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**Service Director – Legal, Governance and
Commissioning**

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Tuesday 10 March 2026

Notice of Meeting

Dear Member

Standards Committee

The **Standards Committee** will meet in the **Council Chamber - Town Hall, Huddersfield** at **2.00 pm** on **Wednesday 18 March 2026**.

The items which will be discussed are described in the agenda and there are reports attached which give more details.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "S Lawton".

Samantha Lawton

Service Director – Legal, Governance and Commissioning

Kirklees Council advocates openness and transparency as part of its democratic processes. Anyone wishing to record (film or audio) the public parts of the meeting should inform the Chair/Clerk of their intentions prior to the meeting.

Standards Committee

Members

Councillor Bill Armer (Chair)

Councillor Martyn Bolt

Councillor Eric Firth

Councillor Alison Munro

Councillor Cathy Scott

Councillor Mohan Sokhal

Green Party Vacancy

Craig Ainsworth – Co-opted Member

Mike Stow – Co-Opted Member

Agenda

Reports or Explanatory Notes Attached

Pages

1: Membership of the Committee

To receive any apologies for absence.

2: Minutes of Previous Meeting

1 - 2

To approve the Minutes of the Meeting of the Committee held on 24 September 2025.

3: Declaration of Interests

3 - 4

Committee Members will be asked to advise if there are any items on the Agenda in which they have a disclosable pecuniary interest, or any other interests, which may prevent them from participating in the discussion or vote on any of the items.

4: Admission of the Public

Most agenda items will be considered in public session, however, it shall be advised whether the Committee will consider any matters in private, by virtue of the reports containing information which falls within a category of exempt information as contained at Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972.

5: Deputation/Petitions

The Committee will receive any petitions and/or deputations from members of the public. A deputation is where up to five people can attend the meeting and make a presentation on some particular issue of concern. A member of the public can also submit a petition at the meeting relating to a matter on which the body has powers and responsibilities.

In accordance with Council Procedure Rule 10, Members of the Public must submit a deputation in writing, at least three clear working days in advance of the meeting and shall subsequently be notified if the deputation shall be heard. A maximum of four deputations shall be heard at any one meeting.

6: Code of Conduct complaints update 5 - 16

To receive the report.

Contact: David Stickley, Legal Services

7: Cases and News Update 17 - 40

To receive the report.

Contact: David Stickley, Legal Services

8: Update on Government Consultation 'Strengthening the Standards and Conduct Framework for Local Authorities in England' 41 - 48

To receive the report.

Contact: David Stickley, Legal Services

Contact Officer: Yolande Myers

KIRKLEES COUNCIL

STANDARDS COMMITTEE

Wednesday 24th September 2025

Present: Councillor Bill Armer (Chair)
Councillor Eric Firth
Councillor Cathy Scott
Councillor Mohan Sokhal

In attendance: Michael Stow (Independent Person)

Apologies: Councillor Martyn Bolt
Councillor Alison Munro
Councillor Imran Safdar
Craig Ainsworth (Independent Person)

3 Membership of the Committee

Apologies for absence were received on behalf of Councillors Bolt, Munro and Safdar and Craig Ainsworth (Independent Person).

4 Minutes of Previous Meetings

RESOLVED – That the Minutes of the Meetings held on 12 March and 21 May 2025 be approved as a correct record.

5 Declaration of Interests

No interests were declared.

6 Admission of the Public

It was noted that all items would be considered in public session.

7 Deputation/Petitions

No deputations or petitions were received.

8 Public Question Time

No public questions were received.

9 Cases and News Update

The Committee received a report providing an update on recent developments in local government ethics and standards cases since the last meeting in March 2025. Several notable cases had been reported in the Local Government Lawyer, including a finding of improper influence by a planning committee member at King's Lynn and West Norfolk Borough Council, and a councillor in Tameside found in breach of the code following social media comments. The report also referenced a case in Durham where a newly elected councillor had to step down due to being an employee of the authority, and a former councillor referred to the police for failing to

Standards Committee - 24 September 2025

declare a disclosable pecuniary interest. Additionally, the committee noted the outcome of the trial of former councillor Ricky Jones, who was acquitted of encouraging violent disorder.

The report also summarised recent published decisions from standards bodies across the UK. The Standards Commission for Scotland had considered six cases, with breaches found in five, resulting in suspensions or censures. In Northern Ireland, two cases were heard, both resulting in suspensions. The Public Services Ombudsman for Wales investigated 13 cases, none of which were upheld. The Committee was also updated on the work of the Committee on Standards in Public Life (CSPL), including its March 2025 report on early warning signs in public sector bodies and its June 2025 annual report, which revisited the 2019 review of local government ethical standards. No feedback had yet been published on the government's consultation on local standards and conduct.

RESOLVED – That the report be noted.

10 **Code of Conduct Complaints Update**

The Committee received an update from the Monitoring Officer on complaints made under the Members' Code of Conduct between 1 March and 31 August 2025. The Committee was informed that 11 complaints had been received during this period, 10 of which related to Kirklees Councillors and one to a Town or Parish Councillor. Of these, two were not pursued, four were not progressed beyond initial assessment, one was resolved informally, and one resulted in a finding of breach. Three complaints remained under investigation at the time of reporting. The Committee also noted that of the nine complaints carried forward from the previous reporting period, five resulted in findings of breach, three were dismissed at the initial stage, and one was resolved informally.

A comparison with the previous reporting period revealed a significant decrease in the number of complaints, from 22 to 11, continuing a downward trend. The nature of the complaints in the current period primarily concerned social media conduct, correspondence, and failure to comply with previous sanctions. It was noted that most complaints were submitted by members of the public, with only one from an officer and none from councillors. The committee was also updated on published decisions, which now only include upheld complaints. The Committee acknowledged the potential influence of the absence of elections in 2025 on the reduced volume of complaints.

RESOLVED – That the report be noted.

KIRKLEES COUNCIL			
COUNCIL/CABINET/COMMITTEE MEETINGS ETC			
DECLARATION OF INTERESTS			
Standards Committee			
Name of Councillor			
Item in which you have an interest	Type of interest (eg a disclosable pecuniary interest or an "Other Interest")	Does the nature of the interest require you to withdraw from the meeting while the item in which you have an interest is under consideration? [Y/N]	Brief description of your interest

Signed: Dated:

NOTES

Disclosable Pecuniary Interests

If you have any of the following pecuniary interests, they are your disclosable pecuniary interests under the new national rules. Any reference to spouse or civil partner includes any person with whom you are living as husband or wife, or as if they were your civil partner.

Any employment, office, trade, profession or vocation carried on for profit or gain, which you, or your spouse or civil partner, undertakes.

Any payment or provision of any other financial benefit (other than from your council or authority) made or provided within the relevant period in respect of any expenses incurred by you in carrying out duties as a member, or towards your election expenses.

Any contract which is made between you, or your spouse or your civil partner (or a body in which you, or your spouse or your civil partner, has a beneficial interest) and your council or authority -

- under which goods or services are to be provided or works are to be executed; and
- which has not been fully discharged.

Any beneficial interest in land which you, or your spouse or your civil partner, have and which is within the area of your council or authority.

Any licence (alone or jointly with others) which you, or your spouse or your civil partner, holds to occupy land in the area of your council or authority for a month or longer.

Any tenancy where (to your knowledge) - the landlord is your council or authority; and the tenant is a body in which you, or your spouse or your civil partner, has a beneficial interest.

Any beneficial interest which you, or your spouse or your civil partner has in securities of a body where -

- (a) that body (to your knowledge) has a place of business or land in the area of your council or authority; and
(b) either -

the total nominal value of the securities exceeds £25,000 or one hundredth of the total issued share capital of that body; or
if the share capital of that body is of more than one class, the total nominal value of the shares of any one class in which you, or your spouse or your civil partner, has a beneficial interest exceeds one hundredth of the total issued share capital of that class.



Code of Conduct complaints update

Meeting:	Standards Committee
Date:	18th March 2026
Cabinet Member (if applicable)	N/A
Key Decision Eligible for Call In	No No
Purpose of Report To brief the standards committee on Councillor complaints under the Code of Conduct since the last Standards Committee meeting in September 2025.	
Recommendations <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • That the report be noted by members Reasons for Recommendations <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The report is for information only 	
Resource Implications: None	
Date signed off by Executive Director & name Is it also signed off by the Service Director for Finance? Is it also signed off by the Service Director for Legal Governance and Commissioning?	Rachel Spencer-Henshall – 9th March Kevin Mulvaney – 10th March Samantha Lawton – 6th March

Electoral wards affected: All

Ward councillors consulted: None

Public or private: Public

Has GDPR been considered? Yes

1. Executive Summary

- 1.1 This report follows on from the similar report that was before the Standards Committee on the 24th of September 2025.
- 1.2 This report will look at the number of complaints received from the 1st of September 2025 to the end of February 2026, along with their type and nature.
- 1.3 It will also look at which of those new complaints have been resolved and which are still subject to investigation or further action. It will also provide an update on those complaints that were received in the previous reporting period and were not resolved at the time of the previous report.
- 1.4 It will also compare this period's complaints with the previous period, to see if there are any significant differences or trends.

