

Agenda

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Standards Committee

This meeting will be held on:

Date: **Tuesday 17 March 2026**

Time: **6.30 pm**

Place: **Long Room - Oxford Town Hall**

For further information please contact:

Hannah Carmody-Brown, Committee & Member Services Officer,

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✉ standards@oxford.gov.uk

Members of the public can attend to observe this meeting and.

- may register in advance to speak to the committee in accordance with the [committee's rules](#)
- may record all or part of the meeting in accordance with the Council's [protocol](#)

Information about speaking and recording is set out in the agenda and on the [website](#)

Please contact the Committee Services Officer to register to speak; to discuss recording the meeting; or with any other queries.

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Committee Membership

Councillors: Membership 7: Quorum 3: substitutes are permitted.

Councillor Susanna Pressel (Chair)

Councillor Dr Christopher Snowton

Councillor Lizzy Diggins (Vice-Chair)

Councillor Dr Hosnieh Djafari-Marbini

Councillor Judith Harley

Councillor Naomi Waite

Councillor Dr Max Morris

Chris Ballinger Independent Person non-voting

Andrew Mills-Hicks Independent Person non-voting

Eric Feltin Independent Person non-voting

Lois Lezemore Independent Person non-voting

Ala Soualhi Independent Person non-voting

Dr Bushra Almunir Yousef Independent Person non-voting

Peter Nowland Blackbird Leys Parish Council
(Blackbird Leys Ward)

Apologies and notification of substitutes received before the publication are shown under *Apologies for absence* in the agenda. Those sent after publication will be reported at the meeting. Substitutes for the Chair and Vice-chair do not take on these roles.

Agenda

	Pages
1 Apologies for Absence Councillor Pressel sent apologies.	
2 Declarations of Interest	
3 Minutes of the previous meeting Recommendation: That the Committee resolve to approve the minutes of the meeting held on 13 November 2025 as a true and accurate record.	1 - 4
4 Addresses by members of the public Public addresses relating to matters of business for this agenda, up to five minutes is available for each public address. <i>The request to speak accompanied by the full text of the address must be received by the Director of Law, Governance and Strategy by 5.00 pm on Wednesday 11 March 2026.</i>	
5 Councillor addresses on any item for discussion Councillor addresses relating to matters of business for this agenda, up to five minutes is available for each address. <i>The request should be received by the Director of Law, Governance and Strategy by 5.00 pm on Wednesday 11 March 2026.</i>	
6 Appointment of a Parish Council representative as a non-voting member of the Standards Committee The Director of Law, Governance and Strategy (Monitoring Officer) had submitted a report to outline the requirement to recommend to full Council the Parish Council representative on the committee as a non-voting member.	5 - 8

Recommendation(s): That the Standards Committee resolves to:

- **Recommend to Full Council** to appoint Councillor David Newman of Blackbird Leys Parish Council as the co-opted, non-voting member of the Standards Committee representing the four Parish Councils in Oxford until May 2026.

7 Consultation Results and Government Response to Remote Meetings and Proxy Voting

9 - 28

The Director of Law, Governance and Strategy (Monitoring Officer) had submitted a report to update the Standards Committee on the Government's response to the consultation for Remote Meetings and Proxy Voting for Local Government Committees.

Recommendation(s): That the Standards Committee resolves to:

- **Note** the Government's response to the consultation for Remote Meetings and Proxy Voting for Local Government Committees.

8 Consultation Results and Government Response to Strengthening the Standards and Conduct framework for Local Authorities in England

29 - 72

The Director of Law, Governance and Strategy (Monitoring Officer) had submitted a report to update the Committee on the Government's response to Strengthening the standards and conduct framework for local authorities in England.

Recommendation(s): That the Standards Committee resolves to:

- **Note** the Government's response to the consultation for Strengthening the standards and conduct framework for local authorities in England.

9 Update to the Committee on Standards in Public Life – Local Government Ethical Standards

73 - 88

The Director of Law, Governance and Strategy (Monitoring Officer) had submitted a report to inform the Committee of the progress in implementing the best practice recommendations of the Committee on Standards in Public Life report on Local Government Ethical Standards.

Recommendation(s): That the Standards Committee resolves to:

- **Note** the progress made by the Council listed within the report.

10 Dispensations under Section 33 of the Localism Act 2011 89 - 92

The Director of Law, Governance and Strategy (Monitoring Officer) had submitted a report to set out the proposal that the Committee approve the general dispensation as set out at section 2 of the report for a period of four years.

Recommendation(s): That the Standards Committee resolves to:

- **Approve**, under Section 33 of the Localism Act 2011, the general dispensations for all elected and co-opted Members of Oxford City Council to remain in force for a period of four years from 1 October 2026 to 30 September 2030.

11 Code of Conduct: summary of complaints and individual dispensations - 1 November 2025 to 28 February 2026 93 - 100

The Director of Law, Governance and Strategy (Monitoring Officer) had submitted a report to advise the Committee of:

- The number and status of complaints received under the Members' Code of Conduct which have been, or are to be, considered by the Director of Law, Governance and Strategy (in her statutory capacity as the authority's Monitoring Officer) in consultation with one of the Council's Independent Persons.
- The number of dispensations to an individual member, granted under Section 33 of the 2011 Localism Act, by the Monitoring Officer, following consultation with an Independent Person.

Recommendation(s): That the Standards Committee resolves to:

- **Note** the updates to the Code of Conduct complaints received by the Monitoring Officer since the previous committee.

12 Member Training Update: March 2026 101 - 106

The Director of Law, Governance and Strategy (Monitoring Officer) had submitted a report to update the Standards Committee on the delivery

of Member training from November 2026 to February 2026.

Recommendation(s): That the Standards Committee resolves to:

- **Note** the updates to the Councillors training since the previous committee.

13 Dates of future meetings

The Committee is scheduled to meet on the following dates:

- 4 June 2026
- 8 October 2026

Information for those attending

Recording and reporting on meetings held in public

Members of public and press can record, or report in other ways, the parts of the meeting open to the public. You are not required to indicate in advance but it helps if you notify the Committee Services Officer prior to the meeting so that they can inform the Chair and direct you to the best place to record.

The Council asks those recording the meeting:

- To follow the protocol which can be found on the Council's [website](#)
- Not to disturb or disrupt the meeting
- Not to edit the recording in a way that could lead to misinterpretation of the proceedings. This includes not editing an image or views expressed in a way that may ridicule or show a lack of respect towards those being recorded.
- To avoid recording members of the public present, even inadvertently, unless they are addressing the meeting.

Please be aware that you may be recorded during your speech and any follow-up. If you are attending please be aware that recording may take place and that you may be inadvertently included in these.

The Chair of the meeting has absolute discretion to suspend or terminate any activities that in his or her opinion are disruptive.

Councillors declaring interests

General duty

You must declare any disclosable pecuniary interests when the meeting reaches the item on the agenda headed "Declarations of Interest" or as soon as it becomes apparent to you.

What is a disclosable pecuniary interest?

Disclosable pecuniary interests relate to your* employment; sponsorship (ie payment for expenses incurred by you in carrying out your duties as a councillor or towards your election expenses); contracts; land in the Council's area; licenses for land in the Council's area; corporate tenancies; and securities. These declarations must be recorded in each councillor's Register of Interests which is publicly available on the Council's website.

Declaring an interest

Where any matter disclosed in your Register of Interests is being considered at a meeting, you must declare that you have an interest. You should also disclose the nature as well as the existence of the interest. If you have a disclosable pecuniary interest, after having declared it at the meeting you must not participate in discussion or voting on the item and must withdraw from the meeting whilst the matter is discussed.

Members' Code of Conduct and public perception

Even if you do not have a disclosable pecuniary interest in a matter, the Members' Code of Conduct says that a member "must serve only the public interest and must never improperly confer an advantage or disadvantage on any person including yourself" and that "you must not place yourself in situations where your honesty and integrity may be questioned". The matter of interests must be viewed within the context of the Code as a whole and regard should continue to be paid to the perception of the public.

*Disclosable pecuniary interests that must be declared are not only those of the member her or himself but also those member's spouse, civil partner or person they are living with as husband or wife or as if they were civil partners.

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Minutes of a meeting of the Standards Committee on Thursday 13 November 2025

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Committee members present:

Councillor Pressel (Chair)	Councillor Snowton
Councillor Djafari-Marbini	Councillor Harley
Councillor Waite	Councillor Morris

Officers present for all or part of the meeting:

Hannah Carmody-Brown, Committee and Member Services Officer
Jonathan Malton, Committee and Member Services Manager
Emma Jackman, Director of Law, Governance and Strategy (Monitoring Officer)

Also present:

Eric Feltin, Independent Person (non-voting)

15. Apologies for Absence

Councillor Diggins sent apologies and attended online.

The Chair welcomed the new Independent Person, Eric Feltin.

16. Declarations of Interest

Councillor Harley noted her membership of the same political party as Councillor David Henwood who is referenced in one report on the agenda. The Monitoring Officer confirmed that this does not qualify as a conflict of interest but noted that Councillor Harley must attend the meeting with an open mind. It was advised that if unable to do so, Councillor Harley should choose to leave the room during deliberation of the relevant item. Councillor Harley also noted that Councillor Malik, referenced in the report, is her ward councillor. The Monitoring Officer provided the same advice on this matter.

Councillor Snowton joined the meeting.

Councillor Snowton noted that one of the reports on the agenda refers to Councillor Railton, his wife. It was clarified that the report is anonymised, and Councillor Railton is not specifically mentioned.

Councillor Diggins joined online.

17. Minutes of the previous meeting

Councillor Djafari-Marbini requested that note of her online attendance at the last meeting be corrected on the minutes and added in both relevant sections of the document; this update was confirmed. Councillor Djafari-Marbini also noted some confusion relating to the current rules around online attendance at Committee meetings since the pandemic. The Monitoring Officer explained that remote attendance is managed in line with relevant legislation, and it is not possible to formally note online attendance as the temporary provisions set out during the pandemic have now ended. Councillor Djafari-Marbini recommended to the Chair that the Leader of the Council may write to Parliament regarding an update to the relevant legislation.

The Committee resolved to **approve** the minutes of the meeting held on 3 July 2025 as a true and accurate record.

18. Addresses by members of the public

None.

19. Councillor addresses on any item for discussion

None.

20. Code of Conduct: summary of complaints and individual dispensations - 20 June 2025 to 31 October 2025

The Director of Law, Governance and Strategy (Monitoring Officer) had submitted a report to advise the Committee of:

- The number and status of complaints received under the Members' Code of Conduct which have been, or are to be, considered by the Director of Law, Governance and Strategy (in her statutory capacity as the authority's Monitoring Officer) in consultation with one of the Council's Independent Persons.
- The number of dispensations to an individual member, granted under Section 33 of the 2011 Localism Act, by the Monitoring Officer, following consultation with an Independent Person
- Update on the action taken in relation to the complaint which was upheld against Councillor Henwood by a Local Hearing Panel on the 27 August 2025.

The Chair noted a correction to the dates listed in paragraph 4 of the report; 2023 was corrected to 2025. The Chair summarised the contents of the report.

In relation to the complaint against Councillor Henwood, the Monitoring Officer summarised the process which had been undertaken and confirmed that it had been concluded the code of conduct had been breached. This was agreed by a Local Hearing Panel which also determined that Councillor Henwood be reprimanded by the Monitoring Officer and that he should send formal apologies to the complainant and the Standards Committee. The Committee were asked to consider the adequacy of these apologies.

The Chair queried the duration of time which it had taken for the letter of apology to have been sent to the complainant. The Monitoring Officer clarified the time frames and delays which took place and confirmed that the letter from Councillor Henwood was sent within the required time limit.

The Chair invited Members to review the letter of apology to the Standards Committee.

Councillor Waite requested clarification on why the Local Hearing Panel had requested the letter be sent back to the Committee for consideration. Councillor Diggins, as chair of the relevant Local Hearing Panel, explained that it had been determined that the letter be brought back to the Committee in any event.

The Monitoring Officer also noted that Councillor Henwood maintains that he did not breach the code of conduct as determined by the Local Hearing Panel, and the Committee were to determine if the apology letters to the Chair of the Standards Committee and to the complainant were sufficient.

The Chair invited a vote on whether the letter to the Chair of the Standards Committee was acceptable. When put to a vote, the Committee voted by 4 in favour, that the apology to the Chair of the Standards Committee was adequate.

Councillor Waite noted her belief that the letter was inadequate as she did not believe it addressed the misleading nature of the comments Councillor Henwood had made on social media.

The Chair requested that the Committee then consider the letter of apology to the complainant. When put to a vote, the Committee voted by 4 in favour, that the apology to the complainant was adequate.

Councillor Waite noted her belief that this letter was also inadequate as it did not address the relevant issues.

The Monitoring Officer noted the outcome of both votes and clarified that the matter was therefore concluded.

The Committee **noted** the content of the report and **confirmed** that the apologies issued by Councillor Henwood were satisfactory.

21. Member Training Update

The Director of Law, Governance and Strategy (Monitoring Officer) had submitted a report to update the Standards Committee on the delivery of Member training from July 2025 to November 2025.

Councillor Harley positively commented on a social media training session recently delivered and praised the responsible officer.

