

STANDARDS COMMITTEE

DATE: 11 March 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 for the year 2025-2026 thus far, 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 during regular briefing sessions throughout the year. The Monitoring Officer also holds quarterly meetings with the Independent Person, Reserve Independent Persons (together referred to as '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 the beginning of the year, 2025.
- 8.2 During the calendar year of January 2025 – to date, 20 complaints / issues have been received.
- 8.3 As per normal practice a summary of the complaints and decisions are provided for the year commencing January 2025, to date. This reporting below is compliant with the Committee on Standards in Public Life ('CSPL') good practice recommendations. 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>
1/2025 complaint in respect of District Councillor.	Breach of Code of Conduct at Council meeting 23.1.25	No breach of the Code of Conduct, therefore no further action.
2/2025 issue raised in respect of a District Councillor.	Comments at a Council meeting regarding officers.	Apology provided at the next meeting by the Councillor; no further action.
3/2025 complaint from a councillor regarding another councillor.	Handling of leadership restructure agenda item at council meeting	No breach of the code, no further action, the independent person also agreed with this decision.
3B/2025 complaint from a councillor regarding another councillor.	Comments uploaded to social media that could cause offence and concerning County Election	Dealt with by the Returning Officer directly with the councillor's agent and the group leader.
4/2025 issue raised regarding a councillor	Issue was regarding campaign literature, not really a complaint more so to make the monitoring officer aware	No further action.
5/2025 complaint from a councillor regarding another councillor.	Alleged bullying, unacceptable behaviour in meetings and via correspondence	Determined to be party political business not the Council's, no further action.
6/2025 complaint from a member of the public regarding a councillor	Alleged bullying as well as a safeguarding issue raised.	Matter was closed due to no further information provided.
7/2025 complaint from a member of the public regarding a councillor	Alleged bullying as well as a safeguarding issue raised.	Matter was closed due to no further information provided.

8/2025 complaint from a member of the public regarding a Town councillor.	Complaint relating to a post uploaded to Facebook.	Matter was closed due to no further information provided.
9/2025 complaint from a member of the public regarding a councillor	Alleged safeguarding incident.	Email sent requesting further information and email sent to the councillor advising them to inform their party of the incident. No further action
10/2025 complaint from a councillor regarding another councillor	Alleged bullying, harassment.	No breach of the code, no further action, the independent person also agreed with this decision.
11/2025 complaint from a member of the public regarding three councillors	Alleged predetermination of a planning application as well as failing to declare interests.	Decision made that the complaint warrants no further action.
12/2025 complaint from a councillor regarding other councillors	Alleged inappropriate conduct at a Council meeting.	Complaint withdrawn, no further action.
13/2025 complaint from a member of the public regarding three councillors	Alleged bullying.	No breach of the code, no further action.
14/2025 complaint from member of the public regarding a councillor	Alleged inappropriate behaviour at a Council meeting.	No breach of the code, no further action.
15/2025 complaint from a councillor regarding another councillor	Complaint regarding failure to challenge hostile behaviour and sharing private information without consent.	No breach of the code, no further action.
16/2025 complaint from a councillor regarding another councillor	Alleged inappropriate behaviour.	No breach of the code, no further action.
17/2025 complaint from a councillor regarding another councillor	Alleged false accusations against another councillor.	No breach of the code, no further action.
18/2025 complaint from a councillor regarding 2 other councillors	Alleged inappropriate behaviour during a full Council meeting.	Informal recommendation – apology.
19/2025 complaint from a member of the public regarding a Parish councillor	Alleged inappropriate wording by a Parish councillor during a meeting.	Informal recommendation – apology.
1/2026 complaint from a councillor regarding another councillor	Alleged inappropriate comments made during a Council meeting.	Ongoing

Councillor training North Herts District Councillors

8.4 As part of the North Herts Council Councillor's Code of Conduct, it is necessary for Councillors to attend compulsory training provided by the authority. It is understood that Councillors are busy and relevant officers will use their best endeavours to accommodate training flexibly, including the use of e-Learning modules where appropriate. In return, Councillors are encouraged to attend and participate in any session to meet these requirements.

National Developments

8.5 In the last twelve months, there have been further national developments in the Government's wider local government and devolution agenda. The English Devolution and Community

Empowerment Bill, introduced to Parliament in July 2025¹, seeks to strengthen local leadership and accountability through enhanced local powers, new governance arrangements for combined and unitary authorities, and provisions for neighbourhood governance.

- 8.6 The Bill focuses on structural reform and devolution rather than councillor conduct or ethical standards matters. However, explanatory material issued by DLUHC and commentary from the Local Government Association (LGA)² emphasise the continuing importance of transparency, accountability and strong local governance frameworks, particularly during any reorganisation or governance change.
- 8.7 On 11 November 2025, the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) published the results of its consultation on proposals to strengthen the standards and conduct framework for local authorities in England.

