

To:
Councillors Edwards, Ayub, Eden, Gavin,
Keane, Keeping, Moore, Terry and Williams

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13 April 2026

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NOTICE OF MEETING - STANDARDS COMMITTEE 21 APRIL 2026

A meeting of the Standards Committee will be held on Tuesday, 21 April 2026 at 6.30 pm in the Committee Room 1, Civic Offices, Reading, RG1 2LU. The Agenda for the meeting is set out below.

1. **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**
2. **MINUTES** **3 - 6**
3. **STANDARDS COMMITTEE ANNUAL UPDATE** **7 - 10**

A report to provide Members of the Standards Committee with an update on matters within its terms of reference.
4. **STANDARDS GOVERNMENT CONSULTATION** **11 - 14**

This report sets out information on the Government's announced position following the consultation on Standards for Local Authorities.

Present: Councillor ;
Councillors Edwards (Vice-Chair, in the Chair), Ayub, Eden, Keane, Keeping, Mitchell and Williams

Apologies: Councillors Cross, Gavin and Moore

1. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 14 September 2023 were confirmed as a correct record.

2. ADSO REPORT ON POLITICAL PROPORTIONALITY AND MEMBER ENGAGEMENT IN DECISION MAKING

The Monitoring Officer submitted a report on the outcome of a review into the application of Political Proportionality rules within the Council.

The review had been commissioned following the Annual Council Meeting in May 2024, where the main opposition group did not take up its full allocation of seats on the Policy Committee, resulting in an underrepresentation on that Committee.

The Association of Democratic Services Officers (ADSO) had been engaged to assess the Council's systems and processes for allocating members to Committees. The review concluded that while the Council broadly operated within the statutory framework, there were areas for improvement.

The report outlined several recommendations for consideration, including:

- Reviewing the arrangements for the allocation of seats on Committees and Sub-Committees.
- Introducing a clear scheme of substitution for Committees.
- Considering a reduction in the size of strategic and policy Committees, balanced by increasing the size of Planning and Licensing Committees.
- Exploring the creation of a smaller overarching strategic policy Committee, comprising Chairs of service Committees, to enhance cross-cutting policy development.
- Reviewing the Members' Allowances Scheme (noting that this had already been completed by the Independent Remuneration Panel in January 2025).
- Encouraging all Members to engage with the LGA's "Effective Opposition" workbook, potentially through a workshop and peer mentoring.
- Considering further options to secure greater Member engagement and participation.

The Committee noted that any changes could be implemented at the Annual Council Meeting in May 2025, with further work to be considered at the June 2025 meeting if required.

STANDARDS COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES - 22 APRIL 2025

The Committee discussed the report and the following points were noted:

- Regarding changing the mechanism to calculate the appointment on sub-committees, it was explained that sub committees were not done on proportionality, and it would not be beneficial to change the current process.
- It would not be beneficial to reduce the size of the standing committees, and these provided a good representation of groups and enhanced scrutiny.
- Regarding substitutions it was noted that substitutes would not work on standing committees due to the expertise and experience needed and gained on the committees. However, on smaller non-frequent committees such as Standards and Personnel this was beneficial.

The Committee noted the report and the recommendations in 3.1 of the associated report for future consideration if necessary.

Resolved –

- (1) That the outcome of the Political Proportionality Review report be noted;**
- (2) That the recommendations outlined in the associated report be considered in the future if necessary.**

3. PLANNING CODE OF CONDUCT

The Monitoring Officer submitted a report outlining a new draft Planning Code of Conduct, attached to the report as Appendix 1, for the Committee to consider.

The draft Code was developed following updated guidance from the Local Government Association (LGA), including the 2019 publication *Probity in Planning: Advice for councillors and officers making planning decisions*, and the LGA's model code of conduct published in January 2024. The draft incorporates adaptations to reflect Reading Borough Council's specific arrangements and replaces the previous version adopted in 2015 and updated in 2019.

The Committee noted that the LGA model code of conduct published in January 2024, which with adaptations to reflect Reading Borough Council's arrangements, would provide an up-to-date code focussing on expected councillor behaviour to replace the current version, which was a mixture of advice and a description of procedure. The details of procedures were set out in Part 4 of the Council's Constitution.

The Committee noted that the draft Code was based on best practice and aimed to ensure clarity and legal robustness in planning decisions.

It was suggested that Planning and Legal officers provide examples to support training on the new code. The Monitoring Officer confirmed that training would be provided and information to support the understanding of the new code would be made available to all councillors.

Resolved –

That the new Planning Code of Conduct attached as Appendix 1 to the associated report be endorsed.