The Committee and Member Services Manager informed the Committee that a review is being undertaken to ensure that maximum engagement for training sessions can be captured in the future.

Councillor Djafari-Marbini asked whether the Council could update its social media training to include content related to accusations of misinformation.

The Monitoring Officer confirmed that this would be considered as part of the review into member development. It was noted that efforts will be made to encourage engagement and attendance at optional training sessions. The feedback from Councillor Harley was welcomed.

The Committee **noted** the report.

22. Dates of future meetings

The Committee **noted** the dates of future meetings.

The meeting started at 6.00 pm and ended at 6.21 pm

Chair

Date: Tuesday 17 March 2026

When decisions take effect:
Cabinet: after the call-in and review period has expired
Planning Committees: after the call-in and review period has expired and the formal decision notice is issued
All other committees: immediately.
Details are in the Council’s Constitution.

To: Standards Committee
Date: 17 March 2026
Report of: Director of Law, Governance and Strategy (Monitoring Officer)
Title of Report: Appointment of a Parish Council representative as a non-voting member of the Standards Committee

Summary and recommendations	
Decision being taken:	For the Standards Committee to recommend to full Council the Parish Council representative on the committee as a non-voting member.
Key decision:	No
Cabinet Member:	N/A
Corporate Priority:	A Well Run Council
Policy Framework:	None.

Recommendation(s):
That the Standards Committee resolves to:
1. Recommend to Full Council to appoint Councillor David Newman of Blackbird Leys Parish Council as the co-opted, non-voting member of the Standards Committee representing the four Parish Councils in Oxford until May 2026.

Information Exempt from Publication	
N/A	N/A

Appendix No.	Appendix Title	Exempt from Publication
N/A	N/A	N/A

Introduction and background

1. The Council may appoint members of committees who are not members of the local authority. Such persons may be appointed because they can offer specialist knowledge, expertise or enthusiasm in the work of the committee, or because they represent sections of the local community that are relevant to the work of the committee. The provision for this is listed at part 14.3 of the Council's Constitution.
2. The Members' Code of Conduct is shared by all Parish Councils, District Councils and the County Council within Oxfordshire, and will apply equally to parish councillors as to city (and county) councillors.

Standards Committee and Appointment from the Parish Councils

3. The Oxford City Council Standards Committee membership provides for one co-opted (non-voting) member to represent the four Parish Councils in Oxford.
4. On 29 November 2021, Council resolved to appoint Councillor Peter Nowland to the position until May 2022 (when his term of office ended, pending re-election). Full Council reappointed Councillor Nowland in July 2022 until May 2026; that period will soon elapse, and therefore, Council is required to agree an appointment.
5. The Parish Councils may agree jointly on a single nominee, or they may submit individual nominations from each Parish Council.
6. There are no rules concerning the qualifications of the appointment, but common sense suggests that:
 - The appointment would be for the duration of the representative's term of office on the Parish Council; this is to provide a degree of consistency and continuity.
 - The appointment should not be for a dual-hatted City and Parish Councillor.
7. Only one Parish Council submitted a nomination, with no objections from the remaining Parish Councils:
 - Councillor David Newman, Blackbird Leys Parish Council
8. Councillor Newman's current term of office at Blackbird Leys Parish Council ends in May 2027. Councillor Newman has been a member of the Parish Council since May 2023.

Alternative Options Considered

9. The Standards Committee could not recommend to appoint Councillor Newman to the Standards Committee, however it would be considered to be inappropriate. The Parish Councils have submitted their nomination to represent their views at the Standards Committee, and it would not be appropriate to recommend against their requested appointment.
10. It would also leave the Parish Councils without a representative at the first Standards Committee of the new municipal year in June 2026.

Implications of Local Government Reorganisation

11. Traditionally, the nomination has been for a four-year term, however Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) is due to take effect from 1 May 2028 and Councillor Newman's term of office is due to expire in May 2027. Depending on where the Council is during the process of LGR, officers will advise on how the appointment should be made in 12 months' time.
12. Thereafter any future nomination to the equivalent of the Standards Committee would be a matter for the new Unitary Authority.

Financial implications

13. There are no financial implications arising from this report. Co-opted members of committees are not entitled to be paid allowances under the Councillors' Allowances Scheme (Part 26 of the Constitution).

Legal issues

14. The Council has the power under Section 102 of the Local Government Act 1972 to appoint persons other than members of the authority to committees. The composition of the Standards Committee is set out in Part 14.3 of the Constitution and provides for a non-voting co-opted member to represent the parish councils in Oxford.

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Background Papers:	
1	Oxford City Council Constitution Part14OtherCommitteeprocedures2025.pdf
2	Oxford City Council Constitution Part22MembersCodeofConduct.pdf
3	Local Government Association Model Councillor Code of Conduct 2020

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To: Standards Committee
Date: 17 March 2026
Report of: Director of Law, Governance and Strategy (Monitoring Officer)
Title of Report: Consultation Results and Government Response to Remote Meetings and Proxy Voting

Summary and recommendations	
Decision being taken:	To note the Government's response to the consultation for Remote Meetings and Proxy Voting for Local Government Committees.
Key decision:	No
Cabinet Member:	N/A
Corporate Priority:	N/A
Policy Framework:	N/A

Recommendation(s): That the Standards Committee resolves to:
1. Note the Government's response to the consultation for Remote Meetings and Proxy Voting for Local Government Committees.

Information Exempt from Publication
N/A

Appendix No.	Appendix Title	Exempt from Publication
Appendix 1	Government Response to Consultation on Remote Meetings and Proxy Voting – 5 June 2025	No

Introduction and background

1. Following the discussion at the previous Standards Committee in November 2025, where Members asked about the provision of remote attendance at Committee meetings, Committee and Member Services have reviewed the latest from Government with this provision to allow remote attendance.
2. As per the Local Government Act 1972, all Committee meetings are required to be in a physical location and for all Committee Members to be present within the room.
3. During the Coronavirus Pandemic in 2020, the Government passed emergency legislation, The Local Authorities and Police and Crime Panels (Coronavirus) (Flexibility of Local Authority and Police and Crime Panel Meetings) (England and Wales) Regulations 2020 allowing all Committee meetings to be held virtually. This temporary legislation expired on 6 May 2021, forcing all local authorities to return to in-person Committees.
4. Equipment for hybrid meetings have been installed in committee rooms at local authorities across the Country to enable livestreaming and for some remote attendance, but attending remotely is only permitted for non-committee Members and Officers, as these are not bound by the legislation.

Remote and Hybrid Meetings from 2019 to 2024

5. There has been extensive lobbying from local authorities across the country alongside the support organisations which represent Local Government at a national level. Their responses to the requests from their member organisations are documented below and within the background documents.
6. The Local Government Information Unit (LGIU) had previously called upon the Government to review remote attendance for committee meetings back in 2019, after the Government had indicated they would be reviewing remote attendance initially for Combined Authorities or Joint Committees.
7. The District Councils Network (DCN) responded to a Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) consultation for evidence on the continuation of remote meetings in June 2021, noting should be for local authorities to decide what works best for their decision-making processes and ensuring councils to meet openness & transparency and access to information requirements, they should be allowed to proceed in the most suitable way and the opportunity to develop hybrid sessions, mixing remote and in person accessibility to best support local democracy.
8. The Local Government Association (LGA) circulated a survey in October 2021, a few months after the legislation had elapsed, to all local authorities to assess the impact of the return to in-person meetings, with the results below:
9. 72% thought that councillor attendance was lower since returning to in-person meetings.
10. 73% thought that attendance by members of the public is lower since returning to in-person council meetings.
11. 53% thought that engagement by members of the public with council meetings is lower since returning to in-person meetings.

12. 84% thought that the costs associated with statutory council meetings had increased.
13. 81% said that they had not had any meetings that were cancelled or not quorate due to councillors being unable to attend.
14. 77% were concerned about running statutory council meetings exclusively in person in the long-term.
15. The County Council Network (CCN) responded to the National Association of Local Councils (NALC) survey as part of their 'Make a Change' campaign in May 2022, with the results indicating:
16. 92% of councillors under the age of 44 and 61% of those aged 65 and over said that adopting a hybrid model would help improve the diversity of councils. 85% of female councillors said such a model would enable a better councillor-life balance. Just 11% of respondents to the survey were under the age of 44.
17. 51% said adopting a hybrid model which enables local people to watch all meetings online would make their council more accessible and accountable to their residents. 69% of respondents said video conferencing had helped them engage with community groups during the pandemic.
18. 70% said a hybrid model would cut down on travel expenses for their local authority, and 76% said it would cut down on their carbon footprint. One councillor in a rural county estimated such a model could cut down on 1,000 miles for them a year.

Remote and Hybrid Meetings since 2024

19. The Association of Democratic Services Officers (ADSO) and Lawyers in Local Government (LLG) have continued to campaign the Government to create the provision for remote meetings since the end of the temporary legislation.
20. On 24 October 2024, the government published a consultation on remote attendance and proxy voting at local authority meetings and invited all local authorities to complete the consultation. The consultation closed on 19 December 2024. The consultation sought views on the practical implications of allowing remote attendance and proxy voting at local authority meetings.
21. The Society of Local Council Clerks (SLCC) submitted a public response to the consultation, noting that the remote attendance would enable participation from those with caring responsibilities, support councillors managing illness or disability, increase diversity in local democracy and enhance accessibility to local decision-making.
22. On 5 June 2025, the Government issued its response in which it stated that they "plan to collaboratively develop guidance with the sector on both policies, to ensure that local authority schemes are supportive of members and officers."

Next Steps

23. It is expected the Government will include the relevant powers for remote and hybrid council meetings in the forthcoming English Devolution and Community Empowerment Bill. This would form part of the sector-wide re-alignment as part of Local Government Reorganisation.

- 24. The government is anticipated to take the bill through the legislative process in 2026, having been introduced in July 2025.
- 25. As per the ministerial statement as part of the consultation response, as set out in Appendix 1, it is expected that when the legislation is implemented, local authorities will be expected to set their own remote and hybrid attendance policies, which could include the minimum requirements for in-person attendance and which committees could be held entirely remotely.

Alternative Options Considered

- 26. There are no alternative recommendations, the Committee are asked to note the Government’s response on remote meetings and proxy voting.
- 27. Councillors should be informed and up to date about potential changes to the constitution of governance meetings.

Implications of Local Government Reorganisation

- 28. It is widely expected that any changes or superseding of the Local Government Act 1972 will coincide with Local Government Reorganisation and any associated legislation. Any decisions relating to quorum of in-person attendees compared to virtual attendees and the process for proxy voting would be matter for the new Unitary Authority.

Financial implications

- 29. There are no financial implications arising from this report. Any future decision to include remote or hybrid committee meetings would be subject to financial review as part of a wider review of implementation the Government’s requests.

Legal issues

- 30. There are no legal implications arising from this report. Any future decision to include remote or hybrid committee meetings would be subject to legal review as part of a wider review of implementation the Government’s requests.

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Background Papers:

- 1 [Remote attendance and proxy voting in local authorities: consultation results and government response - GOV.UK](#)
- 2 [DCN responds to MHCLG call for evidence on the continuation of remote meetings | District Councils' Network](#)
- 3 [Impact of in-person council meetings survey: October - November 2021 | Local Government Association](#)
- 4 [New County Councils Network and Zoom report backs NALC call for remote meeting powers](#)
- 5 [NALC secures major victory as the government backs remote council meetings](#)
- 6 [ADSO joins call for remote and hybrid council meetings to be prioritised in new legislation - ADSO](#)
- 7 [LGA on remote attendance announcement | Local Government Association](#)
- 8 [SLCC | Enabling remote attendance and proxy voting at local authority meetings](#)

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Consultation outcome

Remote attendance and proxy voting in local authorities: consultation results and government response

Updated 5 June 2025

Ministerial foreword

In-person debate, discussion, and the opportunity for residents to engage with their representatives are core aspects of local democracy. At the same time, we know that it is not always possible for elected members to attend local authority meetings in person. We want to support the local government sector to modernise their democratic practices and make elected roles more accessible for more people.

We are keen to reflect feedback from the current makeup of councils, and the demands and requirements we have heard in that process, and also lead the way in opening up elected office for a broader range of candidates, including those of working age, those with caring responsibilities and those with disabilities or other personal circumstances which would benefit from modernised democratic practices.

In the spirit of resetting our relationship with local government, we want to ensure that local authorities can develop their own remote and hybrid attendance policies, with local knowledge, and to respond to local need. Local authorities vary in size, location, responsibility, and makeup, and we want to ensure that they can develop appropriately responsive policies. When elected members cannot attend even remotely, we aim for proxy voting schemes to provide local authorities and members with additional support.

I want to thank all 5,844 respondents to this consultation. Your views on this topic and the richness of your responses have been truly valuable in assisting the government to progress these policies. I hope that these reforms will improve the experience of elected members serving their communities and encourage more people to consider locally elected office.

Jim McMahon OBE MP
Minister for Local Government and English Devolution

1. Introduction

Following time-limited Covid remote attendance permissions that expired in 2021, local authority meetings have been required to be held in a single, specified, physical 'place'.

