

**STANDARDS AND ETHICS COMMITTEE
Thursday 11 June 2026**

Present:- Councillor Clarke (in the Chair); Councillors T. Collingham, Harper and McKiernan, along with Parish Councillors Griffin and Senior and Mrs. A. Bingham (Independent Member).

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Currie, Mrs. K. Penny (Independent Member) and Mr. D. Roper-Newman (Independent Person).

Also in attendance were:-

Mr. P. Horsfield, Monitoring Officer
Mr. S. Fletcher, Deputy Monitoring Officer
Mr. P. Beavers, Independent Person

The Chair wished to place on record her thanks to Councillor Lelliott and other members who had been part of the 2025/26 Standards and Ethics Committee. In addition, she offered a warm welcome to the new Vice-Chair and new members for the 2026/27 municipal year.

1. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

2. EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

Resolved:- That, under Section 100A(4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the press and public be excluded from the meeting for (Minute Nos. 9 and 10 (Whistleblowing and Complaints) on the grounds that the appendices to those reports involves the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in Paragraph 1 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A to the Local Government Act 1972.

3. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING HELD ON 12TH MARCH, 2026

Consideration was given to the minutes of the previous meeting held on 12th March, 2026.

Resolved:- That the minutes of the previous meeting held on 12th March, 2026 were approved as a true and correct record of the proceedings.

4. REVIEW OF THE CODE OF CONDUCT

Consideration was given to the report and appendix presented by the Deputy Monitoring Officer, requesting that the Standards and Ethics Committee reviews the Code of Conduct.

The current Model Code of Conduct as provided by the LGA remained as it was drafted in 2020. The Code of Conduct was reviewed by the Committee last year in its current form, with no suggested amendments. The Monitoring Officer had reviewed the Code of Conduct and was, therefore, happy with its current content, however, the Committee may suggest any amendments they feel would be beneficial.

Furthermore, the Government recently carried out a consultation and provided a consultation response in relation to introducing measures to strengthen the standards and conduct regime in England, partly to ensure consistency of approach amongst Councils in addressing breaches of their member Code of Conduct. One of the items which the Government had stated it would take forward consulted on, was the introduction of a mandatory minimum Code of Conduct for local authorities in England, as opposed to the current optional model code.

The report and model Code set out the importance of regulated behaviour and it was imperative that any changes be monitored and the Committee updated accordingly.

Resolved:- That following a review of the Code of Conduct no amendments were suggested.

5. CIVILITY AND RESPECT PLEDGE

Consideration was given to an update by the Deputy Monitoring Officer on the Civility and Respect Pledge which was for local Councillors providing training and good governance. On this basis Parish and Town Councils were encouraged to make a commitment and sign up and support the Pledge.

The Committee recognised the benefits of local councils signing up and the Deputy Monitoring Officer had attended the Parish Network Group to encourage Parish and Town Councils to do so. Currently participation stood at approximately 50%, compared to the NALC national average of 20%.

The Civility and Respect Pledge was considered a key initiative for local councils, particularly in addressing issues of abuse and harassment.

The Committee had previously written to Parish Councils to encourage them to sign up and indicated that it wished to do so again.

The Chair requested that correlated data be brought forward, identifying which Councils had signed up to the Pledge which could also assist in analysing complaint levels. This was intended to determine whether any links could be drawn between complaint levels and Parish Councils that had not signed up and to use this evidence as a lever to encourage further uptake.

The Committee discussed when there had been any reported improvements in sign-up and were advised that the previous figure of 43% had increased to 50%. It was noted that some Parish Councils felt they already operated in a civil and respectful manner and, therefore, did not consider it necessary to sign up.

The Committee was encouraged to see progress and that the position compared favourably with the rest of the country where overall uptake remained low. There may be some valid reasons why some councils had not signed up.

The importance of ensuring that all Parish Councils operated correctly was emphasised with appropriate safeguards in place to deal with issues as they arose.

The Committee welcomed the suggestion that a further reminder be circulated on the benefits and to encourage Parish Councils to sign up to the Pledge.

Resolved:- (1) That the update on the Civility and Respect Pledge be received and noted.

(2) That the Deputy Monitoring Officer send a further reminder to Town and Parish Councils on the benefits to encourage them to sign up to the Pledge.

6. STRENGTHENING THE STANDARDS AND CONDUCT FRAMEWORK FOR LOCAL AUTHORITIES

Consideration was given to the latest update on the Government's proposed Strengthening the Standards and Conduct Framework, the consultation for which the Committee had submitted comments. This had been with a view to the Government bringing forward primary legislation, including enhanced powers for local authorities including suspension and disqualification for members persistently found in breach of the Code of Conduct, as well as a mandatory Code of Conduct.

It was noted that the proposed legislation had not been included in the King's Speech. The LGA had expressed disappointment that this much needed reform was absent and the Government had responded that legislation would be brought forward when parliamentary time allowed. It was acknowledged that the Committee would be kept updated should there be any further developments, although it was recognised that the Government currently had other priorities.

The Chair asked how the Committee could maintain momentum with the LGA and whether it could continue to feed into the process.

STANDARDS AND ETHICS COMMITTEE - 11/06/26

The Committee was advised that it could continue to lobby, including engaging with local MPs, and suggested that it would be beneficial to write to them to reinforce the Committee's position.

Resolved:- (1) That the update be received and the contents noted.

(2) That the LGA and local Members of Parliament continue to be lobbied for the bringing forward of the much needed reform for strengthening the Standards and Conduct Framework.

7. DEBATE NOT HATE WORKING GROUP

Consideration was given to the update by the Deputy Monitoring Officer on the Working Group's latest meeting which looked in detail at the collaboration with the Police and how Councils reported and shared information.

