



CONSTITUTION AND ETHICS COMMITTEE – 13 JULY 2026

**REPORT OF THE CHIEF LEGAL OFFICER AND MONITORING
OFFICER**

**UPDATE ON PROPOSED NATIONAL CHANGES TO THE LOCAL
GOVERNMENT ETHICAL STANDARDS FRAMEWORK**

Purpose of the Report

1. The purpose of this report is to:
 - (a) update the Constitution and Ethics Committee on national developments relating to the local government standards and conduct framework for local authorities in England, including proposed changes to the Members' Code of Conduct regime, associated complaint-handling arrangements, sanctions and appeals;

and
 - (b) update the Committee on the national change relating to publication of members' home addresses in registers of interests, and the local action already taken by the County Council in anticipation of that change.

Background

2. The Localism Act 2011 established the current local standards framework. Under that framework, local authorities are required to adopt a code of conduct which is consistent with the seven principles of public life and which includes provisions for the registration and disclosure of pecuniary and non-pecuniary interests. Each authority is also required to make arrangements for dealing with allegations that members have failed to comply with its code of conduct, and to appoint at least one Independent Person whose views must be sought and taken into account at relevant stages of the process. Under the present regime, there is no provision in current legislation for suspension as a sanction for a councillor found to have breached the code.
3. The County Council has an established Members' Code of Conduct and arrangements for handling member conduct complaints. The Council's existing framework includes the Members' Code of Conduct, provisions for

declaration and management of interests, a complaints procedure, a Protocol for Member/Officer Relations, a Member Conduct Panel, Independent Persons, training and supporting guidance.

4. Following recent constitutional changes, responsibility for the promotion and maintenance of high standards of conduct for members and co-opted members has transferred from the Corporate Governance Committee to the new Constitution and Ethics Committee. The new Committee has responsibility for oversight of the Members' Code of Conduct, associated protocols, complaint-handling arrangements and related training.

National Standards and Conduct Reform

5. In December 2024 the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government consulted on proposals to strengthen the standards and conduct framework for local authorities in England. The consultation ran from 18 December 2024 to 26 February 2025.
6. The Government response confirms an intention to legislate for what it describes as “whole system reform” of the current standards regime. The proposed reforms include:
 - (a) a mandatory code of conduct for all local authority types and tiers, including a behavioural code;
 - (b) a requirement for principal authorities to convene formal standards committees;
 - (c) a requirement for principal authorities to provide individual support during any code of conduct investigation to both the complainant and the councillor subject to the allegation;
 - (d) a local “right for review” for both complainants and subject members;
 - (e) powers for authorities to suspend elected members for up to six months for serious code breaches;
 - (f) the option to withhold allowances during suspension for the most serious breaches;
 - (g) powers to impose premises and facilities bans, either in addition to other sanctions or as standalone sanctions;
 - (h) interim suspension powers for the most serious cases, including where police investigations are involved or sentencing is pending;

- (i) a new disqualification criterion where an elected member is subject to the maximum period of suspension more than once within five years; and
 - (j) a new national appeals function for appeals relating to suspension, withholding of allowances, and complaints about mishandling of a complaint.
7. The proposed mandatory code is expected to be prescribed nationally, with primary legislation creating the power and the detailed code to be set out in regulations. The Government response states that local authorities will be able to develop local guidance and protocols which align with the mandatory code, but these local additions will not themselves form part of the enforceable code or statutory enforcement arrangement.
 8. The Government response also states that the mandatory code will include a requirement for elected and co-opted members to co-operate with code of conduct investigations, and that submitting multiple vexatious complaints will itself be treated as a code of conduct breach.
 9. In relation to standards committees, the Government proposes to require all relevant principal authorities to formally constitute a standards committee, or a sub-committee convened for the purpose of considering code of conduct cases. The Government also proposes further engagement with sector representatives on the detailed membership requirements for such committees, including issues of objectivity, accountability and transparency.
 10. The Government response indicates that decisions on sanctions following formal investigations are expected to be taken by standards committees. It also states that, subject to relevant legal restrictions, code of conduct investigations should be completed, and investigation findings and decisions should be published following full investigation and determination, including where the investigation concludes that there is no case to answer and the member is exonerated, and where a member stands down before determination.
 11. The Government has not yet published the primary legislation, regulations or statutory guidance needed to implement the wider standards reforms. The Government response states that it intends to bring forward the necessary legislation “as soon as parliamentary time allows”. Accordingly, while the direction of travel is now clear, the detailed timetable for implementation remains to be confirmed.