2. Information required to take a decision

2.1 Complaints Summary

- 2.1.1 Since the 1st of September 2025 the Monitoring Officer has received 11 complaints relating to alleged breaches of the Code of Conduct.
- 2.1.2 Of these, 5 relate to Kirklees Councillors and 6 relate to Town or Parish councillors. A total of 3 Kirklees councillors have been the subject of complaints, with 7 Town and Parish Councillors complained of.
- 2.1.3 Of these 11, 3 were not pursued, 6 were not progressed after the initial assessment process, with no breaches being found, and 1 was resolved informally. The remaining 1 complaint is still being investigated.

2.2 Update on previous complaints

- 2.2.1 Of the 3 complaints that were carried forward from the previous report as ongoing, these were dealt with by an informal resolution.
- 2.2.2 1 complaints has been carried forward in this reporting period.

2.3 Previous Report and comparison with the present report

2.3.1 The previous report, for the period the 1st of March 2025 to the end of September 2025, contained a total of 11 new complaints that related to 8 named Kirklees Councillors and 1 Town or Parish Councillor. This compares with the current period under review, where there is a total of 11 complaints, with 5 complaints relating to Kirklees Councillors and 6 complaints relating to Town or Parish Councillors. A total of 3 Kirklees members and 7 Town or Parish Council members have been the subject of complaints in this period.

2.3.2 The nature of the complaints in the present report concern social media behaviour (4 complaints relating to 3 members), behaviour in meetings (2 complaints about 1 member), failure to declare interests (1 complaint about 4 members), general behaviour (4 complaints about 3 members).

The sources of the complaints are that 4 were received from members of the public, 6 were received from members and 1 was received from an officer.

2.3.3 Comparing this to the previous report, complaints then concerned social media behaviour (6 complaints relating to 3 members), correspondence (3 complaints about 4 members), failure to comply with sanctions from a previous complaint (1 complaint about 1 member) and 1 was unknown, as it was not pursued by the complainant.

The sources of the complaints were that 10 were received from members of the public, none were received from members and 1 was received from an officer.

2.3.4 Comparison between the two reports shows that the overall number of complaints has stayed the same, at 11. If we extend this to earlier periods, we can see that this appears to be consistent with the general downward trend to the number of complaints being made. Whether or not, in the run up to the elections, we see an upturn in complaints remains to be seen.

In this period the number of Kirklees Councillors complained about has decreased, from 8 to 3, whilst the numbers of Town and Parish Councillors complained of has risen from 1 to 7.

2.3.5 In this period, we have seen 1 instance of a 'multiple' complaint.

2.3.6 The total number of complaints relating to Town or Parish Councils has risen in this reporting period, from 1 to 6.

2.3.7 The number of complaints relating to the planning process remains at 0.

2.3.8 In terms of any discernable trends, the numbers of complaints being made in respect of Kirklees Councillors has fallen, whereas there has been quite a sharp increase in the complaints relating to Town and Parish Councils. So, whilst the overall number of complaints remains the same, the make up of those complaints has shifted towards Town and Parish Councils.

2.4 **Published Decisions**

2.4.1 This report now contains a simple summary table that informs members of standards decisions that have been published on the Kirklees website. In line with the decision of the Committee, the published decisions will now only be complaints that have been upheld.

2.4.2 This is a summary only and full details, including copies of the relevant decision notices, remain available on the website.

Council	Councillor	Complaint	Date of decision	Outcome
Denby Dale Parish Council	Cllr Glenn Hirst	failure to comply with sanctions	27/06/2025	Complaint upheld
Kirklees Council	Cllr Hanifa Darwan	member's behaviour during meetings	23/05/2005	Complaint upheld
Denby Dale Parish Council	Cllr Glenn Hirst	member's use of social media	24/03/2025	Complaint upheld
Kirklees Council	Cllr Ammar Anwar	member's behaviours	10/02/2025	Complaint upheld
Holme Valley Parish Council	Cllr James Dalton	member's use of social media	05/07/2023	Complaint upheld

3. **Implications for the Council**

3.1 **Council Plan**

N/A

3.2 **Financial Implications**

N/A

3.3 Legal Implications

N/A

3.4 Climate Change and Air Quality

N/A

3.5 Other (eg Risk, Integrated Impact Assessment or Human Resources)

N/A

4. Consultation

N/A

5. Engagement

None

6. Options

6.1 Options Considered

It is recommended that the report be noted.

6.2 Reasons for Recommended Option

The report is an 'information-only' report.

7. Next steps and timelines

The Monitoring Officer will continue to assess any complaints about members' conduct as and when they are received and will report the outcomes to this committee as appropriate.

8. Contact officer

David Stickley
Principal Lawyer
01484 221000
david.stickley@kirklees.gov.uk

9. Background Papers and History of Decisions

N/A

10. Appendices

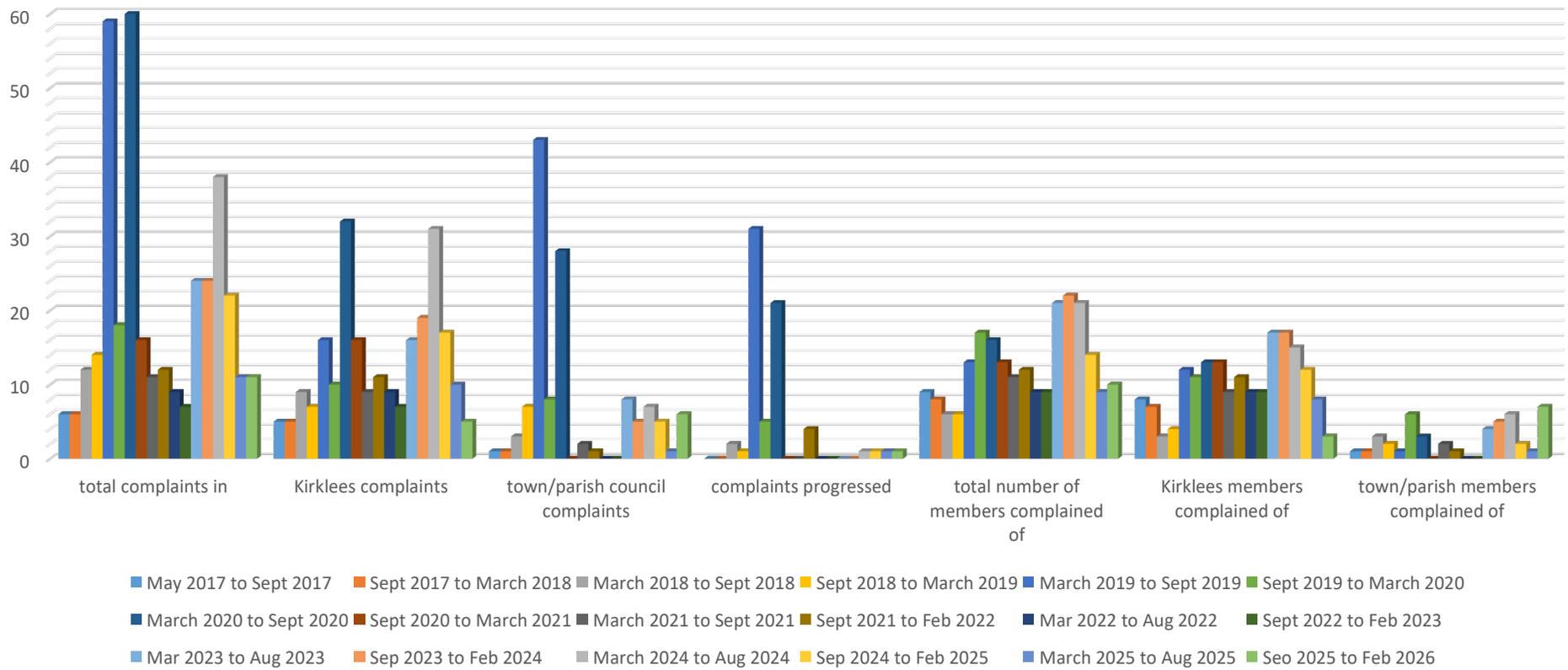
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11. Service Director responsible

