

Meeting Standards Committee

Portfolio Area Resources

Date 25 November 2025



STANDARDS UPDATE - REPORT OF THE MONITORING OFFICER

AUTHOR VICTORIA WILDERS

1 PURPOSE

- 1.1 To provide members of the Standards Committee with an overview of the complaints under the Stevenage Borough Council's Code of Conduct for Members ("the Code") received by the Monitoring Officer to date, to review the arrangements in place for Member Code of Conduct complaints handling and to update members of the Government's response to the consultation in relation to Strengthening the Standards and Conduct Framework for Local Authorities.

2 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 That the Standards Committee receive the update report and provide any observations to the Monitoring Officer.
- 2.2 That the Standards Committee recommend approval of the proposed changes to the 'Arrangements for Dealing with Standards Allegations under the Localism Act 2011(2025) in Appendix A to Council.
- 2.3 Note the Government's response to the consultation outcome of Strengthening the Standards and Conduct Framework for Local Authorities in England dated 11th November 2025 contained in Appendix B.

3 BACKGROUND

- 3.1 In accordance with the Localism Act 2011 Stevenage Borough Council has in place the Code for its borough councillors which is found at Part 5a of the Constitution. The Code applies to borough councillors whenever they are acting or purporting to act in their capacity as borough councillors. The Monitoring Officer is responsible for ensuring compliance with the Code, which sets the standard for conduct of local authority members.
- 3.2 The arrangements for dealing with complaints received under the Code are set out on the Stevenage Borough Council's website and can be viewed at [Councillors Code of Conduct](#). In addition, there is a current procedure which complaints are assessed under, namely the, 'Arrangements for Dealing with Standards Allegations under the Localism Act 2011' ("the current Arrangements") which can be found in Appendix A for reference.
- 3.3 The current Arrangements provides that complaints under the Code are submitted to the Monitoring Officer who is first required to review the complaint and after consultation with the Independent Person, take a decision as to whether it merits formal investigation.
- 3.4 Within its terms of reference, the Standards Committee has the functions to:-
- 3.4.1 promote and maintain high standards of conduct of members of the Council.
 - 3.4.2 consider and dispose of allegations that a member is in breach of the Code in accordance with the arrangements adopted by the Council under Section 28 Localism Act 2011.
 - 3.4.3 To depart from the Arrangements above in the circumstances described in paragraph 12 of those Arrangements.
 - 3.4.4 To consider and, if necessary, recommend changes to the Code of Conduct, the Arrangements under which allegations can be investigated and decisions on allegations can be made or any other aspects of the Standards Regime to the Council.
- 3.5 The current Arrangements were approved in 2012 and require updating given the length of time that has passed since they were last reviewed. In addition, it is advisable that they reflect the Guidance on Member Model Code of Conduct Complaints handling published by the Local Government Association (September 2021).

Stevenage Borough Council complaints update

- 3.5 The following complaints were submitted to the Monitoring Officer since the Standards Committee last met in 2022, the outcomes/updates of which are as follows:-
- A complaint received in 2023 against a borough councillor but the complaint was not progressed as the borough councillor was not acting in capacity as a borough councillor at the time of the alleged incident. **No further action.**

- A complaint received in 2023 against a borough councillor, the Monitoring Officer, in consultation with the Independent Person, concluded that the complaint should be referred for investigation. This complaint was due to be heard by the Standards Committee at the end of 2024 but had to be postponed due to the ongoing ill health of the subject matter. As a result, this complaint is **ongoing**.
- There were 3 complaints received in 2024 against a borough councillor, the Monitoring Officer, in consultation with the Independent Person, concluded that the complaints should not be referred for informal investigation. **No further action.**
- There were 2 separate complaints received in 2025 against a borough councillor, the Monitoring Officer, in consultation with the Independent Person concluded that both complaints fell **outside of the Code and therefore no further action was taken.**

Revised Complaints Procedure

- 3.6 The Council should publish a Complaints Procedure alongside its Code of Conduct so that it is accessible to all and which sets out a criterion to which complaints can be assessed against. Whilst the Council has the current Arrangements in place, it doesn't appear that they have been updated recently.
- 3.7 The Monitoring Officer has reviewed the current Arrangements and has significantly rewritten and updated it. The new procedure is set out in Appendix A which also includes a criterion to which complaints will be assessed against.

Governments Response the consultation outcome of Strengthening the Standard and Conduct Framework for Local Authorities

- 3.8 On the 11th November 2025 the Government published its response to the consultation on improving the local governments standards framework. At present there is no timeframe for when legislation will follow as this is subject to when Parliamentary time allows. Some key measures summarised below include: -
- The introduction of a mandatory code of conduct, to include a behavioural code, for all local authorities.
 - That all principal authorities convene formal standards committee to ensure objectivity, accountability and transparency.
 - The requirement to offer individual support during code of conduct investigations to both the complainant and the councillor subject to the allegation.
 - Publication of allegations and investigation outcomes.

- Requiring completion of investigations if an elected member stands down.
- A new disqualification criterion for any elected member subject to the maximum period of suspension more than once within 5 years.
- The creation of a new national appeals function.

4 REASONS FOR RECOMMENDED COURSE OF ACTION AND OTHER OPTIONS

- 4.1 To ensue good governance within the Council.
- 4.2 To consider, investigate and dispense with Code of Conduct complaints under the Localism Act 2011.
- 4.3 To update the Arrangements for the investigation procedure so they reflect the recommendations of the Local Government Association.

5 IMPLICATIONS

Financial Implications

- 5.1 There are no financial implications.

Legal Implications

- 5.2 Under Section 28(6) and (7) of the Localism Act 2011, the Council must have in place arrangements under which allegations that a councillor, who is acting or appears to be acting as a councillor at that time, has failed to comply with the Code. These arrangements must allow for such complaints to be considered, and where appropriate, investigated and decided upon.

Risk Implications

- 5.3 Appropriate reporting processes and procedures in respect of councillor conduct help to ensure good governance of the Council and therefore reduce risk of poor practice or unsafe decision making.

APPENDICES

- A Arrangements for Dealing with Standards Allegations under the Localism Act 2011 (2025) and new proposed procedure
- B Consultation outcome 'Strengthening the Standards and conduct framework for local authorities in England – Consultation results and Government Response – 11 November 2025 - <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>

