

NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL



5 October 2026

Our Ref Standards Committee 14 October 2026
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To: The Chair and Members of the Standards Committee of North Hertfordshire District Council

District Councillors Vijaiya Poopalasingham (Chair), Ian Albert (Vice-Chair), Tina Bhartwas, Sadie Billing, Val Bryant, Elizabeth Dennis, Dominic Griffiths, Bryony May, Ralph Muncer, Sean Nolan, Sean Prendergast and Paul Ward

(Substitutes: Councillors Sam Collins, Joe Graziano, Claire Strong, Jon Clayden, Keith Hoskins MBE, Alistair Willoughby, Dave Winstanley and Ian Mantle)

Parish Councillors Parish Councillor Rebecca Elliott and Parish Councillor Martin Griffin (Co-opted non-voting Members)

Independent Persons Nicholas Moss OBE (Independent Person), Patrick Hodson and Joel Rogers (Reserve – Independent Person) – advisory roles

NOTICE IS HEREBY GIVEN OF A

MEETING OF THE STANDARDS COMMITTEE

to be held in the

COUNCIL CHAMBER - DISTRICT COUNCIL OFFICES, GERNON ROAD, LETCHWORTH, SG6 3JF

On

WEDNESDAY, 14TH OCTOBER, 2026 AT 7.30 PM

Yours sincerely,

Isabelle Alajooz
Director – Governance

****MEMBERS PLEASE ENSURE THAT YOU DOWNLOAD ALL AGENDAS AND REPORTS VIA THE MOD.GOV APPLICATION ON YOUR TABLET BEFORE ATTENDING THE MEETING****

Agenda **Part I**

Item		Page
1.	APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE Members are required to notify any substitutions by midday on the day of the meeting. Late substitutions will not be accepted and Members attending as a substitute without having given the due notice will not be able to take part in the meeting.	
2.	MINUTES - 11 MARCH 2026 To take as read and approve as a true record the minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on the 11 March 2026.	(Pages 5 - 10)
3.	NOTIFICATION OF OTHER BUSINESS Members should notify the Chair of other business which they wish to be discussed at the end of either Part I or Part II business set out in the agenda. They must state the circumstances which they consider justify the business being considered as a matter of urgency. The Chair will decide whether any item(s) raised will be considered.	
4.	CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS Members are reminded that any declarations of interest in respect of any business set out in the agenda, should be declared as either a Disclosable Pecuniary Interest or Declarable Interest and are required to notify the Chair of the nature of any interest declared at the commencement of the relevant item on the agenda. Members declaring a Disclosable Pecuniary Interest must withdraw from the meeting for the duration of the item. Members declaring a Declarable Interest, wishing to exercise a 'Councillor Speaking Right', must declare this at the same time as the interest, move to the public area before speaking to the item and then must leave the room before the debate and vote.	
5.	PUBLIC PARTICIPATION To receive petitions, comments and questions from the public.	
6.	STANDARDS MATTERS REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR – GOVERNANCE AND MONITORING OFFICER	(Pages 11 - 16)
	The report updates Members of the Committee on standards issues locally and nationally. It contains a summary of the complaints received since the last report taken to the Committee, as well as any other relevant issues that have arisen between Committee meetings.	

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NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

STANDARDS COMMITTEE

MEETING HELD IN THE COUNCIL CHAMBER, DISTRICT COUNCIL OFFICES,
LETCHWORTH 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

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

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STANDARDS COMMITTEE

DATE: 14 October 2026

*PART 1 – PUBLIC DOCUMENT

TITLE OF REPORT: STANDARDS MATTERS REPORT

REPORT OF: SERVICE DIRECTOR: GOVERNANCE AND MONITORING OFFICER

COUNCIL PRIORITY: RESPONSIBLE GROWTH

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 The report updates Members of the Committee on standards issues locally and nationally. It contains a summary of the complaints received since the last report taken to the Committee, as well as any other relevant issues that have arisen between Committee meetings.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

That the Committee

- 2.1. notes the content of the report and makes any suggestions on future actions.

3. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 To ensure good governance within the Council and keep the Committee abreast of changes locally and nationally.

4. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED

- 4.1 None.

5. CONSULTATION WITH RELEVANT MEMBERS AND EXTERNAL ORGANISATIONS

- 5.1 Group Leaders and the Standards Committee Chair are kept informed of Monitoring Officer and standards matters issues during briefing sessions. The Monitoring Officer also holds quarterly meetings with the Independent Person, Reserve Independent Persons ('IPs') and the Chair and Vice Chair of Committee. Any relevant standards matter comments from the IPs meetings are part of the regular briefings with Group Leaders.