4. INDEPENDENT PERSON AND INDEPENDENT CHAIR

The Committee considered a report by the Monitoring Officer seeking approval to begin the recruitment process for a new Independent Person (IP) and an Independent Chair of the Standards Committee, following the resignations of Mr David Comben and Mrs Tina Barnes.

The report explained that under the Localism Act 2011, the Council was required to appoint at least one Independent Person to advise on complaints about Members. Given the low number of complaints received by Reading Borough Council, the Monitoring Officer proposed exploring a shared arrangement with other Berkshire unitary authorities to establish a panel and share Independent Persons. This would involve joint advertising, a memorandum of understanding, and coordinated appointments.

The report also noted that Article 9 of the Council's Constitution required the appointment of an Independent Member to Chair the Standards Committee. The Monitoring Officer sought approval to advertise for a new Independent Chair and proposed that the Monitoring Officer, Deputy Monitoring Officer, and Vice-Chair of the Committee conduct interviews.

The Committee discussed the report and it was noted that as the Independent Person currently received a Special Responsibility Allowance any changes in the SRA would be referred back to the Remuneration Panel for consideration.

Resolved –

- (1) That the Monitoring Officer be authorised to consider arrangements with other Berkshire Councils to establish a Panel and share Independent Persons;**
- (2) That the Monitoring Officer be authorised to recruit an Independent Chair for the Standards Committee;**
- (3) That the Monitoring Officer report back to Council to make the appointments.**

5. INVESTIGATION OF COMPLAINTS 2023/2024

The Monitoring Officer submitted a report outlining the number, type, and disposal of complaints made by members of the public and councillors against councillors during the financial year 2023/2024.

STANDARDS COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES - 22 APRIL 2025

Annex A to the report contained a list of seven complaints received in the financial year 2023/2024. It was noted that none of the complaints progressed beyond Stage 0, meaning that either the Code of Conduct was not engaged or the complaint was found to be misconceived.

Of the seven complaints set out in Annex A:

- 3 complaints were judged not to engage the Code of Conduct and were rejected at the initial stage.
- 2 complaints were found to be misconceived, with no evidence to support the allegations.
- 1 complaint resulted in informal resolution with words of advice offered.
- 1 complaint was not pursued by the complainant.

It was also noted that two complainants requested anonymity, but these requests were declined as they did not meet the “exceptional” criteria outlined in the Council’s Arrangements for Dealing with Complaints. The Monitoring Officer advised that these decisions did not affect the outcome of the complaints.

The Committee was informed that the level of complaint activity remained low and did not indicate any systemic issues. The Monitoring Officer concluded that councillors generally maintain good relations with the community.

Resolved –

- (1) That the Member Complaints received in the financial year 2023/2024 be noted.**
- (2) That any further work which might be necessary to promote high standards of conduct in public life in the Council be considered.**

(The meeting started at 6.30 pm and closed at 7.11 pm)

Standards Committee

21 April 2026



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Title	Standards Committee Annual Update
Purpose of the report	To note the report for information
Report status	Public report
Executive Director/ Statutory Officer Commissioning Report	Jayne La Grua, Director of Legal and Democratic Services (Monitoring Officer)
Report author	Simon Hill, Acting Democratic Services Manager
Lead Councillor	Councillor Terry, Leader of the Council
Council priority	Ensure Reading Borough Council is fit for the future
Recommendations	That the report be noted.

1. Executive Summary

- 1.1 To provide Members of the Standards Committee with an update on matters within its terms of reference.

2. Policy Context

- 2.1 The Council has a duty under section 27 of the Localism Act 2011 to promote and maintain high standards of conduct by its members and co-opted members and to adopt a Code of Conduct that is consistent with the Nolan Principles, addressing the conduct that is expected of members when they are acting in their official capacity as a councillor and/or representative of the Council. Understanding of the Code and expected standards of behaviour should also be embedded through effective member induction and ongoing training.
- 2.2 The Council's Code of Conduct for Members must also include the provisions the Council considers appropriate in respect of the registration and disclosure of pecuniary and non-pecuniary interests.
- 2.3 The responsibility for monitoring the operation of the Members' Code of Conduct and agreeing the arrangements to consider allegations that Councillors have breached the Members' Code of Conduct falls within the jurisdiction of the Standards Committee.

