

STAFFORDSHIRE MOORLANDS DISTRICT COUNCIL

Standards Committee

14 March 2025

TITLE:	Strengthening the standards and conduct framework for local authorities in England
PORTFOLIO HOLDER:	Councillor Mike Gledhill – Leader
CONTACT OFFICER:	Linden Vernon – Head of Democratic Services
WARDS INVOLVED:	Non-Specific

Appendices Attached – Consultation Document

1. Reason for the Report

- 1.1 To update the Committee on the recent consultation exercise conducted by Government with regards to standards in local authorities.

2. Recommendation

- 2.1 That the Committee notes the report.

3. Executive Summary

- 3.1 In 2019, the Committee on Standards in Public Life released a report highlighting concerns about the effectiveness of the existing ethical standards framework for local government. The report recommended several measures to bolster the system, including the introduction of sanctions such as suspension for serious breaches of conduct.
- 3.2 Following recommendations made by the Committee on Standards in Public Life the Government published a consultation document on local authority standards (Appendix A) in December 2024. The consultation sought views on introducing measures to strengthen the standards and conduct regime in England and ensure consistency of approach amongst councils investigating serious breaches of their member codes of conduct, including the introduction of the power of suspension and support for victims affected by misconduct by councillors.

3.3 As the consultation exercise closed prior to the next meeting of the Standards Committee, Members and Independent Persons were invited to provide their responses direct to Government and the Local Government Association.

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

4.1 Aim 2 Objective - Strong and effective democratic processes.

5. **Alternative Options**

5.1 There are no options to consider.

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and Monitoring Officer

Web Links and Background Papers

Appendix A – Consultation Document - attached

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6. **Detail**

6.1 In 2019, the Committee on Standards in Public Life released a report highlighting concerns about the effectiveness of the existing ethical standards framework for local government. The report recommended several measures to bolster the system, including the introduction of sanctions such as suspension for serious breaches of conduct.

6.2 Building upon these recommendations the Government published a consultation document (Appendix A) in December 2024. The consultation sought views on introducing measures to strengthen the standards and conduct regime in England and ensure consistency of approach amongst councils investigating serious breaches of their member codes of conduct, including the introduction of the power of suspension.

6.3 Specific proposals consulted upon for legislative change included:

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

- The introduction of the power for all local authorities to suspend councillors 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.
- A new category of disqualification for gross misconduct and those subject to a sanction of suspension more than once in a 5-year period.
- A role for a national body to deal with appeals.

6.4 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.

6.5 The consultation exercise closed on 26 February 2025. As this was prior to the next meeting of the Standards Committee, Members and Independent Persons were invited to provide their responses direct to Government and also to the Local Government Association in order to contribute to a sector-wide response to the consultation.