

**AGENDA FOR  
STANDARDS COMMITTEE**



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**To: All Members of Standards Committee**

**Councillors** : T Rafiq (Chair), S Arif, M Hayes, D Hill,  
J Hook, D Quinn, M Rahimov, M Smith and S Thorpe

**Independent Persons:** C Ainsworth and S Birtwell

Dear Member/Colleague

**Standards Committee**

You are invited to attend a meeting of the Standards Committee which will be held as follows:-

<b>Date:</b>	Tuesday, 23 June 2026
<b>Place:</b>	Committee Rooms A & B, Bury Town Hall
<b>Time:</b>	6.00 pm
<b>Briefing Facilities:</b>	If Opposition Members and Co-opted Members require briefing on any particular item on the Agenda, the appropriate Director/Senior Officer originating the related report should be contacted.

## **AGENDA**

**1 WELCOME AND APOLOGIES**

**2 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

**3 MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING & ANY MATTERS ARISING** (*Pages 3 - 6*)

To approve as a correct record the Minutes of the Meeting held on the 12<sup>th</sup> February 2026.

**4 STANDARDS COMMITTEE TERMS OF REFERENCE** (*Pages 7 - 10*)

**5 STANDARDS COMMITTEE DRAFT WORK PROGRAMME 2026-2027**  
(*Pages 11 - 12*)

**6 NATIONAL CASE UPDATE** (*Pages 13 - 20*)

Report attached.

**7 LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND SOCIAL CARE OMBUDSMAN UPDATE**

Verbal update.

**8 URGENT BUSINESS**

**9 DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

6.00pm, Thursday 24th September 2026, Bury Town Hall

<b>Minutes of:</b>	<b>STANDARDS COMMITTEE</b>
<b>Date of Meeting:</b>	12 <sup>th</sup> February 2026
<b>Present:</b>	Councillor N Bayley (in the Chair) Councillors R Bernstein, S Arif, A Booth, R Gold, M Hayes, D Quinn, T Rafiq and M Rahimov
<b>Also in attendance:</b>	J. Dennis, Director of Law and Governance. M. Cunliffe, Democratic Services.  Independent Person: Mr S. Birtwell
<b>Public Attendance:</b>	No members of the public or press were present at the meeting.

## 1 WELCOME AND APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were submitted by Councillors J Hook, D Vernon and Independent Person, Mr Craig Ainsworth.  
Councillor R. Bernstein acted as a substitute representative for Councillor Vernon.

## 2 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

## 3 MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING & ANY MATTERS ARISING

The Minutes of the last meeting held on the 26<sup>th</sup> November 2025 were approved as a correct record.

## 4 6 MONTH MEMBER ATTENDANCE UPDATE

The Standards Committee received a report which provided an overview on Councillor attendance covering the last 6 months (1<sup>st</sup> August 2025- 31<sup>st</sup> January 2026) at public meetings for the current municipal year 2025-2026. There was a change in report style presented to the Standards Committee as previously the information covered all meetings from the beginning of the municipal year (May 2025) and provided a full snapshot of attendance data generated from a spreadsheet.

A full attendance report can be generated by the committee management system managed by Democratic Services and all the attendance data could be viewed in an excel spreadsheet. This had been previously presented to Standards Committee but was deemed not required given the amount of data and layout of the information.

Following feedback, previous Standards meetings had seen the 6-month report detailing a summary of the total expected attendance figures along with being present, absent and including apologies at meetings.

With no issues highlighted over the past couple of years in terms of Member attendance, going forward, the 6-month update would only be produced for the Standards Committee as an exceptions report to raise any issues of Members with low attendance or if they have not attended a meeting in some time and could be approaching a 6-month period of non-attendance.

Upon viewing the recent statistics, the data does not warrant any Members attendance falling into the above criteria and being scrutinised by the Standards Committee over the past 6 months. The Committee would act as a fail-safe if attendance was particularly low and in the case of the 6-month rule, an exemption to Full Council could be discussed giving the reasons behind it.

