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| Meeting of: | Standards Committee |
| Date of Meeting: | Thursday, 29 January 2026 |
| Relevant Scrutiny Committee: | No Relevant Scrutiny Committee |
| Report Title: | Civility in Public Life – Programme of Work |
| Purpose of Report: | To provide Standards Committee Members with details on the Programme of Work. |
| Report Owner: | Victoria Davidson, Monitoring Officer / Head of Legal and Democratic Services. |
| Responsible Officer: | Amy Rudman, Principal Democratic and Scrutiny Services Officer. |
| Elected Member and Officer Consultation: | None required, this is a matter for Standards Committee. |
| Policy Framework: | This is a matter for the Standards Committee. |
| Executive Summary: | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> To update Members of the Standards Committee on recent work associated with the Civility in Public Life Programme (“the programme”) being led by the Local Government Association (LGA) in conjunction with the Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA), Northern Ireland Local Government Association (NILGA), and the Confederation of Scottish Local Authorities (COSLA). The programme continues to address abuse, intimidation, and declining standards of discourse in public life, while promoting Councillor safety, transparency, and accountability. This report builds on the update provided in September 2025 and reflects UK-wide and Welsh developments reported during 2024/25, including the launch of the Defending Democracy Policing Protocol, the Debate Not Hate campaign evaluation, and a refreshed focus on online safety and democratic literacy. |

Recommendation

1. T H A T Standards Committee Members note the further progress being undertaken by the LGA, WLGA and the other UK associations on this programme of work.

Reason for Recommendation

1. For Committee's consideration and information.

1. Background

- 1.1 The LGA, WLGA, COSLA and NILGA continue to collaborate on the Civility in Public Life programme, meeting monthly and maintaining close partnership with the Jo Cox Foundation.

The purpose of the programme remains to:

- Address intimidation of local government Members and officers,
- Address standards of political discourse and behaviour, and
- Provide support and advice to Councils and Councillors.

2. Key Issues for Consideration

- 2.1 Led by the WLGA a meeting of all Welsh Leaders is taking place on the 16th January 2026, and PCCs have been requested to attend. Discussions have taken place between South Wales Police and Chief Executives, and further discussions are expected on the following topics:
 - Consideration of the impact on democracy;
 - Community Safety considerations as part of the WLGA Corporate Strategy;
 - LGA Debate Not Hate survey published. 150 members of Welsh Local Authorities responded;
 - Before Senedd Members leave office, this May, a Welsh survey will be undertaken. The WLGA are working with Data Cymru, and work will be merged with a focus on the democratic deficit;
 - Clear need for more data which MP Central Intelligence holds which does not exist for Senedd Members and Councillors.
- 2.2 Local Government organisations across the UK joined the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities (COSLA), in October 2025, including the Local Government Association (LGA), Northern Ireland Local Government Association (NILGA) and Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA) to reaffirm their shared commitment to promoting civility in public life, and to step up the work across all four nations, supporting Councils, and modelling positive behaviours that strengthen local democracy.
- 2.3 The programme operates on a four-nations basis, with strong engagement from Wales through the Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA). Continued resourcing enables shared learning, intelligence, and evidence across nations,

supporting Welsh Councils and Councillors in addressing similar challenges around abuse, intimidation, and democratic resilience.

<https://www.local.gov.uk/publications/debate-not-hate-survey-councillors-2025>

2.4 From a Welsh perspective, the WLGA continues to play a central role in supporting Councils and Elected Members to address intimidation and abuse and to promote respectful democratic engagement. The WLGA continues to champion civility in public life on behalf of Welsh Councils, aligning with UK-wide partners while reflecting the Welsh legislative and cultural context.

Key strands of activity include:

2.5 Reinforcing expectations around member conduct, leadership behaviour, and respect, consistent with the Wales Model Code of Conduct.

2.6 Ongoing work to raise awareness of the impact of abuse and intimidation on Councillors' mental health and wellbeing.

2.7 Promotion of practical support mechanisms for Members experiencing harassment, including signposting to Council procedures, Monitoring Officers, and external support where appropriate.

2.8 Continued emphasis on member development, including training and briefings on; managing online engagement and social media safely; distinguishing legitimate scrutiny from unacceptable behaviour; and maintaining professionalism and resilience in public debate.

2.9 Support for Councils in embedding clear local protocols on Member/officer relations and acceptable behaviour.

2.10 Recognition that online abuse and disinformation present a growing challenge for local democracy in Wales.

2.11 WLGA engagement with Councils to promote consistent messaging, good practice in digital engagement, and responsible use of social media by those in public life.

2.12 The programme supports broader Welsh objectives around diversity, inclusion, and participation, recognising that abuse and intimidation disproportionately deter under-represented groups from standing for election.