6. FORWARD PLAN

- 6.1 This report does not contain a recommendation on an Executive key decision and has therefore not been referred to in the Forward Plan.

7. BACKGROUND

- 7.1 Within its terms of reference the Standards Committee has a function "*to promote and maintain high standards of conduct by Members and Co-Opted Members of the authority*". The Committee will therefore receive update reports from the Monitoring Officer on matters that relate to, or assist with, areas of Member conduct.

8. RELEVANT CONSIDERATIONS

Local

North Hertfordshire complaints/ issues update

Complaints:

- 8.1 The complaints reported below, are complaints and recommendations that have a) been concluded and/ or b) received, since March 2026.
- 8.2 Since the last Standards Committee meeting held in March 2026, 2 complaints/ issues have been received.
- 8.3 As per normal practice a summary of the complaints and decisions are provided for all complaints received since the last report taken to the Committee. Note, where the decision at assessment stage is informal action - the Councillors have not been named. Complaints are treated as confidential, in so far as complainant and the Councillor subject to the complaint is concerned, unless they have reached what will generally be a public stage of the Procedure (i.e. Sub-Committee hearing). Decision outcomes are, however, reported through to the local council Parish/Town/ Community (Clerk and Chair or alternative as appropriate) and relevant Group Leader (or alternative as appropriate). The complaints are as follows - RAG colour coding denotes those completed – Green, with ongoing Orange and outstanding Red:

Complaint about: Parish/Town or District Councillor	Basic summary of complaint	Action <i>NB Independent Person/ R Independent Person involved in all stages of these complaints.</i>
4/2026 Complaint from a member of the public regarding councillors.	Breach of code of conduct – councillors have not completed safeguarding training.	No breach of the code, no further action.
5/2026 Complaint from a member of the public regarding a councillor.	Breach of code of conduct – rude comments made during a councillor surgery.	No breach of the code, no further action.

Councillor training

North Herts District Councillors

- 8.4 All District Councillors were invited to undertake training in May 2026. The training was delivered across two sessions, both of which were well attended by District Councillors.

National Developments

- 8.5 Since the Committee's last report in March 2026, there have been significant developments in relation to Local Government Reorganisation ("LGR"). In July 2026, the Government announced its decision, subject to Parliamentary approval, to implement the proposal for four unitary authorities in Hertfordshire. However, on 7 September 2026 the Government announced a review of the wider LGR programme, including the decision relating to Hertfordshire, and implementation activity has consequently been paused pending the outcome of that review.
- 8.6 Prior to the pause, preparatory work had been taking place across Hertfordshire. Monitoring Officers and governance colleagues had been working collaboratively to identify opportunities to align and harmonise governance practices across the proposed new authority areas, including standards, constitutional and wider governance arrangements. Whilst implementation activity linked specifically to the proposed new structures has been paused, proportionate preparatory work and collaboration between Hertfordshire authorities continues

where appropriate. This work remains valuable in promoting consistency and sharing good practice irrespective of the ultimate outcome of the Government's review.