Appendix 1

On 24 October 2024, the government published a consultation on remote attendance and proxy voting at local authority meetings. The consultation closed on 19 December 2024 and received 5,844 responses. The consultation sought views on the practical implications of allowing remote attendance and proxy voting at local authority meetings.

2. Analysis methodology

Quantitative analysis

The multiple-choice responses to each question were analysed and broken down by respondent class. The figures provided do not include respondents who did not answer the relevant question, and more detail on respondent groupings has been provided below where relevant.

Qualitative analysis

NVivo, a qualitative data analysis tool, was used to support our thematic analysis of free text responses. We reviewed free text responses, then used NVivo to systematically code the data to identify and group common language and themes. We reviewed and refined the themes to ensure that they accurately represented the data and provided us with a comprehensive understanding of the free text responses.

3. Enabling remote attendance and proxy voting at local authority meetings

5,844 respondents completed our consultation between 24 October and 19 December 2024. Figures 1 and 2 show the breakdown of respondent type.

Question 1: In what capacity are you responding to this consultation?

As outlined in Figure 1 below, the majority (63%) of responses to this consultation came from elected members. Most other responses were on behalf of councils themselves (22%) or from members of the public (15%). We received 32 responses from sector representative bodies.

Respondents who responded in their capacity as an elected member or on behalf of a council body were asked to indicate what type of local authority they represent. As outlined in Figure 2 below, most responses came from town or parish councils (3,327) and district or borough councils (858).

Figure 1



A local government sector body

1%

Figure 2

	Local Authority Type (Council Body)	Number of Respondents
1.	Town or parish council	3,327
2.	District or borough council	858
3.	Unitary Council	366
4.	County Council	154
5.	Combined authority/combined county authority	7
6.	Fire and rescue authority	5
7.	Police and crime panel	4
8.	Other local authority type	41
	Total	4762

Question 2: Do you agree with the broad principle of granting local authorities powers to allow remote attendance at formal meetings?

As outlined in Figure 3 below, a significant majority (86%) of respondents were in favour of the broad principle of allowing remote attendance at council meetings. Support for remote attendance was consistently high across the different respondent categories, as outlined in Figure 4.

For this figure, respondents who indicated they were responding on behalf of or as an elected member of a county council or a unitary authority have been combined into a single category representing upper tier councils. Some other categories were excluded from this analysis due to small sample sizes.

Figure 3**Figure 4**

Yes

No





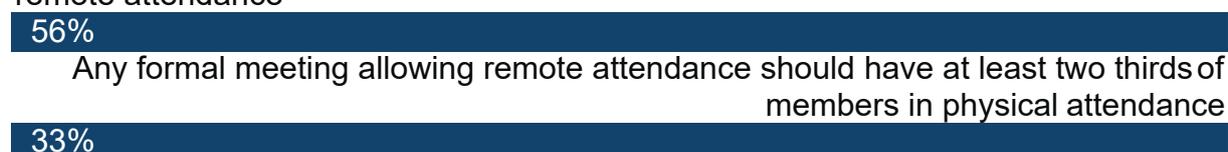
Question 3: If you answered ‘yes’ to question 2, do you think that there should be specific limitations on remote attendance?

As outlined in Figure 5 below, over half of respondents (56%) who were in favour of the broad principle of remote attendance at council meetings did not think that there should be limitations placed on remote attendance. A third of respondents thought that elected members should only be able to attend meetings remotely in exceptional circumstances, and a third thought that two thirds of elected members at a meeting should be present in person.

Figure 5 only includes respondents who answered “yes” to question 2. Respondents could indicate multiple answers in response to this question, and respondents were invited to submit additional limitations through free text fields. Respondents who only provided a free text response have not been included in this figure.

Figure 5

There should be no limitations placed upon councils with regard to setting arrangements for remote attendance of council meetings, up to and including full remote attendance



Members should only be able to attend council meetings remotely in exceptional circumstances, such as those who are medically or physically unable to attend, or for reasons of local or national emergencies

33%

Our analysis of free text responses identified three key themes in response to this question: digital limitations, the risk of bias and inclusion in local democracy.

1. On digital limitations, some authorities (particularly parish councils) noted that they may not have equipment to facilitate hybrid meetings. Some respondents noted concerns about whether members joining online would fully participate in meetings; others were concerned about whether hybrid or fully remote meetings would reduce public access to meetings, or impact the quality of meetings.
2. On risk of bias, some respondents noted concerns about who would develop and implement limitations on remote attendance: many respondents felt that these decisions should be made by councils, because they best understand their local challenges, while some noted that this would place a burden on councils and result in possible challenges of bias if limitations excluded specific groups or were perceived to be unfair.
3. In relation to inclusion, respondents noted that allowing online attendance would encourage more people to become councillors. Respondents believed that remote attendance may remove barriers to becoming a councillor for people with disabilities or caring responsibilities.

Question 4: If you are an elected member, can you anticipate that you personally may seek to attend some of your council meetings remotely?

As set out in Figure 6 below, most responses from elected members indicated that they may seek to attend some meetings remotely (74%). Respondents who indicated that they were not an elected member have been excluded from this analysis.

Figure 6



Question 4a: If you answered 'no' to question 4, please explain your answer below:

Respondents were asked to respond through a free text field. Some respondents noted that they felt that in-person attendance makes elected members more accountable for their actions, and the decisions made. Other respondents noted that online and hybrid meetings could be more complex to run and reduce productive engagement.

Question 4b: If you answered ‘yes’ to question 4, please indicate below which of the following options best describes your likely pattern of attending meetings remotely:

As outlined in Figure 7 below, most respondents indicated that they would attend meetings remotely very occasionally (49%) or from time to time (38%). Very few respondents anticipated attending remotely all the time (2%). Figure 7 only includes respondents who answered “yes” to question 4, and so only includes respondents who were elected members who personally anticipated attending some meetings remotely.

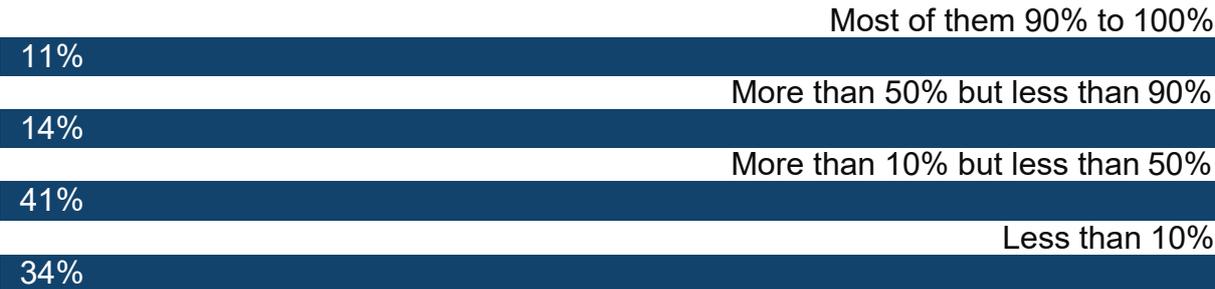
Figure 7



Question 5: If you are responding to this consultation on behalf of a council as a whole, what proportion of the council’s current elected members are likely to seek to attend council meetings remotely over the course of a year?

As set out in Figure 8 below, three quarters of responses on behalf of councils believed that less than half of their members would seek to attend meetings remotely over the course of a year. Only 11% indicated that almost all of their members (90% to 100%) would seek to attend meetings remotely. Figure 8 only includes respondents who indicated they were responding on behalf of a council body in question 1.

Figure 8



Question 6: The government recognises that there may be cases in which it is necessary for councils to hold meetings fully remotely. Do you think there should be limitations placed on the number of fully remote meetings councils should be able to hold?

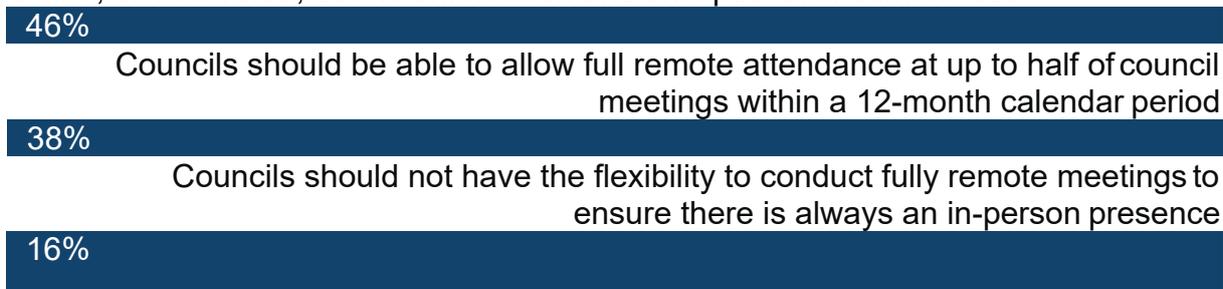
As set out in Figure 9 below, only 16% of respondents thought that councils should not have the flexibility to meet fully remotely under any circumstances. Other responses were split between preferring that councils could meet fully remotely at up to half of their meetings (38%) and preferring that councils could only meet remotely in exceptional circumstances (46%).

Respondents could only select one answer in response to this question. Respondents were invited to submit additional comments alongside this answer.

This question sought views on potential limitations which could be placed on the frequency of fully remote meetings, and so did not offer an option for respondents to indicate that they would prefer no limitations. Question 3 above provided an opportunity for respondents to express this view.

Figure 9

Councils should only have the flexibility to change a meeting from in-person to online, or vice versa, due to unforeseen and exceptional circumstances



Responses to this question were mostly short and repeated previously discussed themes. Some respondents felt that remote meetings should only be allowed in national emergencies, while others felt that councils should develop their own limitations based on their location or function.

Question 7: Do you think there are there any necessary procedural measures that would help to ensure a remote or hybrid attendance policy is workable and efficient?

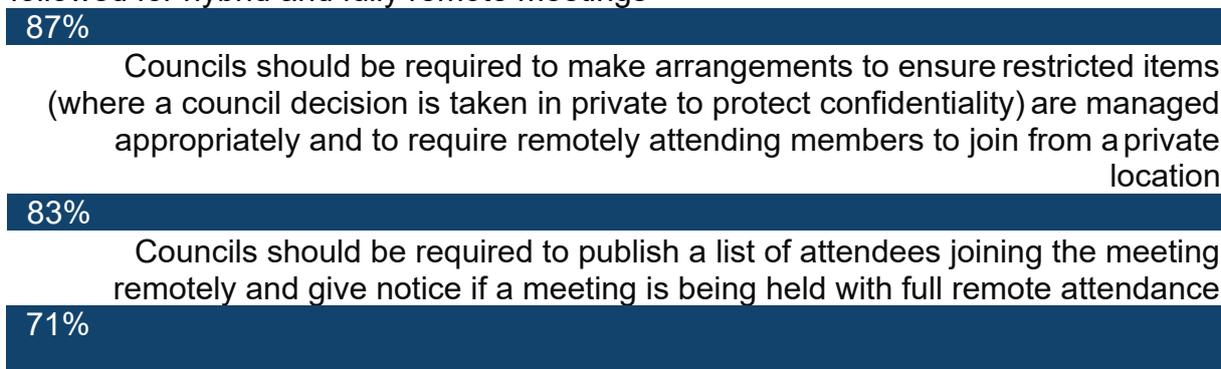
As outlined in Figure 10 below, respondents who supported one of the three procedural measures proposed by this question typically supported all three measures.

“Councils should be required to ensure that standard constitutional arrangements are followed for hybrid and fully remote meetings” (87%) and “Councils should be required to make arrangements to ensure restricted items (where a council decision is taken in private to protect confidentiality) are managed appropriately and to require remotely attending members to join from a private location” (83%) received the strongest support from respondents.

Respondents could indicate multiple answers in response to this question. Respondents who only provided a free text response have not been included in this figure.

Figure 10

Councils should be required to ensure that standard constitutional arrangements are followed for hybrid and fully remote meetings



Responses to this question repeated previous themes. Some respondents highlighted the need to ensure that meetings are secure, and private meetings are not accessible; others felt that meetings should either be in-person or online because hybrid meetings are complex to arrange.

Question 8: Do you think legislative change to allow councillors to attend local authority meetings remotely should or should not be considered for the following reasons?

As outlined in Figure 11 below, respondents who agreed with one of the three supporting reasons for allowing members to attend council meetings remotely proposed by this question typically supported all three. “Councils would be more resilient in the event of local or national emergencies which prevent in-person attendance” (91%) received notably more support than the other two options provided.

Figure 11

Councils would be more resilient in the event of local or national emergencies which prevent in-person attendance



78%

Responses to this question repeated previous themes. Themes of inclusion and transparency were raised, and some respondents mentioned that remote meetings would be beneficial in the context of climate change and reducing emissions. Other respondents noted the benefits of remote meetings for rural councils with poor public transport provision.

As set out in Figure 12 below, respondents who agreed with one of the three dissenting reasons did not necessarily agree with all three options. Respondents who indicated agreement with “It would be more difficult for councillors to build personal working relationships with colleagues, and engage with members of the public in attendance at meetings” (88%) typically also agreed with “It could lead to a significant number of councillors habitually attending remotely and ultimately reduce the effectiveness of councils” (78%).

