

## KENT COUNTY COUNCIL

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### STANDARDS COMMITTEE

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

PRESENT: Mr R Waters, Mr J Moreland, Mr R Ford, Mr N Williams, Mr W Chapman, Mr P King and Mr S Dixon

IN ATTENDANCE: Petra Der Man (Monitoring Officer), Tristan Godfrey (Senior Governance Manager) and Katy Reynolds (Governance Advisor)

#### UNRESTRICTED ITEMS

##### **19. Election of Chair of the Committee**

*(Item 1)*

Mr Wayne Chapman proposed that Mr Ryan Waters be elected as Chair of the Standards Committee. This proposal was seconded by Mr Spencer Dixon.

RESOLVED that Mr Ryan Waters was elected as Chair of the Standards Committee.

##### **20. Apologies and Substitutes**

*(Item 2)*

Apologies were received from Mr Richard Palmer, with Mr Paul King attending as his substitute, and Mr Maxwell Harrison, with Mr Dixon attending as his substitute.

##### **21. Declarations of Interest**

*(Item 3)*

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

##### **22. Minutes of the meeting held on 15 October 2025**

*(Item 4)*

RESOLVED the minutes of the meeting held on 15 October 2025 were taken as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

##### **23. Appointment of Hearing Panel - Verbal Update**

*(Item 5)*

***Owing to the late notification of changes to the Committee Membership, the following item did not appear on the published agenda however, as it was a procedural matter arising directly from the changes, the Chair deemed it appropriate that it be taken at this point.***

1. The verbal update was provided by the Senior Governance Manager, Tristan Godfrey. The following key points were highlighted:
  - a) If a complaint about an elected Member under the Kent Code of Conduct for Members progressed through investigation to the stage where the Monitoring Officer or Officer acting as such in handling the complaint has determined that it would be appropriate to refer to a Hearing Panel, it would expedite matters if the Panel had been duly appointed ahead of time by the Standards Committee. The importance of ensuring that the membership of the hearing panel remained up to date was emphasised.
  - b) Previously and, before the change in Membership, the Hearing Panel consisted of the Committee Chair, Vice-Chair, and a Member from the largest opposition Group. This arrangement was politically proportionate, and Members were asked to confirm whether they were content to maintain the current composition.
2. It was proposed that the current appointment arrangements continued, and this was agreed unanimously.
3.
  - (i) RESOLVED that the Committee noted the verbal update
  - (ii) RESOLVED that Hearing Panel continue with the current membership composition consisting of the Chair of the Committee, Vice Chair of the Committee and 1 Member of the largest opposition Group.

## **24. Standards Regime and Member Complaints Update**

*(Item 6)*

1. The report was presented by the Monitoring Officer, Petra Der Man. The following key points were highlighted:
  - a) The code of conduct set clear expectations regarding Member behaviour. The importance of appropriate declarations of interests, responsible use of social media, and adherence to the Nolan Principles were emphasised.
  - b) Training initiatives were being prepared for delivery to all Members, as soon as possible. It was explained that the aim was always to avoid complaints and, ideally, to avoid the need for any hearings. Going forward, each meeting would include an update on complaint numbers and narrative themes. These updates would remain non-political and anonymised.
  - c) It was drawn to Member attention that, since joining the Council as Interim Monitoring Officer (MO) the previous year, there had been a significant number of complaints, with 39 recorded from the point of taking on the MO role and the end of March 2026.
  - d) An update was provided on recent complaint trends. Following each County Council meeting there was typically an influx of complaints,

including those from members of the public, relating to Member behaviour. Many of these complaints engaged the Code of Conduct but were subsequently refused at an early stage, as robust debate and frank, honest opinions were expected within the Chamber, provided Members treated one another with respect.

- e) There had been a substantial number of complaints related to social media usage. Guidance and training on this theme would be provided, and Members were encouraged to refer to the LGA (Local Governance Association) website for best practice.
- f) Members were reminded that conflicts of interest needed to be carefully managed as even the perception of a conflict could undermine confidence in decision-making. This also applied to behaviour outside the Chamber as the role of the Member included actions outside formal committee meetings.
- g) It was explained that, wherever possible, informal resolution was preferred. Sanctions, where required, would be proportionate and reasonable, and could include mediation or additional training.

2. In answer to Member comments and questions, the following was said:

- a) Approximately 95% of complaints were closed or resolved informally; informal resolution could include a phone call or email to the Member concerned, which sometimes resulted in an apology.
- a) It was emphasised that politically driven, trivial, or repetitive complaints would not be accepted. A clear process existed for determining what did not constitute a complaint, and this could be covered in an informal training session.
- b) Mr Michael Turner's role as an Independent Person was explained. It was confirmed that his was not a full-time role, that he was co-opted and was independent from the Council and its Members. The remuneration (£700 per year) was publicly recorded.
- d) It was acknowledged that there was a subjective aspect to the Monitoring Officer role, which was why the Independent Person's involvement was valuable. Although it was noted that the current volume of complaints was not typical, there was a wider context which could contribute to an explanation of this.
- e) A complaint first went through a triage stage; if a complaint did not engage the Code of Conduct, the Councillor would not be informed and the complainant would be notified that no further action would be taken. If the threshold was met, the allegations would be shared with the Member concerned. Where behaviour raised potential issues but did not strictly breach the Code of Conduct, the Monitoring Officer might still offer informal advice. It was highlighted to Members that there were two

standards a complaint must meet - the legal jurisdiction test and local jurisdiction test.

- f) Members were advised that, whilst overall numbers of complaints could be provided, detailed breakdowns were not always possible to retain anonymity. The number progressing beyond the initial test stage was relatively small.
  - g) It was explained to Members that improvements were being made to the public interface for complaints. As most complaints were submitted by members of the public, a new form was being developed (similar to the corporate complaints form) to guide complainants through a clearer triage process.
3. RESOLVED Members discussed the report and confirmed that ideas for future training and topics for informal briefings to assist Member Development would be provided.