Another fail-safe was that this matter could be discussed with group leaders about their group Members at the Democratic Arrangement Forum meetings.

If Members or the public wish to examine Councillor attendance data in full detail, then this can still be conducted by viewing the Council's website and viewing the attendance record tab on each individual Members webpage with the data in the public domain.

Members discussed some of the classifications for recording criteria which is listed online and another point to note was that Members do also attend ward meetings and surgeries in their own townships and at meetings across Greater Manchester (GMCA), but that data is not recorded. Hence an additional piece of information would also be added to the Councillors section on the website to explain not all attendance at meetings was recorded.

The independent Members welcomed the approach that in the future only an exceptions report would be produced to highlight any issues.

**It was agreed:**

That the report be noted.

**5 OFFICER & MEMBER PROTOCOL**

The Director of Law and Governance, Jacqui Dennis reported that the Officer Code of Conduct formed part of the 2025-2026 constitution annual review plan and was also included on the Standards Committee work programme for this Municipal year. The code defines the standards of behaviour expected from all staff at Bury Council and its primary objective was to promote transparency, accountability and the prudent use of public resources. To remain effective, the code should be subject to periodic review and any revisions.

Members were asked to consider the current constitution, Part 5 The Codes and Conduct and Section 3, Protocol on Member and Officer relations.

Attached to the agenda pack was an updated draft Officer and Member Protocol.

The Protocol presents clear expectations for how elected Members and Officers work together in the public interest. It promoted mutual respect, impartiality and effective decision making, and provided practical rules for day-to-day interactions, including hybrid and digital working, media handling, safeguarding, equality, and the pre-election ("purdah") period.

Once the Committee have agreed a final version, the protocol would go to full Council for approval before the constitution is amended and a review for this item would take place every two years.

Members commented that equality was important and that Officers inform Members of developments taking place in their wards as listed under 6.4 of the guidance. There was also a need not to overstep the mark during informal meetings between each other in terms of personal, private and professional relationships.

Independent Member, Mr Stuart Birtwell commented that some items of the model code didn't apply to the Council and the Director of Law and Governance stated that the model code had been adapted with improvements such as bullying being included as per the ACAS definition.

The Director of Law and Governance also reported she had received comments on this agenda item from the other Independent Member, Mr Craig Ainsworth who was unable to attend this meeting.

Members welcomed the protocol and the review period of every 2 years was deemed appropriate.

The Director of Law and Governance was happy to assist with reporting and escalation matters and details of the Hub and relevant contacts would be added to the list included at 7.3 of the protocol.

**It was agreed:-**

That the report be noted and Members would review the draft protocol and provide any additional comments to the Director Law & Governance.

**6 URGENT BUSINESS**

No urgent business was reported.

**7 EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC**

At this point of the Meeting, the Panel moved into Part B, having resolved under Section 100 (A) (4) of the Local Government Act 1972 that the press and be public be excluded from the meeting during consideration of this item of business since it involved the likely disclosure of exempt information as stated.

**8 COUNCILLOR COMPLAINTS**

The Director Law & Governance provided a verbal report to the Committee on Councillor complaints and provided details of the numbers received and some of the nature of these complaints.

The Committee were informed that one incident could lead to a number of complaints and to date no hearings had been required.

Members discussed the information provided and asked a number of relevant questions on the subject matter.

**It was agreed:**

That the update be noted.

**9 DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

The next Standards Committee meeting was provisionally scheduled to take place in June 2026 subject to the timetable of meetings for the 2026-2027 municipal year being approved at full Council in March.

The Director Law & Governance thanked the Chair, Councillor Noel Bayley for hosting the meeting during his Mayoral year. She also thanked all Members of the committee including the

independent persons for their continued support and constructive comments during the past 12 months.