Despite this, only 38% of respondents agreed that “councillors should be physically present at all formal meetings” was a reason why members should not be allowed to attend meetings remotely.

Figure 12

It would be more difficult for councillors to build personal working relationships with colleagues, and engage with members of the public in attendance at meetings

88%

It could lead to a significant number of councillors habitually attending remotely and ultimately reduce the effectiveness of councils

78%

Councillors should be physically present at all formal meetings

39%

Respondents could indicate multiple answers in response to each half of this question, and respondents were invited to submit additional reasons through free text fields. Respondents who only provided a free text response for either sub-question have not been included in Figures 11 and 12.

Respondents emphasised that some small local authorities have inadequate IT provisions, and noted concerns about hybrid meetings affecting engagement and debate.

Question 9: In your view, would allowing councillors to attend formal local authority meetings remotely according to their needs particularly benefit or disadvantage individuals with protected characteristics? For example, those with disabilities or caring responsibilities.

As outlined in Figure 13 below, three quarters of respondents thought that allowing members to attend remotely would benefit individuals with protected characteristics, and only 5% thought it would disadvantage such individuals.

Respondents could only select one answer in response to this question. Respondents were invited to submit additional comments alongside this answer.

Figure 13



Respondents noted that online meetings would improve inclusion in local democracy and many respondents with protected characteristics mentioned the potential personal impact of being able to attend meetings remotely.

Question 10: In addition to provisions allowing for remote attendance, do you consider that it would be helpful to introduce proxy voting?

As outlined in Figure 14 below, respondents were narrowly opposed to the principle of introducing proxy voting measures, with 47% answering “no” and 36% answering “yes”.

Broadly speaking, responses from members of councils and members of the public were more evenly split, while responses on behalf of councils and sector representative bodies were overwhelmingly opposed. A breakdown of responses by respondent class has been set out in Figure 15 below.

For this figure, respondents who indicated they were responding on behalf of or as an elected member of a county council or a unitary authority have been combined into a single category representing upper tier councils. Some other categories were excluded from this analysis due to small sample sizes.

Figure 14

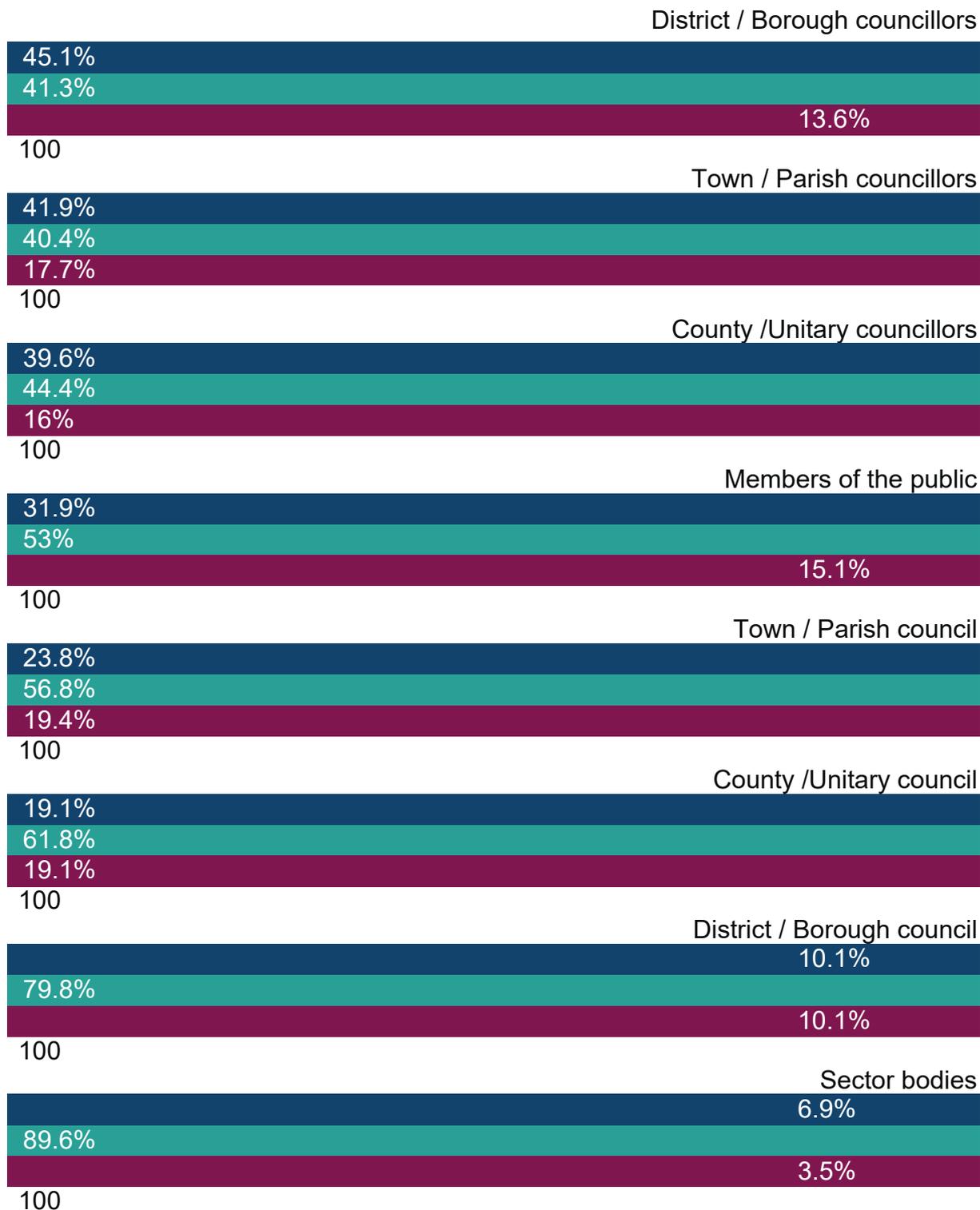


Figure 15

Yes

No

Unsure

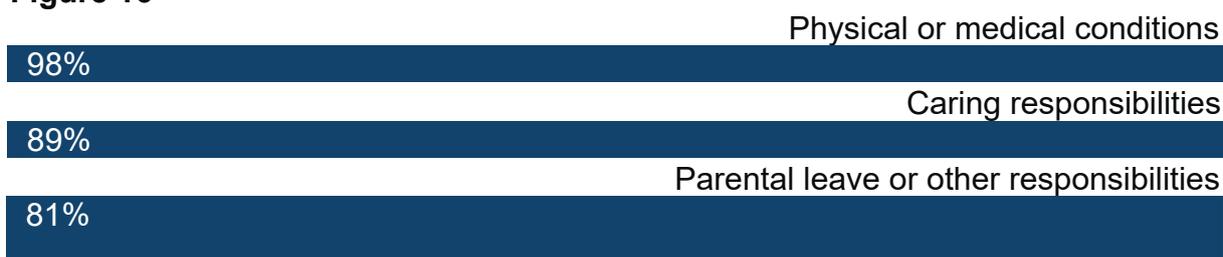


Question 11: If yes, for which of the following reasons which may prohibit a member’s participation in council meetings do you consider it would be appropriate?

As outlined in Figure 16 below, respondents who agreed with one of the three reasons for justifying allowing a member to vote by proxy proposed by this question typically agreed with all three. Almost all such respondents agreed with “Physical or medical conditions” (98%) as a reason.

Only respondents who answered “yes” to question 10 were included in this figure. Respondents could indicate multiple answers in response to this question, and respondents were invited to submit additional reasons through free text fields. Respondents who only provided a free text response have not been included in this figure.

Figure 16



Some respondents felt that proxy voting should be allowed in all instances where an elected member cannot attend a meeting; others felt that it should be reviewed case by case.

Question 12: Are there circumstances in which you feel proxy voting would not be appropriate?

Respondents were invited to respond through a free text field. Respondents generally identified key issues in relation to proxy voting in response to this question, rather than identifying specific circumstances in which proxy voting would not be appropriate. Themes included the potential lack of accountability, pre-determined voting, and misuse. Some respondents felt that proxy voting would not be necessary if meetings could be held remotely or in a hybrid form.

Question 13: If you think proxy voting is appropriate, are there any limitations you think should be placed upon it?

Respondents were invited to respond through a free text field. Respondents suggested limiting the number of proxy votes a year, limiting the circumstances in which they can be used (personal limitations or meeting limitations), and ensuring clear records.

4. Conclusion and next steps

The government is of the view that in-person authority meetings remain vital for local democracy, but that hybrid and remote attendance, and proxy voting, will enable local authorities in England to develop more modern, accessible, and flexible working practices.

Appendix 1

We have carefully considered arguments for and against remote attendance and proxy voting, and we plan to legislate to support permanent provision in relation to both policies, when parliamentary time allows.

On remote attendance, we plan to permit local authorities to develop their own locally appropriate policies, if they decide to hold remote meetings.

On proxy voting, we plan to require principal (unitary, upper and second-tier) councils to implement proxy voting schemes, to provide consistency for members who are absent when they become a new parent, or for serious or long-term illness. We plan for this requirement to apply to meetings of full council. For all other meetings, proxy voting may be used but will not be required, and substitute or pairing schemes may be more appropriate. We plan for other local authorities not listed above to be enabled but not required to implement proxy voting schemes, for any of their meetings, in the context of member absences for serious or long-term illness or becoming a new parent.

We plan to work collaboratively with the sector to develop clear and supportive guidance in relation to both remote attendance and proxy voting policies.

To: Standards Committee

Date: 17 March 2026

Report of: Director of Law, Governance and Strategy (Monitoring Officer)

Title of Report: Consultation Results and Government Response to Strengthening the Standards and Conduct framework for Local Authorities in England

Summary and recommendations	
Decision being taken:	To note the Government's response to Strengthening the standards and conduct framework for local authorities in England
Key decision:	No
Cabinet Member:	N/A
Corporate Priority:	N/A
Policy Framework:	N/A

Recommendation(s): That the Standards Committee resolves to:
1. Note the Government's response to the consultation for Strengthening the standards and conduct framework for local authorities in England.

Information Exempt from Publication
N/A

Appendix No.	Appendix Title	Exempt from Publication
Appendix 1	Government Response to Consultation on Strengthening the standards and conduct framework for local authorities in England – 11 November 2025	No

Introduction and background

1. The Localism Act 2011 is the overarching legislation which outlines the role of the Standards Committee and the process for local authorities dealing with code of conduct complaints. The current role of the Standards Committee and process for how Oxford City Council (the Council) processes complaints can be found at part 7.9 (Roles of decision taking committee (Standards Committee)) and part 22 and its' annexes (Members' Code of Conduct) of the Council's Constitution.
2. The current Code of Conduct was agreed by the Council in January 2022. All other upper and lower tier authorities in the county (Oxfordshire County Council, Cherwell District Council, South Oxfordshire District Council, Vale of White Horse District Council, and West Oxfordshire District Council) have also adopted the code of conduct, along with the Parish Councils across the county.
3. Following the discussion and responses drafted following the previous Standards Committee on 24 February 2025 where the Committee provided their views on the Government Consultation for "Strengthening the Standards and Conduct framework for Local Authorities in England", a response was submitted by the Director of Law, Governance and Strategy on behalf of the Committee at the end of the month. This formed part of the 2,092 responses received by the Government.
4. The Government's response to the consultation was published on 11 November 2025 and included the plans to reform the current rules and responsibilities under the Localism Act 2011.

Proposals following the Consultation

5. The Government intends to introduce a mandatory code of conduct, which will include a behavioural code, to be adopted by all local authority types and tiers, regardless of Local Government Reorganisation (LGR).
6. There is also the requirement that all Councils must convene a formal Standards Committee, to include provisions in the constitution of Standards Committees to ensure objectivity, accountability and transparency. The Standards Committee of Oxford City Council already provides this function, although it's powers and responsibilities may be amended.
7. It also indicates that it will mandate the requirement that all Councils must offer individual support during any investigation into code of conduct allegations to both the complainant, and the councillor subject to the allegation.
8. There will also be 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. At present, this is not possible, however any decision on a Code of Conduct complaint can be taken to the Local Government Ombudsman.
9. There is expected to be provision for allowing all local authorities to have the power 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.

10. In addition, when regarding 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 could be used. This period can be extended, but must require regular review, potentially overseen by the Standards Committee on advice from the Monitoring Officer.
11. A new disqualification criterion is expected to be introduced for any elected member subject to the maximum period of suspension more than once within 5 years. Unless the term following election would be extended, this would be over the term-limit of a current Councillor.
12. Government also indicates that there will be the creation of a new appeals function to operate at a national level and have oversight over all Councils. This would consider appeals from elected members to decisions to suspend them and/or withhold their allowances, along with complainants if they consider their complaint was mishandled by the Council. It was noted that any appeal submitted would only be permitted after the complainant or the elected member has appealed their 'right for review' of the Standards Committee decision and that process is completed.

Next Steps

13. As per the ministerial statement, the Government intends to bring forward the necessary legislation as soon as parliamentary time allows, which could be during 2026.
14. Until the legislation has passed through Parliament and received Royal Assent, the Council cannot reflect any of these proposals in its Standards process.
15. The Association of Democratic Services Officers (ADSO) responded to the outcome of the Government's Consultation, with the Chief Executive welcoming a strengthened standards framework, and highlighting the organisation's role in supporting Officers within Local Government in implementing the proposed changes but commented on the practicalities of these within Local Government.