Likely Implications for the County Council

12. The proposed reforms are likely to require changes to the Council’s local standards arrangements once the legislative detail is available. These may include:

- (a) review and amendment of the Members' Code of Conduct to ensure compliance with the mandatory national code;
 - (b) review of local guidance and protocols, including social media guidance, member/officer protocol material and complaint-handling guidance, to ensure alignment with the national code;
 - (c) review of the Council's procedure for handling member conduct complaints, including any new requirements relating to reviews, publication, support for complainants and subject members, and the completion of investigations;
 - (d) review of the role and operation of the Member Conduct Panel including how case determination arrangements should sit alongside the Committee's wider oversight role for standards, protocols, complaints-handling arrangements and training;
 - (e) review of the Independent Persons Protocol, particularly in light of any national clarification on the role of Independent Persons in standards committee processes;
 - (f) consideration of training requirements for members, substitute members, co-opted members, Independent Persons and members of the Constitution and Ethics Committee; and
 - (g) consideration of how any new sanctions, including suspension, interim suspension, withholding allowances, premises bans and facilities bans, should be incorporated into local arrangements.
13. The Council has already established the Constitution and Ethics Committee and transferred responsibility for member standards and conduct matters to it. This places the Council in a good position to respond to the national reforms once the statutory detail is available. The Committee's responsibilities include the Members' Code of Conduct, protocols, complaints handling arrangements and training, which are all areas likely to be affected by the national reforms.
14. It is not recommended that the Council undertakes a full revision of the Members' Code of Conduct immediately, as the mandatory national code has not yet been published. However, the Council should continue to keep its complaints procedure, Independent Persons Protocol, guidance and training arrangements under review so that it can respond promptly once the new statutory framework is available.

Publication of Members' Home Addresses in Registers of Interests

15. Separately from the wider standards reforms, national changes have been announced in relation to the publication of elected and co-opted members' home addresses in registers of interests.
16. Section 65 of the English Devolution and Community Empowerment Act 2026 took effect from 29 June 2026 and inserted new section 32A into the Localism Act 2011. New section 32A provides that, where a member or co-opted member notifies the Monitoring Officer of a disclosable pecuniary interest that includes their usual residential address, the authority's public register must not include that address unless the member or co-opted member requests publication by written notice. Where the address is withheld, the public register must state that the member or co-opted member has an interest the address of which is withheld under section 32A. The address must still be declared to the Monitoring Officer and retained for internal purposes.
17. The change reflects a national policy direction which seeks to balance transparency in relation to members' interests with personal safety and privacy considerations. It does not remove the requirement for members to register relevant interests with the Monitoring Officer. The effect is on publication of home address details in the public version of the register.
18. In March 2026, following discussion with Group Leaders, the Monitoring Officer implemented a protocol under which councillors' home addresses would be removed from the public website version of the Register of Interests by default, with members able to opt in if they wished their home address to remain publicly available. The protocol made clear that members must continue to register disclosable pecuniary interests with the Monitoring Officer, including relevant land or property interests, and that the statutory register would continue to be maintained by the Monitoring Officer.
19. The local protocol also provided that where registration information would disclose a councillor's home address, or directly identify it, the Monitoring Officer would treat that information as a sensitive interest for publication purposes and withhold it from the website version of the register, unless the councillor had expressly opted in to publication.
20. The local approach is therefore consistent with the national change now in force. Minor administrative updates should be made to ensure that public register wording, member guidance and internal processes now refer to section 32A of the Localism Act 2011, rather than relying solely on the sensitive interests provisions in section 32.

