

**Teignbridge District Council
Governance Committee
Thursday 8th January 2026
Part i**

Proposed reform to the Standards Regime

Purpose of Report

To update Members on the proposed reform of the standards regime in England.

Recommendation(s)

The Committee to consider the information contained within the report and any proactive steps the Council can take in relation to the proposed reforms.

Financial Implications

See 4.1

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Legal Implications / Governance

See 4.2

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Risk Assessment

See 4.3

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Environmental/ Climate Change Implications

See 4.4

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Executive Member

Councillor John Parrott – Executive Member for Finance and Corporate

Background Reports

- [Strengthening the standards and conduct framework for local authorities in England – consultation results and government response - GOV.UK](#)
- [Tough new powers to clean up local politics - GOV.UK](#)

1. Introduction/Background

The Government launched a consultation in December 2024 to address concerns about the effectiveness of the current local government standards framework. Feedback highlighted:

- Inconsistent application of codes of conduct across councils.
- Limited sanctions for serious misconduct.
- Erosion of public trust in local governance.

The Government announced on 11 November 2025 ([Strengthening the standards and conduct framework for local authorities in England - GOV.UK](#)) a response to the consultation and proposed reforms which aim to create a clearer, mandatory, and enforceable conduct system for all tiers of local government in England, from parish councils to combined authorities.

2. Current Framework

The Localism Act 2011 established the current standards and conduct framework for local government. The requirements under the Localism Act include:

- Adoption of a Code of Conduct consistent with the Nolan Principles
- Rules relating to register of interests and the disclosure of pecuniary and non-pecuniary interests.
- Arrangements to investigate allegations of breaches of the Code of Conduct and the role of the Independent Person(s).

It has been widely regarded that the current standards regime has flaws including a lack of meaningful sanctions and an inconsistent approach across many local authorities.

3. Main Proposed Changes

Mandatory prescribed Code of Conduct

A nationally prescribed minimum Code of Conduct will apply to all local authorities. This will include sections on discrimination, bullying, harassment, social media use, public conduct when claiming to represent the Council and the use of local authority resources. The mandatory code will include a behavioural code, the requirement for elected members and co-opted members to co-operate with code of conduct investigations, and that submitting multiple vexatious complaints would be a code of conduct breach.

Councils may adopt additional provisions and adopt their own guidance and other protocol, but the core standards will be uniform.

Strengthened Governance Structures

All principal authorities will be required to establish a formal Standards Committee, strengthening the current framework that just requires local authorities to have “arrangements” in place to investigate or make decisions on allegations of misconduct. The

Government state this will support consistency of decisions and support the development of expertise in handling allegations.

The Government is also considering the membership of the Standards Committees, including allowing co-opted Independent Persons to have voting rights and for the Committee to be chaired by an Independent Person.

The Government also believes that local authorities be required to publish a list of code of conduct allegations following full investigation and a standards committee determination on whether to uphold the complaint or not, and as appropriate any sanction applied. This would apply even if a Member resigns from a Council during any investigation.

Empowering individuals to come forward

The current standards and conduct framework contains little reference to the role of complainants or victims of misconduct in the system. The Government's consultation stated there is no consistency in the level of personal support offered to the elected or co-opted member in a code of conduct complaint situation – a few reported receiving support from either or both the Monitoring Officer or the Independent Person but most stated that they had received no support.

The Government consultation also highlighted that potential victims of misconduct felt unable to come forward due to the sense that a complaint was pointless due to the lack of meaningful sanctions and that behaviours might escalate and be personally directed to them. Individuals raising a complaint wanted to feel confident that they would be taken seriously and listened to.

The Government will introduce best practice guidance for complaint handling including communications with those involved to ensure support is available at key stages and legislate for a new "right to review" for both complainants and subject members, allowing cases to be reassessed.

Sanctions for Misconduct

Government considers a serious code of conduct breach would be behaviours that pose a significant reputational risk to the council, undermine the public's trust in local democracy, and/or where evidence exists that the behaviours are negatively impacting the health, wellbeing, and safety of fellow elected members and officers.

However, this does raise concerns that the Committee must be neutral and transparent, in response the Government proposes to ensure the political independence of code of conduct case decisions, and the establishment of a national function creating a route to appeal a local decision once the local 'right to review' process has been completed.

The Government proposes to legislate to:

- Provide authorities with a power to suspend elected members for serious code of conduct breaches for a maximum of 6 months, with the option to withhold allowances and institute premises and facilities bans where deemed appropriate.
- Confirm that a decision to sanction with a period of suspension, and/or institute premises and facilities bans can only be taken by a Standards Committee, following receipt and consideration of a formal investigation report, and following consideration of the views of the Independent Person.

- Enable Standards Committees to have the discretion to withhold elected member allowances and ban disruptive members from using council facilities or entering property, either as standalone sanctions or in addition to suspension.
- Give authorities the power to place an elected member or co-opted member on interim suspension (for an initial 3 months and subject to ongoing review) in response only to serious code of conduct allegations subject to external investigation, from the police or other bodies within the criminal justice system, and/or where a court hearing and sentencing is awaited.
- Disqualify an elected member or co-opted member if they receive a sanction of suspension for the maximum period of 6 months twice over a 5-year period.

4. Implications, Risk Management and Climate Change Impact

4.1 Finance

No direct financial implications arise from this report.

4.2 Legal / Governance

There are no direct legal implications arising from this report. The Government intends to introduce new legislation to enact the proposed reforms but it is unknown when that will be. The proposed reforms might necessitate the need to change the Constitution and Terms of Reference for the Governance Committee in relation to its Standards role and the role of the Independent Persons.

4.3 Risk Management

There are no direct risk management implications arising from this report but Members will be aware that within the Council's Risk Register includes a specific risk of Breach of the Code of Conduct by Members (CP11). This will need to be updated once the proposed reforms are enacted.

4.4 Environmental and Climate Change

No direct environment or climate change implications arise from this report.

5. Alternative Options

The report is presented for information, there is no decision for the Committee at this stage.

6. Conclusion

The Committee is asked to consider the information contained within the report and any proactive steps the Council can take in relation to the proposed reforms to the Standards Regime in England.