Alternative Options Considered

16. There are no alternative recommendations, the Committee are asked to note the Government's response on the consultation response.
17. Councillors should be informed and up to date about potential changes to the standards process and the legal frameworks that govern this.

Implications of Local Government Reorganisation

18. It is widely expected that any changes to the Localism Act 2011 will coincide with Local Government Reorganisation, and any implementation of updated Standards process would be matter for the new Unitary Authority.

Financial implications

19. There are no financial implications arising from this report. Any future decision would be subject to financial review as part of a wider review of implementation the Government's requests.

Legal issues

20. There are no legal implications arising from this report. Any future decision would be subject to legal review as part of a wider review of implementation the Government's requests.

Report author	Jonathan Malton
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Service area or department	Law, Governance and Strategy
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Background Papers:	
1	Localism Act 2011
2	Agenda for Constitution on Monday 24 November 2025 Oxford City Council
3	Agenda for Standards Committee on Monday 24 February 2025, 6.00 pm Oxford City Council
4	Strengthening the standards and conduct framework for local authorities in England – consultation results and government response - GOV.UK
5	ADSO's response to the Government announcement on strengthening the standards regime

Consultation outcome Strengthening the standards and conduct framework for local authorities in England – consultation results and government response

Updated 11 November 2025

Ministerial foreword

The government is committed to greater devolution, determined to fix the foundations of local government and build a better future for local politics.

Greater devolution relies on local authorities in which elected members embody the highest standards of conduct. The public rightly demand its representatives act in their best interests, and that those who do not meet the high standards of public office expected should be held to account and appropriately sanctioned.

The ‘Strengthening the Standards and Conduct Framework for Local Authorities in England’ consultation sought views on a whole system reform of the standards and conduct framework for local government. The proposed reforms consulted on reflected the government’s ambition to introduce a clearer and consistently applied standards and conduct framework for local government in England.

The reforms aim to ensure misconduct is dealt with swiftly and fairly across the country in every type and tier of local government – from the smallest town or parish council to the largest regional mayoral authority. We want to ensure that local government is empowered, fully accountable and deserving of people’s trust and confidence.

We want local and regional government in England to attract and retain the best possible talent, and for county, town and city halls across the country to promote fair and reasonable democratic discourse, without slipping into cultures which are toxic and intimidating. There will always be room for strongly held beliefs to be represented, tested and debated, with decency and respectful behaviours and conduct.

Of note amongst the consultation responses was testimony received from those who highlighted the personal distress persistent bullying and harassment can cause for elected members and officers alike, particularly as the current regime offers no real prospect of perpetrators being properly held to account.

In response, our reforms will put victims of elected member misconduct at the centre of the system by providing a right to appeal standards decisions and ensure that both complainants and respondents are supported throughout the process of code of conduct investigations. We also want to ensure that those complained about are

given fair opportunity to make representations and that due process is in place throughout the course of complaints being considered.

Frustration with the lack of meaningful sanctions and safeguards, even when elected members are under police investigation or carry out repeated breaches, was also clearly apparent amongst respondents. For a standards regime to be fit for purpose it must provide both appropriate safeguards and sanctions.

I want to thank all the 2,092 respondents to this consultation. The results have clearly indicated there is widespread appetite for system reform and the steers we have received from respondents have shaped our decisions on the policy proposals this document confirms we will now be working to take forward.

In summary, we intend to legislate for a whole system reform of the current regime as set out in Localism Act 2011. The measures will 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

When this government took office, we pledged to reset the relationship with local authorities, and a key part of that commitment is to work creatively and collaboratively with all those with an interest in local government. We will continue to engage with the sector and stakeholders whilst we develop the detail of operationalising these proposals.

I know that most local elected members are public servants working hard to help shape and deliver excellent local public services. It is for them as much as council employees and the public that we are determined to deal with those who bring local government into disrepute. In recognition of how important these reforms are to building a better future for local politics, we intend to bring forward the necessary legislation as soon as parliamentary time allows.

Alison McGovern MP

Minister for Local Government and Homelessness

1. Introduction

The [Strengthening the Standards and Conduct Framework for local authorities in England consultation](#) sought views from members of the public, current and prospective local authority elected members, local government officers from all types and tiers of authorities, and local authority sector representative organisations.

The proposals and 40 consultation questions were arranged under 2 principal headings as follows:

Strengthening the Standards and Conduct framework

- mandatory minimum prescribed code of conduct
- Standards Committees
- publication of allegations and investigation outcomes
- requiring completion of investigations if an elected member stands down
- empowering individuals affected by councillor misconduct to come forward

Introducing the power of suspension with related safeguards

- length of suspension
- withholding allowances and premises and facilities bans
- interim suspension
- disqualification for multiple breaches and gross misconduct

- appeals process
- potential for a national appeals body

The [Localism Act 2011](#) established the current standards and conduct framework for local authorities.

The current regime requires every local authority to adopt a code of conduct, the contents of which must, as a minimum, be consistent with the 7 '[Nolan principles of standards in public life](#)' (selflessness, integrity, objectivity, accountability, openness, honesty and leadership), and set out rules on requiring members to register and disclose pecuniary and non-pecuniary interests. Beyond these requirements, it is for individual councils to set their own local code.

Every principal authority must also have in place arrangements under which it can investigate allegations of breaches of its code of conduct and must consult at least one Independent Person before coming to decisions.

There is no provision in current legislation for a sanction to suspend a councillor found to have breached the code of conduct. Sanctions for member code of conduct breaches are typically:

- barring members from cabinet, committee, or representative roles
- a requirement to issue an apology or undergo code of conduct training
- public criticism

Local authorities are also unable to withhold allowances from elected members who commit serious breaches of their code of conduct, and there is no explicit provision in legislation for authorities to impose premises bans or facilities withdrawals where they consider that it might be beneficial to do so.

The lack of meaningful sanctions, or the power to suspend elected members for serious code of conduct breaches, means local authorities have no effective way of dealing with more serious examples of member misconduct.

This government response document follows the order of the proposals as set out in the consultation document referred to above. Under each proposal there is:

- a headline summary of the responses received
- a summary of the policy considerations
- a statement of government's intended course of action in response

The consultation questions, a breakdown of the responses given to the multiple-choice questions, and a summary of the narrative comments respondents entered in the free text boxes can be found in the Annex.

2. Introduction of a mandatory code of conduct

The government consultation proposed legislating to introduce a minimum mandatory code of conduct, likely to be set out in regulations. A mandatory code with the [Seven Principles of Public Life](#) at its core will ensure that every elected member, or co-opted member, in England is clear what standard of conduct and behaviour is demanded of them in all aspects of their public office.

The consistency of a shared common standard to which all will be equally held to account, and that can be reviewed and updated as required, is a necessary foundation to inspire the trust and confidence of every community councils serve.

Respondents were asked:

- if they agreed in principle (and if not provide any comment)
- if they thought local authorities should be able to add to a mandatory code
- if such a mandatory code should include a requirement for members to cooperate with investigations into code breaches

The results were conclusively in favour of government prescribing a mandatory code with 94% of respondents answering 'yes'. Some 61% of respondents thought that there should be scope for local authorities to add to a mandatory code to reflect local circumstances.

Mindful of avoiding the risk of confusing or diluting the consistency of expected behaviour a mandatory code could provide, government has considered the latter response carefully in framing this policy response. We examined the standards and conduct framework for local government operating in the devolved nations. All 3 devolved nations (Wales, Scotland, and Northern Ireland) prescribe a mandatory code of conduct for local authority members, allowing individual local authorities to develop local guidance and/or protocols provided they align with the nationally prescribed mandatory code.

Examples of the supplementary protocols or provisions to the mandatory code authorities are adopting in the devolved nations typically relate to matters such as handling conflicts of interest, use of social media, and receipt of hospitality. Government considers it is desirable that all such matters could be incorporated into a prescribed mandatory code.

With regards to a mandatory code including the requirement for members to cooperate with investigations, 91% of respondents agreed with this proposal.

In addition, government considers ensuring that the code of conduct complaint system is used appropriately and not for vexatious politically motivated complaints the code should confirm that submitting multiple vexatious complaints is a sanctionable breach of the code.

Summary

In response to the views expressed in the consultation, the government proposes to legislate to prescribe a mandatory code by taking a power in the primary legislation to set out the code in regulations.

This will provide the opportunity for further engagement on the detailed content of the code and provide the flexibility to review and amend in future as required. Local authorities will be able to develop their own guidance and protocols which must align with the mandatory code but will not, in themselves, be part of the code or arrangements for enforcement.

The mandatory code will include a behavioural code, the requirement for elected members and co-opted members to co-operate with code of conduct investigations, and that submitting multiple vexatious complaints would be a code of conduct breach.

3. Standards Committees

To strengthen and support the consistent handling of misconduct allegations, government proposed that all principal authorities, and strategic authorities, should be required to convene a standards committee.

Some 91% of respondents agreed that all principal authorities should be required to form a standards committee.

Comments focused mainly on the following recurring themes:

- that without effective strengthened sanctions the requirement to form a standards committee would of itself make little impact on misconduct
- concerns about how to achieve political impartiality amongst the membership of the committee to ensure that decisions on code of conduct investigations are objective

As well as the function of receiving code of conduct investigation reports and determining as appropriate any sanction, government considers that standards committees also have a crucial role in promoting and upholding a culture of high ethical standards for an authority. Numerous respondents commented that there is a need for more to be done in this regard to emphasise a greater individual and collective responsibility for ensuring that the corporate culture of every authority rightly prioritises respectful discourse between elected and co-opted members, officers and the public.

62% of respondents agreed that sanction decisions on formal investigations into code of conduct breach allegations should be heard and taken by a standards committee. The government proposes to legislate for this.

In response to the question of whether Independent Persons¹ and co-opted members serving on standards committees should be given voting rights, 68% agreed this is important to ensure objectivity and 63% considered that standards committees should be chaired by an Independent Person. Government considers that co-opted members should have voting rights.

Government considers that there is merit in standards committees being chaired by someone who is independent and not an elected member of the authority, but that it would not be appropriate to be the Independent Person whose role is defined in law as an advisor on standards investigations.

The Localism Act 2011 (Chapter 7, section 28(7)) requires every relevant authority to appoint at least one Independent Person, whose views must be sought and considered by the authority before it decides on an allegation which has been investigated. There is no intention to change the role of the Independent Person.

Views expressed on ensuring fairness and objectivity and reducing incidences of vexatious complaints coalesced around the following themes:

- constituting committees to ensure political impartiality
- providing the option of appropriately strengthened sanctions to ensure that a standards committee is equipped to effectively address misconduct and that members subject to a complaint take the process seriously
- ensuring that members of standards committees receive appropriate training

Government believes that the consultation responses confirm that confidence in political impartiality of standards committees is important to ensure that every complainant and elected or co-opted member subject to a code of conduct allegation are consistently treated fairly and objectively.

To achieve political impartiality on decisions taken in response to a code of conduct investigation, the government will engage further with sector representatives on what the optimum membership arrangements for standards committees should be prior to finalising the detail of requirements in legislation.

On the question of whether local authorities should be required to publish annually a list of allegations of code of conduct breaches, and any investigation outcomes views varied. 47% considered that the public should have full access to all allegations and investigation outcomes, while 50% thought only cases in which a member is found guilty of wrongdoing should be published.

¹ An Independent Person is a person who is not a member, co-opted member, or officer of the authority, and who has not held such a position within the previous 5 years. They are appointed under Section 28 of the Localism Act 2011 to support the authority with code of conduct complaints and standards issues. Essentially, they are a neutral party brought in to help ensure fairness and impartiality in handling matters of standards and conduct within the council.

Government considers that local authorities should only be required to publish a list of code of conduct allegations following full investigation and a standards committee determination on whether to uphold the complaint or not, and as appropriate any sanction applied. This avoids the risk of allegations whilst an investigation is ongoing being in the public domain at a point when it is yet to be resolved.

The final question in the standards committee section of the consultation asked for views about whether investigations should continue to their conclusion if the member stands down before a determination on their case is arrived at, and if the investigation findings should still be published. A total of 84% of respondents agreed with this proposal.

Government considers that it is important to be consistent in holding to account any member who breaches the code of conduct or provide the opportunity for that individual to be publicly exonerated where an investigation concludes there was no case to answer regardless of if they stand down during an investigation.

Summary

In response to the views expressed with regards to standards committees the government:

- proposes to legislate to require all relevant principal authorities to formally constitute a standards committee (or, as appropriate, a sub-committee convened for the purposes of considering code of conduct cases); and engage further with sector representatives to consider the specific requirements for the membership of standards committees prior to legislating on the matter
- will require, subject to relevant legal restrictions, any code of conduct investigation to be completed, and investigation findings and decisions arising be published, including when the investigation findings are 'no case to answer' and the member is exonerated, and in the event a member stands down during an investigation.

