

Report to: Audit & Governance Committee Meeting – 7 May 2025

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Report Summary	
Report Title	Conduct and Public Service
Purpose of Report	To consider progress on implementation of the Full Council resolution 'Conduct and Public Service' made on 15 October 2024.
Recommendations	<p>That Committee:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. notes that proposals for Member training in respect of standards of conduct will be taken forward in the Member Training Protocol workstream; 2. agrees to give further consideration to amendments to the Code of Conduct for Councillors at a future date; 3. agrees to convene one further workshop on the Conduct and Public Office topic focussing on social media; 4. notes that Officers will explore the cost and resource implications of supporting the Local Government Association's Debate not Hate Campaign, and 5. notes that further enquiries will be made regarding the possibility of hosting a conference regarding good conduct in public office.
Reason for Recommendation	To identify practical measures the Council could adopt to address poor conduct by Members where it arises.

1.0 Background

- 1.1 On 15 October 2024 the Full Council passed a resolution requesting that the Audit & Governance Committee review the Code of Conduct and the LGA's Civility in Public Life programme, with a view to identifying practical measures the Council could adopt

to address poor conduct by members where it arises. This included a request for clear and robust guidance around member behaviour on social media, and to consider if necessary, the Council making representations to Government and the Local Government Association for proposed changes and stiffer sanctions.

- 1.2 Following this resolution, the Government announced a consultation on the local government standards regime so that councils have the powers they need to suspend councillors who break their codes of conduct. This Committee approved the Council's response to that consultation in February 2025.
- 1.3 In December 2024 this Committee also resolved to convene an informal workshop to consider: -
 - Whether to align the Council's Code of Conduct exactly with the Local Government Association Model Code.
 - Whether the Council can adopt any recommendations or good practice from the Local Government Association's Civility in Public Life report and Debate not Hate Campaign.
 - Review and Update the Council's Social Media Protocol for Members, taking into account Local Government Association guidance.

2.0 Proposal/Options Considered

- 2.1 The informal workshop took place on 27 March. Members discussed training on conduct and standards. The benefits of different styles of training were recognised and it was generally agreed that a varied offer would be most effective. This will be taken into account in development of the Member training Protocol, which is being brought to this Committee separately.
- 2.2 Members were asked to consider whether the Council's Code of Conduct should be fully aligned with the Local Government Association Model Code of Conduct. There are a couple of minor differences (reported to this Committee in December 2024); the main one relating to non-participation in relation to 'Other Registerable Interests' and 'Non-Registerable Interests'. There was a general consensus that any amendment should be accompanied by comprehensive training, and some doubts were raised about amending the Code of Conduct at this time when Government may be issuing new requirements. The Members also acknowledged that given Local Government Reorganisation, any new larger authority would most likely adopt the model code of conduct for expediency.
- 2.3 It is proposed to convene one more workshop to conclude consideration of the topic, focussing on review and update of the Councillor Social Media Protocol. In the meantime, Officers will explore the cost and resource implications of raising awareness of the Local Government Association's 'Debate not Hate' campaign which encourages: -

- “Add the Debate Not Hate email banner to corporate communications during specific times of year, like in the run-up to elections and add the campaign logo to your website to show your support.
- Shout about the campaign on your social media profiles by using the branded social media assets and suggested sample social text
- Print our Debate Not Hate branded promotional materials (including posters, foamboards and standee) and display them at council events, public meetings, and election events.”

2.4 Members also discussed the possibility of the Council hosting a conference to promote good conduct in public service with the aim of encouraging people to enter public life. There were mixed views about the merits of hosting a conference, and some concerns were raised about the potential cost, and whether a conference properly falls within the Council’s remit. Officers are minded to make further enquiries with partners who might be able to take the lead on arrangements, with the Council possibly hosting at Castle House, Newark. Committee will be kept updated.

3.0 Implications

In writing this report and in putting forward recommendations, officers have considered the following implications: Data Protection; Digital & Cyber Security; Equality & Diversity; Financial; Human Resources; Human Rights; Legal; Safeguarding & Sustainability and where appropriate they have made reference to these implications and added suitable expert comment where appropriate.

3.1 Financial Implications - FIN25-26/7855

There are no financial implications from this report.

3.2 Legal Implications (LEG2425/2011)

Audit & Governance Committee is the appropriate body to consider the content of this report.

Background Papers and Published Documents

Except for previously published documents, which will be available elsewhere, the documents listed here will be available for inspection in accordance with Section 100D of the Local Government Act 1972.

December 2024 Audit & Governance Committee report - <https://democracy.newark-sherwooddc.gov.uk/documents/s21437/Item%2018%2011.12.24%20Conduct%20and%20Public%20Service.pdf>

February 2025 Audit & Governance Committee report – item 19 - <https://democracy.newark-sherwooddc.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=298&MId=988>