

Meeting of the Standards Committee – 12th January 2026

Report of the Monitoring Officer

Proposed changes to the Standards regime

Purpose of report

1. To provide information on the Government's planned reforms.

Recommendations

2. It is recommended that the Committee note and comment on the proposals made by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government to strengthen the standards and conduct regime for local authorities in England.

Background

3. Between December 2024 and February 2025, the Government consulted on proposals to introduce a robust new standards regime for local authorities in England.
4. The current standards and conduct framework for local authorities, set out in the Localism Act 2011, require local authorities to adopt a code of conduct which must be consistent with the Nolan principles of standards in public life (selflessness, integrity, objectivity, accountability, openness, honesty and leadership).
5. The current regime contains no provision to enable suspension in the event of a breach of conduct and therefore, limits the measures available to local authorities to less meaningful sanctions such as barring members from cabinet, committees, or representative roles, a requirement to issue an apology of undergo code of conduct training and public criticism.

Outcome of the consultation on the standards and conduct framework

6. The Government's intention is to legislate for a whole system reform of the current regime as set out in the Localism Act 2011 and will include the following measures:
 - a. The introduction of a mandatory code of conduct to include a behavioural code for all local authorities and tiers.
 - b. The requirement that all principal authorities to convene formal standards committees including provisions on the constitution of standards committees to ensure objectivity, accountability and transparency.
 - c. The requirement that all principal authorities to offer individual support during any investigation into code of conduct allegation(s) to both the complainant and the elected member subject to the allegation(s).
 - d. The introduction at the authority level of a 'right for review' for both complainant and the subject elected member to have the case reassessed on grounds that will be set out in legislation
 - e. Powers for authorities to suspend elected members for a maximum of six months for serious code of conduct breaches, with the option to withhold allowances during suspension for the most serious breaches and introduce premises and facilities bans either in addition or as standalone sanctions
 - f. Powers for local authorities to suspend elected members on an interim basis for an initial period of three months which, if extended, will require regular review in response to the most serious allegations involving police investigation, or where sentencing is pending
 - g. The introduction of a new disqualification criterion for any elected member subject to the maximum period of suspension more than once within five years
 - h. The creation of a new national appeals function, to consider appeals from elected members against decisions to suspend them and/or withhold allowances, and for complainants if they consider their complaint was mishandled. Any appeal submitted will only be permitted after the complainant or elected member has invoked their 'right for review' of the local standards committee decision has been invoked and that process is completed.
7. No timeframes have yet been announced for when these proposals will be introduced. The Bill will need to be considered further once the final text has been agreed by both the House of Commons and House of Lords.

Finance

8. There are no financial implications arising from this report.

Law

9. The current regime is set out in the Localism Act 2011 however the relevant legislation for these proposals is yet to be brought in.

Risk Management

10. The proposed reforms do not create any risks for the Council, but this will need to be reviewed once the new legislation comes into effect.

Equality Impact

11. This report takes into account the Council's policy on equality and diversity and will need to be reviewed once the new legislation comes into effect.

Human Resources/Organisational Development

12. Once the final text of the Bill has been approved and a draft policy has been drafted, this will need to be circulated and consulted upon with Human Resources/Organisational Development.

Commercial/Procurement

13. There are no commercial/procurement considerations associated with this report.

Environment / Climate Change

14. There are no Environmental/Climate change matters arising from this report.

Council Plan

15. Following the implementation of new legislation a review will need to be undertaken to ensure that all relevant policies and procedures align with the new regime and will form part of the Council's overall governance arrangements and continuous improvement.

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List of Background Documents

Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government Consultation
Outcome:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/strengthening-the-standards-and-conduct-framework-for-local-authorities-in-england/outcome/strengthening-the-standards-and-conduct-framework-for-local-authorities-in-england-consultation-results-and-government-response#ministerial-foreword>