**COUNCILLOR N BAYLEY**  
**Chair**

**(Note: The meeting started at 6.00pm and ended at 7.10pm)**

### **Standards Committee (including Standards Sub Committee) Terms of Reference**

The Standards Committee is responsible for promoting and maintaining high standards of conduct by Councillors, co-opted members and church and parent governor representatives. The Standards Committee will appoint up to three independent persons.

#### **Standards Hearings Panel - Sub Committee**

The Standards Committee will set up a sub-committee called the Standards Hearings Panel. The Independent Person is invited to attend all meetings of the Hearing Panel. The Panel will consider complaints under the code of conduct that cannot be resolved informally.

#### **Functions:**

##### Code of conduct

- (a) To recommend to Council the adoption of a code (the Code of Conduct) dealing with the conduct that is expected of members and co-opted members of the Council and its arrangements for dealing with complaints (the Complaints Procedure) that members and co-opted members have failed to comply with the code.
- (b) To keep the Code of Conduct and Complaints Procedure under review and recommend changes/replacement to Council as appropriate
- (c) To publicise the adoption, revision or replacement of the Council's Code of Conduct and Complaints Procedure
- (d) To oversee the process for the recruitment of the Independent Persons and make recommendations to Council for their appointment
- (e) To annually review overall figures and trends from Code of Conduct complaints.
- (f) To grant dispensations under Section 33 (2) (b) (d) and (c) Localism Act 2011 or any subsequent amendment
- (g) To hear appeals in relation to dispensations granted under section 33 2) (a) and (c) Localism Act 2011 by the Monitoring Officer
- (h) Advising, training or arranging to train Councillors, co-opted members, on matters relating to the Members' Code of Conduct;
- (i) To determine how to deal with complaints made against Councillors where it is alleged that they have failed to comply with the Code of Conduct.
- (j) To determine investigation reports compiled on behalf of the Monitoring Officer, including the power to establish hearing panels, where necessary.
- (k) To deal with any reports from the Monitoring Officer on any matter which is referred to it for determination;

- (l) To deal with reports of the Monitoring Officer regarding breaches of the protocols/guidance to Members accompanying the Council's Code of Conduct for Members which do not in themselves constitute a breach of that Code;
- (m) To report from time to time to Council on ethical governance within the Council.
- (o) To maintain an overview of complaints handling and Ombudsman Investigations
- (p) To consider and determine applications for exemptions from political restriction
- (q) To maintain an overview of the council's Constitution.

### Standards Hearing Panel

The Standards Hearings Panel is a sub-committee of the Standards Committee, which will undertake the functions set out below, where the matter cannot be resolved by the Monitoring Officer.

The following functions have been delegated to it:

To take decisions in respect of a Council Member who is found on a hearing held in accordance with the Council's Complaints Procedure to have failed to comply with the Council's Code of Conduct for Members ("the Subject Member"), such actions to include:

- (i) Publication of the findings of the Standards Hearings Panel in respect of the Subject Member's conduct;
- (ii) Reporting the findings of the Standards Hearings to Council for information;
- (iii) Recommendation to Council that the Subject Member should be censured;
- (iv) Recommendation to the Subject Member's Group Leader (or in the case of ungrouped Members to Council) that the Subject Member should be removed from any or all Committees or Sub-Committees of the Council for a recommended period;
- (v) Recommendation to the Leader that the Subject Member should be removed from the Executive, or removed from their Portfolio responsibilities;<sup>2</sup>
- (vi) Instructing the Monitoring Officer to arrange training for the Subject Member;
- (vii) Recommendation to Council that the Subject Member should be removed from all appointments to which the Subject Member has been appointed or nominated by the Council;
- (viii) Withdrawal of facilities provided to the Subject Member by the Council, such as a computer, website and/or e-mail and internet access; or
- (ix) Placing such restrictions on the Subject Member's access to Council staff, buildings or parts of buildings as may be reasonable in the circumstances

### **Membership:**

The Mayor will chair the Committee. In the absence of the Chair, the Committee will elect a Chair for the duration of the meeting.