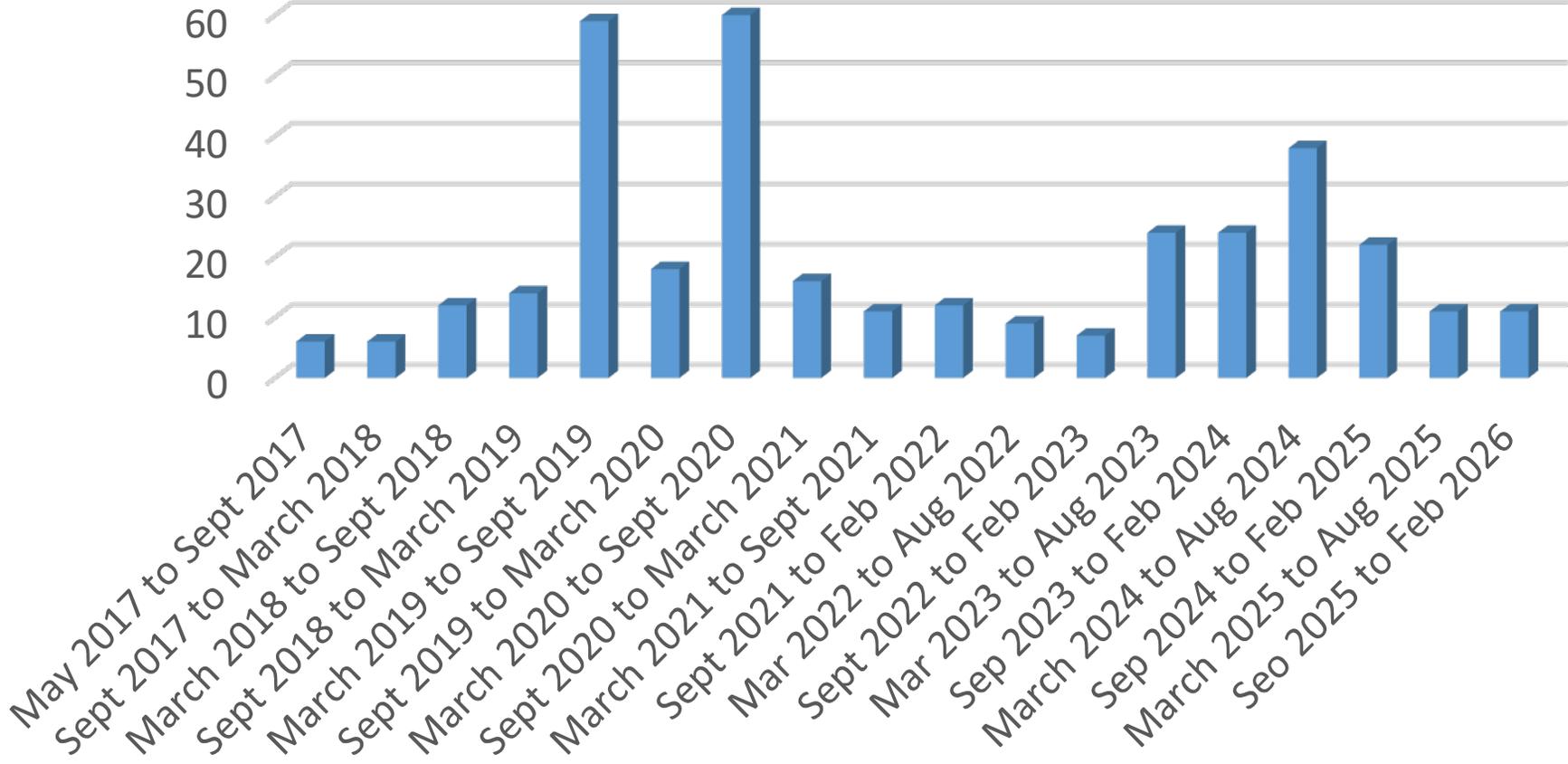
Samantha Lawton
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Complaints summary

