Part I – Release to Press

Agenda item: ##

Meeting Standards Committee

Portfolio Area

Date 18 November 2026

STANDARDS UPDATE - REPORT OF THE MONITORING OFFICER

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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 Note the update in relation to Strengthening of Standards and Conduct Framework for Local Authorities and the publication of Solace Commission on Professional Standards and Ethics published its report 'Enough is Enough' A Blueprint for Rebuilding Standards in Local Government.

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 Committee agreed to vary the terms of the Arrangements when it last meet and a report will be taken to the next available full Council meeting for ratification.

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.

Stevenage Borough Council complaints update

3.5 The following complaints were submitted to the Monitoring Officer since the Standards Committee last met. The outcomes/updates of which are as follows:

Complaint and time period.	**Summary of complaint**	**Action taken**
Complaint 2023/24 A complaint received in 2023 against a borough councillor by an officer. This complaint was due to be heard by the	Complaint about a borough councillor's behaviour in a public meeting, alleged breach of Respect under the Code.	Concluded under the criteria that there were circumstances where an investigation would not be in the public interest given the age the specific and unique circumstances of

Standards Committee at the end of 2024 but had to be postponed due to medical reasons.		the case. Complainant was spoken to by the MO. **No further action.**
Complaint (2025/26) Complaint made against a borough council by a borough councillor	Complaint of a borough councillor's behaviour in a public meeting, alleging breach of the 'Respect' part of the Code	MO carried out an initial assessment under the criteria and consulted the Independent Person. Concluded against the assessment criteria that complaint was trivial/tit-for-tat. **No further action**.
Complaint (2026/27)	Complaint against a borough councillor by a county councillor regarding an exchange of words on social media. Complaint alleged breach of 'Respect' part of the Code.	MO carried an initial assessment under the criteria and consulted the Independent Person. Concluded that against the assessment criteria that the complaint was trivial/tit for tat**. No further action.**

Update of Strengthening the Standard and Conduct Framework for Local Authorities

3.6 It was reported at the last meeting that on 11th November 2025 that the Government had published its response to the consultation on improving and strengthening the local governments standards framework and a summary of those responses were provided. There is still no indication as to when primary legislation is to be introduced and it was absent from the 2026 King's Speech.

3.7 In October 2026, the Solace Commission on Professional Standards and Ethics published its report 'Enough is Enough' A Blueprint for Rebuilding Standards in Local Government ("the Report"). The Report argues that standards and behaviour in local government have deteriorated significantly and that the current standards regime is no longer fit for purpose. It calls for both national legislative reform and local organisational action to rebuild respect, accountability and professionalism across the sector. The Report's central message is that poor behaviour in local government has become too common and accepted as 'part of the job', and that both stronger statutory

powers and healthier organisation cultures are urgently needed to restore confidence in local government. The Report can be accessed here Enough is Enough: A Blueprint for Rebuilding Standards in Local Government. The Monitoring Officer will be making both officers and members aware of the Report and will summarise key takeaways.

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.

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.