

Committee: Standards Committee

Date:

Title: Standards of Discourse in Public Life

21 September 2022

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Summary

1. Following the meeting of Full Council on the 7th December 2021 and the Member Motion: Action on violence and harassment against elected representatives and public servants, and the coarsening of public discourse. Council resolved as follows:

To instruct the Chief Executive to work with elected members, staff and external partners, particularly Essex Police, to carry out an annual assessment of safety and security of both elected representatives, council staff and the public we serve in the course of our work, and to present that report, with actions taken and recommendations as appropriate, each year to full Council for debate.

To task our Standards Committee, in addition (and separate to) their work considering individual complaints, to consider the standards of discourse in public debate locally focused on the Council, both by members of the public and amongst councillors ourselves, and to report annually with conclusions and recommendations as appropriate for part of the same annual debate.

2. The purpose of this report to the Standards Committee today is to consider the second part of the resolution above and to make recommendations to be reported on to Full Council. The first part of the Motion will be the subject of a separate report to Full Council.

Recommendations

3. That members of the Committee debate and provide input into the design of a number of training sessions on the standards of discourse in public debate so that sessions can be developed and provided in house by the Monitoring Officer and Independent Persons. That members consider such training be provided in an interactive manner, involving the review of debates in a selection of public meetings and via discussion in feedback sessions. That action points are drawn from feedback sessions for reporting to Full Council.
4. That Committee draw upon their own experience of debate, problems they have encountered, improvements they may wish to make and to make any additional recommendations they wish for Full Council to consider.

Financial Implications

5. If training is provided internally the financial implications will be low.

Background Papers

6. No background papers were referred to. The Monitoring Officer held some informal discussion with the Councils Independent Persons.

Impact

- 7.

Communication/Consultation	N/A
Community Safety	None
Equalities	None
Health and Safety	None
Human Rights/Legal Implications	None
Sustainability	N/A
Ward-specific impacts	None
Workforce/Workplace	None

Situation

8. The situation is described in the summary section above at paragraphs 1 and 2.

Risk Analysis

- 9.

Risk	Likelihood	Impact	Mitigating actions
1	1	1	1 Further training and addressing the issues within the Councils membership will assist in raising the standards of public debate.

- 1 = Little or no risk or impact
- 2 = Some risk or impact – action may be necessary.
- 3 = Significant risk or impact – action required
- 4 = Near certainty of risk occurring, catastrophic effect or failure of project.