



Leicester  
City Council

## WARDS AFFECTED

Not Applicable

## FORWARD TIMETABLE OF CONSULTATION AND MEETINGS:

Standards Committee

6<sup>th</sup> May 2026

---

### Proposed Reforms to the Ethical Standards Regime for Local Government

---

#### Report of the Monitoring Officer

#### 1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To update the Standards Committee on recent Government consultations and proposed reforms to the ethical standards framework for local government in England, and to set out their potential implications for Leicester City Council.

#### 2. RECOMMENDATION

- 2.1 The Standards Committee is recommended to note the content of this report and the proposed direction of travel for reform of the ethical standards regime, and to request further reports as legislative proposals progress.

#### 3. REPORT

- 3.1 The ethical standards framework for local government in England is principally derived from Part 3 of the Localism Act 2011. That legislation abolished the former national standards regime and replaced it with a locally-determined system under which each authority is responsible for adopting its own code of conduct and for investigating and determining alleged breaches.
- 3.2 While the Localism Act 2011 was intended to promote local accountability and reduce central prescription, experience over more than a decade has highlighted a number of structural limitations in the current arrangements. In particular, the range of sanctions available to local authorities is limited, with no power to suspend or disqualify a member found to have committed serious misconduct. In practice, this has meant that councils are often constrained to issuing censures or making recommendations that rely on political goodwill rather than enforceable consequences.

- 3.3 Concerns have also been raised nationally about inconsistency in how standards complaints are handled across the sector, resulting in what is sometimes described as a “postcode lottery”. Similar allegations of misconduct may be treated very differently by different authorities, and there is currently no external right of appeal for either complainants or subject members. These factors have contributed to a perception, reflected in reports by standards bodies and professional advisers, that the existing regime lacks sufficient robustness to command public confidence in serious cases, particularly those involving bullying, harassment, or persistent disrespect towards officers or other members.
- 3.4 Against that background, the Government has revisited the operation of the post-2011 standards framework. In December 2024 it published a consultation entitled “*Strengthening the Standards and Conduct Framework for Local Authorities in England*”, seeking views on whether the balance struck by the Localism Act remained appropriate and whether further legislative intervention was required. The consultation explicitly acknowledged widespread concern that the current system does not always provide effective remedies for serious misconduct and that victims of such behaviour may feel inadequately protected.
- 3.5 The Government’s response, published in November 2025, confirms an intention to pursue legislative reform. The proposed changes represent a partial re centralisation of the standards framework, with the stated aim of introducing greater consistency, clearer minimum expectations of behaviour, and a more credible range of sanctions. The Government has emphasised that these reforms are not intended to undermine local democracy, but rather to ensure that robust local debate takes place within a framework that promotes respect, fairness, and public trust.
- 3.6 At this stage, the proposals remain subject to the introduction and passage of primary legislation. However, they represent the most significant potential reform of the ethical standards regime since 2011 and, if implemented, would require local authorities to revisit existing constitutional arrangements, codes of conduct, and procedures for dealing with misconduct.
- 3.7 Under section 28 of the Localism Act 2011, Leicester City Council is required to have in place a Members’ Code of Conduct together with arrangements for the investigation and determination of alleged breaches. Those arrangements are set out in the Council’s Constitution and in the document entitled “Arrangements for Dealing with Standards Complaints at Leicester City Council under the Localism Act 2011”, which has been approved by Council and kept under review by the Standards Committee.
- 3.8 Any future reforms arising from the Government’s proposals would therefore need to be considered alongside the Council’s existing constitutional framework and, if

implemented through legislation, would require corresponding amendments to the Code of Conduct and the Council's adopted Standards Arrangements.

- 3.9 For ease of reference, a comparison between the current standards regime and the proposed reformed framework is set out below.

Area	Current Position	Proposed Position
Code of Conduct	Locally adopted codes under Localism Act 2011	Mandatory national Code of Conduct
Sanctions	Limited sanctions, no power of suspension	Expanded sanctions including suspension
Standards Committees	Local discretion	Formal standards committees required
Appeals	No appeal mechanism	Right of appeal to an independent body
Transparency	Variable publication of outcomes	Mandatory publication of outcomes

- 3.10 At this stage the reforms are proposals only and no immediate changes to the Council's Constitution, Code of Conduct or standards arrangements are required. The Monitoring Officer will continue to monitor developments and report further as appropriate.
- 3.11 For Leicester City Council, the Government's proposals do not require any immediate change to current arrangements. The Council already operates a formal standards framework, including an adopted Members' Code of Conduct, published Standards Arrangements, appointed Independent Persons, and established Standards Committee and Hearing Panel structures. These arrangements broadly reflect good practice within the sector and mirror the statutory requirements of the current regime.
- 3.12 However, if the proposed reforms are implemented through legislation, they would represent a material change to the legal context in which the Council's standards framework operates. In particular, the introduction of a mandatory national code of conduct, enhanced sanctions (including suspension), and a right of appeal would require the Council to review and amend elements of its Constitution, Code of Conduct, and procedural arrangements to ensure compliance with new statutory requirements.
- 3.13 The reforms may also have practical implications for the operation of the Council's standards process, including the role of the Standards Committee, the handling of serious or complex complaints, and the resourcing required to support investigations, hearings

and any appeals. The Monitoring Officer will continue to monitor national developments closely and will bring forward further reports to the Standards Committee at appropriate points, including any recommendations for constitutional or procedural change once the legislative position is clear.

**6. REPORT AUTHOR**

Kamal Adatia

Monitoring Officer

[Kamal.Adatia@leicester.gov.uk](mailto:Kamal.Adatia@leicester.gov.uk)