



MEETING : STANDARDS COMMITTEE
VENUE : COUNCIL CHAMBER, WALLFIELDS, HERTFORD
DATE : WEDNESDAY 21 JANUARY 2026
TIME : 7.00 PM

PLEASE NOTE TIME AND VENUE

This meeting will be live streamed on the Council's Youtube page:
<https://www.youtube.com/user/EastHertsDistrict>

MEMBERS OF THE COMMITTEE

Councillor V Burt (Chair), N Clements, A Parsad-Wyatt, , V Smith, T Stowe, R Townsend, Vacancy and Mr N Moss

CO-OPTED MEMBERS

Councillor I Hunt – Much Hadham Parish Council

Councillor J Kenyon – Buckland Parish Council

Vacancy

Substitutes

Green Group: Councillors R Carter, N Cox and G Hill

Labour Group: Councillor C Redfern

Liberal Democrat Group: Councillors C Horner

(Note: Substitution arrangements must be notified by the absent Member to Democratic Services 7 hours before the meeting, i.e. by midday on the day of the meeting)

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- must not participate in any discussion of the matter at the meeting;
- must not participate in any vote taken on the matter at the meeting;
- must disclose the interest to the meeting, whether registered or not, subject to the provisions of section 32 of the Localism Act 2011;
- if the interest is not registered and is not the subject of a pending notification, must notify the Monitoring Officer of the interest within 28 days;
- must leave the room while any discussion or voting takes place.

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AGENDA

1. Apologies

To receive apologies for absence.

2. Minutes - 16 July 2025 (Pages 5 - 10)

To confirm the Minutes of the meeting held on 16 July 2025.

3. Chairman's Announcements

4. Declarations of Interest

5. Standards Update (Pages 11 - 18)

6. Exclusion of the Press and Public - (if required)

No Part II business has been notified for this meeting. If Part II business is notified and the procedures set out in the Local Authorities (Executive Arrangements) (Meetings and Access to Information) (England) Regulations 2012 have been complied with, the Chairman will move: -

That under Section 100(A)(4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the press and public be excluded from the meeting during the discussion of item XX on the grounds that it involves the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in paragraph XX of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the said Act and the public interest in maintaining the exemption outweighs the public interest in disclosing the information.

7. Urgent Business

To consider such other business as, in the opinion of the Chairman of the meeting, is of sufficient urgency to warrant consideration and is not likely to involve the disclosure of exempt information.

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE
STANDARDS COMMITTEE HELD IN THE
COUNCIL CHAMBER, WALLFIELDS,
HERTFORD ON WEDNESDAY 16 JULY
2025, AT 7.00 PM

PRESENT:

District Council Members:

Councillors N Clements, A Parsad-Wyatt,
V Smith, T Stowe and R Carter

Independent Person:

Nicholas Moss

ALSO PRESENT:

Councillors J Kenyon and I Hunt

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE:

James Ellis

- Director for Legal,
Policy and
Governance and
Monitoring Officer
- Committee
Support Officer

Roz Hamilton

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APPOINTMENT OF VICE-CHAIR FOR 2025/26

It was moved by Councillor Smith and seconded by Councillor Parsad-Wyatt, that Councillor Clements be appointed Vice-Chair of the Standards Committee for 2025/26. After being put to the meeting and a vote taken, the motion was declared CARRIED.

RESOLVED – that Councillor Clements be appointed as Vice-Chair of the Standards

Committee for 2025/26.

110 APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Burt and Councillor Furness. It was noted that Councillor Carter was substituting for Councillor Burt.

Councillor Smith asked that it be noted that she had apologised for missing the meeting on 28 January 2025 due to a technical error with a new mobile telephone.

111 MINUTES - 28TH JANUARY 2025

Councillor Stowe proposed, and Councillor Parsad-Wyatt seconded, a motion that the Minutes of the meeting held on the 28 January 2025 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

RESOLVED: that the minutes of the meeting held on the 28^t January 2025, be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

112 CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

There were no Chair's announcements

113 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

114 STANDARDS UPDATE

The Director of Legal, Policy and Governance and Monitoring Officer submitted a report that updated Members of the Committee on the standards complaints that had been received during the last six months.