In addition, government will:

- engage with sector representative bodies and stakeholder to develop 'best practice' guidance on the handling of code of conduct complaint allegations
- retain the statutory responsibility of promoting and maintaining high standards of conduct by elected members and co-opted members on the authority and engage with sector representative organisations to consider developing guidance on what more could be done by individual authority standards committees to deliver on this responsibility

4. Empowering individuals affected by councillor misconduct to come forward

Government considers that the standards and conduct framework both supports and underpins the principle of accountability, an important aspect of which is to be open and supportive to challenge, and support those who call out examples of behaviour that falls below the standards expected.

The current standards and conduct framework contains virtually no reference to the role of complainants or victims of misconduct in the system. We believe this represents an imbalance that needs to be corrected. A consequence of encouraging complainants to come forward will likely increase the volume of complaints, but we consider that giving victims of misconduct the faith that they will be supported in pursuing legitimate complaints will ultimately result in a stronger standards and conduct regime.

The consultation asked local authorities to provide a figure for the average number of code of conduct complaints received against elected members over a 12-month period. 705 respondents answered this question. There was a very wide variation in the number of complaints reportedly received which likely reflects whether the respondent local authority type was a principal authority with multiple parishes in their area. Responses ranged from 0 to 174 average complaints. 48% of respondents noted receiving between 1 and 10 complaints, whilst 14% said they received more than 10 complaints. 37% said they had received no complaints.

352 of the 705 respondents provided a breakdown of the number of complaints made by officers, other elected members, the public, or any other source. 55% of complaints came from the public. 12% were complaints from other elected members, 30% were complaints from officers.

The consultation then asked anyone who currently works or had worked within a local authority if they had been a victim of (or witnessed) misconduct by an elected member but felt unable to come forward to explain why that was the case. Many of the 676 responses to this question describe the circumstances of the misconduct experienced and the considerable personal impact. The recurrent themes that emerged included:

- a sense that a code of conduct complaint would be pointless given the lack of meaningful sanctions in the current system is no real deterrent
- a fear that the misconduct behaviours, frequently cited as bullying, would only likely escalate and be personally directed at them

A high proportion of respondents to this question came from the parish council sector. Parish clerks often work alone as the only paid officer or as a member of a very small officer team. They may live in the same community where parish

councillors reside and will likely have a higher degree of interaction with the elected members or co-opted members than officers working in principal and upper tier authorities. All these factors serve to amplify the personal impact on parish council staff.

630 respondents replied to the question asking if they had come forward with a complaint what support was offered, and 1324 responded to what in addition could be offered to support individuals raising a complaint.

In summary, the views expressed were as follows:

- the majority reported receiving little or no support – though a handful did indicate they had received support from the Monitoring Officer, Independent Person or other council staff
- numerous respondents, both complainants and respondent elected members, commented that they felt anxious, isolated and fearful during the process
- they wanted to feel confident that they would be taken seriously and listened to
- that if effective sanctions and consequences for misconduct were introduced there was a need to have greater confidence in the independence of the decision makers on cases
- they wanted the assurance that appropriate confidentiality and anonymity for the complainant would be applied
- that access to one-to-one buddy support as needed at key stages of the process would be helpful

In response to the question of whether elected members had ever been subject to a code of conduct complaint and, if so, did they feel they received appropriate support, 377 comments were received.

In summary the comments reveal the following:

- there is no consistency in the level of personal support offered to the elected or co-opted member in a code of conduct complaint situation – a few reported receiving support from either or both the Monitoring Officer or the Independent Person but most stated that they had received no support
- a significant proportion reported that the complaints were vexatious and politically motivated so had largely not been carried forward for investigation

Government considers that for a standards and conduct framework to operate fairly, support should be available to all those involved in an investigation.

As set out above, government intends to develop best practice guidance on complaint handling which will specifically include communicating with all those

involved to ensure support is available at key stages be that with regards to mediation, interacting with the investigation, or following a complaint outcome decision.

Summary

As referred to in the section below entitled [Appeals and a national appeals function](#), in response government plans to:

- legislate to provide both complainant and the respondent elected or co-opted member with a 'right for review' of standards committee investigation decisions
- set out the grounds in legislation for assessing eligibility to consider a right for review request at the local level

In addition, government will:

- include recommended actions to support those affected through the complaint and investigation process in the best practice guidance we have committed above to develop with sector representative organisations and stakeholders
- investigate with key stakeholders and sector representative organisations the case for creating an independent confidential helpline support offer for complainants

5. Introducing the sanction of suspension

The consultation proposed the introduction of the power for authorities to suspend elected members for serious code of conduct breaches for a maximum of 6 months, with the option to withhold allowances and institute premises and facilities bans where deemed appropriate.

Government considers a serious code of conduct breach would be behaviours that pose a significant reputational risk to the council, undermine the public's trust in local democracy, and/or where evidence exists that the behaviours are negatively impacting the health, wellbeing, and safety of fellow elected members and officers.

Most respondents (87%) agreed that local authorities should be given the power to suspend members. 60% agreed that a decision to suspend should be made by the standards committee, whilst 27% thought the decision should be referred to an independent body. 647 comments were received on the question of whether the decision to suspend should lie with the local authority standards committee or be for an independent body.

Broadly, the majority of comments echoed the following themes:

- concerns that if the decision to suspend is vested in a standards committee, the committee needs to be politically neutral and fully transparent

- a view that a right to appeal a suspension decision should be available and that should sit with an independent body

As referred to in the [Standards Committee section above](#), government proposes to ensure the political independence of code of conduct case decisions, and in the [Appeals section below](#) the establishment of a national function creating a route to appeal a local decision once the local 'right to review' process has been completed.

Government considers these measures will create the necessary safeguards to ensure independence of decision-making on any decision to suspend. We will be working at pace in collaboration with key stakeholders and sector representative bodies to finalise the operational details of the national appeals function prior to bringing forward legislation on the matter.

If it were to be deemed that suspension is an appropriate response to a code of conduct breach, 60% of respondents considered councils should be required to put in place an alternative point of contact for constituents, whilst 31% considered it should be for councils to determine such arrangements.

Government considers that it should be for councils to make their own arrangements for managing constituent representation during a period of elected member suspension, as appropriate to the length of suspension and any special responsibility roles (committee membership, cabinet portfolio member et cetera) which may apply.

On the question of the maximum length of suspension, 51% of respondents were of the view that government should set a maximum of 6 months. 15% considered that the maximum period should be different and 21% did not think the government should prescribe the maximum period. Respondents were asked to opine on what the maximum length should be if different from 6 months, there were 371 responses to this part of the question. Whilst there was a range of views, few thought it should be less than 6 months with the most popular alternative length of maximum suspension suggested as 12 months.

The government's view is that code of conduct breaches serious enough to warrant a sanction of suspension would likely occur infrequently and 62% of respondents agreed with this premise.

The consultation also sought views on whether councils should have the option to withhold allowances from suspended elected members and 87% of respondents agreed. Government considers that authorities should have the option of withholding allowances from suspended elected members and that a decision to do so or not should rightly be at the discretion of the standards committee, in line with the best practice guidance the government will be issuing, as referred to above in the [Standards Committee section](#).

With regards to premises and facilities bans, 88% agreed that authorities should have the power to implement these. Government believes that this power should be

available as a safeguarding measure where the nature of the misconduct may pose a risk to the safety and wellbeing of other elected members, staff or members of the public.

Summary

In response, the government proposes to legislate to:

- provide authorities with a power to suspend elected members for serious code of conduct breaches for a maximum of 6 months, with the option to withhold allowances and institute premises and facilities bans where deemed appropriate
- confirm that a decision to sanction with a period of suspension, and/or institute premises and facilities bans can only be taken by a standards committee, following receipt and consideration of a formal investigation report, and following consideration of the views of the Independent Person
- the legislation will enable standards committees to have the discretion to withhold elected member allowances and ban disruptive members from using council facilities or entering property, either as standalone sanctions or in addition to suspension

6. Interim suspension

The consultation proposed a power for interim suspension when elected members, or co-opted members, are subject to complex investigations into serious code of conduct breaches, for example which may be referred to the police to investigate or be pending a court hearing.

There are, from time-to-time, cases that arise when an elected member is subject to allegations which involve police investigations, for example where the misconduct involves allegations of a sexual offence, assault or fraudulent behaviour.

When the media reports on elected members being arrested or awaiting sentencing, such cases are often brought to the attention of Ministers by concerned residents and Members of Parliament. In the context of the standards and conduct framework, of key consideration is if the alleged crime took place in the context of the elected member's public role or in their private life. However, it is recognised that at the point the issue has become a matter of public interest, if the alleged crimes are of a serious nature there may be safeguarding and safety considerations that the authority may need to consider

The consultation proposal stated that elected members on interim suspension would continue to receive allowances until an investigation, or a criminal investigation concludes. Based on the principle of innocent until proven guilty, the decision to impose an interim suspension would not therefore represent a pre-judgement of the validity of an allegation.

In addition, it was proposed that:

- interim suspensions should initially be for a maximum of 3 months, and, after that period, the relevant standards committee should review the case to decide whether it is in the public interest to extend
- as appropriate, the period spent on interim suspension may be deducted from any period of suspension a standards committee subsequently imposes

79% of respondents agreed with the proposals to suspend on an interim basis and 73% agreed that it should be for an initial period of 3 months and then subject to review. Free text boxes were provided for both questions (Q28 and Q29) with 631 and 350 comments received respectively. The headline points raised included:

- concern that complex investigations or allegations that involve police investigations and ultimately a court judgement can take many months to come to trial and could result in the subject member being on interim suspension for a significant period
- that this is a sensible proposal to safeguard the subject member, staff and mitigate reputational risk whilst investigations are ongoing
- that it is appropriate to mirror the common practice in employment settings of interim suspension whilst investigations are conducted
- that it is right that allowances should not be withheld during interim suspension to comply with the 'innocent until proven guilty' principle

Government considers that in the circumstances where interim suspension can be deemed appropriate, as in employment settings, a local authority's decision to use the power to interim suspend should only be taken to reasonably protect any of the following:

- the investigation – if there was a risk of someone damaging evidence or influencing witnesses
- the smooth running of the authority – if there was a genuine risk to the safety of other elected members, officers, property or business
- the person under investigation or complainant

The final consultation question asked if at the point when the initial 3-month period of interim suspension was reached and a standards committee decided to extend there should be safeguards to ensure interim suspension was not allowed to run on unchecked.

72% agreed that there should be safeguards, but 23% considered that authorities know the details of individual cases and should be trusted to act responsibly.

Those that agreed that there should be safeguards were asked to comment on what they thought might be needed to ensure unlimited interim suspension was not misused. 1908 comments were received in response to this question, the headline summary of points included:

- that the decision to confer an interim suspension should be made by an independent body
- suggesting a defined period for ongoing reviews, for example monthly or 3 monthly should be prescribed if the initial period of interim suspension was extended
- concerns that safeguards (such as a requirement to evidence that investigations were actively ongoing) should be put in place to ensure that interim suspension was not politically weaponised
- that this should only be used for the most egregious cases
- suggestion that a period of interim suspension should not exceed 6 months as per the suspension proposal, as longer than 6 months would risk incurring Section 85 of the Local Government Act 1972 'vacation of office by failure to attend meetings'

Summary

In response the government plans to legislate to give authorities the power to place an elected member or co-opted member on interim suspension in response only to serious code of conduct allegations subject to external investigation, from the police or other bodies within the criminal justice system, and/or where a court hearing and sentencing is awaited i.e. cases where there are legitimate safeguarding considerations, and the council is not in control of the pace and resolution of the investigation.

It also plans to legislate to confirm that the grounds to justify a standards committee taking a decision to impose interim suspension must only take place if the matter is subject to law enforcement investigation and include:

- **The seriousness of the allegations.** Meaning the allegations against the individual must be of a serious criminal nature and subject to police investigation/pending sentencing
- **Risk of Harm.** Where the nature and seriousness of the allegations is such that if the elected member were to continue in their role during the investigation, it could result in a risk of harm to either the public, the complainant, the subject member, or the authority and its reputation.

The legislation will set the maximum period of interim suspension at an initial 3 months and require ongoing review if the case remains unresolved after that initial period.

Government will engage further with sector representative bodies on the question of whether authorities should be required to publish on their website a notice of decision to place an elected member or co-opted member on interim suspension whilst investigations are ongoing and, as appropriate, a notice exonerating an elected member placed on interim suspension in the event the external investigation results in no charges being brought or when a court decides not to uphold the charge against the subject member.

7. Disqualification for multiple breaches and gross misconduct

Currently the law disqualifies anyone from standing or sitting as an elected member if they have been convicted of any offence for which they have received a sentence of imprisonment (suspended or not) for a period of 3 months or more (without the option of a fine) in the 5-year period before the relevant election.

Disqualification also covers sexual offences, even if they do not result in a custodial or suspended sentence but when the individual has been made subject to the [notification requirements under the Sexual Offences Act 2003](#) (i.e. placed on the sex offenders register).

The consultation sought views on proposals that elected members who are suspended more than once during a 5-year period should be subject to disqualification, and if immediate disqualification should apply to instances of gross misconduct (for example, theft or physical violence impacting the safety of other members and/or officers).

