

## Cases and News Update

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

**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 21<sup>st</sup> [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 16<sup>th</sup> 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**

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## **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  
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