

Slough Borough Council

REPORT TO: Standards Committee

DATE: 8th October 2025

SUBJECT: Strengthening the standards and conduct framework for local authorities in England

CHIEF OFFICER: Sukdave Ghuman, Monitoring Officer

CONTACT OFFICER: Nick Pontone, Principal Democratic Services Officer

WARD(S): All

EXEMPT: No

APPENDICES: None

1. Summary and Recommendations

1.1 This is an information report to update the committee on the government proposals on the local authority standards and conduct framework, which is reviewing whether stronger sanctions against poor conduct should be introduced. An initial update was provided to the Committee on 20th March 2025 as part of the Schedule of Complaints under the Code of Conduct report.

1.2 The government published a consultation on reforming England's local government standards system in December 2024. The consultation has closed and the government's response is awaited. The consultation suggests that the government is in favour of introducing stronger sanctions and to make other changes to the standards regime including to committees and the requirements for transparency of the outcome of complaints about councillors.

Recommendation:

The Committee is recommended to note the update.

Reason for Recommendation:

The Standards Committee has responsibility for the standards framework at the Council and so is the appropriate body to receive updates on these matters.

2. Commissioners Review

This report is outside the scope for pre-publication commissioner review; please check the [Commissioners' instruction 5 to CLT to sign off papers](#) for further details.

3. Report

Introduction

3.1 On 18 December 2024, the Government published a consultation paper on strengthening the standards and conduct framework for local authorities in

England. Any changes to legislation that followed this consultation would apply to all local authorities in England. The consultation stated that:

“The government considers that the current local authority standards and conduct regime is in certain key aspects ineffectual, inconsistently applied, and lacking in adequate powers to effectively sanction members found in serious breach of their codes of conduct.”

3.2 As a reminder to the Committee, the main elements proposed and consulted on include:

a) The introduction of a mandatory minimum code of conduct for local authorities in England

The government has signalled its intention to introduce “a prescribed model code which covers important issues such as discrimination, bullying, and harassment, social media use, public conduct when claiming to represent the council, and use of authority resources could help to uphold consistently high standards of public service in councils across the country and convey the privileged position of public office. It could also provide clarity for the public on the consistent baseline of ethical behaviour they have a right to expect.”

b) A requirement that all principal authorities convene formal standards committees to make decisions on code of conduct breaches, and publish the outcomes of all formal investigations

Local authorities in England have a duty under section 27 of the Localism Act 2011 to maintain high standards of conduct, however, currently there is no legal requirement to have a standards committee. Following the introduction of the 2011 Act, Slough Borough Council decided to integrate standards into a new Audit & Corporate Governance Committee, with a Standards Determination Sub-Committee being established to hear any complaints about councillors following a referral by the Monitoring Officer. A separate Standards Committee was then re-established in 2022 on the recommendation of the Lead Commissioner following the then DLUHC Governance Review and Secretary of State’s Directions.

The recent consultation asked for views on whether standards committees should be required to have at least one Independent Person, including whether an Independent Person should have voting rights and/or chair the committee.

It was also proposed that local authorities should be required to publish annually a list of allegations of code of conduct breaches and any investigation outcomes.

c) The introduction of the power for all local authorities (including combined authorities) to suspend councillors or mayors found in serious breach of their code of conduct and, as appropriate,

interim suspension for the most serious and complex cases that may involve police investigations

The new proposals being consulted on could significantly strengthen the sanctions available by permitting councils to suspend councillors from office for up to six months for serious breaches of the code. Councils would also be able to suspend allowances paid to suspended councillors. There could be an additional power to impose an interim suspension of up to three months whilst a case is being investigated. Councillors who were suspended on an interim basis would continue to receive their allowances. The interim suspension period could be deducted from any period of full suspension that was subsequently imposed.

Further potential changes include introducing a clear legal power to prevent councillors from making use of council facilities, as a less onerous sanction than suspension. The government says this could “be beneficial in cases of behavioural or financial misconduct, ensuring that suspended councillors do not misuse resources or continue egregious behaviour”.

d) A new category of disqualification for gross misconduct and those subject to a sanction of suspension more than once in a 5-year period

e) A role for a national body to deal with appeals

It is proposed that there be a right of appeal for any councillor suspended, which must be accessed within five days of the decision to suspend. It is expected that this would be heard by a (new or existing) national body.

3.3 In addition, the consultation sought views on how to empower victims affected by councillor misconduct to come forward and what additional support would be appropriate to consider.

3.4 The government is still considering the feedback from the consultation and is expected to publish its response in the coming months. The committee will be kept updated on the proposed changes.

4. Implications of the Recommendation

4.1 Financial implications

4.1.1 There are no financial implications arising from this information report.

4.2 Legal implications

4.2.1 The current standards regime in England was introduced in the Localism Act 2011 and came into effect in 2012. Section 27 of the Act requires local authorities to promote and maintain high standards of conduct by members and co-opted members of the authority. Each local authority must publish a

code of conduct, and it must cover the registration of pecuniary interests, the role of an 'independent person' to investigate alleged breaches, and what sanctions are to be imposed on councillors who breach the code.

- 4.2.2 The Council's current arrangements, including the Councillors' Code of Conduct and establishment of a Standards Committee are compliant with this legislation and guidance, and has sought to take account of best practice in the local government sector. The relevant codes and policies would be reviewed following any changes to the legislation relating to standards and conduct.

4.3 Risk management implications

- 4.3.1 There are no risk management implications arising from this report. Any future decisions to change the standards regime would include consideration of any risks.

4.4 Environmental implications

- 4.4.1 None.

4.5 Equality implications

- 4.5.1 There are no equalities implications arising from this information report.

5. Background Papers

None.