The Leader of the Council cannot be a Member of the Standards Committee

One Member may be appointed from the Cabinet but they cannot Chair the Committee.

The Committee will appoint up to three Independent Person(s), for a period of two years and will receive remuneration in line with the Member Allowance Scheme – Co-optees' Allowance.

### **5. MEETINGS**

The Standards Committee will meet 4 times a year.

The **date and timings** of the meetings will be fixed in advance by the Council, as part of the agreed schedule of meetings.

Additional meetings may be convened at the request of the Chair, and with the agreement of the Council Leader.

A **quorum** of three will apply for meetings of the Standards Committee.

**Declarations of Interest** – Any personal, prejudicial or pecuniary interests held by members should be declared in accordance with the Councils Code of Conduct on any item of business at a meeting, either before it is discussed or as soon as it becomes apparent. Interests which appear in the Council Register of Interests should still be declared at meetings, where appropriate.

Decisions are to be taken by **consensus**. Where it is not possible to reach consensus, a decision will be reached by a simple majority of those present at the meeting. Where there are equal votes the Chair of the meeting will have the casting vote, there will be no restriction on how the Chair chooses to exercise his/her casting vote.

The Councils Monitoring Officer will act as the **lead officer**. Lead officer responsibilities will include ensuring that agendas are appropriate to the work programme of the Standards Committee.

**Workload** – Work Programme to be determined annually by the Standards Committee.

The agenda and supporting **papers** shall be in a standard format and circulated at least five clear working days in advance of meetings. The minutes of decisions taken at the meeting will be kept and circulated to partner organisations as soon as possible. Minutes will be published on the Council web site.

**Access to Information** – It is important to ensure that all councillors are kept aware of the work of the Standards Committee and a copy of the minutes will be uploaded on to the Councils website as soon as practicable following the meeting. The Standards Committee shall be regarded as a Council Committee for Access to

Information Act purposes. Freedom of Information Act provisions shall apply to all business.

All meetings will be held in **public**.

The Standards Committee will retain the ability to **exclude representatives** of the press and other members of the public from a defined section of the meeting having regard to the confidential nature of the business to be transacted, publicly on which would be prejudicial to the public interest (Part 5A and Schedule 12A, Local Government Act, as amended).

Meetings will be **clerked** by a representative of Democratic Services.

**Standards Committee**  
**Work Programme 2026-2027**

<b>Meeting</b>	<b>Topics</b>
Tuesday 23rd June 26	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Welcome to the new Chair &amp; membership for 26-27</li> <li>• Terms of reference</li> <li>• Draft Standards work programme for 26-27</li> <li>• National Case Update</li> <li>• LGO Annual Review- Verbal update</li> </ul>
Thursday 24 <sup>th</sup> September 26	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Constitutional review 26-27- Items listed for Standards Committee -Code of conduct – Annual review &amp; legislative proposals for changes to the standards regime</li> <li>• LGO Annual Review for 01/04/25- 31/03/26 including data and national annual reports</li> </ul>
Thursday 3 <sup>rd</sup> December 26	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• This meeting maybe withdrawn dependant on items of business. Some local authorities don't have four Standards meetings within a municipal year.</li> </ul>
Thursday 11 <sup>th</sup> March 27	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Constitutional review 26-27- Items listed for Standards Committee -Proposed legislative changes – Hybrid/ virtual meetings, proxy voting etc.</li> </ul>

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<b>Classification</b>	<b>Item No. 6</b>
<b>Open / Closed</b>	

<b>Meeting:</b>	Standards Committee
<b>Meeting date:</b>	23 <sup>rd</sup> June 2026
<b>Title of report:</b>	Standards Committee – National Case Update
<b>Report by:</b>	Jacqui Dennis, Director Law & Governance
<b>Decision Type:</b>	Report of the Monitoring Officer
<b>Ward(s) to which report relates</b>	Not applicable

### **Executive Summary:**

#### **1. Purpose of Report**

##### 1.1

The purpose of this report is to provide Members with an update on recent standards cases and developments from other local authorities, as reported in the press and sector publications.