Training and Member Awareness

21. The proposed national reforms place renewed emphasis on the importance of members understanding their standards obligations and the consequences of failing to comply with them. The Council already provides training and guidance on the Members' Code of Conduct and related matters. Members receive training on the Code of Conduct, and supporting information and guidance is made available through the Elected Members' portal.
22. The Committee may wish to consider, as part of a future report, whether training on the Members' Code of Conduct, registration and declaration of interests, social media use and the member/officer protocol should be treated as mandatory for all members, and whether it should receive an annual or bi-annual update on training completion. This would support the Council's preparedness for the national reforms and reinforce the Committee's role in promoting and maintaining high standards of conduct.

Next Steps

23. Officers will continue to monitor national developments, including publication of draft legislation, regulations, statutory guidance and any implementation timetable.
24. Once further national detail is available, a further report will be brought to the Committee setting out:
 - (a) the changes required to the Members' Code of Conduct;
 - (b) any amendments required to the complaints procedure and Member Conduct Panel arrangements;
 - (c) any changes required to the Independent Persons Protocol;
 - (d) any implications for the Constitution and the Committee's Terms of Reference;
 - (e) proposed training and communication arrangements for members; and
 - (f) any transitional arrangements required for ongoing complaints.

Recommendations

25. The Committee is asked to:
 - (a) note the Government's proposed reforms to the local government standards and conduct framework;

- (b) note that the detailed legislative timetable for the wider standards reforms has not yet been confirmed, although the Government has stated its intention to bring forward legislation as soon as parliamentary time allows;
- (c) note that section 65 of the English Devolution and Community Empowerment Act 2026 has inserted new section 32A into the Localism Act 2011, changing the requirements relating to publication of members' home addresses in public registers of interests from 29 June 2026;
- (d) note that the Council has already taken local steps to remove councillors' home addresses from the publicly available version of the Register of Interests, while maintaining the requirement for members to register relevant interests with the Monitoring Officer;
- (e) agree that public register wording, member guidance and internal processes be updated as necessary to refer to section 32A of the Localism Act 2011;
- (f) agree that officers review the Council's member training arrangements in light of the proposed national reforms, including training on the Members' Code of Conduct, registration and declaration of interests, social media use, the Member/Officer Protocol and the operation of the complaints process, and bring forward proposals for future training and reporting arrangements as part of a further report to the Committee; and
- (g) agree that a further report be brought to the Committee once draft legislation, regulations, statutory guidance, or implementation dates for the wider standards reforms are available.

Equality Implications

26. The national reforms are intended to support a clearer, more consistent and fairer standards framework across local government. The Government response specifically refers to both complainants and respondent members being supported during investigations and to those complained about having a fair opportunity to make representations. Any local changes to the Code of Conduct, complaints procedure or related protocols will be assessed for equality implications when detailed proposals are brought forward.

Human Rights Implications

27. The standards framework engages a range of legal and human rights considerations, including natural justice and procedural fairness, Article 10

freedom of expression, protection of reputation, privacy, safety, and the need to maintain public confidence in local democracy. Any local implementation of the national reforms will need to ensure that appropriate safeguards are built into complaint-handling, investigation, publication, review, appeal and sanction processes. The change relating to non-publication of home addresses supports members' privacy and safety while preserving the requirement to register relevant interests with the Monitoring Officer and to publish appropriate information about the existence of interests.

Background Papers

Strengthening the standards and conduct framework for local authorities in England – consultation results and government response, Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, updated 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>

Strengthening the standards and conduct framework for local authorities in England, consultation page, published 18 December 2024 and closed 26 February 2025

<https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/strengthening-the-standards-and-conduct-framework-for-local-authorities-in-england>

Removal of the requirement for councillors' addresses to be listed on council registers of interest.

Section 65 of the English Devolution and Community Empowerment Act 2026:

<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2026/23/section/65/enacted?view=plain>

Circulation under Local Issues Alert Procedure

None.

Officers to Contact

Fiona McMillan

Chief Legal Officer and Monitoring Officer

Tel: 0116 305 2024

Email: fiona.mcmillan@leics.gov.uk