3. Code of Conduct Complaints

- 3.1 The Council's Code of Conduct for Members was substantively reviewed in 2022 and appears published on the Council's website at [Councillor Code of Conduct](#). The Code is supplemented by a number of written protocols, which are set out in Part 5 of the Council's [Constitution](#) and include a Protocol on Member/Officer Relations.
- 3.2 Regular oversight of complaints received under the Members' Code of Conduct enables the Standards Committee to identify particular trends or issues which might need further consideration by the Committee and/or wider training needs.

3.3 During the preceding quarter, one complaint against a councillor has been received by the Monitoring Officer. This related to their use of social media and has been dealt with informally.

4 Declarations of Interest

4.1 The Council's requirements for its members to register and declare interests are set out in paragraph 9 of the Members' Code of Conduct.

4.2 Each Councillor's Register of Interests, together with any Declarations at Meetings, is published on their profile page in the [Your Councillors](#) section of the Council's website.

4.3 These are updated as and when changes are notified to the Monitoring Officer (via Councillor Services), and a reminder has recently been sent to all Councillors to update their Register of Interests, or confirm no change.

5. Gifts and Hospitality

5.1 The requirement to register with the Monitoring Officer the receipt of any gift or hospitality with an estimated value of at least £25 is set out in paragraph 10 of the Members' Code of Conduct. No qualifying gifts or hospitality have been registered in the preceding quarter (December 2025 – March 2026).

6. Recruitment of Independent Person

6.1 The Council is required, by Section 28 of the Localism Act 2011, to appoint at least one Independent Person whose views are to be sought, and taken into account, by the Council before it makes its decision on an allegation under the Members' Code of Conduct that it has decided to investigate. The views of the Independent Person may also be sought by a member, or co-opted member, of the Council if that person's behaviour is the subject of an allegation.

6.2 For the purposes of the legislation, a person is not independent if they are, or have been in the preceding five years, a member, co-opted member or officer of the Council, or a relative or close friend of a member, co-opted member or officer.

6.3 Following the retirement of the Council's previous Independent Person, the post of Independent Person is currently vacant. An Independent Person may not be appointed unless the vacancy has been advertised, the person has submitted an application to fill the vacancy, and the person's appointment has been approved by a majority of the members of the authority.

6.4 The post has therefore been advertised with the intention that full Council can make an appointment at its meeting in June 2026, following a selection process.

7 Recruitment of Independent Chair

7.1 The terms of reference of the Standards Committee include provision for at least one, and no more than three, co-opted Independent Member(s), that is, persons who are not a councillor or an officer of the Council or otherwise disqualified from being a member of a committee of the Council under Section 104 of the Local Government Act 1972. The Committee's terms of reference further provide that the Council will appoint an Independent Member of the Standards Committee to be its Chair.

7.2 At present, the Committee does not have any Independent Members. Accordingly, the role has also been advertised with the intention that full Council can make an appointment at its meeting in June 2026 following a selection process.

8. Member Training and Development

8.1 The Member Training and Development Programme is in the process of being refreshed for the 2026/27 municipal year and will commence immediately following the local elections in May.

9. Contribution to Strategic Aims

9.1 The Council Plan has established five priorities for the years 2025/28. These priorities are:

- Promote more equal communities in Reading;
- Secure Reading's economic and cultural success;
- Deliver a sustainable and healthy environment and reduce our carbon footprint;
- Safeguard and support the health and wellbeing of Reading's adults and children;
- Ensure Reading Borough Council is fit for the future.

9.2 In delivering these priorities, we will be guided by the following set of principles:

- Putting residents first;
- Building on strong foundations;
- Recognising, respecting, and nurturing all our diverse communities;
- Involving, collaborating, and empowering residents;
- Being proudly ambitious for Reading.

9.3 Full details of the Council Plan and the projects which will deliver these priorities are published on the Council's website: [Council plan - Reading Borough Council](#). These priorities and the Council Plan demonstrate how the Council meets its legal obligation to be efficient, effective and economical.

9.4 The Council's strategic aims are underpinned by the ability of members, officers and local residents to participate in democratic processes in the confidence that high standards are maintained. The Members' Code of Conduct and the Standards Committee assist in building and maintaining that confidence.

10 Environmental and Climate Implications

10.1 The Council declared a Climate Emergency at its meeting on 26 February 2019 (Minute 48 refers).

10.2 There are no environmental or climate implications arising from the contents of this report.

11 Community Engagement

11.1 There are no Community Engagement implications arising from this report.

12 Equality Implications

12.1 An Equality Impact Assessment is not relevant to the contents of this report.

13 Other Relevant Considerations

13.1 There are none.

14 Legal Implications

14.1 Covered in the body of the report.

15 Financial Implications

15.1 The Independent Chair of the Standards Committee receives a Special Responsibility Allowance (Tier 3) and the Independent Person receives a Special Responsibility Allowance (Tier 4) under the Members' Allowances Scheme 2026/27, as approved by Council on 27 January 2026.