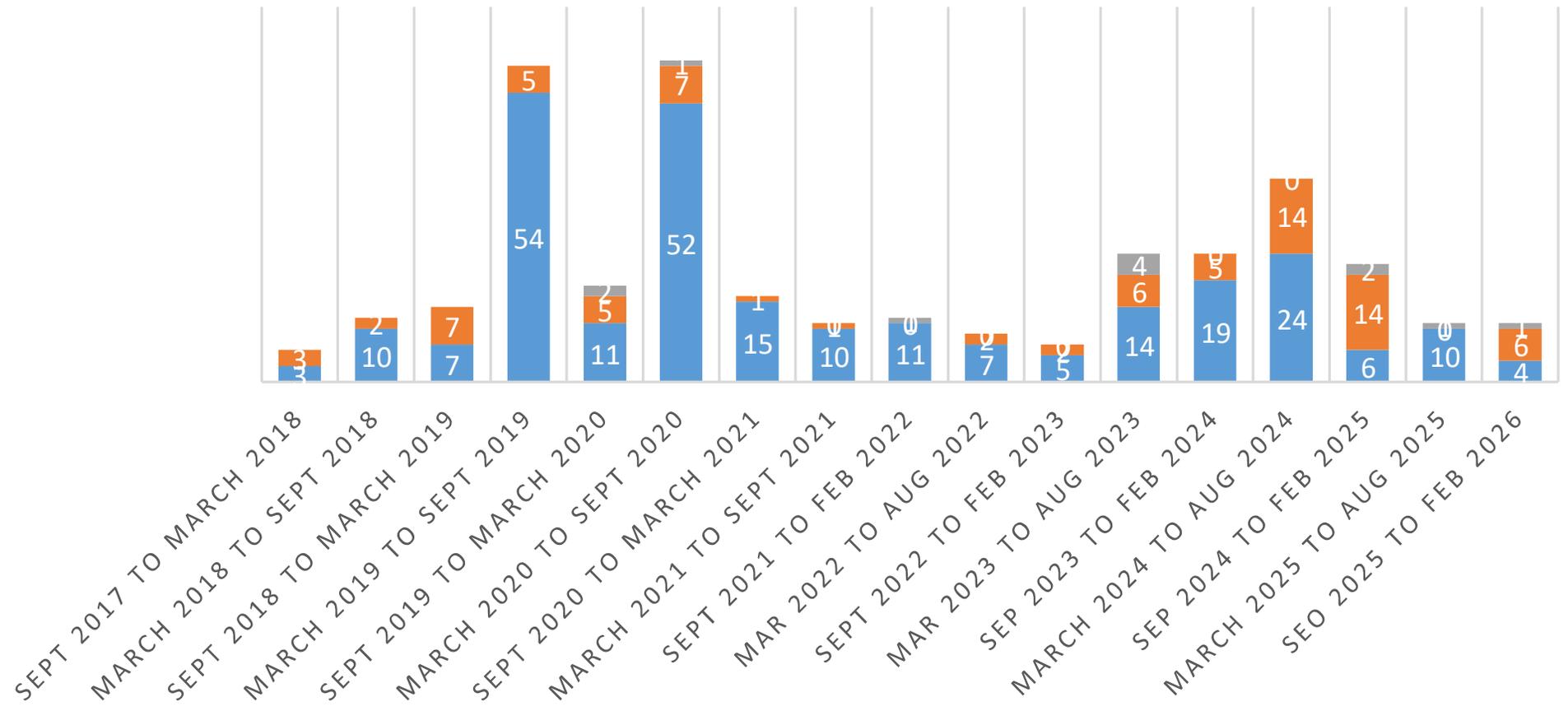


total complaints in

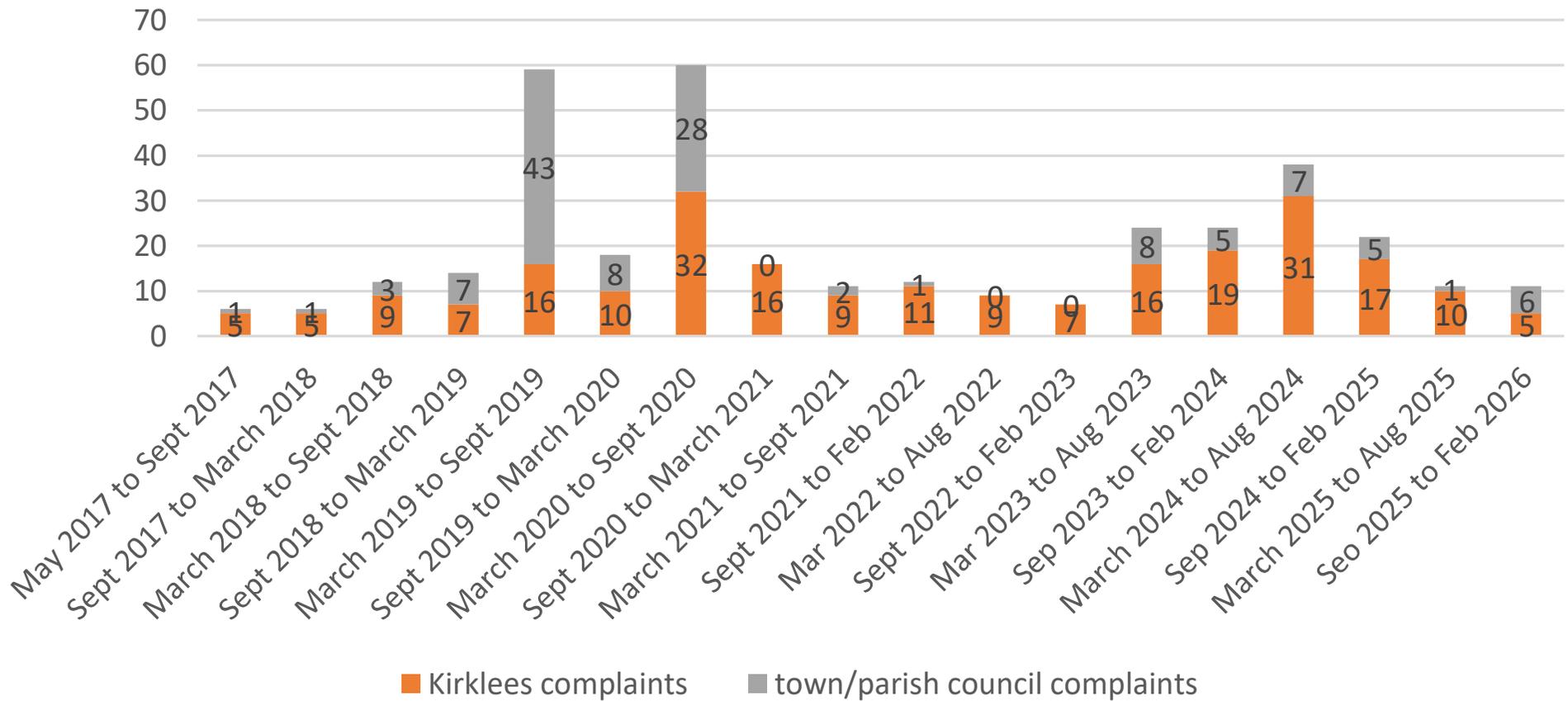


SOURCES OF COMPLAINTS RECEIVED

from mop from cllrs from officers



COMPLAINTS - KIRKLEES / TOWN AND PARISH COUNCILS





Cases and News Update

Meeting:	Standards Committee
Date:	18th March 2026
Cabinet Member (if applicable)	N/A
Key Decision Eligible for Call In	No No
Purpose of Report To brief the standards committee on any news and cases of interest since the last Standards Committee meeting in September 2025.	
Recommendations <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • That the report be noted by members Reasons for Recommendations <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The report is for information only 	
Resource Implications: None	
Date signed off by Executive Director & name Is it also signed off by the Service Director for Finance? Is it also signed off by the Service Director for Legal Governance and Commissioning?	Rachel Spencer-Henshall – 9th March Kevin Mulvaney – 10th March Samantha Lawton – 6th March

Electoral wards affected: All

Ward councillors consulted: None

Public or private: Public

Has GDPR been considered? Yes

1. Executive Summary

- 1.1 This report is intended to brief members on any developments and news on matters of local government ethics.
- 1.2 It will look at news items and any relevant case law, as well as any recent published decisions from other local authorities or any of the existing standards boards.
- 1.3 It will also provide an update on the work of the CSPL, in particular that which follows on from their report 'Ethical Standards in Local Government'.

2. Information required to take a decision

2.1 News since September 2025 – Appendix A

- 2.1.1 In December 2025, Local Government Lawyer reported on the findings of an independent investigator into allegations of breaches by 6 members of Tameside Council.

The allegations related to a 'WhatsApp' group containing some 40,000 messages, a number of which were alleged to have breached the Code of Conduct. The investigation raises issues around capacity of members and private communications.

The investigation did find that all 6 members had breached the Code of Conduct.

- 2.1.2 Also in December 2025, Local Government Lawyer reported that a Councillor who had predetermined his position on planning application was in breach of the Code of Conduct.

Cllr Stuart Munro had participated in a consultation on the application and had been opposed to the development. An independent investigation concluded that he was in breach and should have declared an interest and withdrawn. He was asked to have some further training.

- 2.1.3 In January 2026, Local Government Lawyer reported that Milton Keynes City Council had rebuked Kents Hill and Monkston Parish Council for the 'unprecedented volume' of complaints received. The Council claimed that 64% of all Town and Parish complaints were from the parish council, despite them only comprising of 3% of the registered voters in the Council's area.

The Chair of the Council's Standards Committee wrote to the parish council highlighting the impact on the Council's resources and urging the parish council to promote "preventative and holistic measures such as mediation, training, and governance reviews as opposed to relying only on the complaints process".

- 2.1.4 In December 2025, Local Government Lawyer reported on the findings of an external audit that made a recommendation in respect of abusive behaviour in Council meetings that it suggested needed to be addressed.

The auditor recommended that the council commission an expert to investigate the underlying causes of the poor behaviour and to formulate an action plan.

- 2.1.5 In December, the BBC and Local Government Lawyer reported on the sentencing of a former Liverpool City Councillor who sent anonymous 'poison pen' letters to a former Council colleague.

The former Councillor was charged with harassment and was handed a community order as well as a fine.

2.2 Recent published decisions – Appendix B

- 2.2.1 Some Local Authorities in England publish their decisions on member complaints, as do the Standards Boards in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland.

- 2.2.2 The Standards Commission for Scotland continues to hold hearings and publish the outcomes on its website.

- 2.2.3 Since September 2025, the Commission has considered 4 cases, with a further 4 to be considered, and has published its findings in respect of the 4 cases that have been heard.

- 2.2.4 In these 4 cases, breaches were found to have occurred in 2, and these resulted in suspensions of the members complained of in both of the cases. The complaints were about a failure to declare interests, and disrespectful behaviour on social media. One of the complaints that was not upheld is of interest as it found that, despite the member behaving in a manner that was not respectful, his freedom of expression outweighed this and no breach was established. Copies of the press releases are at Appendix B.

- 2.2.5 The Commissioner for Standards in Northern Ireland is now part of the Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman (NIPSO), which covers various types of complaints, as well as complaints relating to local government. In this reporting period, 3 complaints about local government were investigated, but none related to elected Councillors.

- 2.2.6 The Public Services Ombudsman for Wales publishes its finding directly to its website. There were 20 cases referred to the Ombudsman, which were investigated and reported on. Often the Ombudsman works by referring matters back to local authorities or, in more serious cases to the Adjudication Panel for Wales.
- 2.2.7 In this period only 1 case was referred, the remainder being discontinued or with no action being deemed necessary. The one that did go forward concerned a Councillor who had accepted a caution for the offence of fraud. It was held that this brought the Council into disrepute. The sanction applied was disqualification for 3 years.
- 2.2.8 In England, publication by local authorities of standards decisions still remains discretionary, although the CSPL did recommend publishing these, so it may be the case that we start to see more decisions from English local authorities being published in due course.

2.2.9 No reports have been identified in this period.

2.3 **Case Law – Appendix C**

2.3.1 No relevant case law has been identified in this reporting period.

2.4 **The work of the Committee on Standards in Public Life**

- 2.4.1 The Committee has now been replaced by the Ethics and Integrity Commission and has a new website - <https://eic.independent-commission.uk/>. A Government press release was published on July 21st [Ethics and Integrity Commission to drive up standards across the public sector - GOV.UK](#) which set out the government plans.
- 2.4.2 The first meeting was held on the 16th of September and has been followed by monthly meetings since then.
- 2.4.3 The EIC has set up a 'Network of Standards Bodies' but has restricted the membership to standards bodies in central government.
- 2.4.4 The EIC has responded to the government response to the standards consultation in a news article in which it welcomes the proposals for a stronger standards system for local government [Chair's statement on the government response to 'Strengthening the standards and conduct framework for local authorities in England' consultation. | Ethics and Integrity Commission](#)

2.5 **The consultation on local standards and conduct**

2.5.1 There has now been a response from the Government and this is the subject of a separate report to Committee.

3. Implications for the Council

3.1 **Council Plan**

N/A

3.2 **Financial Implications**

N/A

3.3 **Legal Implications**

The promotion and maintenance of high standards of conduct by councillors is an important part of maintaining public confidence in both the council and its members. Failure to do so could have adverse reputational implications.