The Director of Legal, Policy and Governance and Monitoring Officer opened by congratulating Councillor Clements on his appointment as Vice-Chair.

The Director of Legal, Policy and Governance and Monitoring Officer reiterated the purpose of the Standards Committee. He said that Members who were familiar with the report would be aware that there was usually around 6 - 7 issues included. He said that over the last 6 months there had been no reported issues, as everyone had been impeccably behaved.

The Director of Legal, Policy and Governance and Monitoring Officer said that the one issue reported in 2025 had been investigated, and that the independent advisor had identified no breach.

Councillor Parsad-Wyatt agreed with the Director of Legal, Policy and Governance and Monitoring Officer, and congratulated all East Herts Councillors for being on their best behaviour. He said that following on from the meeting held in July 2024, he thought that it had been agreed moving forward that any complaints from a resident, Parish Council or District Council would be shared, in order to give the Committee the context on the type of behaviours involved, as long as the information disclosed did not identify the individual.

The Director of Legal, Policy and Governance and Monitoring Officer apologised for not including this information, he said that he did not recall this specific action, but he did however recall that withdrawn complaints would be added to the report moving forward.

The Director of Legal, Policy and Governance and Monitoring Officer Members gave a verbal report on the one complaint which was from a resident towards a District Councillor.

Councillor Clements asked if the large turnover of councillors in the last couple of years had resulted in a difference in behaviours from councillors, thus resulting in fewer complaints. The Director of Legal, Policy and Governance and Monitoring Officer stated that in his five

and a half years tenure, he had not known of a lower level of complaints, and that hoped that the cycle of good conduct would continue.

Councillor Carter asked for an update on how the legislation in Standards Committees would operate under the proposed unity authority working and asked if the process would change.

The Director of Legal, Policy and Governance and Monitoring Officer said that if the unity authority was set up tomorrow the legislation would be the same. He said that the current government were looking at changing the standards regime, particularly around repercussions of complaints that were upheld against councillors. He said that the current strongest sanction was censure, no matter how egregious the breach was. He said that central government were looking at introducing additional, and more vigorous sanctions, such as suspensions and exclusions from committees.

The Director of Legal, Policy and Governance and Monitoring Officer referred Members to the independent person who stated that he was actively involved in the works currently being undertaken by central government. He said that in 2011 the Localism Act changed, permitting councils to follow the code which they wanted. He said that there was however an imminent proposal to go back to one single mandatory code of conduct.

The independent person said that regarding sanctions, central government was looking at suspensions under certain circumstances, and the more contentious possibility of disqualifications. He said that there was a thin line in this process ensuring that the public had some sort of demonstrable redress, and balancing that against the need not to interfere with the democratic mandate.

The independent person said that there were complexities in and around the entire process that required careful consideration, but these were not insurmountable. He

said that other areas that could be tightened up in supporting standards of conduct were the declaration of office, managing the expectation of high standards for the role of a councillors.

Councillor Carter asked when there would be a decision on the implementation of the new standards. The independent person said a response was imminent, the caveat being dependant on other competing interests which could elongate the process.

Members then discussed if they were considered a councillor 24/7. They debated the impact of things which members said, and how these were perceived, and the fine line that needed to be understood regarding this.

The Director of Legal, Policy and Governance and Monitoring Officer reiterated to the committee that before they could breach the code of conduct, members had to be acting in their capacity as a councillor. He summarised by saying that a councillor was not a councillor 24 hours a day.

Councillor Stowe observed the lack of complaints and said that the pushing back complaints to the parish and town councils had potentially made this difference. The Director of Legal, Policy and Governance and Monitoring Officer agreed that the new element of the complaints procedure, being local resolution, had been positive.

It was moved by Councillor Parsad-Wyatt, and Seconded by Councillor Smith that the recommendation, as detailed, be approved. After being put to the meeting and a vote taken, this motion was declared CARRIED.

RESOLVED – that the committee received the report and provided any observations to the Director of Legal, Policy and Governance and Monitoring Officer.

