KENT COUNTY COUNCIL

STANDARDS COMMITTEE

MINUTES of a meeting of the Standards Committee held in the Council Chamber, Sessions House, County Hall, Maidstone on Tuesday, 29 September 2026.

PRESENT: Mr R Waters (Chair), Mr J Moreland, Mr R Ford, Mr W Chapman, Mr P King, Mr S Jeffery and Mrs C Palmer

IN ATTENDANCE: Mr T Godfrey (Senior Governance Manager), Ms R Emberley (Governance Advisor), Ms P Der Man (Head of Law - Monitoring Officer) and Mrs K Goldsmith (Assistant Democratic Services Manager (Operations))

UNRESTRICTED ITEMS

25. Apologies and Substitutes
(Item 1)

Apologies were received from Mr Palmer, with Mrs Palmer attending as his substitute.

26. Declarations of Interest
(Item 2)

RESOLVED that there were no Member declarations of interest in any item on the agenda.

27. Minutes of the meeting held on 29 April 2026
(Item 3)

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 29 April 2026 were taken as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

28. Standards Regime and Member Complaints: Update
(Item 4)

1) The report was presented by the Monitoring Officer, Petra Der Man. The following key points were highlighted:
   a) Since May 2025, 122 complaints had been received under the Member Code of Conduct at the time of the report. Of these, 116 (95%) had been closed or resolved informally and six remained under review. It was noted that complaint volumes remained broadly consistent with those reported to the Committee previously.
   b) Whilst individual complaints could not be discussed, the principal themes continued to relate to social media activity, behaviour during formal meetings and the use of council resources.
   c) Two Member development sessions covering confidentiality and the Nolan Principles had been delivered since the previous meeting, and recordings

would be made available to Members via SharePoint. Members were invited to suggest further training topics.

d) Guidance was being prepared on social media use and the declaration of gifts and hospitality. Further work was underway regarding Member development and support.

2) In response to Member questions and comments, the following points were discussed:

a) Members considered whether additional social media training would be beneficial. It was agreed that, given the number of complaints in this area, an interactive session focusing on practical examples and good practice would be valuable. The Monitoring Officer advised that such a session would be arranged in the coming months.

b) Members discussed the importance of balancing freedom of political expression with the expectations of the Code of Conduct. It was noted that social media remained an important means of communicating with residents, but that Members should remain mindful of how comments and online activity could be perceived by others.

c) The Monitoring Officer outlined the process followed when complaints were received. Members were advised that an initial assessment determined whether the Code of Conduct was engaged. Where appropriate, complaints were then reviewed against established criteria, the relevant Member was invited to comment, and the Independent Person might be consulted before a decision was reached on any further action.

d) Informal resolution remained the preferred approach where suitable. However, more serious matters could ultimately be referred to a Hearing Panel following investigation.

e) Members discussed the context in which conduct was assessed, particularly the distinction between Full Council meetings and other committee meetings. It was recognised that whilst the same Code of Conduct applied in all settings, the political nature of Full Council meetings formed part of the context that was considered when assessing behaviour.

f) Mr Godfrey confirmed that complainant details were logged and there was not a single person submitting a majority of the complaints. Any misuse of the Member complaints process would be addressed by the Monitoring Officer.

g) The Committee discussed the increase in the overall number of complaints and expressed a desire to better understand how complaints progressed through the process. Members suggested that future reports include additional information on the stages at which complaints were concluded, whilst maintaining confidentiality.

h) Members also considered whether greater awareness of the complaints process may help reduce invalid or inappropriate complaints. It was suggested that guidance explaining the complaints process and the characteristics of a valid complaint could assist both Members and potential complainants. Some Members were concerned that the complaints process may be used incorrectly, either through a lack of awareness or understanding, or as a political tool.

i) It was confirmed that officers would continue to identify and deliver training on topics they considered most relevant to supporting high standards of conduct amongst Members.

3) During discussion, Members proposed that:

   a) A future report should provide further analysis of complaints at different stages of the process, whilst preserving confidentiality.

   b) A briefing note and process flowchart explaining the Member complaints process be prepared and circulated to Members.

   c) Further Member development sessions be arranged on social media usage and gifts and hospitality.

4) RESOLVED that the Committee discussed the report and requested that future updates include additional information, where possible, regarding complaint outcomes and progression through the complaints process, together with supporting guidance for Members on the operation of the standards regime.