3.4 **Climate Change and Air Quality**

N/A

3.5 **Other (eg Risk, Integrated Impact Assessment or Human Resources)**

N/A

4. Consultation

N/A

5. Engagement

None

6. Options

6.1 **Options Considered**

It is recommended that the report be noted.

6.2 **Reasons for Recommended Option**

The report is an 'information-only' report.

7. Next steps and timelines

The Monitoring Officer will continue to monitor any relevant news and cases and will report back to this committee. She will also continue to monitor and report back on any relevant work of the CSPL and the government.

8. Contact officer

David Stickley
Principal Lawyer
01484 221000
david.stickley@kirklees.gov.uk

9. Background Papers and History of Decisions

N/A

10. Appendices

Appendix A – News items
Appendix B – published decisions from the devolved nations

11. Service Director responsible

Samantha Lawton
Service Director – Legal, Governance and Commissioning
01484 221000
samantha.lawton@kirklees.gov.uk

Appendix A

Standards investigation finds six councillors breached code over ‘Trigger Me Timbers’ WhatsApp group

An independent investigator has said six councillors have breached Tameside Council's code of conduct over their involvement in a controversial group chat which garnered national attention and led to local MP Andrew Gwynne being suspended from the Labour Party. The investigation by Linda Comstive followed a series of complaints to the council about the conduct of councillors who participated in the group chat named ‘Trigger me Timbers’ (TMT).

The leak revealed that almost 40,000 messages were exchanged in the group between January 2019 and April 2022. Participants included six Labour councillors: Brenda Warrington, Allison Gwynne, George Newton, Claire Reid, Jack Naylor and George Jones. The investigator concluded that the councillors were acting in their official capacity by sending messages in the group, as some of the correspondence concerned council business and took place during council meetings.

Comstive also stated that the “fact that the communication is by WhatsApp does not mean it cannot be investigated under the Code”, adding: “The Code applies when a councillor is engaging in media activity including the use of social media.”

In addition, the report said that while some councillors claimed the conversations were private, the councillors were not necessarily acting outside of their capacity as council members.

It continued: “Council proceedings are often carried out in private as exempt business, but there is always the potential for it to get in the public domain, including by leaks.

“TMT was leaked into the public domain in February 2025 and there is public interest in it because of its offensive content and who was involved in it.”

Among the most serious findings, the report said Cllr George Newton made “several remarks” in the group chat “that a reasonable person would find racist” towards Navendu Mishra MP.

It stated that Cllr Newton also “appeared to joke about the MP’s accent or use of English”, and that some messages he sent “could be considered discriminatory on grounds of race against members of the public”.

The investigator concluded that Cllr Newton breached four paragraphs of the code of conduct, relating to a failure to treat councillors and members of the public with respect, bullying, failure to promote equality, and conduct bringing the council into disrepute. When interviewed by the investigator, Newton said: “Looking at it now, I’d admit it was childish behaviour.”

This was in reference to some of the messages he had sent. However, he maintained that the comments were made in a "private conversation on a private messaging platform, that were maliciously leaked to the media".

According to a report from The Guardian, it is understood that Newton intends to apologise for the messages but will dispute the investigator's interpretation of the private texts in a group where there was "obviously a power dynamic at play".

The investigation into Cllr Jack Naylor meanwhile found that he had breached four aspects of the code.

Two of the breaches in Cllr Naylor's case stemmed from what the report described as an "antisemitic" joke shared in the group chat.

The Guardian has reported that Cllr Naylor is set to tell councillors his comment was "ill-judged and inappropriate" but strongly contests any accusation of antisemitism.

In a written statement, he offered a "full and unequivocal" apology and added: "There is no justification for my involvement, irrespective of any inexperience – I take full responsibility for my actions; and for any offence caused, regardless of my intent, I am truly sorry."

The report found that Cllr Claire Reid breached three paragraphs of the code, having "bullied a member of the Labour Party", failed to "show respect to various members of the public", and behaved in a way that could reasonably be regarded as bringing the council into disrepute.

Cllr Reid, who created the group chat, responded to the investigator's questions by email. When asked about the derogatory chats, she stated that the "vast majority" of her contributions to the group involved "organising for meetings, ensuring we have the numbers for votes and making sure the rules are correctly applied".

The investigator highlighted some messages sent by Reid, which included swear words and insults aimed at individuals.

Reid told the investigator that some of the messages were in response to "the hideous abuse I received at the hands of these members", adding that she "offloaded in a private forum".

All six councillors under investigation were found to have breached provisions of the code relating to bringing the council into disrepute and treating other councillors and members of the public with respect.

The report also found that Cllr Brenda Warrington breached the code by misusing council resources after using a council-owned mobile phone, paid for with public funds, to participate in the group chat.

"TMT included chats on Council business and for political purposes; the latter is misuse of council resources," the report said.

Cllr Warrington told the investigation that it "was never my intention to offend anyone, and I apologise for any comments I may have made in the chat that has resulted in upset".

However, she said that the "responsibility for the offence lies with those persons who, for malicious reasons chose to leak the chat to the press".

In a statement given to the Local Democracy Reporting Service, Cllr Warrington said she would like to "offer apology to anyone who genuinely feels offended, hurt or upset by any comment that I have made in the private chat.

"It was never the intention that people be offended, hurt or upset. I do have a range of questions that I will be seeking to raise at the hearing of the Standards Sub Committee which will include the scope of the investigation, the process and also the cost, and so at this stage I do not wish to comment further until the hearing."

The investigator concluded that Cllr Allison Gwynne - in addition to breaching the requirements to treat other councillors and members of the public with respect, and not conduct herself in a manner, which could reasonably be regarded as bringing her office or the council into disrepute - failed to cooperate with the code of conduct investigation.

Cllr Gwynne did not respond to the investigation, but has been approached for comment. Cllr Jones, who was 18 years old when he first joined the chat, told the investigator that "in hindsight I wish I had not been involved and sincerely apologise".

He added: "I put it down to my youth and lack of experience. I am truly sorry and genuinely mean all that I have said about how it makes me feel. It has been a terrible few months. I am very sorry for everything, and I have more experience now and like to think I would now behave totally differently."

The investigator said: "In my opinion, Cllr GJ is genuinely sorry for his chats and participation in the TMT and the upset it has caused."

Adam Carey – Local Government Lawyer

Councillor who “made up his mind” ahead of planning vote breached code of conduct

A councillor who voiced opposition to a planning application in a consultation response ahead of voting on it breached Wokingham Borough Council's code of conduct, a standards panel has concluded.

Cllr Stuart Munro voiced "strong objections" to the 81-home application in a consultation response, claiming the development constituted inappropriate development, would put pressure on existing infrastructure, and lead to traffic problems.

He then took part in a discussion and voted against the planning application in January 2024.

The complaint alleged that Cllr Munro should have declared an interest in one of the items on the agenda of a planning committee meeting held in January 2024.

It argued that Cllr Munro had "made up his mind" in advance to oppose the planning application and "that he was provided advice, which shows that he knew there was a risk he had fettered his discretion, and then ignored that advice by voting".

This left the council open to a finding of maladministration or other challenges and constituted a breach of the members code of conduct, the complaint added.

According to a report by the BBC, Cllr Munro said he felt the decision was "nonsense". He said he submitted his comments about the application a year before they were included in the committee's papers and that he did not participate in its discussion about it.

The BBC report said Cllr Munro added that the application was amended after he had submitted his comments and before the committee rejected it.

A decision notice said that the panel agreed with the conclusions reached by an investigating officer that Cllr Munro should have declared an interest relating to the planning item and not participated in the debate or voted on the application.

"This would have been in accordance with the legal advice Councillor Munro received prior to the meeting," it said.

The panel instructed Wokingham's monitoring officer to arrange appropriate training for Cllr Munro on declaration of interests.

It also "noted the investigating officer's conclusion that this is a complex area of law, and the concept of predetermination is not straightforward".

Adam Carey – Local Government Lawyer

City council rebukes parish for "unprecedented volume" of standards complaints

A parish council responsible for an "unprecedented volume" of standards complaints has been asked to contribute to the costs of standards investigations.

In a letter sent to Kents Hill and Monkston Parish Council, the chair of Milton Keynes City Council's Standards Committee, Cllr Mandy Legg, said the circumstances had resulted in a "disproportionate pull on the City Council's resources".

According to the correspondence, the parish is responsible for 64% of all parish council complaints received during this financial year, despite the number of electors registered in the parish comprising less than 3% of those in the local authority area.