16 Timetable for Implementation

16.1 Not applicable.

17 Background Papers

17.1 There are none.

Standards Committee

21 April 2026



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Title	Strengthening the standards and conduct framework for local authorities in England – government response to consultation
Purpose of the report	To note the report for information
Report status	Public report
Executive Director/ Statutory Officer Commissioning Report	Jayne La Grua, Monitoring Officer
Report author	Simon Hill, Acting Democratic Services Manager
Lead Councillor	Councillor Terry, Leader of the Council
Council priority	Ensure Reading Borough Council is fit for the future
Recommendations	That the report be noted.

1. Executive Summary

- 1.1. Since the previous meeting of the Standards Committee, the Government has published its response to a consultation carried out in 2024-25 on '*Strengthening the Standards and Conduct Framework for Local Authorities in England*', which indicates the proposals it intends to take forward in legislating for a whole system reform of the current standards regime as set out in the Localism Act 2011.
- 1.2. This report summarises for information the Government's announced position¹ following their consideration of responses to the consultation. Further updates and an assessment of actions required to comply with the proposed reforms will be provided as the legislation progresses.

2. Policy Context

- 2.1. The Localism Act 2011 introduced changes to the standards regime for local authorities in England. It abolished the national Standards Board for England and ended the centrally prescribed model code of conduct, replacing the national framework with a more decentralised, locally driven system of accountability and self-regulation. Councils were required to adopt their own local code of conduct, focused on the Nolan Principles of public life, and to put in place arrangements for investigating complaints, including appointing at least one Independent Person to give views on allegations.
- 2.2. The Localism Act retained a duty on local authorities to promote and maintain high standards of conduct, but removed most statutory sanctions, meaning councils could no longer suspend members; they were instead limited to local remedies such as censure or training requirements.
- 2.3. Reading Borough Council retained a local Standards Committee which has overseen our local Member Code of Conduct and arrangements for dealing with allegations of breaches of the Code. These were most recently considered at the Committee's meeting on 10

¹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/strengthening-the-standards-and-conduct-framework-for-local-authorities-in-england/outcome/strengthening-the-standards-and-conduct-framework-for-local-authorities-in-england-consultation-results-and-government-response>

October 2022, when a new Member Code of Conduct, largely based on the Local Government Association's Model Code, was recommended for adoption by Council. The new Code and associated procedures and changes to the Constitution were agreed at the Council meeting of 18 October 2022.²

3. Standards and Conduct Framework for Local Authorities In England: summary of proposed reforms

- 3.1 The Government's response to the consultation sets out its intention to introduce a strengthened national framework for standards in local government, centred on a mandatory code of conduct and a clearer, more consistent system for handling complaints, investigations, sanctions, and appeals. The proposals aim to provide greater transparency, support for those affected by misconduct, and more robust mechanisms for upholding high standards of ethical conduct among elected and co-opted members.

Introduction of a Mandatory Code Of Conduct

- 3.2 A central element of the proposals is the introduction of a mandatory national code of conduct. This code will set out expected behavioural standards and impose an explicit requirement for elected and co-opted members to co-operate with any code-related investigation. The Government also intends to make clear that submitting repeated vexatious complaints constitutes a breach of the code itself.
- 3.3 The principle of a mandatory code will be established through primary legislation, supported by regulations that will set out its detailed content. This approach will enable further engagement with the sector during development and allow future amendments as needed. Local authorities will be permitted to produce their own supplementary protocols or guidance, but these must align with the mandatory code and will not themselves form part of the enforceable standards framework.

Standards Committees

- 3.4 Legislation will require all relevant principal authorities to establish a Standards Committee, or a sub-committee dedicated to considering code of conduct matters. The Government plans further engagement with public sector bodies before finalising any specific requirements for committee membership.
- 3.5 Authorities will be required to ensure that all code of conduct investigations are completed and that their outcomes are published. This duty will apply even in cases where the investigation finds no wrongdoing or where a member resigns before the process concludes. By mandating the publication of both findings and decisions, the Government aims to increase transparency and public confidence.
- 3.5 In addition, the Government will work with public sector organisations to develop best practice guidance covering the handling of code of conduct complaints. It will also retain the statutory duty to promote and maintain high standards of conduct and consider, with sector representatives, how Standards Committees might further fulfil this responsibility.

