Committee Name and Date of Committee Meeting
Standards and Ethics Committee - 12th November 2026

Report Title
Strengthening the Standards and Conduct Regime for Local Authorities in England - Update

Is this a Key Decision and has it been included on the Forward Plan?
No

Strategic Director Approving Submission of the Report
N/A

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Ward(s) Affected
Borough-Wide

Report Summary
A report updating the Committee on the Government proposals to strengthen the standards and conduct framework for local authorities in England and the current stage reached by those proposals.

Recommendations
That the Committee notes the Government proposals and the current position, and receives further updates as the necessary legislation and implementation arrangements develop.

List of Appendices Included

Appendix 1 - The Municipal Journal, "Standards shake-up", 15 October 2026

Background Papers
Strengthening the Standards and Conduct Framework for Local Authorities in England - consultation results and Government response, published 11 November 2025 The MJ, "Standards shake-up", 15 October 2026.

Consideration by any other Council Committee, Scrutiny or Advisory Panel
None

Council Approval Required
No

Exempt from the Press and Public
No

Strengthening the Standards and Conduct Regime for Local Authorities in England

1. Background

1.1 The Localism Act 2011 establishes the current standards framework for local authorities in England. It requires authorities to promote and maintain high standards of conduct, adopt a code of conduct and maintain arrangements for dealing with allegations that members have failed to comply with that code.

1.2 Following consultation, the Government published its formal response on 11 November 2025 and confirmed its intention to legislate for a significant reform of the standards and conduct regime. Recent reporting in The MJ, excerpt at appendix 1, indicates that the Government has reaffirmed its commitment to bringing forward the proposed legislative reforms.

2. Key Issues

2.1 The Committee has previously received a report on the substance of the Government's proposed reforms to the local government standards regime. This report is therefore intended to provide a further update on the current position and the continuing Government work to take those proposals forward, rather than to revisit the detail of each individual proposal.

2.2 The Government published its consultation response on 11 November 2025, confirming its intention to legislate to strengthen the standards and conduct framework. Since then, the position has remained that the reforms require primary legislation before they can take effect. Recent sector reporting indicates that Ministers remain committed to progressing the changes, but the legislative vehicle, detailed drafting and implementation timetable have not yet been finalised.

2.3 The current position is therefore one of policy commitment rather than legal implementation. The Government is continuing the preparatory work needed to bring forward legislation and associated implementation arrangements, including matters that will need to be addressed through regulations, guidance or national procedural arrangements. Until that work is complete, the existing statutory framework under the Localism Act 2011 continues to apply.

2.4 Officers will continue to monitor Government announcements, the introduction of any Bill and the publication of further regulations or guidance. A further report will be brought to the Committee when there is sufficient clarity on the final statutory requirements, likely implementation timetable and the consequential changes required to the Council's Code of Conduct, complaints procedure, Standards and Ethics Committee arrangements and Constitution.

3. Options considered and recommended proposal

3.1 No decision on the substance of the Government proposals is required at this stage. The recommended approach is for the Committee to note the current position and for officers to assess the implications for the Council's Code of Conduct, complaints procedure, Standards and Ethics Committee arrangements and Constitution when the legislative requirements are clearer.

4. Consultation on proposal

4.1 N/A

5. Timetable and Accountability for Implementing this Decision

5.1 The Government has confirmed the policy direction following consultation, but the reforms require legislation before they can take effect. Implementation timescales will therefore depend on the introduction and passage of the necessary legislation and the publication of any associated regulations or guidance.

6. Financial and Procurement Advice and Implications

6.1 There are no financial or procurement implications arising from this report.

7. Legal Advice and Implications

7.1 Sections 27 and 28 of the Localism Act 2011 provide the principal statutory basis for the existing local authority standards regime, including the duties to promote and maintain high standards of conduct, adopt a code of conduct and maintain arrangements for investigating and determining allegations.

7.2 The Government proposals do not alter the Council's present legal duties unless and until the necessary legislation comes into force. Any future changes to the Council's Code of Conduct, complaints arrangements, committee structure or Constitution will need to be considered against the final legislation, regulations and guidance.

8. Human Resources Advice and Implications

8.1 There are no immediate human resources implications. Future arrangements may require training and support for officers and members involved in standards investigations, reviews and appeals.

9. Implications for Children and Young People and Vulnerable Adults

9.1 No direct implications have been identified at this stage.

10. Equalities and Human Rights Advice and Implications

10.1 A clearer and more consistent standards framework, with appropriate safeguards for complainants and subject members, is intended to support fair decision-making and public confidence. The equality and human rights implications of any revised local procedure will be assessed once the final statutory framework is available.

11. Implications for Partners

11.1 The proposed mandatory framework will apply across tiers of local government and will therefore be relevant to town and parish councils as well as principal authorities. The detailed implications for the Council's role in handling parish and town councillor complaints will be assessed when the legislation is available.

12. Risks and Mitigation

12.1 The principal current risk is uncertainty while the legislative detail and implementation timetable remain outstanding. This will be mitigated by continuing to operate the existing statutory arrangements, monitoring Government announcements and bringing further reports to the Committee as the reforms progress.

13. Accountable Officer(s)

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