##### 1.2

The report highlights key themes emerging from recent findings and identifies any learning points relevant to this authority.

#### **2. Summary of Recent Cases**

Recent national reporting confirms that Standards Committees and hearing panels continue to uphold complaints across a range of authorities, with consistent themes emerging.

##### 2.1 Respect, conduct and behaviour

A number of cases relate to failures to treat others with respect and inappropriate conduct in meetings:

Leicester City Council (May 2026). A councillor was found to have breached the Code of Conduct by making comments at a Full Council meeting that were deemed unwarranted, irrelevant and intended to humiliate another Member. The Members comments related to members allowances.

Tameside Metropolitan Borough Council (February 2026). A private WhatsApp group named “*Trigger Me Timbers*” operated between January 2019 and April 2022. In February 2025, the contents of the chat were leaked, leading to formal standards complaints and a subsequent independent investigation.

Six councillors (five current and one former) were found to have breached the Code of Conduct.

Key breaches identified:

- *Failure to treat others with respect*
- *Bullying and/or discriminatory behaviour*
- *Failure to promote equality*
- *Conduct bringing the office of councillor and the authority into disrepute*

Nature of the conduct:

- *Messages within the group included offensive content, including racist, sexist and anti-Semitic remarks*
- *Mocking of colleagues, MPs and members of the public*
- *References which were interpreted as hate speech and, in some instances, comments relating to violence towards constituents*
- *One councillor was found to have made remarks that a reasonable person would consider racist, including comments relating to an MP's accent*

Sanctions / outcomes:

- *Written apologies and requirements for training*
- *Consideration by the Standards Sub-Committee of further proportionate measures (e.g. censure / removal from roles)*

Matters to Note / Learning Points

- *The Code of Conduct applies to communications via WhatsApp and other social media platforms, where Members are acting (or perceived to be acting) in their official capacity*
- *The fact that communications are described as “private” does not prevent them from falling within the scope of the Code*
- *The capacity test is interpreted broadly, including where:*
  - *council business is discussed, or*
  - *Members are interacting in a political or governance context*

- *Reputational impact is key – even private communications may constitute disrepute if they enter the public domain*
- *The case reinforces the need for Members to maintain the Nolan Principles and behavioural standards in all communications, not only formal meetings*

Slough Borough Council (March 2025): A councillor was censured for multiple breaches, including lack of respect, harassment and intimidation of officers and another councillor.

Melton Borough Council (July 2025): A councillor was found to have engaged in behaviour towards an officer that was deemed bullying and brought the role into disrepute.

Sanctions included censure, publication of findings and restrictions on access to council premises. The most frequently upheld complaints continue to relate to respect, tone and behaviour, particularly in formal meetings.

## 2.2 Bullying and misuse of position

- Peterborough City Council (January 2026):  
A councillor was found to have bullied a resident, abused their position and brought their office into disrepute. Sanctions included formal apologies and publication of findings.
- Falkirk Council / Standards Commission (June 2025):  
A councillor was suspended for three months for behaviour towards officers that was judged to be bullying, even where no intent to bully was established.

There is increasing scrutiny of Member conduct outside formal meetings, particularly interactions with residents and officers

## 2.3 Confidentiality and information governance

- Hinckley & Bosworth Borough Council (March 2025):  
A councillor breached the Code by sharing confidential personal information, including forwarding a resident's details inappropriately.
  - Sanctions: apology and training.
- Royal Borough of Kingston upon Thames (February 2026):  
A councillor was censured for breaches of confidentiality and failure to treat officers with respect, with additional concerns where the Member did not fully comply with imposed sanctions.

