

FULL COUNCIL

Date: Monday, 13 February 2023

Title: Civility & Respect

Contact Officer: Deputy Town Clerk - Adam Clapton

Background

Members will recall the National Association of Local Councils (NALC) has a project dedicated to promoting Civility & Respect in the parish/town Council sector.

The Town Council previously supported a Parliamentary Early Day Motion (EDM) calling for effective sanctions and mechanisms to improve 'Standards in Public Life' at its meeting held on 11 April 2022. The EDM was in response to the government's re-stated position that recommendations from a 'Review of Local Government Ethical Standards' in 2019 could be more appropriately and effectively taken forward by local authorities, rather than through further legislation. The Council resolved to encourage the MP for Witney to support the motion, minute no. 182 refers.

Current Situation

The NALC Civility & Respect Project has backed a new EDM on intimidation in community, parish and town councils, tabled in parliament by Dr Julian Lewis MP.

The motion calls on the government to revisit its response to the Committee on Standards in Public Life report on local government ethical standards and introduce its recommendations in full, including tougher sanctions such as suspension for poorly behaving councillors. The full EDM text can be seen below.

The Civility and Respect Project urges local (parish and town) councils to support the motion by writing to their MPs to back it.

Early Day Motion 611: tabled on 23 November 2022

Intimidation at community, parish and town councils

'That this House expresses its support and appreciation for local community, parish and town councils which are the first tier of local government in England and Wales and play a vital role in our communities; notes with concern that whilst the vast majority of local councils are well run, there remain behavioural issues in a small minority of councils and by members of the public which involve bullying, intimidation and harassment of both councillors and their staff, as confirmed through a dedicated Civility and Respect project

led by the National Association of Local Councils (NALC), Society of Local Council Clerks (SLCC), One Voice Wales (OVW), county associations of local councils, and also highlighted by the Association of Local Council Clerks (ALCC); further notes with concern this is leading to councillors and staff leaving the sector and is creating difficulties in recruiting to those roles; and calls on the Government to re-visit its response to the Committee on Standards in Public Life report on local government ethical standards and introduce the report's recommendations in full including tougher sanctions such as suspension for poorly behaving councillors.'

Environmental impact

Having declared a Climate Change Emergency at its Council meeting on 26 June 2019 Councillors should have due regard to the environmental impact of any decisions they make with regard to its facilities and services it operates.

Risk

In decision making Councillors should give consideration to any risks to the Council and any action it can take to limit or negate its liability.

The MP for Witney responded to the previous request to support the motion by advising that he does not sign EDM's as they are ineffective and a waste of taxpayer's money. In the same response he advised he agreed with the sentiments of a robust system and was writing to the responsible Minister to raise the concerns and request an up-to-date position on the points raised.

It is likely the same response will be received so members should consider whether to lobby the MP to show a continued commitment to civility and respect in public life. A letter could ask for further updates relating to his earlier comments.

Financial implications

There are no financial implications.

Recommendations

Members are invited to note the report and consider the following:

1. Supporting EDM 611 – Intimidation at community, parish and town councils and if yes;
2. Whether to write and encourage the MP for Witney to emulate.