

East Herts Council Report

Standards Committee

Date of meeting: 1st July 2026

Report by: Jonathan Geall – Director for Communities and Monitoring Officer

Report title: Standards Update Report

Ward(s) affected: All wards

Summary

- The report updates members of the Standards Committee on standards-related complaints logged with the Monitoring Officer since the previous report to Committee on 21st January 2026 and gives a brief overview of how the governance of high standards of conduct within the new unitary authority, to be brought in by Local Government Reorganisation, is being prepared for.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR STANDARDS COMMITTEE: THAT:

- A. The Committee considers the complaints cases received over the last six months (paragraph 2.3) and provides any observations to the Director for Communities and Monitoring Officer; and**
- B. The Committee considers the preparations for maintaining standards in the new unitary authority to be brought in by Local Government Reorganisation (paragraphs 2.4 to 2.8) and the national picture regarding standards framework reform (paragraphs 2.9 and 2.10) and provides any observations to the Director for Communities and Monitoring Officer.**

1.0 Proposal(s)

- 1.1 Members provide oversight on standards-related matters.

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’.

East Herts complaints/ issues update

- 2.3 There have been two complaints logged with the Monitoring Officer since the last report to the Standards Committee on 21st January 2026. These are as follows:

Complaint about: Parish/Town or District Councillor	Summary of complaint	Action taken
Complaint 01 (2026/27) Complaint against two parish councillors (of the same parish council)	Complaint of parish councillors’ behaviour referred to the Monitoring Officer by the parish clerk	Referred back to attempt local resolution as required under the council’s Complaints Handling Procedure
Complaint 02 (2026/27) Complaint against a district councillor made by a member of the public	Complaint about actions attributed to the district councillor in a local press article	Determined that the councillor was not acting in the capacity of a member of East Herts Council and so the Code of Conduct was not engaged

Local Government Reorganisation

- 2.4 Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) as planned will see the abolition of East Herts Council, with its functions moving to a new

unitary authority operating over a larger geographical footprint. The legislative instrument that lays out the basis and process for this will be a Structural Changes Order (SCO).

- 2.5 The SCO will require that a shadow authority (of the unitary authority to cover this area) comes into being in May 2027 following elections and must, at its first meeting, adopt the necessary instruments to ensure good governance. Of particular relevance for this committee, the shadow authority must adopt a code of conduct, as required under section 27 of the Local Act 2011, at its first meeting.
- 2.6 To enable the existing local authorities to jointly work on the governance arrangements in readiness for the shadow authority coming into being, the SCO will require a joint committee of elected members from the existing councils to oversee implementation arrangements and prepare documents to hand over to the shadow authority for adoption.
- 2.7 The SCO will be subject to an 'affirmative' parliamentary process, that is, it must be approved by both Houses of Parliament. Thus, it is unlikely to come into effect until early 2027. Waiting for enactment of the SCO will give limited time for the joint committee to be formed and complete its business prior to dissolving after the May 2027 elections (to enable the shadow authority to prepare for the unitary authority). Therefore, across Hertfordshire, the option of voluntarily setting up joint committees in the autumn is being considered. East Herts Council is supportive of this, and the council's Monitoring Officer is engaged in work to establish the joint committee for this area.
- 2.8 At the next scheduled Standards Committee meeting in January 2027, members of the committee will be given an update on LGR preparations as they relate to standards matters.

Strengthening the standards and conduct framework

- 2.9 At its January 2026 meeting, the Standards Committee received an update on the government's proposal for 'Strengthening the standards and conduct framework'.
- 2.10 At the last committee meeting, members noted that with the consultation closing last November, there was an expectation of

implementation in summer to late 2026. To date, there have been no updates issued by the government. Officers will keep members informed of developments at the national level.

3.0 Reason(s)

3.1 To ensure oversight of the maintenance of standards and good governance.

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 As noted below.

Community Safety

None arising directly from this report.

Data Protection

All information pertaining to the complainants, councillors complained of and the parish / town council involved have been removed to maintain confidentiality.

Equalities

None arising directly from this report.

Environmental Sustainability

None arising directly from this report.

Financial

None arising directly from this report. It is worth noting that complaints are dealt with by the Monitoring Officer with some referrals externally should the Complaints Handling Procedure indicate that this is appropriate or because of resource implication within the Directorate in dealing with this in-house. Resources are available to cover this.

Health and Safety

None arising directly from this report.

Human Resources

None arising directly from this report.

Human Rights

None arising directly from this report.

Legal

Yes – The Standards Committee has a function under paragraph 7.4.1(a) and (f) of the council’s Constitution ‘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’ respectively. This report assists in fulfilling these functions.

Specific Wards

No.

7.0 Background papers, appendices and other relevant material

7.1 None.

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