With regards to the proposal to introduce disqualification for anyone subject to the sanction of suspension twice within a 5-year period 60% agreed, 19% disagreed and 15% agreed but considered disqualification should be for a different length of time and/or with a different timeframe.

Respondents were also asked to provide any comments on the proposal, and there were a range of views. In summary, those most often repeated included:

- concern about the severity of this proposal which would give standards committees the power to override an elected member's democratic mandate
- the suggestion disqualification should only apply when the suspension had been for the maximum proposed period of 6 months, or alternatively 3 months or more
- that in the event of code of conduct investigation decision/outcomes being published it should be for the electorate to decide at the next election if an individual no longer represents them

Appendix 1

- queries about why the proposal applies to suspension twice within a 5-year period, when habitually an electoral term in local government is 4 years
- that disqualification should apply for the first instance of serious misconduct and that if someone has seriously transgressed, they are not fit for public office and the period should be longer than 5 years

Government has thought carefully about the responses to this question, including looking at what currently applies in the devolved nations. In Scotland, the [Ethical Standards in Public Life \(Scotland\) Act etc. Act 2000](#) provides a framework for the conduct of elected members and details the sanctions available to the Standards Commission for Scotland to impose when a hearing finds a councillor has contravened the code of conduct. These provisions include powers to disqualify an elected member for a period not exceeding 5 years, from being, or from being nominated for election. In Wales the power to disqualify a councillor for up to 5 years for serious code of conduct breaches also exists, and rests with the Adjudication Panel for Wales.

The government's view is that introducing a measure to disqualify an elected member subject to suspension twice for serious misconduct is supported by the safeguards in the full suite of standards reforms it intends to pursue. Those strengthened safeguards being a universally applied mandatory code, best practice procedures for code of conduct complaint handling, the requirement for formal political neutral standards committee, a respondent's right to review a standards committee decision, and provisions to then take a final appeal of the decision to a national appeals function.

Government also considers that, in view of the consultation responses, the disqualification for 2 periods of suspension should only apply if those periods of suspension are both for the maximum period of 6 months. This will ensure that disqualification would only apply to at least 2 incidents of the most serious misconduct occurring within a 5-year timeframe.

The 5-year timeframe is specified to bridge the period between the 4-year electoral cycle to ensure that where serious misconduct repeatedly occurs by someone who gets re-elected there is a route to address the cumulative effect of the misconduct.

On the question of immediate disqualification for gross misconduct, provided there has been an investigation of the incident and the elected member has had a chance to respond before a decision is made, 82% agreed. Comments received in response to this question tended to be polarised around the 2 following themes:

- that the same rules that apply in an employment setting regarding gross misconduct should also apply to elected members

- that it is an unnecessary measure, and the proposed interim suspension could suffice in such cases awaiting outcome of police investigation following arrest or sentencing

Considering the government's intention to introduce interim suspension for serious code of conduct breaches subject to police investigation and/or awaiting sentencing from the courts, it is not in addition appropriate to introduce disqualification on the grounds of gross misconduct. However, government does consider that in cases of serious misconduct repeatedly occurring councils do need a means of curbing egregious disruptive behaviour.

Summary

In response the government intends to introduce legislation to disqualify an elected member or co-opted member if they receive a sanction of suspension for the maximum period of 6 months twice over a 5-year period.

8. Appeals and a national appeals function

The consultation proposed that any elected member subject to a decision to suspend them should have the right to appeal, that an appeal should be invoked within 5 working days of notification of a suspension decision and that an appeal hearing should be conducted within 28 working days.

A significant majority of respondents (86%) agreed that elected members should have the right to appeal a decision to suspend them. 53% agreed with the proposals that an appeal should be made within 5 working days and a further 36% considered that a different length of time within which to bring an should apply. Views were invited on the latter point and ranged between 7 working days to 100, with the most popular alternative to the proposed 5 working days being 10 or 14.

Respondents were also asked if complainants should have a right of appeal if a decision was taken not to investigate their complaint and if they should have a right of appeal when an allegation of misconduct is not upheld. The majority answered yes to both questions with 53% agreeing to the first question and 46% agreeing to the second. Those not in agreement were 30% and 35% respectively. For those who responded 'yes' to either of these questions they were then invited to give their view on the most suitable route of appeal for either or both situations. Comments received included:

- a suggestion that complainants should receive a notification of the grounds for refusal to investigate their complaint to help inform a decision to appeal and as appropriate aid them to prepare their appeal
- concerns about the independence of any council appeal hearing – and that an appeal panel should enable 'a fresh set of eyes' or that appeals could be heard by a neighbouring authority

- suggestion that there should be prescribed qualifying 'grounds for appeal'
- concerns about the resource implications of servicing and managing appeals

In response to the question of whether appeals panels should be in-house within authorities or whether there was a need for an external national function to hear appeals to the sanction of suspension, 69% agree with the statement that an external national body would help uphold impartiality, with 25% of the view that appeals should be held by an internal panel. And 56% thought both member and claimant appeals should be in scope.

As referenced above, the government does consider that both complainants and the subject elected member should have the right for review a standards committee decision following investigation. This right of review would be conducted at a local level and only those cases that have been the subject of a review will be eligible for then progressing to the national appeals function. We will work with stakeholders to finalise grounds for exercising the right for review.

In the current standards and conduct regime there is no route to appeal code of conduct standards decisions, though some authorities already operate a 'right to review' within their complaint handling processes.

The devolved nations have broadly similar grounds for appeal including procedural errors, new evidence or a disproportionate or unfair sanction.

Government has listened carefully to the range of views on the establishment of a national appeals function and considers this is necessary. Government is keen to ensure that it operates coherently and supportively with the delivery of the strengthened standards and conduct regime locally.

Eligible appeals will be those cases where either complainant or subject member has already invoked and completed the 'right to review' process with the principal authority standards committee.

Summary

In response, government plans to legislate on arrangements for appeals to code of conduct decisions following further consideration of the detailed requirements to support the proposed local 'right to review' code of conduct case decisions, and the scope and scale of a national appeals function.

Annex - consultation responses report

Responses to this survey: 2092

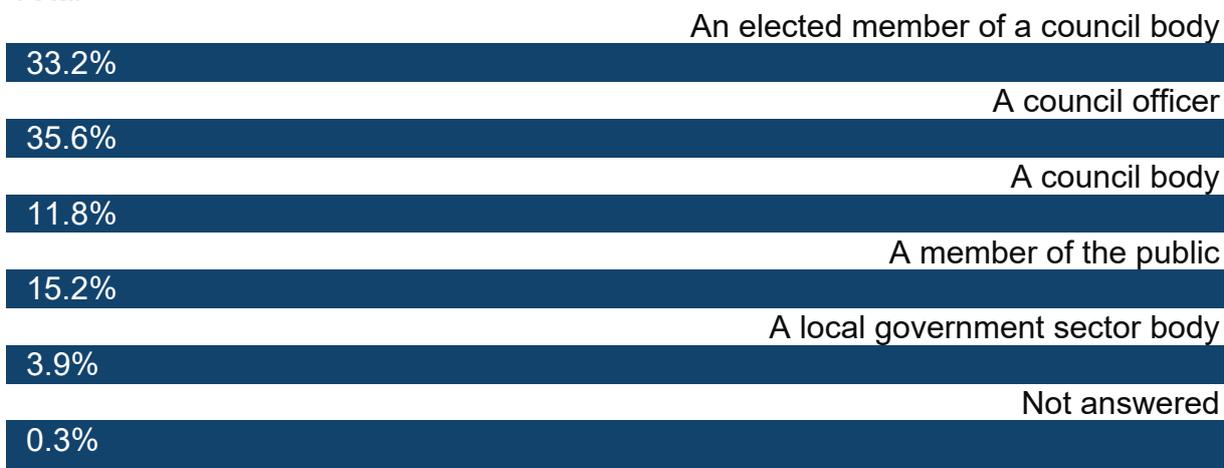
1: In what capacity are you responding to this consultation?

There were 2086 responses to this question.

Appendix 1

Total

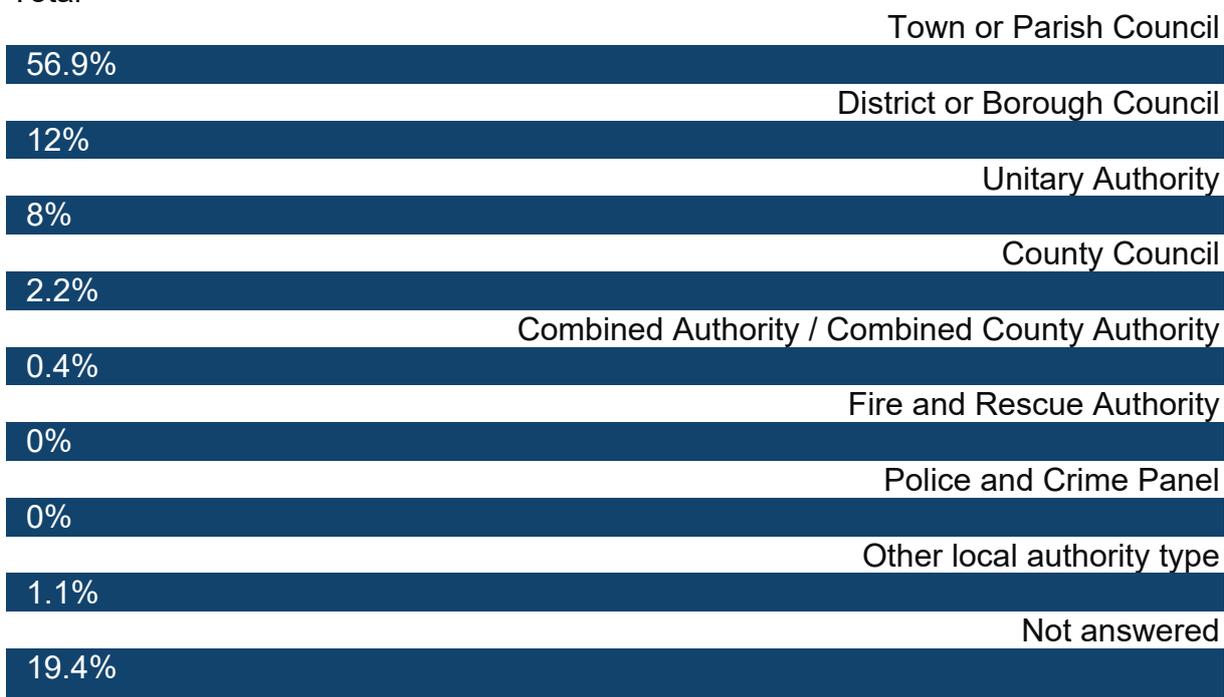
Total



Please indicate the local authority type:

There were 1687 responses to this question.

Total



2: Do you think the government should prescribe a mandatory minimum code of conduct for local authorities in England?

There were 2053 responses to this question.

Appendix 1

Total



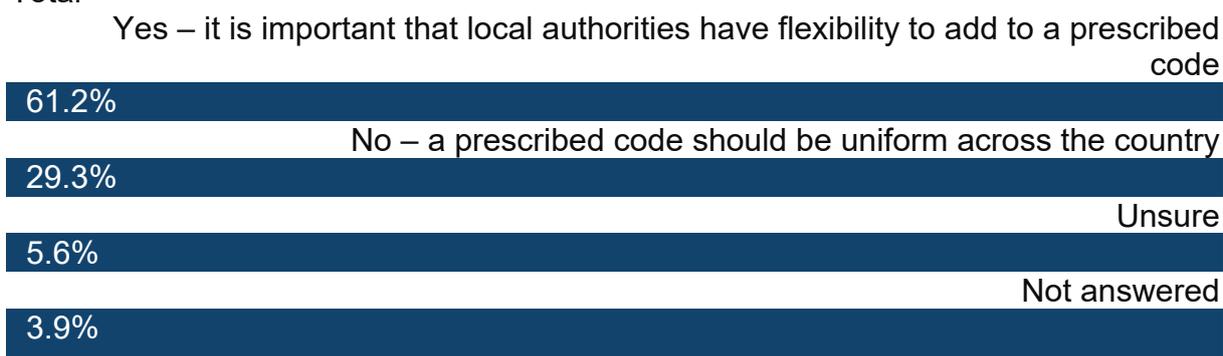
There were 157 narrative responses to this question.

- whilst some respondents indicated that they felt the current system is adequate and therefore there is no need for a mandatory code, many of the comments focused on what the composition of the code should look like
- some respondents argued that there should be some ability at the local level to build upon the provisions of a national code, whereas others were clear that there should be no local variation
- there was a clear sense that the Nolan principles remain important and that any mandatory code should reflect and reinforce the values to which those principles hold those in public office
- there was a range of views on who should ultimately set the code, reinforcing importance of the government consulting further on its provisions

3: If yes, do you agree there should be scope for local authorities to add to a mandatory minimum code of conduct to reflect specific local challenges?

There were 2010 responses to this question.

Total



4: Do you think the government should set out a code of conduct requirement for members to cooperate with investigations into code breaches?

There were 2049 responses to this question.

Appendix 1

Change to table and accessible view

Total

	Yes
91.2%	
	No
4%	
	Unsure
2.7%	
	Not answered
2.1%	

5: Does your local authority currently maintain a standards committee?

