

NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

STANDARDS COMMITTEE

**MEETING HELD IN THE COUNCIL CHAMBER, DISTRICT COUNCIL OFFICES,
LETCWORTH GARDEN CITY, SG6 3JF
ON WEDNESDAY, 11TH MARCH, 2026 AT 7.30 PM**

MINUTES

Present: *Councillors: Vijaiya Poopalasingham (Chair), Val Bryant, Elizabeth Dennis, Emma Fernandes, Keith Hoskins, Ian Mantle, Caroline McDonnell, Ralph Muncer, Sean Nolan and Sean Prendergast*

Parish Councillors: Martin Griffin non-voting advisory roles.

Nicholas Moss OBE (Independent Person), non-voting advisory role.

In Attendance: *Isabelle Alajooz (Director - Governance and Monitoring Officer), Amy Cantrill (Trainee Committee, Member and Scrutiny Officer) and Susan Le Dain (Committee, Member and Scrutiny Officer)*

Also Present:

There were no members of the public present for the duration of the meeting.

9 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Audio recording – 53 seconds

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Ian Albert.

Having given due notice Councillor Emma Fernandes substituted for Councillor Albert.

Councillors Chris Lucas and Dominic Griffiths were absent.

10 MINUTES - 22 OCTOBER 2025

Audio Recording – 1 minute 16 seconds

Councillor Keith Hoskins proposed and Councillor Ralph Muncer seconded and, following a vote, it was:

RESOLVED: That the Minutes of the Meeting of the Committee held on 22 October 2025 be approved as a true record of the proceedings and be signed by the Chair.

11 NOTIFICATION OF OTHER BUSINESS

Audio recording – 2 minutes 3 seconds

There was no other business notified.

12 CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

Audio recording – 2 minutes 8 seconds

(1) The Chair advised that, in accordance with Council policy this meeting would be recorded.

- (2) The Chair drew attention to the item on the agenda front pages regarding Declarations of Interest and reminded Members that, in line with the Code of Conduct, any Declarations of Interest needed to be declared immediately prior to the item in question.
- (3) The Chair advised for the purpose of clarification Clause 4.8.23(a) of the Constitution does not apply to this meeting.

13 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Audio recording – 2 minutes 48 seconds

There was no public participation.

14 STANDARDS MATTERS

Audio recording – 2 minutes 56 seconds

The Monitoring Officer presented the report entitled 'Standards Matters' and advised that:

- It followed the usual structure and provided a summary of complaints and how they had been managed.
- Since publication of the report, there had been two further complaints, which had been resolved, leaving only one outstanding.
- Proposed changes to the standards and conduct framework process nationally were outlined in section 8 of the report.

The following Members asked questions:

- Councillor Ralph Muncer
- Councillor Vijaya Poopalasingham
- Councillor Val Bryant
- Councillor Sean Prendergast
- Councillor Keith Hoskins

In response to questions, the Monitoring Officer advised that:

- The total of 20 complaints was a slight increase on the previous year.
- Approximately 30% of complaints were Councillor to Councillor complaints and this had not increased.
- A complaint submitted through the online portal would be required to answer specific questions to help with triaging the complaint. However, those received via email directly often required further follow up to request details of the complaint for triage.
- Councillors were made aware if a complaint was made about them even if the complaint was closed.
- There was mandatory training sessions planned for Members in May 2026 with two different sessions one in the afternoon one in the evening to ensure Members can attend.
- Group Leaders were made aware of complaints, as laid out in the Complaints Handling Procedure.
- There has been a consultation about changes, but the data was not yet available.

In response to questions, the Independent Member advised that:

- If the public make a complaint on a decision made by Councillors in a meeting, for example a planning decision, they might raise a Code of Conduct complaint. The triage

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process will weed out these complaints if there is no legitimate breach of the Code of conduct.

- As a taxpayer of North Herts District Council, it was troubling that a third of complaints are Councillor on Councillor, which resulted in money being spent on procedure rather than constituents.
- Not all councillors are part of a political group; therefore, mediation could not be done exclusively by group leaders.

Councillor Sean Nolan proposed the recommendations as outlined in the report and Councillor Val Bryant seconded.

The following Members took part in the debate:

- Councillor Ralph Muncer
- Councillor Vijaya Poopalasingham
- Councillor Val Bryant
- Councillor Sean Prendergast
- Councillor Keith Hoskins
- Councillor Elizabeth Dennis

Points raised in the debate included that:

- Complaints could be taken informally, but the Council must recognise that making a complaint should not be taken lightly by the complainant.
- Complaints should not be used for political point scoring but for legitimate grievances against Councillors.
- It should be investigated if there is a way to deal with Councillor on Councillor complaints less formally, to reduce costs.
- A working group should be formed to address the Councillor on Councillor complaints and if groups are not being managed properly then ask for support via the Local Government Association or the Local Government Information Unit.

Councillor Keith Hoskins proposed amending the recommendation to include a working group to explore the way Councillor to Councillor complaints were managed. This was agreed by Councillor Nolan as proposer and Councillor Bryant as seconder.

Having been proposed and seconded and following a vote, it was:

RESOLVED: That the Committee noted the content of the report and suggested a working group to adjust the way Councillor to Councillor complaints are managed.

REASON FOR DECISION: To ensure good governance within the Council and keep the Committee abreast of changes locally and nationally.

The meeting closed at 8.00 pm

Chair