

Classification	Item No. 6
Open / Closed	

Meeting:	Standards Committee
Meeting date:	23 rd June 2026
Title of report:	Standards Committee – National Case Update
Report by:	Jacqui Dennis, Director Law & Governance
Decision Type:	Report of the Monitoring Officer
Ward(s) to which report relates	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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