Misuse of information and poor casework handling remain a recurring source of complaints, often with data protection implications

## 2.4 Planning and decision-making conduct

Sector reporting highlights cases where:

- Councillors have been found to improperly influence decision-making processes, including planning matters
- Outcomes have included removal from committees and other governance sanctions

Issues of probity, bias and influence in quasi-judicial roles continue to present significant risk.

## 2.5 Other issues identified

Additional reported cases include:

- Failure to declare Disclosable Pecuniary Interests (DPIs), in some cases leading to referral to police
- Social media conduct, including inappropriate or inflammatory commentary, resulting in Code breaches

## **3. Sanctions Applied**

The range of sanctions applied across these cases is consistent with the current statutory framework and includes:

- Formal censure
- Written or public apology
- Mandatory training or coaching
- Removal from committees or outside bodies
- Publication of findings
- In some cases, referral to the police (DPI-related matters)

It is noted that, under the current legislative framework, local authorities have no power to suspend Members, limiting the scope of sanctions available.

## **4. Key Learning Points for Members**

Based on recent cases, the following areas represent the highest risk of breach:

- Respect and civility in meetings and communications
- Appropriate behaviour towards officers and residents
- Proper handling of confidential and personal information
- Compliance with rules on interests and decision-making
- Conduct on social media and in public forums

## **5. Conclusion**

The national picture demonstrates that:

- Findings of breaches remain relatively common across authorities, though generally limited to a minority of Members

- The majority of cases concern behavioural issues rather than corruption or serious misconduct
- There is an increasing emphasis on early intervention, training and cultural expectations

The Committee is invited to note this report and consider whether any of the identified themes should inform the Council's local standards work programme.

## **6. Recommendation(s)**

That Members of the Standards Committee are asked to note the contents of this report.

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### **Report Author and Contact Details:**

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**Agenda Item 6**

<b>Appendix A</b>					
<b>Leicester City Council (2026)</b>	Conduct at Full Council meeting	Breach upheld	Failure to treat others with respect	Apology and training	Maintain civility and professionalism in formal debate
<b>Tameside MBC (2026)</b>	WhatsApp group (“Trigger Me Timbers”)	Breach upheld (6 Members)	Failure to treat others with respect; bullying and discriminatory behaviour; failure to promote equality; bringing office into disrepute	Written apologies; training; further action considered by Standards Sub-Committee	Code applies to WhatsApp/social media; “private” communications may still fall within scope; broad interpretation of capacity; reputational impact is key
<b>Slough Borough Council (2025)</b>	Behaviour towards Members and officers	Breach upheld	Harassment, intimidation, lack of respect	Censure	Professional conduct towards colleagues and officers is essential
<b>Melton Borough Council (2025)</b>	Behaviour towards an officer	Breach upheld	Bullying; conduct bringing office into disrepute	Censure; publication of findings; restrictions on access to council premises	Respect for officers must be maintained at all times
<b>Peterborough City Council (2026)</b>	Interaction with a resident	Breach upheld	Bullying; abuse of position	Apology; publication of findings	Conduct outside formal meetings is equally subject to the Code
<b>Falkirk Council (2025)</b>	Communications with officers (emails)	Breach upheld	Bullying behaviour	Suspension (3 months, imposed by Standards Commission)	Tone and behaviour standards apply across all communication methods
<b>Hinckley &amp; Bosworth BC (2025)</b>	Sharing of resident information	Breach upheld	Disclosure of confidential information	Apology; training	Care is required when handling personal and confidential data

<b>Kingston upon Thames RLBC (2026)</b>	Communications and data handling	Breach upheld	Failure to treat officers with respect; breach of confidentiality	Censure; training (with partial compliance issues)	Members must comply fully with imposed sanctions
<b>Various authorities (2025 sector reports)</b>	Planning / decision-making conduct	Breach upheld	Improper influence; bias in quasi-judicial decision-making	Removal from committees (typical)	Maintain probity and impartiality in regulatory roles