The complaints have thus far resulted in two investigations commissioned by the monitoring officer, incurring costs to the city council of over £10,000.

Cllr Legg also predicted that the associated cost of consulting Independent Persons was likely to be in excess of £3,000.

The letter said that Milton Keynes has previously resolved to ask whether the Parish Council would consider contributing towards the investigation costs currently borne by the city council.

It also recommended that the parish council promote "preventative and holistic measures such as mediation, training, and governance reviews as opposed to relying only on the complaints process".

"In our experience, this is a better way of addressing the issues being presented and a more comprehensive approach may result in individual councillors reflecting on the benefits of progressing live complaints," Cllr Legg added.

The letter was highlighted in a report on standards complaints, which is set to be discussed by members of the Standards Committee on Wednesday (14 January).

The report stated that the parish council undertook to discuss the letter at a future meeting, and the Standards Committee will be updated when a response has been received.

Adam Carey – Local Government Lawyer

Auditors tell council to address abusive behaviour in meetings for second year in row

The external auditors for Teignbridge District Council have retained a statutory recommendation calling on the council to address "swearing" and abusive behaviour towards officers and members during meetings.

Grant Thornton issued the statutory recommendation alongside three key recommendations in 2023/24 after finding significant weakness in arrangements for standards, behaviour and decision-making at the council.

The statutory recommendation called on the council to adopt a zero-tolerance approach to any swearing, lack of respect for other people attending meetings, or other abusive behaviour towards other members or officers in meetings.

"This should be done by making full use of the procedural rules set out in the Council's constitution by: Immediately adjourning the meeting; moving a motion that the member concerned be not heard; or moving a motion that the member concerned should leave the meeting," it added.

It also recommended the council commission an expert to investigate the underlying causes of member behaviours in order to assist in the creation of an action plan.

In a value for money assessment for 2024/25 published on 8 December, auditors said the council is currently in the process of procuring an expert to assist with analysing and addressing causes of bad behaviour.

It also noted that amendments to the constitution concerning meetings and motions had been approved in May 2025, a member conduct review had been commenced, and new members had been appointed to the Governance Committee.

A governance action plan is also in place, according to the report.

Commenting on the changes, the auditors said: "Our prior year statutory recommendation remains in place, but we recognise that progress is being made. Root causes of issues and complaints, and the ability of Group Leaders to take responsibility for their groups, now need to be addressed."

Auditors meanwhile retained a key recommendation on councillor access to information after finding an instance in which members had breached confidentiality.

The 2023/24 recommendation reported that "members do not always understand which aspects of council business they do or do not have access to by law".

Writing in this year's update, auditors noted an instance in which members used council information to stage a protest against the council and a project by the developer Vistry. "This was a breach of confidentiality," it noted.

The second retained key recommendation stated that the council should review its decision-making arrangements at the Executive Committee and Full Council levels.

It said the council should stick to decisions once they are made in order to ensure projects can proceed as required, referencing a £500k write-off which came after abandoning a cinema project.

Commenting on progress against this recommendation, auditors acknowledged the findings of an LGA Peer Review, which said that decision-making arrangements had improved, given the lack of significant last-minute changes to recommendations in meetings.

"However, they also reported that there were still concerns around one meeting not being as easy as expected; and the way officer advice is given and challenged on the planning committee," auditors added.

Grant Thornton meanwhile closed its third key recommendation, which concerned declarations of interest and investigations.

It said a 'declarations of interest audit' has now taken place, and the report and recommendations were received in October 2025, in line with the recommendation issued last year.

Adam Carey – Local Government Lawyer

Councillor behind anonymous 'poison pen' letters sentenced

Magistrates have handed a former Liverpool City Council member who sent anonymous 'poison pen' letters to a colleague a restraining order and community order.

Merseyside Police charged Gerrard Woodhouse with harassment without violence in September after allegations emerged that he had sent up to 100 abusive letters between 2023 and 2025 to a fellow Labour Party member, Christine Banks.

At a hearing last month, Liverpool Magistrates' Court heard that the pair had fallen out while serving on the city council's licensing committee, according to a BBC report.

Woodhouse's letters contained foul language and abuse directed at Banks. His solicitor said he had severe mental health problems at the time of the offences.

His involvement was uncovered after forensic evidence linked the councillor to the letters. The judiciary confirmed that he was sentenced yesterday.

His community order is to last 18 months and includes 30 'Rehabilitation Activity Requirement Days'.

He was also fined £300 and ordered to pay a victim surcharge of £114 alongside prosecution costs of £85.

In addition, a total of £499 is to be deducted from his benefits.

The restraining order was issued under section 360 of the Sentencing Act 2020 and is to last until further order.

He must not contact, approach or make reference to Banks, directly or indirectly and via electronic means, including all social media.

Adam Carey – Local Government Lawyer



7 October 2025

MEDIA RELEASE

ARGYLL & BUTE COUNCILLOR CRITICISED FOR BEING DISRESPECTFUL BUT CLEARED OF BREACH OF CODE OF CONDUCT

At a Hearing held online on 7 October 2025, Argyll & Bute Councillor Tommy Macpherson was found by the Standards Commission, on the face of it, to have breached the provision in the Councillors' Code of Conduct that requires elected members to treat others with courtesy and respect, in a Facebook post published in September 2024. The Standards Commission's Hearing Panel found, however, that a restriction on Cllr Macpherson's right to freedom of expression could not be justified in the specific circumstances of the case and, therefore, that a formal finding of breach could not be made.

Ms Helen Donaldson, Standards Commission Member and Chair of the Hearing Panel, said: *"The Panel heard it was not in dispute that in September 2024, Cllr Macpherson shared, on his Facebook page, a post published by a group called by 'Glasgow Friends of Israel', along with a quote taken from it that stated he had landed in trouble as a result of being an outspoken and unashamed supporter of Israel. The Panel noted that the Glasgow Friends of Israel post, shared by the Respondent, included a statement that a "certain Israel hater in Argyll who's a member of an Argyll and Bute Palestinian society", had decided to walk into a council meeting and complain about Cllr Macpherson. The Glasgow Friends of Israel post further stated that Cllr Macpherson then found himself being investigated by the Ethical Standards Commissioner (ESC), whereas the "nasty Israel hater has ties and a strong affiliation to proscribed terrorist organisations".*

The Panel noted that the post concerned Glasgow Friends of Israel's comments on a complaint made to the ESC about Cllr Macpherson. The Panel agreed that it was apparent Cllr Macpherson posted the quote from, and link to, the Glasgow Friends of Israel post in order to draw attention to it and promote its contents. In the circumstances, the Panel agreed Cllr Macpherson's post would be reasonably regarded as endorsing the Glasgow Friends of Israel post in its entirety, even if that had not been his intention.

The Panel noted that the Glasgow Friends of Israel post did not name the individual it had accused of being a "nasty Israel hater" who had "ties and a strong affiliation to proscribed terrorist organisations". The Panel noted, however, that the post referred to the individual as having complained about Cllr Macpherson in a council meeting. The Panel noted that council meetings are held in public and, further, that there had been press coverage of the complaint the individual made. The Panel further noted that Cllr Macpherson had advised the ESC's office, during its investigation, that the individual had "long relinquished" their right to anonymity. The Panel was satisfied, therefore, that it was accepted the individual was readily identifiable.

The Panel was further satisfied that it was objectively disrespectful to endorse a post where a readily identifiable member of the public was accused of having ties and a strong affiliation to terrorist organisations, when there was no evidence the individual in question had been investigated, charged or convicted with any related offence. The Panel therefore concluded that Cllr Macpherson had, on the face of it, breached the respect and courtesy provisions in the Code in respect of the post.

The Panel accepted nevertheless that, as a politician posting about a matter of public concern, being the fact that a complaint had been made about him in his capacity as an elected member, Cllr Macpherson was entitled to enhanced protection in respect of his right to freedom of expression, under Article 10 of the European Convention on Human Rights. In assessing whether a restriction on this right could be justified, the Panel noted that the Courts have found that, in such a context, a degree of the shocking, non-rational and even aggressive, that would not be acceptable outside that context, should be tolerated.

In this case, the Panel accepted that the accusation about the member of the public having ties and a strong affiliation to terrorist organisations could be taken as being a value judgement or opinion. The Panel was satisfied that it had not been presented with any evidence whatsoever the individual in question had been investigated, charged or convicted with any related offence or anything that could reasonably be regarded as being a sufficient basis in fact for an accusation of such a serious nature.