- 8.7 Separately, on 11 November 2025 the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government ("MHCLG") published its response to the consultation on strengthening the standards and conduct framework for local authorities in England. The Government confirmed its intention to legislate for reform of the current standards regime established under the Localism Act 2011.
- 8.8 The principal reforms proposed by Government include:
- I. the introduction of a mandatory Code of Conduct applying across local authorities, including a behavioural code based upon the Seven Principles of Public Life;
 - II. a requirement for principal authorities to convene formal Standards Committees, with provisions intended to promote objectivity, accountability and transparency;
 - III. a requirement for principal authorities to provide individual support during investigations to both complainants and councillors who are the subject of allegations;
 - IV. the introduction of a local right of review for both complainants and subject members, on grounds to be prescribed in legislation;
 - V. powers for authorities to suspend elected members for serious breaches of the Code of Conduct for a maximum period of six months;
 - VI. powers, where appropriate, to withhold allowances and impose restrictions on access to council premises and facilities;
 - VII. provision for interim suspension in prescribed circumstances involving the most serious cases, including certain matters subject to police investigation or awaiting sentencing;
 - VIII. provision for disqualification where a Member or co-opted Member receives the maximum six-month suspension twice within a five-year period; and
 - IX. provision for a national appeals mechanism following completion of the local review process.
- 8.9 The Government also intends to strengthen arrangements concerning the publication of standards outcomes. This includes completing investigations where a Member stands down during the process and publishing investigation findings and decisions, including where the outcome is that there is no case to answer. The Government intends that allegations should not routinely be published before an investigation has been completed and a determination made.
- 8.10 If implemented, the reforms will represent a significant change to the existing standards framework under the Localism Act 2011. The introduction of more substantial sanctions, formal review rights and a national appeals mechanism will require authorities to ensure that their assessment, investigation, hearing and decision-making arrangements contain appropriate procedural safeguards and are sufficiently robust to withstand review or appeal.
- 8.11 The reforms may require amendments to the Council's Code of Conduct, Standards Committee terms of reference, complaints procedure and associated constitutional arrangements. There may also be additional training and resource implications for Members, the Monitoring Officer, the Independent Person and officers supporting the standards process.
- 8.12 At the date of this report, the proposed reforms have not yet been implemented. The Government has continued to indicate its intention to bring forward the necessary legislation as Parliamentary time allows. Officers will therefore continue to monitor developments and

report further to the Committee as the detailed legislative framework and implementation arrangements become clearer.

- 8.13 There has, however, been a separate legislative development affecting Members' interests. The English Devolution and Community Empowerment Act 2026 amended the Localism Act 2011 so that a Member's or co-opted Member's usual residential address is not included in the authority's public register of interests by default. A Member or co-opted Member may request in writing to the Monitoring Officer that their usual residential address is included in the public register. As such, work has been undertaken and completed to redact residential addresses from the authority's public register in line with the new legal requirements.

Local Developments

- 8.14 Locally, the Council has continued to strengthen its governance and ethical standards arrangements. In particular:
- the remit of the Standards Committee was broadened in 2024 to include advising the Council on ethical governance matters prior to submission to Full Council;
 - the Code of Practice on Good Governance for Local Authority Statutory Officers, developed collaboratively by Solace, CIPFA and Lawyers in Local Government, was presented to and endorsed by the Committee in October 2024. The Code provides a framework for the Head of Paid Service, Chief Finance Officer and Monitoring Officer to work effectively together as the Council's statutory officer "Golden Triangle";
 - the Monitoring Officer Protocol was considered and recommended by the Committee and subsequently adopted by Full Council on 28 January 2026, further strengthening the Council's internal governance framework;
 - guidance has been provided to Members in relation to their roles and responsibilities when appointed to outside bodies; and
 - Member induction and refresher training on ethical standards and the Code of Conduct continues to be provided.
- 8.15 Officers will continue to monitor national legislative and policy developments and their implications for the Council. Further reports will be brought to the Committee as the Government's proposed reforms to the standards and conduct framework progress and any consequential changes to the Council's local arrangements become necessary.

9. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 The terms of reference of the Standards Committee include, at paragraph 7.5.1 of their terms of reference *"to promote and maintain high standards of conduct by Members and Co- Opted Members of the authority"*.

10. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 10.1 There are no capital or revenue implications arising from this report at this stage.

11. RISK IMPLICATIONS

- 11.1 Good Risk Management supports and enhances the decision-making process, increasing the likelihood of the Council meeting its objectives and enabling it to respond quickly and effectively to change. When taking decisions, risks and opportunities must be considered.
- 11.2 Appropriate policy frameworks help to ensure good governance of the Council and therefore reduce risk of poor practice or unsafe decision making.

12. EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

- 12.1 In line with the Public Sector Equality Duty, public bodies must, in the exercise of their functions, give due regard to the need to eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation, to advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations between those who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.
- 12.2 Good governance and high ethical standards of conduct ensure that local government decisions are taken in the public interest.

13. SOCIAL VALUE IMPLICATIONS

- 13.1 The Social Value Act and “go local” policy do not apply to this report as this is not a procurement or contract.

14. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

- 14.1 There are no implications to this report.

15. HUMAN RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

- 15.1 None other than again highlighting the ongoing resource implications for the complaints received.

16. APPENDICES

- 16.1 None.

17. CONTACT OFFICERS

- 17.1 Isabelle Alajooz Service Director: Governance & Monitoring Officer
isabelle.alajooz@north-herts.gov.uk

18. BACKGROUND PAPERS

- 18.1 None other than those referred to/ linked above.

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