

Brighton & Hove City Council

Audit Standards & General Purposes Committee

Agenda Item 13

Subject: Standards Update

Date of meeting: 24th June 2025

Report of: Elizabeth Culbert, Director – Governance & Law and
Monitoring Officer

Contact Officer: Name: Victoria Simpson, Senior Lawyer – Corporate Law
Email: Victoria.Simpson@brighton-hove.gov.uk

Ward(s) affected: All

For general release

1. Purpose of the report and policy context

- 1.1. To provide a quarterly update, both on complaints received in alleging that Members have breached the Council's Code of Conduct for Members and on related matters.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 That Committee agrees to note this Report.

3. Context and background information

- 3.1. The Council is required by the Localism Act 2011 to have in place arrangements for dealing with complaints against elected and co-opted Members. Brighton & Hove City Council reviews its arrangements regularly and takes a proactive approach to publishing information on this topic on its website, while making data on member complaints available to the public via these reports to this Committee.
- 3.2. At Brighton & Hove City Council, the Audit, Standards and General Purposes Committee has delegated authority for leading in discharging the statutory requirement that the Council maintain and promote high standards of conduct by Members. The Committee receives quarterly reports on complaints against members as well as information on the training and briefings offered to assist Members in discharging their responsibilities according to the Nolan Principles.
- 3.3. This quarterly Report provides data on the live complaints to provide reassurance that complaints are being considered and dealt with in accordance with the Council's processes.

4. Member complaints

Update on complaints previously reported to this Committee

4.1. This data is provided in Appendix 1, at table 1.

New complaints received in since the last Update in January 2025

4.2. This data is provided in table 2 of Appendix 1.

4.4. The complaints referred to in this section are being progressed by the office of the Monitoring Officer in accordance with the Procedure which governs member complaints.

5. Proposed changes to the Standards Framework

5.1 Committee members will be aware that the Government's main consultation on its proposed changes to strengthen the framework which governs the conduct of members of local authorities closed on 26.2.25. It reportedly attracted over 2,000 responses and the most recent information provided is that those are still being considered. While a formal response from the Government – including any proposed legislative changes - is yet to be announced, a watching brief continues to be kept. This Committee will be kept informed of progress.

6. Analysis and consideration of alternative options

6.1. The Council is obliged under the Localism Act to make arrangements for maintaining high standards of conduct among members and to make arrangements for the investigation of complaints. This Council's arrangements are regularly reviewed. This Report draws attention to the wider picture without recommending specific options.

7. Community engagement and consultation

7.1 Past reviews of the Council's Standards arrangements (most recently in 2021) have been carried out by its elected Members and the Council's Independent Persons, supported by officers who have provided stakeholder data as well as signposting relevant LGA resources.

8. Financial implications

8.1 There are no direct financial implications arising from this report. Any activity in relation to monitoring standards and investigating complaints is met from existing budgets.

Name of finance officer consulted: Haley Woollard
06/06/25

Date consulted:

9. Legal implications

These are covered in the Report.

Name of lawyer consulted: Victoria Simpson Date consulted 28/5/25

10. Risk implications

- 10.1 If fundamental changes are made to the standards framework, that will likely create additional pressure on the Council's resources. That pressure will continue post-implementation if councils are required to set up a dedicated Standards Committee and/or are made the nominated body for the hearing of appeals rather than an external body. It is also possible that the volume of complaints may increase, not necessarily as a result of a spike in member conduct issues, but because of the publicity the changes will likely attract and the perception that the regime is being given more 'teeth'.
- 10.2 Any changes are likely to result in a prescribed approach across all principal authorities. Those changes will generate the risk that the current allocated resource is insufficient to ensure that new statutory timescales (potentially relevant not just to the processing of complaints, but in relation to their determination, including at appeal stage) are consistently adhered to. However the risks and their potential impacts can only be identified and reviewed in a meaningful way once the proposals are finalised.

11. Equalities implications

There are no equalities implications arising from this Report, which provides reassurance on the arrangements which have been developed with the need to ensure the Council and its members discharge their responsibilities with appropriate regard for equalities considerations in mind.

12. Sustainability implications

No sustainability implications have been identified.

13. Other Implications

No other implications have been identified.

14. Conclusion

Members are asked to note the contents of this Report, which aims to assist the Council in discharging its responsibilities for overseeing that standards of conduct are maintained in a way which is compliant with local requirements.

Supporting Documentation

Strengthening the standards and conduct framework for local authorities in England - GOV.UK

Appendices

Appendix 1 – data on member complaints previously reported to Committee (Table 1 and new Complaints (Table 2)