

STAFFORDSHIRE MOORLANDS DISTRICT COUNCIL

Standards Committee

15 July 2022

TITLE:	Government Response to the Committee on Standards in Public Life Review of Local Government Ethical Standards
PORTFOLIO HOLDER:	Councillor Paul Roberts - Council Leader
CONTACT OFFICER:	Linden Vernon - Head of Democratic Services
WARDS INVOLVED:	Non-Specific

Appendices Attached:

- Appendix A** - Local Government Ethical Standards Committee on Standards in Public Life
Appendix B - Government Response

1. Reason for the Report

- 1.1 To inform the Committee of the Government response to the Committee on Standards in Public Life review of local government ethical standards.

2. Recommendation

- 2.1 That the Committee notes the contents of the report.

3. Executive Summary

- 3.1 The Committee on Standards in Public Life (CSPL) considers that robust standards arrangements are needed to safeguard local democracy, maintain high standards of conduct, and to protect ethical practice in local government.
- 3.2 In 2018, the Committee on Standards in Public Life undertook a review of local government ethical standards. The Council responded to the consultation exercise which informed the report. The full details of the outcomes of the review, including best practice and recommendations, were reported to the Committee on 22 March 2019 (the CSPL's report is attached at Appendix A).

- 3.3 A further report was presented to the Committee on 19 July 2019. This informed members about the best practice recommendations which were incorporated into the Councils Ethical Framework where appropriate.
- 3.4 The Government published its response to the report on 18 March 2022 and is attached at Appendix B to this report.

4. **How this report links to Corporate Priorities**

- 4.1 Not applicable.

5. **Alternative Options**

- 5.1 There are no options to consider.

Mark Trillo
Executive Director (Governance & Commissioning)

Web Links and Background Papers

Appendices A and B attached

Contact details

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6. **Detail**

- 6.1 In 2018, the Committee on Standards in Public Life (CSPL) undertook a review of local government ethical standards. The CPSL considers that robust standards arrangements are needed to safeguard local democracy, maintain high standards of conduct, and to protect ethical practice in local government. The consultation period ran from 29 January to 18 May 2018.
- 6.2 The terms of reference for the Committee were to:
1. Examine the structures, processes and practices in local government in England for:
 - a. Maintaining codes of conduct for local councillors.
 - b. Investigating alleged breaches fairly and with due process.
 - c. Enforcing codes and imposing sanctions for misconduct.
 - d. Declaring interests and managing conflicts of interest.
 - e. Whistleblowing.
 2. Assess whether the existing structures, processes and practices are conducive to high standards of conduct in local government.

3. Make any recommendations for how they can be improved.
 4. Note any evidence of intimidation of councillors, and make recommendations for any measures that could be put in place to prevent it.
- 6.3 The CSPL's report was published on the 30th January 2019. The full details of the outcomes of the review, including best practice and recommendations, were reported to the Committee on 22 March 2019 (the CSPL's report is attached at Appendix A).
- 6.4 A further report was presented to the Committee on 19 July 2019. This informed members about the best practice recommendations which resulted in the approval of appropriate best practice recommendations into the Council's ethical standards framework, the approval of a revised Code of Conduct and adoption of initial assessment criteria when considering standards complaints.
- 6.5 The Government published its response to the report on 18 March 2022 and is attached at Appendix B to this report. The response starts with a letter from Kemi Badenoch MP, Minister of State for Equalities and Levelling Up Communities. This states that "the government agrees with the Committee's conclusion that there have been benefits from local authorities being responsible for ethical standards, including the flexibility and discretion to resolve standards issues informally. However, we also recognise the role of government in ensuring that the system is robust."
- 6.6 The letter further states that "the number of requests for legislation in the Committee's recommendations to strengthen the standards and conduct framework and its safeguards is considerable. As indicated in this response, the government believes that some of these suggestions do not need a legislative response but can be more appropriately, effectively, and swiftly taken forward by local authorities as best practice."