

Report to: Council



Date of Meeting 15 July 2026

Document classification: Part A Public Document

Exemption applied: None

Review date for release n/a

Annual Report of the Standards Committee

Report summary:

To review the work of the Standards Committee for the civic term 2025/26 and submit the report to Council.

Is the proposed decision in accordance with:

Budget Yes ☒ No ☐

Policy Framework Yes ☒ No ☐

Recommendation:

1. That Council note the the Annual Report, outlining the work undertaken by the Standards Committee for the civic term 2025/26.

Reason for recommendation:

To inform Council of the work of the committee during the year.

Officer: Melanie Wellman, Director of Governance and Monitoring Officer

Portfolio(s) (check which apply):

- ☐ Climate Action and Emergency Response
- ☐ Coast, Country and Environment
- ☒ Council and Corporate Co-ordination
- ☐ Communications and Democracy
- ☐ Economy
- ☐ Finance and Assets
- ☐ Strategic Planning
- ☐ Sustainable Homes and Communities
- ☐ Culture, Leisure, Sport and Tourism

Equalities impact Low Impact

Climate change Low Impact

Risk: Low Risk;

Links to background information n/a

Link to [Council Plan](#)

Priorities (check which apply)

- ☒ A supported and engaged community
 - ☐ Carbon neutrality and ecological recovery
 - ☐ Resilient economy that supports local business
 - ☒ Financially secure and improving quality of services
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Report in full

1. The Standards Committee

- 1.1 The Standards Committee believes that high ethical standards are crucial in the work of any public body and that robust application is important. This summary report shows how the Committee has undertaken these tasks during the last 12 months and how it continues to contribute to and offer direction to shape the governance, culture, and ethos of the organisation.
- 1.2 The Standards Committee comprises of 7 elected councillors (plus one reserve); Co-opted non-voting members include 2 Independent Persons; 3 Independent Representatives and 3 Town/Parish Representatives.
- 1.3 Members of the Committee work together to promote the importance of high standards of behaviour and systems of governance to create a climate where complaints or problems are rare. The Chair of the Committee is held automatically by the Chair of the Council recognising the impartiality of that role. The Council has long recognised the added value brought by an independent voice on its Standards Committee, reinforced by the Co-opted membership and Independent Persons.

2. Purpose and Remit of the Committee

- 2.1 The Committee acts as champion of the Council's ethical standards and is responsible for promoting and maintaining high standards of conduct. The Constitution makes it clear that any member of the public may complain to the Monitoring Officer about an alleged breach of the Members' Code of Conduct. The Council has in place appropriate arrangements for dealing with complaints against Members and a mechanism to deal with allegations that Members may have breached the Code of Conduct. The Council has appointed 'Independent Persons' in line with the requirements of the Localism Act 2011. More information about the Code of Conduct and the complaints process can be found on the Council's website.
- 2.2 The remit of the committee includes:
 - (a) Advising on the discretionary elements of the Local Code of Conduct; including monitoring and updating.
 - (b) Advising on the implementation of the Local Code of Conduct, including the training of Members in matters of conduct and advice to Members on such issues as the treatment of Disclosable Pecuniary Interests and personal interests and more general conduct issues.
 - (c) To the extent allowed by law, making arrangements for Members to receive dispensations to speak on, or participate in, matters in which they have interests.
 - (d) Appointing such Sub Committees (including Membership thereof) as appropriate to discharge the functions.

- 2.3 As part of the Committees role, the training of District, Town and Parish Councillors on the Code of Conduct is an important function. A number of sessions were provided following the last elections in 2023 and further sessions took place before Christmas, in March and a session for Towns and Parishes will be offered between now and June 2026.

3. Meetings in 2025/26

- 3.1 The Committee met twice in 2025/26, two meetings were cancelled, one due to lack of quorum and there were no Standards Assessment Sub-Committee meetings to assess complaints or Standards Hearings Sub-Committee meetings to hear complaints. It is unfortunate that the January 2026b meeting had to be cancelled due to weather issues. All Group Leaders have been reminded of the importance of their councillors giving priority to these meetings.