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There was no urgent business.

The meeting closed at 7.23 pm

Chairman

Date

East Herts Council Report

Standards Committee

Date of meeting: Wednesday 21 January 2026

Report by: James Ellis – Director for Legal, Policy and Governance and Monitoring Officer

Report title: Standards Update

Ward(s) affected: (All Wards);

Summary – The report updates Members of the Committee on standards issues generally.

RECOMMENDATIONS THAT:

- a) The Committee receive the report and provide any observations to the Director for Legal, Policy and Governance and Monitoring Officer.

1.0 Proposal(s)

- 1.1 As above

2.0 Background

- 2.1 Within its terms of reference, the Standards Committee has a function “to promote and maintain high standards of conduct of Members and Co-opted Members of the Council” and “to receive reports from the Monitoring Officer and assess the operation and effectiveness of the Members’ Code of Conduct”.
- 2.2 Paragraph 7.5.1 of the Constitution also states that “The Monitoring Officer will present a general report on standards matters at each Committee meeting, updating the Committee on the workload of the Monitoring Officer and current standards issues”.

2.3 The Committee will therefore receive update reports from the Monitoring Officer on matters that relate to, or assist to govern, Member conduct.

East Herts complaints/ issues update

2.4 There have been five complaints made to the Monitoring Officer since the last report to the Standards Committee on 16 July 2025, which are as follows:

Complaint about: Parish/Town or District Councillor	Summary of complaint	Action taken
Complaint 02/2025 Complaint against a District Councillor made by two fellow District Councillors	Inappropriate social media post.	No acting in capacity.
Complaint 03/2025 Complaint against a District Councillor made by three Parish Councillors	Inappropriate social media post.	No breach found.
Complaint 04/2025 Complaint against a Parish Councillor made by a member of the public.	Inappropriate social media post.	Referred back to attempt local resolution under paragraph 5.2.1 of the Procedure
Complaint 05/2025 Complaint against a Town Councillor made by a local business.	Misuse of position as a councillor.	Referred back to attempt local resolution under paragraph 5.2.1 of the Procedure
Complaint 06/2025 Complaint against a District Councillor made	Inappropriate social media post.	Ongoing

by a member of the public.		
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Strengthening the standards and conduct framework

2.5 At the last meeting of the Standards Committee, members asked for an update on central government's proposed reform of the standards regime, which the Monitoring Officer responded was still with central government and there was nothing to bring forward to members at that time.

2.6 On 11 November 2025, however, the Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government (MHCLG) released the outcome of its consultation on strengthening the standards and conduct framework for local authorities in England¹

2.7 The core reforms MHCLG says it will take forward are as follows:

2.7.1 A nationally prescribed mandatory Code of Conduct.

MHCLG proposes to legislate so it can set a mandatory code in regulations, intended to apply across all types/tiers (including co-optees).

2.7.2 Formal Standards Committees with stronger, clearer functions. MHCLG proposes to require principal authorities to formally constitute a standards committee (or appropriate sub-committee for standards cases).

2.7.3 Transparency: publication of outcomes. MHCLG's position is that authorities should publish a list of allegations only after:

- a full investigation, and

¹ [Strengthening the standards and conduct framework for local authorities in England – consultation results and government response - GOV.UK](#)

- a standards committee determination whether to uphold or not uphold, plus any sanction, so allegations aren't publicised mid-investigation.

2.7.4 Investigations to continue even if a member resigns/stands down.

MHCLG says it will require (subject to legal restrictions) that investigations be completed and that findings/decisions be published even if the member stands down, including publishing "no case to answer" outcomes to exonerate where appropriate.

2.7.5 Supporting complainants and others affected by misconduct.

MHCLG say that the current framework has "virtually no reference" to complainants/victims and that that imbalance needs correcting. MHCLG says its best practice guidance will include recommended actions to support individuals through the process, and it will explore an independent confidential helpline for complainants

2.8 MHCLG are also looking to introduce new sanctions, those being:

2.8.1 Suspension and related sanctions. MHCLG proposes to legislate for a power to suspend elected members for serious code breaches for up to 6 months. There will also be an option to withhold allowances for the most serious breaches, and to impose premises/facilities bans, either alongside suspension or as standalone sanctions.

