

REPORT TO: Audit & Governance Board

DATE: 18 March 2026

REPORTING OFFICER: Director, Legal and Democratic Services/
Monitoring Officer

PORTFOLIO: Leader

SUBJECT: Standards Update

WARDS: Borough-Wide

1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

1.1 To inform Members of Standards issues which have arisen recently.

2.0 RECOMMENDATION: That the report be noted and referred to Council for information.

3.0 SUPPORTING INFORMATION

- 3.1 Audit & Governance Board assumed responsibility for the work of the former Standards Committee in 2021.
- 3.2 In discussions with the Chair, it was agreed that reports on Standards issues would be brought as and when necessary, but that it would be helpful to bring an update to the last meeting of each municipal year in any event, with the intention of giving Members information on any national and local developments of interest, and providing the Monitoring Officer with the opportunity of informing Members of any complaints received in Halton.
- 3.3 There are no proposed changes to the Code of Conduct for Members for the Board to consider at this point but that may change in the light of anticipated legislation referred to in this report.
- 3.4 In terms of standards complaints since the last report, two similar issues have been raised about one councillor. A formal investigation was not appropriate in the circumstances and the matters were swiftly and properly dealt with by informal action. As for parishes, one complaint was received, which was about a private issue and therefore outside the scope of the Code of Conduct, and a request for information was received from a member of the public about registration of interests in another case.
- 3.5 The most significant national development has been the publication in November of the Government's response to the Strengthening the Standards and Conduct Framework for Local Authorities in England consultation, which had been shared with

all members in January 2025. The major changes which have been announced include :-

A mandatory minimum Code of Conduct. This will have to include provisions in respect of, for example, bullying, harassment, discrimination, and use of resources and social media. Our present Code was based on the LGA model, with some small local variations developed alongside the other LCR authorities.

Standards Committee. This will become a compulsory requirement and the form will become clear with the advent of legislation. We already have provision for a Hearings Panel drawn from the membership of this Board to hear Standards cases following investigation. Any necessary changes will be picked up in due course.

Sanctions and suspension. There will be power to impose suspension of up to 6 months in the most serious cases with the option to withhold allowances during suspension in the most severe circumstances Premises bans could be enforced, as could interim suspensions when there is a police investigation. Where there have been repeated offences, a disqualification of up to 5 years could be brought into effect.

Right of Appeal and national oversight. Both complainant and Councillor will have the right to appeal decisions on grounds to be set out in legislation. A new national appeals body will be set up to ensure consistency.

Support. Councils will have to provide support to complainants and councillors during investigations, and guidance will be produced.

The Government has indicated that the necessary legislation will be introduced when parliamentary time allows.

4.0 POLICY IMPLICATIONS

4.1 It is vital that the highest standards of conduct are maintained, and all changes required by forthcoming legislation will be implemented in due course.

5.0 FINANCIAL AND OTHER IMPLICATIONS

5.1 None at this stage.

6.0 IMPLICATIONS FOR THE COUNCIL'S PRIORITIES

6.1 Improving Health, Promoting Wellbeing and Supporting Independence

None.

6.2 Building a Strong, Sustainable Local Economy

None

6.3 Supporting Children, Young People and Families None.

6.4 Tackling Inequality and Helping Those Who Are Most In Need

None.

6.5 Working Towards a Greener Future

None.

6.6 Valuing and Appreciating Halton and Our Community

None

7.0 RISK ANALYSIS

7.1 No risks have been identified which require control measures.

8.0 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY ISSUES

8.1 The report itself does not contain any specific equality and diversity issues.

9.0 CLIMATE CHANGE IMPLICATIONS

9.1 None arising from this report.

10.0 LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS UNDER SECTION 100D OF THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972

9.1 None under the meaning of the Act.