

Old Stratford Parish Council

Civility in Public Life Policy and Pledge

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| Status | Adopted |
| Date Adopted | 8th August 2023 |
| Minute Reference | Minute 4 |
| Adopting Committee | Full Council |
| Date of next review | August 2024 |

1. Policy

The intimidation and abuse of Councillors and Council Staff in person or otherwise, undermines democracy. It can prevent members from representing the communities they serve, prevent individuals from standing for election and undermines the democratic processes.

There are growing concerns about the impact an increasing level of public intimidation and toxicity of debate is having on our community's democratic process. These harmful behaviours, whether occurring towards, between or by elected members are entirely unacceptable.

Public intimidation is defined as "words and/or behaviour intended or likely to block, influence or deter participation in public debate or causing alarm or distress which could lead to an individual wanting to withdraw from Public Life". This includes discriminatory, physical, psychological and verbal actions such as physical attacks; being stalked, followed or loitered around; threats of harm, distribution of misinformation; character assassination; inappropriate emails, letters, telephone calls and communications on social media; sexual harassment or sexual assault and other threatening behaviours.

Old Stratford Parish Council is committed to promote civility in Public Life; it encourages positive debate and supports the wellbeing of its elected members, volunteers and employee(s).

Key Points:

- Councillors are encouraged to keep a record of any intimidatory communication or behaviour.
- The Parish Council will consider the context, content and frequency of communications and behaviours and actions that can be taken retroactively.
- Contact with unknown or anonymous individuals will be taken with care.
- Councillors and Council Staff are encouraged to speak out against harassment and intimidation of others and address any inappropriate and disrespectful behaviour, where they feel safe to do so, with the aim of discouraging others from accepting such behaviours.

Set out below are a suggested set of actions that Parish Councillors, Council Staff and volunteers could undertake if they are being subjected to intimidation:

- Make sure that your immediate safety is not at risk.
- Make sure you personally are safe.
- If possible, record or diarise the encounter or communication.
- In the event of emails, or letters you can save it.
- A telephone call or face to face discussion and social media incident could be written down in a diary as soon as possible after the event, recorded, screen-shot or saved.
- You can also take photos of possible damage or a computer screen, even if this is the first or only incident. Others may have also been subject to intimidation and a collective record is important if future action is going to be taken.

- It also important that incidents relating to the same individual or individuals should be recorded as such evidence could be critical if the matter gives rise to criminal prosecution.
- Raise the incident with a view to discussing it or obtaining support from Old Stratford Parish Council. This will also help you establish if others have been subjected to the same or similar intimidation.
- If a serious potential crime has occurred, it is advisable to formally report it to Old Stratford Parish Council and to the Police, particularly in the context of a serious threat to life or anticipated violence.
- If you are concerned about your personal safety, raise your concerns with Old Stratford Parish Council and the Police so that there is a record of the impact the incident is having and review your own security and personal safety. This could include your personal or work activities and those of your family.
- Under the Health & Safety at Work Act, Old Stratford Parish Council has a duty to safeguard Council Staff against potential violent persons. Although Parish Councillors are not employees in the legal sense, Old Stratford Parish Council will treat them as such in this instance and will enable the Councillor to ascertain if the individual or individuals who have intimidated them is on a Police Violent Persons register and if not, ensure that their name(s) are added,
- Every situation will be different and it will need a personal judgement about whether it is worthwhile to pursue the incident, ignore it, or potentially acknowledge it.
- If letters, phone calls, social media communications or emails continue, further steps may need to be considered, such as advising the individual that if such abuse continues it will result in a referral to the Police and the stopping of further correspondence.

Old Stratford Parish Council agrees that it will:

1. Ensure that complaints made of harassment or bullying made by a Parish Councillor, Parish Clerk, Council Volunteer or Council Contractor are fully investigated by the full Parish Council.
2. A written report will be kept on file regarding what happened and how to proceed, including potential sanctions against perpetrators if they use any Council owned facility.
3. Ensure a separate list is kept to ensure that perpetrators are identified to Councillors who may to deal with them in the future and are thus as well prepared as possible.
4. Communicate with the perpetrator the decision of the Parish Council.
5. Advise the Police if investigations result in a decision that a crime has been committed.
6. Ensure that the Parish Councillor, Parish Clerk, Council Volunteer or Council Contractor are correctly supported including, where necessary mental health support.

It is important to remind the Community that the role of the Parish Councillor, Parish Clerk, Council Volunteer or Council Contractor must not be confused with the person. Parish Councillors must ensure that all communication on Parish Council matters must go through the Parish Clerk as the Proper Officer of the Parish Council.

2. Civility Pledge

Definition of civility and respect:

Civility means politeness and courtesy, also in the written word. Examples of ways in which you can show respect are by listening and paying attention to others, having consideration for other people's feelings, following protocols and rules, showing appreciation and thanks and being kind.

Old Stratford Parish Council is therefore signing up to the civility and respect pledge it is demonstrating that our Parish Council is committed to treating Councillors, Clerks, employees, volunteers and members of the Public, representatives of partner organisations with civility and respect in their role.

To comply with this pledge Old Stratford Parish Council agrees with the following Statement:

1. Our Council has agreed that it will treat all Councillor's, Clerk and employees, members of the Public, representatives of partner organisations and volunteers with civility and respect.
2. Our Council has committed to training Councillor's and Staff.
3. Our Council has signed up to Code of Conduct for Councillor's.
4. Our Council has good governance arrangements in place including Staff Contracts and a dignity at work policy.
5. Our Council will commit to seeking professional help in the early stages should civility and respect issues arise.
6. Our Council will commit to calling out bullying and harassment when if and if it happens.
7. Our Council will continue to learn from best practice in the sector and aspire to being role model.
8. Our Council supports the continued lobbying for the change in Legislation to support the Civility and Respect Pledge, including sanctions for elected members where appropriate.

Signed: *A Pateman*

Date:

Parish Chairman, on behalf of Old Stratford Parish Council.