
Ethics Committee

26 September 2024

Name of Cabinet Member:

N/A - Ethics Committee

Director Approving Submission of the report:

Director of Law and Governance

Ward(s) affected:

None

Title: Ending Abuse in Public Life Council Self-Assessment Toolkit

Is this a key decision?

No

Executive Summary

As part of the Debate Not Hate campaign the Local Government Association (LGA) have created a toolkit as a resource designed to aid local Councils in tackling and mitigating the impact and risks of abuse and intimidation that Councillors may encounter as part of their role, supporting them to be safe.

This report provides an overview of the toolkit and how it may be used by the City Council.

The first stage proposed by the toolkit is for an evidence gathering exercise to be undertaken that informs, as a second stage, the preparation of a summary and forward plan including the use of best practise examples provided within the toolkit.

Recommendations:-

The Ethics Committee is recommended to:

1. Endorse the use of the toolkit by Coventry City Council and request that an evidence gathering exercise is undertaken (as recommended by the toolkit) to inform a summary and forward plan for the Committee's consideration.

List of Appendices included

None

Other useful background papers

Ending abuse in public life council self-assessment toolkit | Local Government Association

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: Ending Abuse in Public life Council Self-Assessment Toolkit

1. Context (or background)

- 1.1 The LGA's Debate Not Hate campaign aims to raise public awareness of the vital role Councillors play in local democracy, promote healthy debate, and improve responses to the challenges they encounter. It recognises that some Councillors can be subject of abuse and harassment.

The LGA note that whilst it's important to protect freedom of speech, the cumulative effect of derogatory and abusive comments can be personally and democratically harmful. Councillors may find themselves vulnerable to verbal, psychological, and even physical abuse due to their elected role.

In response to some of these challenges the LGA has produced a toolkit *“designed to aid local councils in tackling and mitigating the impact and risks of abuse and intimidation that councillors may encounter as part of their role, supporting them to be safe. The primary objective of this toolkit is to guide councils in assessing their role and efforts to prevent and respond to abuse and intimidation against councillors.”*

- 1.2 The toolkit was developed by a specialist abuse and harm reduction consultancy organisation who worked closely with the LGA, a sounding group of Council officers and consulted with several national police colleagues.
- 1.3 The toolkit is structured around five principles and offers practical approaches to implementing these principles:-

1. **Creating supportive and informed spaces:** This component focuses on establishing a supportive and inclusive environment within the council, ensuring that Councillors have access to essential information, advice, and support options. It aims to cultivate environments that empower Councillors with the necessary tools and resources to effectively navigate challenges and promote their well-being.
2. **Creating a risk-led approach:** This section highlights the importance of empowering individuals, including officers and Councillors, by adopting a comprehensive approach to understanding and mitigating risks. It advocates for proactive identification of risks through dynamic and periodic risk assessments, considering both the broader political landscape and the specific needs of individual Councillors.
3. **Creating an infrastructure:** This segment outlines the helpful structures within the Council itself, encompassing policies, processes, and designated responsible individuals. It emphasises the importance of clearly defining procedures for raising concerns and assigning support to Councillors.

4. **Creating connections:** This section considers how Councils collaborate with the police as a partner in protecting Councillors. This includes proactive efforts to develop strong alliances with local police to enhance coordination in addressing significant abuse affecting Councillors.
5. **Creating a culture of safety and respect:** This section aims to encourage a community culture that prioritises safety, respect, and constructive interaction, fostering an environment where all Councillors feel valued and heard.

1.4 The first stage proposed by the toolkit is for an evidence gathering exercise to be undertaken to assess the Council's current position; which then informs as a second stage the preparation of a summary and forward plan including the use of best practise examples provided within the toolkit.

2. Options considered and recommended proposal

The Ethics Committee could decide not to proceed with using the toolkit and rely on the current resources available.

The Ethics Committee are recommended to endorse the use of the toolkit, as a basis for understanding the current position of the City Council against the 5 principles, and for a summary and forward plan to be prepared as proposed by the toolkit to inform any further actions that could be taken to help tackle abuse and intimidation against Councillors.

3. Results of consultation undertaken

Not applicable.

4. Timetable for implementing this decision

The evidence gathering stage should be undertaken to enable the summary and forward plan to be available for consideration at the next Ethics Committee meeting.

5. Comments from Director of Finance and Resources and the Director of Law and Governance

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.

6. Other implications

None.

6.1 How will this contribute to the One Coventry Plan

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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