The Committee was advised that the next meeting was to concentrate on the principle of creating a culture of safety and respect, which was recognised as a significant and wide-ranging topic. Other areas previously considered included Councillor wellbeing, online safety and health and safety with substantial work being undertaken across these themes.

It was stated that a report would be brought to the Committee in September, setting out the Working Group's findings and any recommendations arising.

The Chair highlighted the positive work emerging from the Working Group, particularly in relation to defining its remit for potential election candidates and considering how individuals could be better protected and supported. It was noted that the current landscape could be challenging and, if left unaddressed, might hinder democratic participation.

The Chair also emphasised the flexibility of the Working Group's arrangements, including the availability of hybrid meetings and the option to join via Microsoft Teams and encouraged other Committee Members to participate.

It was agreed that the Clerk would write to Committee Members to invite expressions of interest in joining the next meeting, scheduled for Tuesday, 21st July 2026 at 1.00 p.m.

Resolved:- (1) That the update be received and the contents noted.

(2) That an invitation be issued to other Committee Members to join the next meeting, scheduled for Tuesday, 21st July 2026 at 1.00 p.m.

8. REGISTER OF INTERESTS - PARISH COUNCILS

Consideration was given to the report presented by the Monitoring Officer which set out the findings of a review of Parish and Town Council members Registers of Interests.

The review considered Parish and Town Council websites and Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council (RMBC) records. A representative sample of Parish and Town Councils was examined at Councillor level to identify gaps in publication and accessibility.

The exercise found that Registers of Interests were held centrally by RMBC for all Councils reviewed and, therefore, compliance across Parishes and Town Councils as a whole was considered high. However, transparency varied significantly between Councils and in some cases, Councillors were listed without clear links to their Register of Interests.

Frequently occurring issues presented, such as Registers existing but not being consistently linked to individual Councillors and some Parish and Town Council websites relying entirely on RMBC for publication and often information appears fragmented or difficult to access.

Improvements which could be made include all Parish and Town Councils should provide direct links from each Councillor to their Register of Interests and a consistent Borough-wide format being implemented for publishing registers, although this may be dependent on the website provider for the Parish and Town Councils. If this was not possible Parish and Town Councils should be encouraged to ensure that their Registers were easy to locate, clearly labelled and accessible to the public.

As such the review concluded that Parish and Town Councillors' Registers of Interests were in place across the Borough. However, inconsistencies in publication and accessibility reduced transparency.

Furthermore, from 29th June 2026, Section 65 of the English Devolution and Community Empowerment Act 2026 ('2026 Act') removed the requirement for a Local Government Member's home address to be published in Council registers of interest. The newly added Section 32A of the Localism Act 2011 required that Councils did not publish details of a Member's home address in public registers of interest unless an individual Member explicitly requested it.

To aid transparency, public registers of interest would still state that an interest existed, but that the address was withheld under the new Section 32A. The exact address details would still need to be declared, remain available internally to Councils and would continue to prevent conflicts of interest. Parish and Town Council Clerks have been informed about this change.

STANDARDS AND ETHICS COMMITTEE - 11/06/26

It was considered appropriate to write to Clerks to request that they review the Registers of Interests and ensure they were published on their websites or appropriately linked to the RMBC website.

The Chair referred to the Committee's experience of working with Clerks and the potential barriers to publishing Registers of Interests, noting that it could be a substantial task, although managing and updating websites was generally manageable.

The Committee was advised that most Parish Councils were compliant and had the information available on their websites. However, it was noted that larger Parish Councils, with greater resources, were better placed to ensure appropriate arrangements were in place. Smaller Parish Councils sometimes found this more challenging, although it was emphasised that this should not detract from the importance of transparency as a key principle.

The Committee queried whether there was any correlation between Parish Councils that had not published Declarations of Interests and those that had not signed up to the Civility and Respect Pledge, suggesting there may be some overlap.

It was, therefore, noted that overall figures were available, but not broken down by individual Parish Councils. It was suggested that the Parish Liaison Officer be approached to obtain more detailed information and to explore whether any links could be identified between complaints, registers and pledge uptake, with a view to targeting further attention where needed.

It was suggested the Parish Liaison Officer may best be placed to provide some support where needed.

The Committee established that the majority of Parish Councils did have a website, although in some cases Registers of Interests were not published or there was no link to the Council's website, which may be due to training or resource issues or a lack of proficiency in website management.

Resolved:- (1) That the report be received and the contents noted.

(2) That the Parish Liaison Officer be approached to obtain more detailed information on Parish Councils and to explore whether any links could be identified between complaints, registers and pledge uptake, with a view to targeting further attention where needed.

(3) That the Parish Liaison Officer consider offering additional support to those Parish Councils that may be struggling to maintain registers and website management.

9. A REVIEW OF CONCERNS RAISED PURSUANT TO THE WHISTLEBLOWING POLICY

Consideration was given to the report and appendix presented by the Deputy Monitoring Officer, which provided an overview of the Whistleblowing cases which have been received over the past year.

Particular reference was made to the appendix to the report which set out clearly the description of the concerns received and action taken.

Resolved:- That the Whistleblowing concerns raised over the previous year and the actions taken to address these matters be noted.

10. REVIEW OF COMPLAINTS

Consideration was given to the report presented by the Deputy Monitoring Officer, detailing the progress with the handling of complaints relating to breaches of the Council's Code of Conduct for Members and Town and Parish Councillors. The report listed the current cases of complaint and the action being taken in respect of each one.

Reference was made to each related case and recommended outcomes/actions identified were highlighted.

Resolved:- That the report be received and the contents noted.

11. URGENT BUSINESS

The Chair advised that there were no urgent items of business requiring the Committee's consideration.