>;
- Local Government Association’s Debate Not Hate: Campaign toolkit:  
<https://www.local.gov.uk/about/campaigns/debate-not-hate/debate-not-hate-campaign-toolkit>
- TED Talk – Chris Turner: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4RUIhjwCDO0>

**Has it been or will it be considered by Scrutiny?**

No

**Has it been or will it be considered by any other Council Committee, Advisory Panel or other body?**

No

**Will this report go to Council?**

No

## Report title: Civility in Public Life and Digital Citizenship Update

### 1 Context (or background)

1.1 The Council's Ethics Committee has requested that Civility in Public Life and Digital Citizenship remains part of the committee's work programme.

#### 1.2 *Work of the LGA*

1.2.1 At the last meeting on 29 September 2022 the Committee were advised that the Local Government Association (LGA) have provided a link as follows: <https://www.local.gov.uk/about/campaigns/debate-not-hate/debate-not-hate-sign-our-public-statement> to its "Debate Not Hate public statement," for Councillors, MPs and organisations to sign to support the work of the LGA and act as a call to action for the relevant Government department to form a working group. Members approved the signature of the statement and a request was subsequently made for the Council's Ethics Committee to be added to the public statement, which is now publicly available and a copy of which is attached at Appendix A of this report.

1.2.2 A new toolkit to help combat abuse of councillors was launched on 1 December 2022 by the LGA as part of their Debate Not Hate Campaign, which can be found at the following link: <https://www.local.gov.uk/about/campaigns/debate-not-hate/debate-not-hate-campaign-toolkit>. The toolkit is aimed at putting an end to the increasing intimidation reported by a number of councillors.

1.2.3 Seven in 10 councillors said they have either been abused or have felt intimidated within the last twelve months, with one in 10 saying that they now felt it was becoming a frequent occurrence, according to a recent LGA census.

1.2.4 The new toolkit offers a range of resources and actions for both individual councillors and councils to take forward, including digital assets and template press releases that can be used to help raise awareness of the issue locally.

1.2.5 The toolkit outlines different ways councils and councillors can support the Debate Not Hate campaign objectives and take action. Officers are reviewing the content of the toolkit in line with local activity and will bring a further report to the Committee as appropriate.

#### 1.3 *Local picture*

1.3.1 The Council launched a campaign commencing on 5 September 2022 called "Debate Not Hate". On 27 September a virtual session entitled "Civility Saves Lives" was held, as part of National Inclusion Week, which was open to all Councillors and Council staff. The session discussed civility and respect and how people treat each other at work.

1.3.2 The key takeaways were as follows:

- People have different personalities and preferences. Just because someone sees something differently, it doesn't mean that either of you are wrong;
- Chris Turner who is a consultant at University Hospital, Coventry & Warwickshire is a campaigner against incivility in the workplace. Chris talks about how incivility shuts down our brains at work, and reduces our bandwidth, which in turn has an impact on staff and their efficiency. He talks about this in the following TED Talk available on You Tube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4RUIhjwCDO0>;
- Chris refers to some research by Christine Porath and Christine Pearson from 2013 which highlights the cost of incivility:
  - 48% of staff intentionally decreased their work effort
  - 47% intentionally decreased the time they spent at work
  - 38% intentionally decreased the quality of their work
  - 80% of staff lost work time worrying about the incident of incivility that they had experienced
  - 63% lost work time trying to avoid the offender
  - 66% stated their performance had declined
  - 78% said their commitment to the organisation declined
  - 12% said they left their job because of uncivil treatment;
- Examples of incivility are as follows:
  - Humorous put downs, sarcasm, irony, banter
  - Eye rolling, tutting, heavy sighing
  - Chipping away at others self confidence
  - Poor communication – email, text, written spoken
  - Ignoring others and their opinions
  - Addressing people in an unprofessional manner
  - Undermining, micromanaging, giving someone all the “bad” tasks;
- People need to start highlighting uncivil behaviour, including Micro-Aggressions and calling these out (where safe to do so).

1.3.3 It acknowledged that in highly pressurised workplaces, behaviours of incivility and disrespect can become common place and have a detrimental impact on staff wellbeing and customer care. The session, designed and delivered by NHS England, aimed to support and promote cultures of civility and respect, creating positive working environments that are kind, compassionate and inclusive for all.

1.3.4 On 12 October 2022, a face to face training session on Personal Safety Awareness was delivered by the Local Government Association (LGA), as part of their Debate Not Hate campaign. 16 elected members attended the session. The session covered:

- National context
- Focusing on the facts
- Knowing the law
- The role of the councillor and personal safety
- Looking after your mental health and wellbeing

- Staying safe in your ward
- Red flags: what to report
- Things to remember
- How the Council can support you
- Digital citizenship
- Useful resources

Feedback from the session was positive with 92% rating the session either Good or Excellent. At the end of the session 67% rated their “knowledge of personal safety awareness in your role as a councillor”, as Good, with 33% rating it as Excellent. Further sessions on on-line safety and safe use of social media are being considered as further training sessions with the LGA.

## **2. Options considered and recommended proposal**

Ethics Committee are recommended to:

1. Note the work undertaken by the Local Government Association on their Debate Not hate campaign;
2. Note the work that has been undertaken locally in respect of the Council’s “Debate Not Hate” Campaign promoting Civility in Public Life and Digital Citizenship; and
3. Request that this item remains on the work programme of the Ethics Committee for continued review.

## **3. Results of consultation undertaken**

- 3.1 There has been no consultation as there is no proposal to implement at this stage which would require a consultation.

## **4. Timetable for implementing this decision**

- 4.1 Any actions arising from this report will be implemented as soon as possible.

## **5. Comments from Chief Operating Officer (Section 151 Officer) and Chief Legal Officer**

- 5.1 Financial implications  
There are no specific financial implications arising from the recommendations within this report.
- 5.2 Legal implications

There are no specific legal implications arising from this report. The issues referred to in this report will assist the Council in complying with its obligations under section 27 of the Localism Act 2011.

## **6 Other implications**

None

### **6.1 How will this contribute to the Council Plan ([www.coventry.gov.uk/councilplan/](http://www.coventry.gov.uk/councilplan/))?**

Not applicable.

### **6.2 How is risk being managed?**

There is no direct risk to the organisation as a result of the contents of this report.

### **6.3 What is the impact on the organisation?**

No direct impact at this stage.

### **6.4 Equalities / EIA**

There are no public sector equality duties which are of relevance at this stage.

### **6.5 Implications for (or impact on) climate change and the environment**

None

### **6.6 Implications for partner organisations?**

None at this stage.

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