

WEST LINDSEY DISTRICT COUNCIL

MINUTES of the Meeting of the Standards Committee held in the Council Chamber - The Guildhall on 16 December 2025 commencing at 6.00 pm.

Present: Councillor Adam Duguid (Chairman)
Councillor Mrs Mandy Snee (Vice-Chairman)

Councillor Trevor Bridgwood
Councillor Mrs Jackie Brockway
Councillor Karen Carless

Non-Voting Members Mr Stephen Beard – Independent Member

In Attendance:
Lisa Langdon Assistant Director People and Democratic (Monitoring Officer)
Katie Storr Democratic Services & Elections Team Manager

Apologies: Councillor Emma Bailey
Councillor Mrs Diana Rodgers
Mr Andrew Middleton– Independent Member

1 WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS

This being the first meeting on the newly formed Standards Committee, round table introductions were made, with special welcome to the Independent Member, Mr Beard.

2 MEMBERS' DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest made at this point in the meeting.

3 SUMMARY OF THE GOVERNMENT RESPONSE AND PROPOSED CHANGES TO STANDARDS REGIME

Members considered a report which provided an update to the Committee in relation to the current regime the Council operated to process complaints made about Elected Members. The report also informed the Standards Committee of the forthcoming changes suggested by the Government, as outlined in their Consultation Outcome "*Strengthening the standards and conduct framework for local authorities in England – consultation responses and government response*"

In presenting the report the Monitoring Officer highlighted the key points to take from the Consultation Outcome as detailed in section 2.2 report namely that the Government intended to legislate for a whole system reform which would include a mandatory Code of Conduct, the introduction of a “right of review” within the authority, powers to suspend Elected Members for a maximum of 6 months for serious code of conduct breaches, an option to withhold allowances during suspension for the most serious breaches, and the creation of a new national appeals function. The Government was also intending to legislate to disqualify an Elected Member if they received a 6-month suspension twice over a 5-year period.

No timetable for the changes had been indicated by the Government at this stage but further updates would be reported to the Standards Committee as required.

Members welcomed the intention to increase sanctions, noting how the current regime failed to deal with the most unacceptable behaviour.

Members asked a number of pertinent questions to which Officers responded accordingly; during which Officers confirmed that any changes would also apply to Parish Councillors; greater transparency and wider publication of complaints was likely to be expected given there would be more meaningful sanctions; it was anticipated the revised framework would feel more similar to that of the pre Localism Act. It was also confirmed that the Authority would need to review all of its operating procedures, again guidance regarding this matter was expected to be received, particularly given the rationale was to ensure all Authorities operated to the same expectations under the new framework. The Monitoring Officer did expect both the Committee’s and Officers’ workload in this area to increase with any regime change.

RESOLVED that the contents of the report and the Government’s consultation outcome document in relation to the standards and conduct framework for local authorities in England be noted.

4 PROPOSED AMENDMENTS TO ENGLISH DEVOLUTION AND COMMUNITY EMPOWERMENT BILL - ALLOWING THE RIGHT FOR COUNCILLORS NOT TO PUBLICLY DISCLOSE THEIR HOME ADDRESSES

Consideration was given to a report which updated the Committee on proposed amendments to the English Devolution and Community Empowerment Bill, which would allow Councillors the right not to publicly disclose their home addresses.

The current requirements in respect of this matter were outlined to the Committee and were prescribed by the Localism Act 2011. The requirement was often a cause for concern and confusion, particularly amongst Parish Councillors, and the Committee were provided with details as to how such matters were currently approached by West Lindsey District Council’s Monitoring Officer.

Committee noted that should the amendment to the English Devolution and Community Empowerment Bill be enacted, the Monitoring Officer would communicate this fact to all

Elected Members across the District and take appropriate action as necessary.

With no questions or comments, it was: -

RESOLVED that the update and the current approach adopted by West Lindsey's Monitoring Officer be noted.

5 OUTCOME OF AUDIT INTO CODE OF CONDUCT COMPLAINTS PROCESS

The Committee received a report which summarised the findings of the most recent Audit conducted into Code of Conduct Complaints process.

The Audit had concluded in January 2025 and found "Reasonable Assurance" within the process. As per practice the Audit findings, the outcome and associated actions were reported to the Governance and Audit Committee earlier in the year.

The Audit had proposed two medium level actions, as detailed in section 2 of the report, as well as some low priority actions as detailed in section 3 of the report. Committee noted that all arising recommendations from the Audit had been accepted and implemented.

Members asked a number of questions in relation to dealing with vexatious complaints and the impact on Council resources. In responding the Monitoring Officer confirmed, there were processes to address such matters, however in light of the first report presented to Committee, these would likely need to be reviewed. A pragmatic approach to resource was taken given, investigations were costly and often lacked satisfactory outcomes, as such informal resolutions, advice and guidance were commonly used.

In response to questions, the Monitoring Officer outlined the types of training Officers currently undertook and confirmed, she and the staff involved in the process had access to external training, as recommended by the Audit

RESOLVED that the contents of the report be noted.

6 ANALYSIS OF THE NUMBER, NATURE AND OUTCOME OF COMPLAINTS RECEIVED MAY 2025 TO-DATE (AND COMPARATIVE DATA)

Consideration was given to a report which presented data analysis of the number, nature and outcome of complaints received under the Code of Conduct Complaint Process for the current civic year to-date (May 2025 to 30 November 2025). The report also included comparative data for the same period (May 2024- 30 November 2024).

Section 2 of the report provided the report data in chart format. In presenting the report Officers advised of a correction to chart 1, in which the years had been transposed incorrectly. For clarity during the 2025/26 Civic Year a total of 9 formal complaints were received through the Code of Conduct Complaints process, compared to 10 for the same period the previous year.

Section 3 summarised the Monitoring Officer's current approach to enforcing the code, with

the Committee noting that local and informal resolutions were used wherever possible, in the main due to the imposable sanctions being limited. Furthermore, the Authority focussed efforts and activity on trying to achieve an outcome, and a change in behaviour and would seek to pursue this option over a hearing wherever possible. Three training sessions had been held for Parish Councillors the previous year.

Section 4 summarised evident trends during which Committee noted: -

- the number of complaints remained low and comparable to the same period the previous year.
- more complaints received against Parish Councillors than District Councillors, but to be expected given there are circa 700 parish councillors compared to 36 District Councillors)
- Respect, Bullying and Harassment most commonly cited in complaints
- Social media continued to feature regularly in a number of complaints.
- The majority of complaints resulted in a “no breach” determination being made at the initial assessment stage.

The Independent Person , who was required to be consulted on all complaints, addressed Committee and summarised the process undertaken at the assessment stage. He concurred with the trends detailed in the report and also spoke of the misunderstanding amongst the public of personal and private capacity.

Questions ensued, with the Monitoring Officer providing further detail of the training offered to Parish Councillors and the numbers attending. It was suggested this information could perhaps be displayed in future reports and /or on the Parish Councillor’s website.

On the whole, given the number of Elected Members which served West Lindsey, complaints were low with the vast majority of Councillors undertaking their duties accordingly.

Having been proposed and seconded, it was: -

RESOLVED that: -

- (a) the statistical data presented within the report be noted; and
- (b) a further report on the number, nature and outcome of complaints received during the whole of the 2025/26 civic year be received by the Committee at the end of the civic year.

The meeting concluded at 6.27 pm.

Chairman