The Panel nevertheless noted that, by appearing at a Council meeting where a motion on the conflict in the Middle East was being considered, the member of the public had essentially already put herself and her views into the public domain. The Panel agreed that given the contentious nature and strength of views on both sides of the conflict, it would be reasonable for her to expect that, in doing so, she might be the subject of some negative commentary (albeit not necessarily from an elected representative).

The Panel acknowledged, however, that while Cllr Macpherson shared the Glasgow Friends of Israel post containing the statement about the individual in question, he had neither authored it himself nor specifically named them. The Panel further noted that the Respondent had edited his post to remove the link to the Glasgow Friends of Israel post, when advised that the ESC was investigating the matter.

Having taken into account the context and factors outlined above, the Panel determined, on balance, that Cllr Macpherson's conduct was not so excessive as to justify, as proportionate, a restriction on his enhanced right to freedom of expression. The Panel concluded, therefore, that a formal finding of a breach of the Code could not be made.

Ms Donaldson stated: *"the Panel wishes to emphasise, nonetheless, that the Standards Commission and, indeed the public, expect councillors, to lead by example and be courteous and respectful at all times, including when publishing content on social media. The Panel noted a failure to do so can have a detrimental impact on the standards of public debate and can erode public confidence in both elected members and the local authorities they represent."*

A full written decision of the Hearing will be issued and published on the Standards Commission's website within 14 days.

ENDS

NOTES FOR EDITORS

1. Complaints about councillors are made to the Ethical Standards Commissioner (ESC). The Standards Commission and ESC are separate and independent, each with distinct functions. The ESC is responsible for investigating complaints. Following investigation, the ESC will refer its report to the Standards Commission for Scotland for adjudication. Email: info@ethicalstandards.org.uk, <https://www.ethicalstandards.org.uk/>
Tel: 0300 011 0550
2. The [Standards Commission for Scotland](#) is an independent public body, responsible for encouraging high standards of behaviour by councillors and those appointed to boards of devolved public bodies including in education, environment, health, culture, transport, and justice. The role of the Standards Commission is to encourage high ethical standards in public life; promote and enforce the Codes of Conduct; issue guidance to councils and devolved public bodies and adjudicate on alleged breaches of the Codes of Conduct, applying sanctions where a breach is found.
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4 November 2025

MEDIA RELEASE

HIGHLAND COUNCILLOR SUSPENDED FOR A BREACH OF THE CODE OF CONDUCT

At a Hearing held online on 4 November 2025, Highland Councillor, Michael Baird, was found to have breached the Councillors' Code of Conduct. The Standards Commission suspended his entitlement to attend full Council meetings for two months. This was for failing to declare an interest at a meeting of the Sutherland County Committee on 23 January 2024.

Suzanne Vestri, Standards Commission Convener and Chair of the Hearing Panel, said: "The Panel found that Cllr Baird failed to declare a non-financial interest in relation to a grant application by made by a community interest company for funds from the Council's Community Regeneration Fund and, instead, took part in the discussion and decision-making. This was despite him having a friendship and a client / legal representative relationship with the company's sole director, and despite him having written a letter supporting the development of her property, that had been included in the papers submitted in support of the application".

The Panel acknowledged that Cllr Baird did not vote in favour of the application at the meeting. It further accepted there was no evidence of any benefit to the community interest company or its director from Cllr Baird's failure to declare an interest. The Panel nevertheless considered that, having applied the objective test as required by the Code, Cllr Baird should have reached the view that his connection to the director of the applicant company would reasonably be regarded as being so significant to the application to be considered, as to be likely to affect his potential discussion and decision-making at the meeting.

In support of this conclusion, the Panel noted it was evident from the fact that the Chair of the Committee had questioned, at the meeting, whether the Respondent should declare an interest, that he, the Chair, had such a perception. Indeed, the Panel noted that the Respondent appeared to have advised during the investigation process that he would have declared an interest had he been aware before the meeting that the letter was included in the paperwork submitted in support of the application.

The Panel agreed, therefore, that Cllr Baird should have declared an interest, withdrawn from the meetings and taken no part in the discussion and decision-making on the specific matter in question. The Panel found that his failure to do so amounted to a breach of the Code.

In reaching its decision on sanction, the Hearing Panel noted that Cllr Baird had co-operated with the investigative and Hearing processes. The Panel also noted the Respondent's commitment to his constituency and constituents.

The Panel agreed, nevertheless, that Cllr Baird should have been aware that the objective test was one of perception and that he should have considered how members of the public might reasonably view his connection to the director of the applicant company and whether this was likely to influence his discussion and decision-making at the meeting. The Panel agreed this was particularly the case given he was reminded, at the meeting, about the need to declare any interest.

In the circumstances, the Panel agreed that it was necessary to impose a suspension in order to reflect the nature of the breach, to promote adherence to the Code and to maintain and improve the public's confidence that councillors will comply with the Codes and will be held accountable if they fail to do so. The Panel determined that a suspension of two months was appropriate and proportionate in the circumstances.

Ms Vestri noted: "The Panel emphasised that the requirement for councillors to declare interests is a fundamental requirement of the Code as it gives the public confidence that decisions are being made in the public interest, and not the personal interest of any councillor or their friends, family or close associates. A failure to comply with the Code's requirements in this regard can erode confidence in the Council and leave its decisions open to legal challenge."

A full written decision of the Hearing will be issued and published on the Standards Commission's website within 14 days.

ENDS

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23 October 2025

MEDIA RELEASE

ARGYLL & BUTE COUNCILLOR SUSPENDED FOR BREACH OF CODE OF CONDUCT

At a Hearing held online on 23 October 2025, the Standards Commission suspended, for one month, an elected member of Argyll & Bute Council, Cllr Liz McCabe. This was after she was found to have breached the Councillors' Code of Conduct.

Morag Ferguson, Standards Commission Member and Chair of the Hearing Panel, said:

"The Panel found that, in a social media post published in May 2024, Cllr McCabe was disrespectful towards a relatively junior council officer and criticised their performance and capability in public."

The Panel heard that it was not in dispute that when a member of the public posted a comment on Facebook saying "our beautiful flower beds! What is happening to our town?", Cllr McCabe replied, stating "nothing has been done since Joe retired in November. It is absolutely shocking. That's what happens when someone who has no experience gets the job and doesn't have a clue." The Panel further noted it was not in dispute that 'Joe' was Cllr McCabe's husband.

The Panel noted that Cllr McCabe's position was that she had not intended her comments to be disrespectful and that they were directed towards the Council rather than any individual. The Panel noted, however, that Cllr McCabe referred, in her post, to the person who replaced the retired postholder as having "no experience" or "clue". The Panel was satisfied that, given this, it would be reasonable for anyone viewing the post to consider it was directed at the individual postholder who was now in the role, rather than the Council itself.

The Panel noted that Cllr McCabe did not name the individual postholder. The Panel considered, however, that the officer in question was readily identifiable. This was because:

- there was evidence members of the public had been able to identify him;
- the officer's wife's colleague took a screenshot of the post indicating council officers were also able to identify him); and
- Only five Council officers were responsible for the work referenced, with only one based in Bute. Therefore, it would be apparent which one had replaced 'Joe'.

The Panel was of the view that by saying the individual had no experience or clue, Cllr McCabe was inferring they should not have got the job. The Panel considered this was inherently disrespectful to the officer in question. The Panel was further of the view that Cllr McCabe implied, in the post, that the officer was responsible for the "absolutely shocking" state of the flowerbeds and the alleged failure to do anything about this. The Panel was therefore satisfied that it would be reasonable for anyone reading the post to perceive it as amounting to public criticism of both the individual officer's performance and capability.

The Panel concluded, therefore, that Cllr McCabe had breached the provisions in the Code that require councillors to be respectful and to refrain from criticising their performance, conduct or capability in public.

In determining the sanction to be imposed, the Panel noted it had found Cllr McCabe's comments were personal in nature and amounted to an unwarranted, egregious and offensive personal attack on an officer. The Panel considered that it would have been entirely possible for Cllr McCabe to express dissatisfaction with the Council's performance without undermining and demeaning the officer in public. The Panel was disappointed to note Cllr McCabe had not demonstrated insight into how her comment may have affected the officer in question (in terms of his confidence and reputation) and, instead, had indicated at the Hearing that she considered it should have resulted in an improvement in his performance.

The Panel nevertheless acknowledged, in mitigation, that the conduct in question was essentially limited to the one social media post that had been removed quickly and, as such, was limited in duration. The Panel further noted that Cllr McCabe had co-operated with the investigative and Hearing processes and had not been the subject of any previous finding of a previous contravention of the Code. It also acknowledged Cllr McCabe's contribution to her town and public life in general. The Panel was pleased to note Cllr McCabe deleted the post shortly after posting it and accepted it was the result of her being frustrated and angry at the time.

