
Ethics Committee

9 January 2025

Name of Cabinet Member:

N/A - Ethics Committee

Director Approving Submission of the report:

Director of Law and Governance

Ward(s) affected:

None

Title: Local Government Association (LGA) Ending Abuse in Public Life – Council Self-Assessment Tool Kit

Is this a key decision?

No

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. Reports were previously considered by the Committee on 30 March 2023 and 28 September 2023.

In May 2024, the LGA designed a self-assessment tool kit 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 work remains part of the Committee's Work Programme, and this report is to provide an update on the self-assessment and Forward Plan.

Recommendations:

The Ethics Committee is recommended to:

- 1) Note the work undertaken by the Local Government Association (LGA) on their Debate Not Hate campaign, including the self-assessment tool.
- 2) Note the initial self-assessment and subsequent forward plan (Appendix 1 to the report).

- 3) Support the proposal to use the initial self-assessment as a benchmarking and evaluation tool and to identify ways for Councillors to feedback.

List of Appendices included:

Appendix 1 - LGA Self-Assessment Toolkit and Forward Plan

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

- Local Government Association's publication: Debate Not Hate: Ending abuse in public life for councillors, 3 July 2023:
<https://www.local.gov.uk/publications/debate-not-hate-ending-abuse-public-life-councillors>
- Local Government Association's publication Ending abuse in public life council self-assessment toolkit, 30 May 2024:
[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: Local Government Association (LGA) Ending Abuse in Public Life – Council Self-Assessment Tool Kit

1 Context (or background)

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

2 Work of the LGA

- 2.1 In July 2023 the LGA issued a publication called “Debate Not Hate: Ending abuse in public life for councillors” which outlines how Councils can better support Councillors to prevent and handle abuse. [Debate Not Hate: Ending abuse in public life for councillors | Local Government Association](#) External consultants worked with Councils and relevant partners to inform the report, which includes principles for Councils to consider, top tips and good practice case studies. The key findings of this report were reported to Ethics Committee on 28th September 2023.

3 Ending Abuse in Public Life Council Self-Assessment Tool Kit

- 3.1 Further to the Debate Not Hate report, a self-assessment toolkit has been developed by the LGA to support the work within Councils to address abuse of Councillors. The toolkit acknowledges the distinct roles and responsibilities held by Councillors, Councils and police in addressing instances of abuse and intimidation. It is crucial to acknowledge and understand the diverse spheres of influence within which each entity operates and that there are limitations in their ability to address certain issues alone. By understanding their unique sphere of influence and collaborating with other stakeholders, Councils can work towards meaningful solutions for many of these challenges. As such, this toolkit is designed to be realistic and flexible in its implementation.
- 3.2 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.
- 3.3 The toolkit is structured around the five principles outlined in the “Debate Not Hate: Ending abuse in public life for Councillors” report, offering a practical approach to implementing these principles.
- 3.4 The five principles are as follows:
1. Creating supportive and informed spaces
 2. Creating a risk-led approach
 3. Creating an infrastructure
 4. Creating new connections
 5. Creating a culture of safety and respect
- 3.5 An initial assessment of the tool kit has been completed and a summary of which, and subsequent forward plan for Coventry, can be found at Appendix 1 with the intention of creating a baseline as a starting point for this work.
- 3.6 The next step will be to gather feedback from Councillors as part of the self-assessment to further inform the forward plan.

- 3.7 Work already delivered which contributes to this work has been information provided on the Members intranet webpages in a section called “Well-being and your safety”, which sign-posts Members to where advice and support can be found. These webpages provide links to all of the LGA materials from the Debate Not Hate campaign, as well as support offered through the Council’s Occupational Health Service.
- 3.8 These webpages also provide a link to the “Personal safety guidance for elected members” document, as well as how to deal with online abuse and how to report harassment and intimidation.
- 3.9 Other actions already in progress are linking with the police on Operation Ford to identify a single point of contact, as well as a programme of personal safety workshops delivered by the police for Councillors in the New Year.
- 3.10 A number of personal safety and awareness raising training sessions have been arranged for Councillors this municipal year, including one specifically on safety whilst election campaigning, and sessions delivered by the LGA on online abuse and harassment. 27 Councillors have accessed these sessions.

4 Options considered and recommended proposal

- 4.1 Option 1: Do nothing
- 4.2 If the Council did not undertake the self-assessment process, there would be no understanding of the effectiveness of the work being done under the Debate Not Hate campaign and potentially put Members at risk from the effects of abuse and intimidation in public life. This is not recommended.
- 4.3 Option 2: Use the opportunity offered by the Ending Abuse in Public Life Council Self-assessment Tool to identify ways the Council can tackle and mitigate the impact and risks of abuse and intimidation councillors may encounter as part of their role and support them to be safe. This is the recommended option
- 4.4 The Ethics Committee are recommended to:
 - 1) Note the work undertaken by the Local Government Association (LGA) on their Debate Not Hate campaign, including the self-assessment tool.
 - 2) Note the initial self-assessment and subsequent forward plan. (Appendix 1)
 - 3) Support the proposal to use the initial self-assessment as a benchmarking and evaluation tool and to identify ways for Members to feedback.

5 Results of consultation undertaken

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

6 Timetable for implementing this decision

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

7 Comments from Director of Finance and Resources and Director of Law and Governance

7.1 Financial implications

There are no specific financial implications arising from the recommendations within this report.

7.2 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.

8 Other implications

None

8.1 How will this contribute to the Council Plan?

<https://www.coventry.gov.uk/strategies-plans-policies/one-coventry-plan>

Not applicable.

8.2 How is risk being managed?

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

8.3 What is the impact on the organisation?

No direct impact at this stage.

8.4 Equalities / EIA

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

8.5 Implications for (or impact on) climate change and the environment

None

8.6 Implications for partner organisations?

None at this stage.

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