

# TEIGNBRIDGE DISTRICT COUNCIL

## STANDARDS COMMITTEE

26 FEBRUARY 2020

Report Title	Update on Pending Changes to Standards Legislation
Purpose of Report	To provide an update on the pending changes proposed by central government to the powers available to local government standards committees.
Recommendation(s)	The Committee RESOLVES to note the report
Financial Implications	None
Legal Implications	As set out in the report
Risk Assessment	N/A
Climate Change Implications	N/A
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### 1. BACKGROUND

- 1.1 The Standards Committee (2015 – 2019) previously considered the recommendations to central government from the independent Committee for Standards in Public Life on 27 February 2019  
<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/local-government-ethical-standards-committee-publishes-report>. Changes to the Council's Code were made partly in response to that report in March 2019.
- 1.2 Members may recall that one of the significant findings of the 'Standards in Public Life' report was that bullying and harassment of individual politicians and officers was on the rise (including from other politicians) and that it was recommended that standards committees be provided with greater sanctions to effectively punish wrongdoers. .

### 2. UPDATE

- 2.1 It is understood that further to the consideration by the Local Government Association (LGA) of the report, recommendations on changes to the law will be formally considered by the Secretary of State this year. It seems that emphasis is being given to the specific recommendations seeking increases in the sanctions available to standards committees to address serious offences. This would include powers to suspension for a year, clarity on the ability to ban guilty parties from accessing council buildings or from attending meetings and take away any community funding.

2.2 It is anticipated that amendments to the existing ethical framework legislation will be implemented by the end of the year. In the meantime, the following general points / themes appear in respect to the updates on the progress of the report and anticipated changes to the law:

- The LGA has already produced several reports to provide advice for councillors who feel harassed or unsafe. See <https://www.local.gov.uk/councillors-guide-handling-intimidation> .
- The LGA has launched the Civility in Public Life project. This involves the spread of the DebateNotHate hashtag on social media to encourage polite political discourse and refers to a review of a model code of conduct for all councils which will be considered at the LGA annual conference in July 2020 which accords with the 'Standards in Public Life' report which recommended the re-introduction of a national model code – see <https://www.local.gov.uk/our-support/guidance-and-resources/civility-public-life-and-review-model-code-conduct>
- Nationally councils do not make best use of their Independent Persons (the Committee might want to consider this as part of its consideration of hearings which may remove any possible perception of political bias when adjudicating on alleged breaches of the high standards of conduct expected of councillors).
- Standards for councillors and officers should be viewed as a two way street – *'you should give respect if you want to receive it'*.
- Whilst the changes anticipated to sanctions for breaches of the code of conduct may still be some months' away, polarisation and vitriolic politics at central as well as the local government level is a significant driver behind the government's support for the reforms.