In the circumstances and context, the Panel concluded, on balance, that a full suspension of one month was the appropriate sanction.

Mrs Ferguson stated: *"the requirements for elected members to treat council officers with respect, and to refrain from criticising their performance, conduct or capability in public are key provisions in the Councillors' Code. The Panel noted that a failure to comply with the Code's requirements in this regard can have a detrimental impact on officers and can also erode the mutual bond of trust and confidence, between them and councillors, that allows local government to function effectively."*

A full written decision of the Hearing will be issued and published on the Standards Commission's website within 14 days.

ENDS

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PANEL DYFARNU CYMRU
ADJUDICATION PANEL FOR WALES

**PANEL DYFARNU CYMRU
ADJUDICATION PANEL FOR WALES**

NOTICE OF DECISION

TRIBUNAL REFERENCE NUMBER: APW/001/2025-026/CT

RESPONDENT: Former Councillor Iwan Huws

RELEVANT AUTHORITY: Gwynedd County Council

1. A Case Tribunal convened by the President of the Adjudication Panel for Wales has considered a reference in respect of the above Respondent.
2. The Adjudication Panel for Wales received a referral from the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales in relation to allegations made against Former Councillor Huws that he had breached the Gwynedd County Council Code of Conduct by accepting a Conditional Caution for the offence of “Fraud by misuse of office” in an attempt to defraud his employer by the misuse of money. It was considered reasonable that a conditional caution and the Member’s misconduct brought his office and his County Council into disrepute.
3. The Case Tribunal determined its adjudication by way of written evidence and representations at a meeting on 17 December 2025 which was held by way of remote video-conferencing. The Case Tribunal unanimously found that the Councillor had acted in breach of the Code as set out in paragraph 2 above.
4. The Case Tribunal concluded by unanimous decision that the former Councillor should be disqualified from acting as a member for any relevant authority, as defined by section 49(6) of the Local Government Act 2000, for a period of 3 years.
5. The Authority and its Standards Committee are notified accordingly.
6. The Respondent has the right to seek the leave of the High Court to appeal the above decision.
7. The Case Tribunal made no recommendations to the Authority.

Signed..... Meleri Tudur Date...17 December 2025.....

Judge Meleri Tudur
President of the Adjudication Panel for Wales and Chair of the Case Tribunal

Dr G Jones
Panel Member

Mrs S McRobie
Panel Member

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Update on Government Consultation ‘Strengthening the Standards and Conduct Framework for Local Authorities in England’.

Meeting:	Standards Committee
Date:	18th March 2026
Cabinet Member (if applicable)	N/A
Key Decision Eligible for Call In	No No
<p>Purpose of Report</p> <p>To brief the standards committee following the publication of the Government response on the ‘Strengthening the Standards and Conduct Framework for Local Authorities in England’ consultation.</p>	
<p>Recommendations</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • That the report be noted by members <p>Reasons for Recommendations</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The report is for information only 	
<p>Resource Implications:</p> <p>None</p>	
<p>Date signed off by Executive Director & name</p> <p>Is it also signed off by the Service Director for Finance?</p> <p>Is it also signed off by the Service Director for Legal Governance and Commissioning?</p>	<p>Rachel Spencer-Henshall – 9th March</p> <p>Kevin Mulvaney – 10th March</p> <p>Samantha Lawton – 6th March</p>

Electoral wards affected: All

Ward councillors consulted: None

Public or private: Public

Has GDPR been considered? Yes

1. Executive Summary

- 1.1 This report follows on from earlier news items reported to this committee, this consultation being a recurring item in the Standards Committee new report.
- 1.2 The Government has now published its full response to the consultation and this report will look at what the results were and what the response from central government is to those results.
- 1.3 Unless any future developments necessitate a full separate report, any updates will be given to committee as part of the Standards Committee news report.

2. Information required to take a decision

2.1 Consultation Summary

- 2.1.1 The Government response presents an overview, from the Minister, Alison McGovern, MP, of the purpose of the consultation exercise, before an introduction which summarises the particular questions that the consultation focused on.
- 2.1.2 The consultation had two principal 'headings':

1. Strengthening the Standards and Conduct framework

and

2. Introducing the power of suspension with related safeguards

2.2 Strengthening the Standards and Conduct framework

- 2.2.1 The issues that the consultation concerned itself with under this heading were:
 - mandatory minimum prescribed code of conduct
 - Standards Committees
 - publication of allegations and investigation outcomes
 - requiring completion of investigations if an elected member stands down

- empowering individuals affected by councillor misconduct to come forward

2.2.2 Mandatory minimum prescribed code of conduct

The consultation proposed the introduction of a mandatory code and the response noted that 94% of respondents were in favour of such a code.

The Government response is that there will be legislation to prescribe a mandatory code. This code will include a behavioural code, which will require members to co-operate with code of conduct investigations.

2.2.3 Standards Committees

The consultation proposed that there should be a requirement for a local authority to have a Standards Committee and 91% of respondents agreed with this proposal.

Respondents were also asked if decisions on sanctions should be taken by the committee and 62% agreed with this proposal.

With regards to the publication of allegations of Code of Conduct breaches, respondent opinion was split, with 47% in favour of publishing all allegations, and 50% in favour of only publishing where a complaint is upheld.

The final question asked was whether an investigation should continue if the member on question were to stand down. 84% felt that it should continue.

The Government response is that legislation will be introduced that will require Local Authorities to have a Standards Committee and will also require the publication of the outcomes of all Code of Conduct investigations.

2.2.4 Empowering individuals affected by councillor misconduct to come forward

The consultation asked a number of questions about respondents being the victim of poor member behaviours and noted that two recurrent themes emerged:

- making a complaint is pointless as there are no meaningful sanctions available
- fear that further poor behaviour would be directed personally towards them

The consultation also asked about the levels of support available to those raising complaints and to members complained of.

The Government response is that there will be recommendations for support being made available to those affected by the complaints process.

2.3 Introducing the power of suspension with related safeguards

- 2.3.1 The consultation proposed the introduction of the power to suspend for up to 6 months and 87% of respondents were in agreement with this proposal.
- 2.3.2 60% of respondents felt that it should be a Standards Committee that agreed such a decision, with 27% feeling that the decision should be made by an independent body.
- 2.3.3 The Government response is that there will be legislation to provide a power to suspend for a maximum of 6 months, with an option to withhold allowances and access to facilities. Any such decisions will be reserved to a Standards Committee.
- 2.3.4 The consultation also proposed a power for an interim suspension to be imposed, typically where there might be an ongoing investigation of serious allegations, such as during a criminal investigation. The proposal was for a maximum of 3 months, with a power to extend on review.
- 2.3.5 79% of respondents agreed with this proposal.
- 2.3.6 The Government response is that there will be legislation to provide a power to impose interim suspension, but only where the matter alleged is subject to law enforcement.
- 2.3.7 The consultation sought views on proposals that members who are suspended more than once during a 5 year period should be disqualified and whether gross misconduct should trigger immediate disqualification.
- 2.3.8 With regards to the first proposal, 60% of respondents agreed, with 19% disagreeing.
- 2.3.9 The Government response compared this to the powers of the devolved nations, who do currently have the power to disqualify. There is an intention to introduce legislation to disqualify and elected member if they received the maximum suspension twice over a 5 year period.
- 2.3.10 The consultation sought views on any appeals process that suspended members would have access to, proposing a right to appeal a

suspension decision, with a 28 working day time limit on an appeal being heard.

2.3.11 86% of respondents agreed that there should be a right of appeal to any member subject to a decision to suspend them.

2.3.12 Respondents were also asked if there should be a right of appeal given to complainants if complaints were not investigated or not upheld. A small majority of respondents were in favour of this.

2.3.13 The Government response is that legislation will be introduced for appeals to be introduced, but notes that further consideration will be needed on how to best implement this.

3. Implications for the Council

3.1 Council Plan

N/A

3.2 Financial Implications

N/A

3.3 Legal Implications

N/A

3.4 Climate Change and Air Quality

N/A

3.5 Other (eg Risk, Integrated Impact Assessment or Human Resources)

N/A

4. Consultation

N/A

5. Engagement

None

6. Options

6.1 Options Considered

It is recommended that the report be noted.

6.2 Reasons for Recommended Option

The report is an 'information-only' report.

7. Next steps and timelines

The Monitoring Officer's team will continue to monitor progress and report back to this committee with any updates.

8. Contact officer

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9. Background Papers and History of Decisions

N/A

10. Appendices

[Strengthening the standards and conduct framework for local authorities in England – consultation results and government response - GOV.UK](#)

11. Service Director responsible

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