

## Audit Standards & General Purposes Committee

## Agenda Item 52

**Subject:** Standards Update, including Annual Review

**Date of meeting:** 27<sup>th</sup> January 2026

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

**Contact Officer:** Name: Victoria Simpson, Senior Lawyer – Corporate Law

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**Ward(s) affected:** All

### For general release

#### 1. Purpose of the report and policy context

1.1. To provide an update on Standards-related matters, including a review of complaints received in during 2025 alleging that Members have breached the Council's [Code of Conduct for Members](#).

#### 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 publishes them on its website. It also makes data on member complaints available to the public via quarterly reports such as this one.

3.2 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. This Committee receives quarterly reports on complaints against members to provide reassurance that complaints are being considered and dealt with in accordance with the Council's processes. The Report appends data on the complaints both still outstanding at the time of the last Report, and those which have been received since then.

3.3 also provides data regarding the full twelve months of complaints received during the 2025 calendar year to enable members to better assess the overall picture. In this way, the Report seeks to provide reassurance that

complaints are being considered and dealt with in accordance with the Council's processes.

3.4 Members are asked to note the contents of the Report and to make any comments or suggestions they wish.

#### **4 Quarterly report on Member complaints**

##### Progress on complaints previously reported to this Committee

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

##### Progress on new complaints received in since the last update in September 2025

4.2. This data is provided in Appendix 1, at table 2.

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

##### **Annual review of Member Complaints**

4.4 This Report provides annual data at Appendix 2 which shows the overall volume of complaints made about elected members during 2025 alongside a high level description of the nature of those complaints. Members will be aware that 2025 is the first full year in which the updated criteria for dealing with complaints (approved in September 2024) has been applied, and also that (in accordance with the steer given by this Committee) the Group Leader of members who are the subject of a complaint (if the member is part of a Group) is routinely copied into new complaints as they are received in.

4.5 There is currently no legal requirement that authorities publish data on member complaints. In this context there is only limited information available regarding the member complaints received by other comparable authorities. Past attempts at benchmarking have previously shown that members of Brighton & Hove City Council appeared to receive a greater number of complaints than other authorities considered. This may be attributable in part to the high degree of democratic engagement which is such a feature in this City.

4.6 Members will be aware that there is currently no means of compelling Members to cooperate in investigations, while the sanctions available where a breach is found to have been committed do not currently include the power to suspend or disqualify members. Committee has been made aware of the proposals consulted on by Government this time last year which – if implemented – would substantively reform this and other aspects of the member complaint regime.

4.7 The Government response to the consultation outcome was [published in November 2025](#). It signalled an intention to legislate for a “whole system” reform of the current regime. The response included the following list of measures which they propose to include:

- *‘the introduction of a mandatory code of conduct, which will include a behavioural code, for all local authority types and tiers’*
- *‘a requirement that all principal authorities convene formal standards committees, to include provisions on the constitution of standards committees to ensure objectivity, accountability and transparency’*
- *‘the requirement that all principal authorities offer individual support during any investigation into code of conduct allegations to both the complainant and the councillor subject to the allegation’*
- *‘the introduction at the authority level of a ‘right for review’ for both complainant and the subject elected member to have the case reassessed on grounds that will be set out in legislation’*
- *‘powers for authorities to suspend elected members for a maximum of 6 months for serious code of conduct breaches, with the option to withhold allowances during suspension for the most serious breaches and introduce premises and facilities bans either in addition or as standalone sanctions’*
- *‘in response to the most serious allegations involving police investigation, or where sentencing is pending, the introduction of powers to suspend elected members on an interim basis for an initial period of 3 months which, if extended, will require regular review’*
- *‘a new disqualification criterion for any elected member subject to the maximum period of suspension more than once within 5 years’*
- *‘the creation of a new national appeals function, to consider appeals from elected members to decisions to suspend them and/or withhold allowances, and for complainants if they consider their complaint was mishandled. Any appeal submitted will only be permitted after complainant or elected member has invoked their ‘right for review’ of the local standards committee decision has been invoked and that process is completed.’*

4.8 Members will be mindful that the above changes will involve significant changes to the status quo. While primary legislation is needed to give effect to the above reforms, there is currently no indication of a likely timeframe. A watching brief will be maintained and Committee will be alerted once timescales become clear and the detail of the proposals is announced. For now, however, Members are simply asked to note this Report, including the commitment made by the Government

## 5 Member training

5.1 This Committee is aware that training and information on the Council’s Standards arrangements is offered to all newly elected members, including those appointed following the May and September 2025 by-elections. In order to provide an opportunity for existing members to refresh their understanding, at least one further session will be offered this quarter for any members who have previously received training but seek an update. That session will be offered to co-opted voting members also.

## **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 'for noting' Report provides information as opposed to 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. While options for consultation and engagement will be kept under review, the Government's stated commitment to a standards regime which is standardized and consistent across the country is considered to be highly likely to result in mandated arrangements, rather than affording the same degree of discretion local authorities have been given in the past.

## **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.

8.2 Any financial impacts that arise from the reforms proposed by government will be assessed and reported once proposals are published and understood.

Name of finance officer consulted: Haley Woppard      Date consulted: 09/01/26

## **9 Legal implications**

These are covered in the Report.

Name of lawyer consulted: Victoria Simpson      Date consulted 5/01/2025

## **10. Risk implications**

10.1 The Report to members in June 2025 noted the potential for pressures on the Council's resources if the Government enacts legislation to make the substantive changes to the standards regime that have been proposed. Any risks generated by a requirement to implement significant changes using existing resource will be explored and reported on once detailed proposals are published and understood.

## **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 in this area.

## **Supporting Documentation**

[Guidance on Member Model Code of Conduct Complaints Handling | Local Government Association](#)

[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)

Appendix 2 – annual data on member complaints received in during 2025.