2.13 Civility is positioned as essential to ensuring local government in Wales remains representative, accessible and trusted.

2.14 The LGA published its Annual Report in June 2025 and set out its priorities.

2.15 The Civility in Public Life Programme, led by the Local Government Association (LGA) through its Civility in Public Life Steering Group, continues to address the growing challenge of abuse, intimidation and harassment of Councillors and officers, which poses a serious threat to local democracy, democratic participation, and Councillor wellbeing.

2.16 During 2024/25, the programme focused on influencing national policy, strengthening support for Councillors, and building evidence of the scale and impact of abuse and intimidation. Key achievements included:

- 2.17** National advocacy and engagement with Ministers following the 2024 General Election, resulting in Government commitments to legislate on the privacy of Councillors' home addresses and to pursue reform of the Councillor standards regime.
- 2.18** Enhanced engagement with policing partners, including the Home Office, National Police Chiefs' Council and College of Policing, and direct involvement in training police Force Elected Official Advisers.
- 2.19** Delivery of the Debate Not Hate annual Councillor survey, achieving a significantly increased response rate and expanding evidence on threats, violence, and online abuse; findings received national media coverage.
- 2.20** High-profile discussions at the LGA Annual Conference, securing public Ministerial commitments on standards reform and councillor safety.
- 2.21** A co-ordinated sector response to the Government's Councillor standards consultation, including the development of a shared local government vision for strengthening standards.
- 2.22** An independent evaluation of the Debate Not Hate campaign, which confirmed strong sector support, positive policy influence and the value of a more focused, Council-facing approach going forward.
- 2.23** Delivery of a substantial Civility in Public Life improvement offer, including national and bespoke training workshops on personal safety, online abuse, and safer canvassing, reaching hundreds of Councillors.
- 2.24** Ongoing support to Councils and regions, providing specialist advice and resources in response to local issues.
- 2.25** Some planned activities, including new training products and wider political literacy initiatives, were deprioritised due to capacity pressures arising from major Government consultations.
- 2.26** For 2025/26, the programme will continue to support the LGA's goal of championing local government and strengthening local democracy. Proposed priority areas include:
- 2.27** Influencing Government legislation, particularly opportunities arising from the English Devolution Bill to secure reforms on Councillor safety, home address privacy, and standards.
- 2.28** Improving consistency of the policing response to abuse, intimidation and mis/disinformation affecting Councillors.
- 2.29** Tackling online abuse and mis/disinformation, including engagement with Ofcom on implementation of the Online Safety Act.
- 2.30** Supporting healthy debate and democratic literacy, clarifying expectations of respectful political discourse.
- 2.31** Building evidence and awareness of Councillors' experiences and risks.
- 2.32** Supporting Councillor safety and wellbeing, including targeted support for new Councillors and those at greater risk of abuse.

3. How do proposals evidence the Five Ways of Working and contribute to our Well-being Objectives?

3.1 The role of the Standards Committee is to promote and maintain high standards of conduct by Councillors, Co-opted Members and Church and Parent Governor Representatives.

4. Climate Change and Nature Implications

4.1 None as a direct result of this report.

5. Resources and Legal Considerations

Financial

5.1 None as a direct result of this report.

Employment

5.2 None as a direct result of this report.

Legal (Including Equalities)

5.3 The Council has a duty to establish and maintain a Standards Committee as defined by legislation as set out in the Standards Committees Rules and Regulations 2001 and the Standards Committee (Wales) Amendment Regulations 2006.

Background Papers

[https://lga.moderngov.co.uk/documents/s50429/Annual Report of the Civility in Public Life Steering Group and 202526 priorities.pdf?utm_source=chatgpt.comhttps://www.jocoxfoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/01/Jo-Cox-Civility-Commission-report.pdf?utm_source=chatgpt.comhttps://lgiu.org/blog-article/civility-in-public-life-a-global-executive-live-panel-reflects-on-challenges-and-solutions/Four-Nations-Civility-In-Public-Life-Statement-1.pdf](https://lga.moderngov.co.uk/documents/s50429/Annual%20Report%20of%20the%20Civility%20in%20Public%20Life%20Steering%20Group%20and%20202526_priorities.pdf?utm_source=chatgpt.comhttps://www.jocoxfoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/01/Jo-Cox-Civility-Commission-report.pdf?utm_source=chatgpt.comhttps://lgiu.org/blog-article/civility-in-public-life-a-global-executive-live-panel-reflects-on-challenges-and-solutions/Four-Nations-Civility-In-Public-Life-Statement-1.pdf)

[UK local government associations: Joint statement on Civility in Public Life | Local Government Association](#)

Report – Standards Committee [26th September 2024](#) - Civility in Public Life – Programme of Work.

Report – Standards Committee [25th September 2025](#) - Civility in Public Life – Programme of Work.