4. Monitoring of complaint caseload

- 4.1 The committee continued to monitor at each meeting the scale and type of complaints under the Code of Conduct, in order to identify any trend or emerging issues that warranted further action or support. This reporting provides enough detail to the Committee on trend without impacting on confidential information and ensure that the Committee is open and transparent.
- 4.2 In 2025 the Monitoring Officer received 8 Code of Conduct complaints. Six of those related to District Councillors and 2 related to Town and Parish Councillors. 7 of those complaints alleged lack of courtesy and respect, six alleged use of position, 4 alleged bullying and harassment, 4 alleged disrepute and one alleged a failure to declare interests.
- 4.3 Following an initial assessment of the complaints, one was rejected at Stage 1 of the process because it related to the day to day running of a Town/Parish Council over which we have no jurisdiction. Following consultation with one of the Independent Persons, informal resolution (training) occurred in two cases and no further action was taken in the remainder. No complaints were referred for investigation.
- 4.4 In terms of number of complaints, the 8 in 2025 compared with 9 in 2024, 12 in 2023, 32 in 2022, 27 in 2021 and 36 in 2020. This shows a clear reduction in the number of complaints being made year on year. This is due, in part, to a reduction in the number of complaints coming forward but also is due to the work being carried out by the Monitoring Officer and their team, in trying to resolve issues before they escalate to a formal complaint.
- 4.5 In terms of the number of complaints being referred for investigation, there were 8 in 2020, 4 in 2021, 5 in 2022 and none in 2023, 2024 and 2025. Again, this also shows a reduction in the number of investigations needing to be undertaken.

5. Resolving complaints before they escalate presentation

- 5.1 A presentation on the potential ways of resolving complaints before they escalate was presented to the Committee by the Monitoring Officer in 2024/25 and to the new Co-opted Members in March 2026. The same presentation had previously been shared with DALC at their conference in 2024 and means of dissemination were discussed.

6. Response to Government consultation on changes to the Standards regime

- 6.1 A detailed response was compiled between the Monitoring Officer and the committee in response to the government consultation on changes to the Standards regime which included the following aspects for reform:-

- Reintroduction of suspension powers;
- Disqualification for repeat offenders;
- Right of appeal;
- National Appeals body;
- Mandatory minimum Code of Conduct;

- Interim suspension powers:-
- Empowering victims.

The Committee have since considered the Government's response to the consultation which is recommending a number of changes to the current regime including increased sanctions. These changes will require a change in legislation and further details are awaited.

7. Re-appointment of Independent Persons, Independent Representatives and Town/Parish Representatives

- 7.1 The Independent Representatives, Independent Persons and Town/Parish Representatives play a critical role on the Committee and their input is highly valued by the Committee. With the exception of one Independent Representative and one Parish Representative, a recruitment exercise was carried out in late 2025 to appoint 2 Parish Representatives, 2 Independent Representatives and 2 Independent Persons. Shortlisted applicants were interviewed by a Sub-Committee of the Standards Committee and appointment of the recommended candidates was submitted to and approved by Full Council in December 2025. Training of those individuals took place with the Monitoring Officer in March 2026.

8. Dispensations

- 8.1 Dispensations were granted to dual-hatted County councillors and to councillors who also work for another local authority in Devon, to allow them to speak and vote on any matter before the Council and / or Committee relating to local government reorganisation in Devon. This ensures that residents are not disenfranchised and those councillors can continue to play a key role in debating what is a matter of key significance for everyone residing in East Devon.

9. Looking Ahead

- 9.1 Looking ahead, much of the work of the Committee is demand led. However, it will continue to monitor adherence to the Council's ethical governance framework. It will also identify and support provision of regular training and refresher events for elected councillors of the Council (particularly on the importance of the Code of Conduct and high standards of ethics and probity), review policies and procedures, as well as ensuring that the Committee itself remains updated on best practice in the local authority sector.
- 9.2 Following the government consultation, it is hoped that changes will be made, in the near future, that will enhance the Standards regime and enable tougher sanctions to be imposed by Standards Committees in the more serious cases of breaches of the Code of Conduct and which lead to improvements in councillor performance generally.
- 9.3 In order to keep members of the Committee fully informed on standards issues, the Committee will receive regular updates on emerging best practice elsewhere in the country from other authorities' standards decisions and caselaw and looking forward will also look to share that best practice with Town and Parish Councils.

Financial implications:

There are no financial implications directly arising from this annual report.

Legal implications:

There are no legal implications directly arising from this annual report.