2.8.2 Interim suspension for the most serious cases. MHCLG proposes interim suspension powers where allegations are of a serious criminal nature and subject to police investigation / pending sentencing, with statutory grounds including seriousness and risk of harm (including reputational/safeguarding considerations). • Interim suspension would be capped at an initial 3 months, with ongoing review required if unresolved.

2.8.3 Disqualification for repeat serious misconduct. MHCLG intends to legislate so that if a member/co-optee receives the maximum 6-month suspension twice within 5 years, they can be disqualified.

Appeals and Right for Review

2.9 It is also proposed to have a route of appeal, as currently the only recourse is to take matters to the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman, who will only consider if there has been maladministration in how the matter was considered.

2.10 Under the proposals there will be a two-stage structure:

- a local “right for review”, then
- access to a new national appeals function.

2.11 The national function is intended to hear appeals by members against suspension / allowance withholding and appeals by complainants where they believe a complaint was mishandled, but only after the local review route has been exhausted.

Likely Impact on Councils

2.12 If the proposals are implemented as described, it is likely that standards work in the future will feel less like an internal governance process and more like a structured quasi-judicial function.

2.13 Complaint volumes may rise, and processes will need to be more customer focused than they currently are. MHCLG explicitly links a more complainant-centred system with a likely increase in complaint volumes due to people having more confidence to come forward.

2.14 A built-in challenge route will increase second-looks and extend timelines. Both the right for review and the national appeals

function will likely result in longer end-to-end durations for high-stakes cases, consisting of initial investigation, sub-committee hearing, potential review, and eventually a potential national appeal.

- 2.15 Sanctions will become meaningful, potentially changing member behaviour due to it being a genuine deterrence.
- 2.16 Repeat serious misconduct that leads to disqualification has a direct electoral consequence in that, where a member is disqualified, there will be the need for a by-election. Where one group has a slender majority, this could also potentially affect the balance of power on the Council.

Implementation

- 2.17 There is not set time for when these proposals will be implemented, with MHCLG only stating that it intends to bring forward the necessary legislation “as soon as parliamentary time allows”.

3.0 Reason(s)

- 3.1 To ensure good governance within the Council.

4.0 Options

- 4.1 Not providing updates to Members on standards issues. This option is NOT RECOMMENDED, as to do so would weaken the Committee’s ability to adequately promote and maintain the Ethical Standards Framework, and to maintain an oversight of the council’s arrangements for dealing with complaints.

5.0 Risks

- 5.1 Appropriate reporting processes and policy frameworks help to ensure good governance of the Council and therefore reduce risk of poor practice or unsafe decision making.

6.0 Implications/Consultations

- 6.1 None.

Community Safety

No – None in this report.

Data Protection

No – All information pertaining to the complainants, Councillors complained of, and the Parish and Town Council involved have been removed to maintain confidentiality.

Equalities

No – Not in this report, however, where complainants make it known that they require assistance in making their complaints e.g. with language issues, the Monitoring Officer takes additional steps to assist them in this regard.

Environmental Sustainability

No – There are no environmental implications to this report.

Financial

No – There are no capital or revenue implications arising from the content of this report. Complaints are dealt with by the Monitoring Officer with some referrals externally should the Procedure indicate that this is appropriate or because of resource implication within the Directorate in dealing with this in-house.

Health and Safety

No – None in this report.

Human Resources

No – None in this report.

Human Rights

No – None in this report.

Legal

Yes – The Standards Committee has a function under paragraph 7.4.1(a) and (f) to promote and maintain high standards of conduct of

Members and Co-opted Members of the Council and receive reports from the Monitoring Officer and assess the operation and effectiveness of the Members' Code of Conduct.

Specific Wards

No

7.0 Background papers, appendices and other relevant material

- 7.1 [Strengthening the standards and conduct framework for local authorities in England – consultation results and government response](#)

Contact Officer

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Report Author

As above.