Proposed Core Reforms

- 8.8 MHCLG has confirmed that it intends to move forward with several key changes:

1. Introduction of a mandatory national Code of Conduct

MHCLG plans to bring forward legislation enabling it to establish a compulsory code, set out in regulations, which would apply across all councils and all categories of members, including co-opted members.

2. Requirement for formal Standards Committees with clearer roles

Principal authorities will be required to formally establish a standards committee (or an appropriate sub-committee) responsible for handling standards matters.

3. Increased transparency through publication of outcomes

Authorities would only publish information about allegations once:

- i. a full investigation has been completed, and
- ii. a standards committee has reached a decision on whether the allegation is upheld and what sanction, if any, applies.

This is intended to avoid publicising allegations before investigations are concluded.

4. Investigations must continue even if the member resigns

Subject to legal limitations, investigations would be expected to proceed to completion even if the councillor steps down. MHCLG also proposes that outcomes should be published in all cases, including findings of “no case to answer.”

5. Greater support for complainants and those affected by misconduct

MHCLG highlights that the current system gives little recognition to complainants or victims. Proposed best practice guidance will include measures for supporting individuals through the process, and MHCLG will explore establishing an independent, confidential helpline for complainants.

Proposed New Sanctions

- 8.9 MHCLG is also considering introducing additional sanctions, including:

1. Suspension and related measures

Legislation is proposed to allow councils to suspend members for up to six months for serious breaches. Additional sanctions could include withholding allowances and

¹ [English Devolution and Community Empowerment Bill - GOV.UK](#)

² [English Devolution and Community Empowerment Bill: LGA policy summary | Local Government Association](#)

restricting access to council premises or facilities, either during suspension or as separate penalties.

2. Interim suspensions for the most serious cases

Interim suspension powers would be available where allegations involve serious criminal matters under police investigation or awaiting sentencing. Grounds would include seriousness, risk of harm (including safeguarding risks), and the initial suspension would be limited to three months, subject to review.

3. Disqualification for repeated serious misconduct

If a councillor or co-optee receives the maximum six-month suspension twice within a five-year period, MHCLG proposes that they could be disqualified.

Appeals and Review Rights

8.10 Local and national appeal mechanisms

Currently, the only route for challenge is to complain to the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman, who considers only procedural issues. Under the new proposals, a two-stage challenge process would be introduced:

- i. an initial local “right for review”, followed by
- ii. access to a new national appeals body.

8.11 The national body would hear appeals from councillors against suspensions or loss of allowances and appeals from complainants who believe their case was mishandled, but only once the local review process has been completed.

Likely Impact on Councils

8.12 If implemented, the reforms are expected to significantly reshape how standards matters are handled:

- i. Standards processes may take on a more formal, quasi-judicial character.
- ii. Complaint numbers may rise, especially if the system becomes more accessible and complainant-focused.
- iii. The built-in review and appeal stages are likely to lengthen overall case timelines.

8.13 The introduction of more meaningful sanctions, including suspension and potential disqualification, may influence member behaviour.

8.14 Disqualification would trigger a by-election, which could influence political control in councils with a narrow majority.

Implementation Timescale

8.15 MHCLG has indicated that it intends to bring forward the required legislation “as soon as parliamentary time allows.”

Local Developments

8.16 Monitoring Officers across Hertfordshire continue to meet regularly through the countywide Governance and Monitoring Officers’ Network, sharing best practice on complaint handling, training and constitutional updates to promote consistency and readiness for any future structural change flowing from the Bill.

8.17 Locally, the Council has strengthened its own arrangements:

- The Standards Committee approved and recommended to Full Council the endorsement and adoption of the Monitoring Officer Protocol as part of our measures to further strengthen our internal governance framework. Full Council voted in favour to adopt the Monitoring Officer Protocol on the 28th January 2026³;

- The Standards Committee approved and recommended to Full Council the endorsement of the adoption of Guidance to Councillors on Outside Bodies⁴ as part of our measures to empower Councillors so that they are equipped with knowledge and information regarding their liabilities based on the type of organisation which they are appointed to and the risks associated with these appointments both to the Councillor and the Council;

- Member induction and refresher ethics training remain mandatory for all councillors; and

- The complaints procedure is kept under review to ensure consistency with the LGA Model Code and to encourage proportional and informal resolution where appropriate.

8.18 Officers will continue to monitor legislative and policy developments, report any confirmed changes to the national standards framework, and update local arrangements accordingly.

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.

³ [6B Adoption of the Monitoring Officer Protocol - referral from Standards.pdf](#)

⁴ [6A Adoption of Updated Guidance to Councillors on Outside Bodies - referral from Standards.pdf](#)

14. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

14.1 There are no financial 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
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18. BACKGROUND PAPERS

18.1 None other than those referred to/ linked above.