

Governance Committee Annual Report 2025/26

1. Foreword

Since being established by Full Council, the Committee with members from all parties has met regularly with an agenda to identify and suggest appropriate changes to the Council's Constitution.

Combining the Standards Committee and the Procedures Committee into the Governance Committee has allowed Members to have a wider oversight of the governance of the Council and issues that are important to Members and about Members.

As seen in Section 5, in just a few meetings, the Committee has achieved a lot over the past year, firstly to formalise its working arrangements and then to improve the transparency of its work and then its usual business.

As Chair of the Governance Committee, I wish to thank all those involved in the important work of the Committee.

Councillor Phil Bullivant, Chair of the Governance Committee

2. Introduction

This Annual Report provides an overview of the work undertaken by the Governance Committee during the 2025/26 municipal year. The Committee is responsible for advising the Council on the operation of its Constitution, Governance and decision-making arrangements, the Council's Member Development programme, on the adoption and revision of the Members' Code of Conduct and for monitoring the operation of the code.

The Committee was formally constituted following a decision by Full Council on Tuesday 29th July 2025 to merge the former Standards and Procedures Committees into the Governance Committee.

In the 2025/26 Municipal Year, the Committee met on 4 occasions:

1. 2nd July 2025 (as the Standards Committee)
2. 2nd October 2025
3. 8th January 2026
4. 23rd April 2026

3. Role and Purpose of the Governance Committee

The Governance Committee's responsibilities include:

- To review the operation of the Constitution, Standing Orders, conventions, codes, protocols, calendar of meetings and working practices.
- To make recommendations to the Council to make changes to the Constitution.

- To oversee the Council's programmes for member development and training.
- To make recommendations to the Council on its Scheme of Members' Allowances.
- To consider of maladministration and Public Interest Reports issued by the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman.
- To act as the appropriate Committee to deal with Code of Conduct Complaints against Members to discharge the Council's duty under Section 28 of the Localism Act 2011 by:
 - Monitoring the effectiveness of the Member Code of Conduct.
 - Promoting high standards of ethical behaviour.
 - Considering allegations of misconduct and determining appropriate action.

The Committee is primarily supported by the Monitoring Officer, Legal Services and Democratic Services in carrying out its work.

4. Membership of the Committee

- Chair: Councillor Phil Bullivant
- Vice Chair: Councillor Andy Henderson
- Councillors Chris Clarence, John Nutley, Charles Nuttall and David Palethorpe.
- Independent Person(s) (not voting): Sandra Geneder, Hazel Elliott and Dr Geraldine Sharp.

The contribution of the Independent Persons continues to be invaluable in ensuring fairness, proportionality, and transparency in the Code of Conduct complaint process.

N.B. Councillor Charles Nuttall was Chair of the Committee and Councillor Phil Bullivant was Vice Chair of the Committee from 20th May to 29th July 2025. After being appointed to the Executive Committee, Councillor Nuttall relinquished the Chair and Councillor Phil Bullivant was appointed as Chair of the Committee on 29th July 2025, and Councillor Andy Henderson as Vice Chair.

5. Work of the Committee in 2025/26

During the year, the Committee:

- Reviewed the Appeal System within the Code of Conduct Complaints process.
- Confirmed of the Committee Terms of Reference.
- Determined of four Code of Conduct Complaints after independent investigation.
- Agreed a schedule of meetings and to meet quarterly.
- Approved the Arrangements under the Code of Conduct complaints procedure to accompany the Code of Conduct complaints procedure.
- Agreed to publish an Annual Report of the Governance Committee
- Agreed a regular publication of Code of Conduct complaints information to Committee meetings.
- Agreed to webcast Governance Committee meetings, improving the transparency of meetings.

- Agreed to grant dispensations to Councillors in relation to Local Government Reorganisation and Devolution.
- Reviewed the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman Annual Letter 2024/2025
- Received regular updates on the work of the Constitution Review Working Group, publishing the notes of the Working Group to improve the transparency of the Group.
- Agreed to grant a general dispensation in relation to the Members' Allowance Scheme.
- Agreed recommendations from the Independent Remuneration Panel (IRP) and recommended these to Full Council for adoption.
- Considered the proposed reforms to the Standards Regime in England and the implications for these for the Council.
- Consideration of the introduction of a Councillor Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) checks scheme for Members.

6. Code of Conduct Complaints and Casework

6.1 Overview

By law, the Council must make arrangements to investigate and determine allegations of breaches of the Code of Conduct. As a District Council, we also do this on behalf of Town and Parish Councils in the Teignbridge area.

In the 2025/26 Municipal Year:

- **34** complaints received about Member Conduct (this includes District, Town and Parish Councillors).
- 14 were from Members of the Public, 12 were from Elected Members, 4 from Council staff/officers, 4 were others
- **23** were resolved through no further action or were invalid complaints
- **2** were resolved through informal resolution
- **1** proceeded to formal investigation and was determined by the Governance Committee
- **8** are currently at different stages within the process to be resolved and/or determined.

4 complaints received in the 2024/25 municipal year were considered by the Governance Committee.

6.2 Themes Identified

Whilst most complaints were based on individual cases, common themes across the year included:

- Use of social media and the balance regarding Member's Freedom of Speech and Article 10 Rights.

- Civility and respect amongst Members.
- Supporting Town and Parish Councils with governance issues, which are not all directly related to the Code of Conduct.

The Monitoring Officer continues to encourage early resolution and acts to ensure fairness and appropriate decision making.

7. Training and Development

The Committee oversaw or supported:

- The adoption of the Member Development Strategy.
- Member Code of Conduct training in November 2025, attended by 20 Members.
 - Members rated the overall session 4.8/5.
 - Members rated if the overall session met their expectations 4.8/5.
 - Members understanding of the content (standards, code of conduct and interests) rose from 4.0/5 before the session to 4.7/5 after.
- Regular updates on Member Training and Briefings, including attendance at sessions and feedback on sessions are reported at each Governance Committee meeting.
- Consideration of the Councillor Digital Skills Framework, highlighting the proficiency of Councillor's digital skills and opportunities for further training.

8. Forward Plan 2026/27

Next year, the Committee intends to:

- Annual Review of the Code of Conduct Complaint Process.
- Review the Member–Officer Protocol.
- Consider the adoption of the LGA's Debate Not Hate Campaign.
- Consider any implications of the Government's proposed reforms to the Standards Regime.
- Continue to receive regular updates on Member Training and Briefing
- Continue to receive regular updates on Code of Conduct Complaints received.
- Following the winding up of the Constitution Review Working Group, take a more prominent role in reviewing the Constitution and recommending changes to Full Council.

9. Conclusion

The Committee wishes to thank Councillors, Officers, and Independent Persons for their contribution to this important area of governance.