Supporting Complainants and Respondents

- 3.6 To strengthen fairness and accountability, both complainants and the subject member will be granted a right to request a review of a Standards Committee's decision. Legislation will define appropriate grounds for exercising this right at the local level.
- 3.7 The Government also intends to provide additional support for individuals affected by councillor misconduct. Best practice guidance will contain recommended actions for supporting both complainants and respondents throughout the process. Furthermore, the government will explore the case for establishing an independent, confidential helpline for complainants to provide additional advice and support.

² <https://democracy.reading.gov.uk/mgAi.aspx?ID=8980>

Introducing the sanction of suspension

- 3.8 Authorities will be given the power to suspend elected members for up to six months where a serious breach of the code of conduct is proven. Standards Committees will be solely responsible for imposing such a sanction, and only after receiving and considering a formal investigation report and the views of the Independent Person.
- 3.9 The legislation will also allow Standards Committees, at their discretion, to withhold allowances and to restrict access to premises or facilities. These measures may be used either alongside suspension or as standalone sanctions in cases of persistent or disruptive conduct.

Interim Suspension

- 3.10 A new power for interim suspension will be introduced, but only in tightly defined circumstances. Authorities will be permitted to impose an interim suspension when a member faces serious allegations that are under external investigation by the police or other bodies in the criminal justice system, or where a court hearing or sentencing is pending. This recognises that in some situations there may be legitimate safeguarding concerns and that councils may have limited control over the pace of external investigations.
- 3.11 To justify the use of interim suspension, Standards Committees must consider two criteria:
- (1) **Seriousness of the allegations** – the matter must involve alleged criminal behaviour of a serious nature and be under active investigation; and
 - (2) **Risk of harm** – continued participation by the member could pose a risk to the public, the complainant, the member themselves, or the authority's reputation.
- 3.12 The maximum initial period of interim suspension will be three months, subject to ongoing review if the investigation remains unresolved. The Government will consult further on whether authorities should publish decisions on interim suspensions, and where appropriate, publish notices exonerating members when investigations conclude with no charges or findings of guilt.

Disqualification for multiple breaches and gross misconduct

- 3.13 Legislation will introduce a new disqualification criterion: a member will be disqualified if they receive the maximum six-month suspension twice within a five-year period. This measure is intended to address persistent or serious misconduct that undermines public trust.

Appeals and a national appeals function

- 3.14 Finally, the Government will legislate on arrangements for appeals against code of conduct decisions, following further development of the proposed local right to review and consideration of the appropriate scope of a national appeals function. This work will clarify how local and national mechanisms should interact to ensure fairness, consistency, and proportionality.

4. Contribution to Strategic Aims

- 4.1. The Council Plan has established five priorities for the years 2025/28. These priorities are:
- Promote more equal communities in Reading;
 - Secure Reading's economic and cultural success;
 - Deliver a sustainable and healthy environment and reduce our carbon footprint;
 - Safeguard and support the health and wellbeing of Reading's adults and children;
 - Ensure Reading Borough Council is fit for the future.
- 4.2. In delivering these priorities, we will be guided by the following set of principles:

- Putting residents first;
 - Building on strong foundations;
 - Recognising, respecting, and nurturing all our diverse communities;
 - Involving, collaborating, and empowering residents;
 - Being proudly ambitious for Reading.
- 4.3. Full details of the Council Plan and the projects which will deliver these priorities are published on the Council's website: [Council plan - Reading Borough Council](#). These priorities and the Council Plan demonstrate how the Council meets its legal obligation to be efficient, effective and economical.
- 4.4. The Council's strategic aims are underpinned by the ability of members, officers and local residents to participate in democratic processes in the confidence that high standards are maintained. The Members' Code of Conduct and the Standards Committee assist in building and maintaining that confidence
- 5. Environmental and Climate Implications**
- 5.1. The Council declared a Climate Emergency at its meeting on 26 February 2019 (Minute 48 refers).
- 5.2. There are no environmental or climate implications arising from the contents of this report.
- 6. Community Engagement**
- 6.1. There are no Community Engagement implications arising from this report.
- 7. Equality Implications**
- 7.1. An Equality Impact Assessment is not relevant to the contents of this report.
- 8. Other Relevant Considerations**
- 8.1. There are none.
- 9. Legal Implications**
- 9.1. Covered in the body of the report.
- 10. Financial Implications**
- 10.1. There are no financial implications arising from this report.
- 11. Timetable for Implementation**
- 11.1. There is no published timetable at this stage for legislation to bring forward the proposed reforms.
- 12. Background Papers**
- 12.1. There are none.