There were 1953 responses to this question.

Total

	Yes
60.1%	
	No
33.3%	
	Not answered
6.6%	

There were 631 narrative responses to this question:

- a number of respondents noted that whilst their authority or principal authority maintains a standards committee, it is in its current form ineffective in dealing with instances of member misconduct where it arises
- an increased focus on independence was noted as being important in improving effectiveness, suggesting support for measures to ensure that a requirement for independent members should be built into any measures governing the constitution of committees with responsibility for member standards

6: Should all principal authorities be required to form a standards committee?

There were 2029 responses to this question.

Total

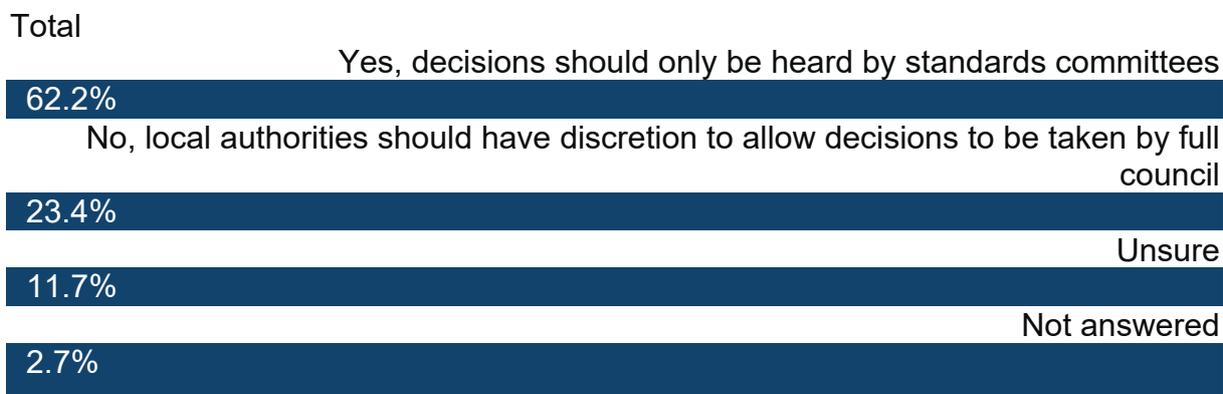
	Yes
90.8%	
	No
6.2%	
	Not answered
3%	

There were 388 narrative responses to this question:

- a key theme of the responses to this question was an emphasis on ensuring impartiality and protecting against political bias when adjudicating on potential code of conduct breaches, consistent with the emphasis on fairness and independence that runs through the comments on many other questions
- several respondents felt that mandating standards committees would improve the overall effectiveness of the standards process, although some emphasised a need for flexibility around how standards committees are structured
- a number of respondents made the point that whilst there is a need for a committee responsible for standards, it could form part of another committee's remit rather than necessitating a standards committee

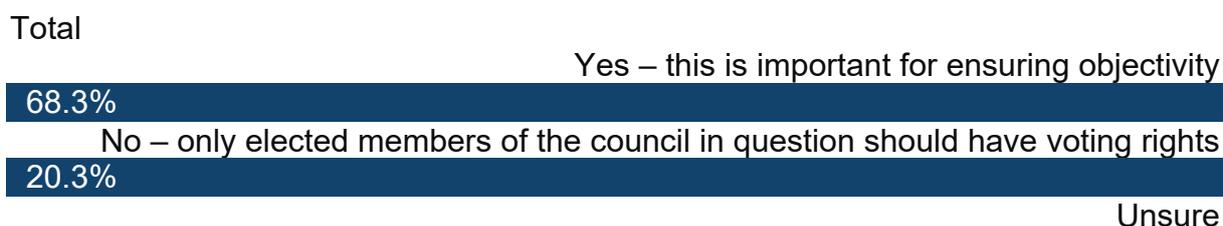
7: In most principal authorities, code of conduct complaints are typically submitted in the first instance to the local authority Monitoring Officer to triage, before referring a case for full investigation. Should all alleged code of conduct breaches which are referred for investigation be heard by the relevant principal authority's standards committee?

There were 2035 responses to this question.



8: Do you agree that the Independent Person and co-opted members should be given voting rights?

There were 2031 responses to this question.





9: Should standards committees be chaired by the Independent Person?

There were 2026 responses to this question.



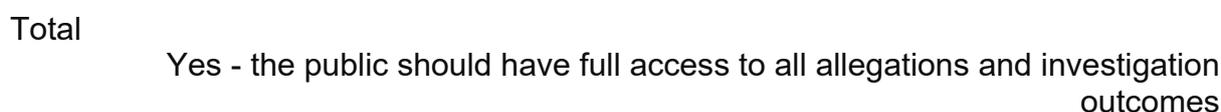
10: If you have further views on ensuring fairness and objectivity and reducing incidences of vexatious complaints, please use the free text box below.

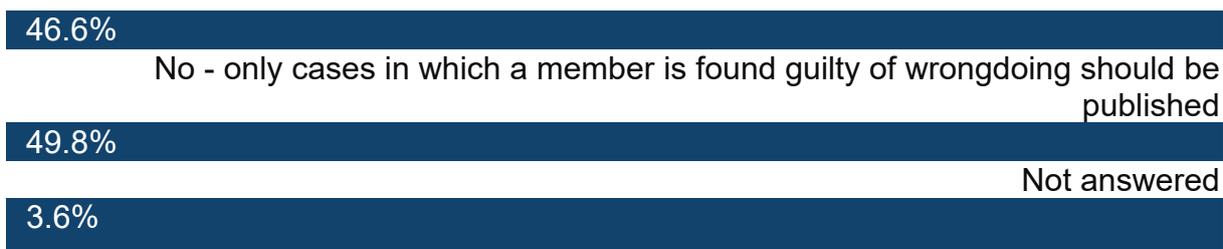
There were 857 narrative responses to this question:

- the need to protect against political bias in order to ensure fairness and objectivity was once again prevalent in the response to this question
- specifically in regard to reducing incidences of vexatious complaints, there was a range of suggestions including a greater focus on mediation, barring vexatious complainants from registering further complaints, and training for Monitoring Officers to identify vexatious complaints
- the point raised most frequently by respondents was that there is a need to ensure that local authorities have a clear and consistent process for identifying and addressing vexatious complaints

11: Should local authorities be required to publish annually a list of allegations of code of conduct breaches, and any investigation outcomes?

There were 2017 responses to this question.





There were 663 narrative responses to this question:

- there was a wide range of comments for this question, ranging from the view that all code of conduct breach allegations and outcomes should be published, to none at all
- many people felt there should be some degree of balance – views expressed included publishing breach details only where the complaint is upheld, publishing the allegation whilst maintaining the anonymity of both parties, and publishing a periodic summary of cases rather than the full detail
- some respondents felt that exonerations should be published in cases where complaints are not upheld, and others felt that decisions relating to what is published should be determined on a case-by-case basis

12: Should investigations into the conduct of members who stand down before a decision continue to their conclusion, and the findings be published?

There were 2055 responses to this question.



13: If responding as a local authority, what is the average number of complaints against elected members that you receive over a 12-month period?

Number of complaints

There were 705 responses to this part of the question. Responses ranged from 0 to 174 average complaints, with an average of 6.7 complaints over a 12-month period. 48% of respondents noted receiving between 1 and 10 complaints, whilst 14% said they received more than 10 complaints. 37% said they had received no complaints.

13a: For the above, where possible, please provide a breakdown for complaints made by officers, other elected members, the public, or any other source:

352 respondents were able to accurately breakdown their average complaints over a 12-month period for complaints made by officers, other elected members, the public, or any other source. 55% of complaints came from the public. 12% were complaints from other members, 30% were complaints from officers.

14: If you currently work, or have worked, within a local authority, have you ever been the victim of (or witnessed) an instance of misconduct by an elected member and felt that you could not come forward?

There were 1293 responses to this question.



There were 676 narrative responses to this question:

- the comments associated with this question pointed strongly towards a lack of faith in the current standards framework amongst respondents
- many indicated that they had witnessed or been subjected to bullying or harassment, but did not come forward because they feared reprisal, felt that the current sanctions available are not sufficient to make it worthwhile, were concerned about the influence elected members have over officers, or feared it would harm their standing in the community
- some respondents also highlighted cultural barriers within their council that prevented them coming forward

15: If you are an elected member, have you ever been subject to a code of conduct complaint?

There were 887 responses to this question.



57.6%

If so, did you feel you received appropriate support to engage with the investigation?

There were 377 narrative responses to this question:

- many respondents to this question restated their 'yes' or 'no' response
- of those who did expand upon this, several cited a lack of clarity in the investigative process. A lack of support for independent members without party or group support was also raised

16: If you did come forward as a victim or witness, what support did you receive, and from whom? Is there additional support you would have liked to receive?

There were 630 narrative responses to this question:

- in responding to this question, many respondents took the opportunity to note that they felt they received no support when coming forward
- a significant proportion of respondents noted that they either did receive, or would have liked to receive, support from their local authority, whilst others referenced the importance of independent support during the process, including in the form of impartial mediators or emotional support services
- others mentioned the importance of the Monitoring Officer in the process and their role in triaging complaints to filter out those which may be vexatious

17: In your view, what measures would help to ensure that people who are victims of, or witness, serious councillor misconduct feel comfortable coming forward and raising a complaint?

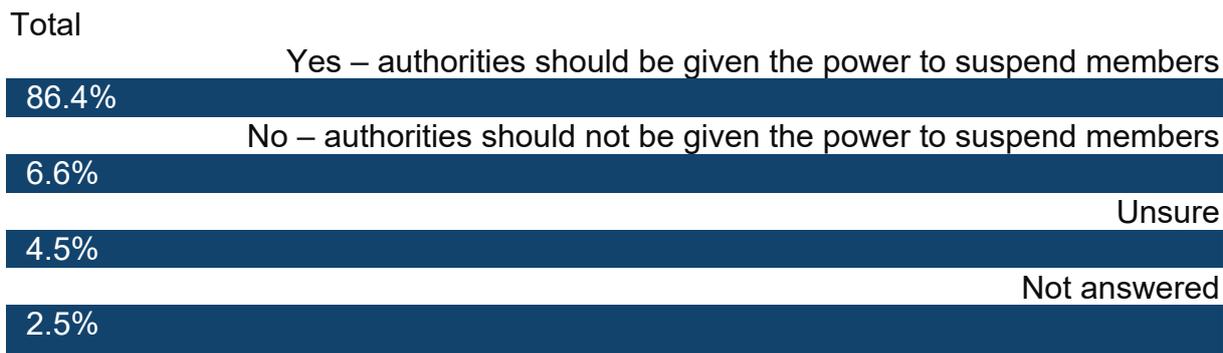
There were 1326 narrative responses to this question:

- of particular note amongst the comments attached to this question is the number of respondents who emphasised the importance of giving complainants confidence that there are real consequences for misconduct to make coming forward worthwhile. Associated with this, many respondents noted that clear sanctions need to be in place to ensure appropriate action can be taken
- a number of respondents called for clearer process, and noted that investigations should be completed in a timely manner. Others talked about the importance of there being some element of independence to the

process and that complainants should be given appropriate support including anonymity where appropriate

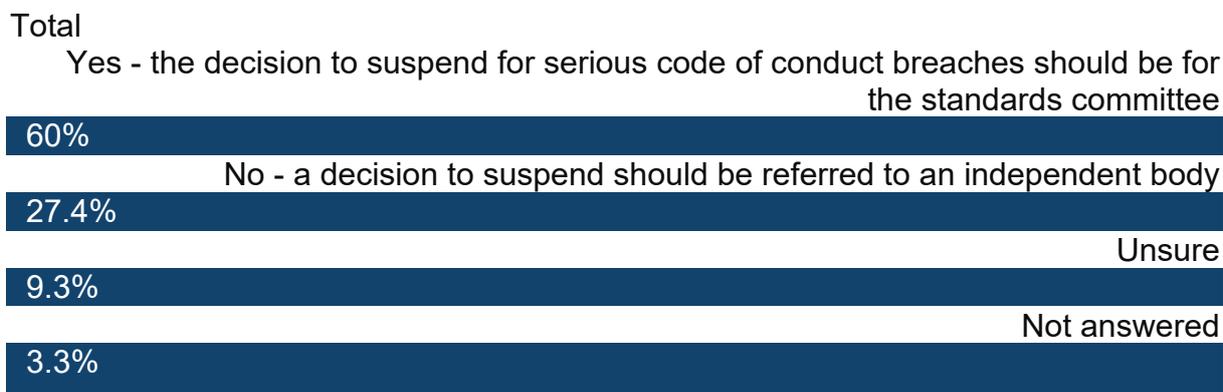
18: Do you think local authorities should be given the power to suspend elected members for serious code of conduct breaches?

There were 2039 responses to this question.



19: Do you think that it is appropriate for a standards committee to have the power to suspend members, or should this be the role of an independent body?

There were 2023 responses to this question.



There were 650 narrative responses to this question:

- a significant number of respondents to this question emphasised the importance of impartiality and protections against political bias where the sanction of suspension is concerned, with some respondents suggesting that an independent body would provide this impartiality and protect against misuse
- others felt that a peer-led process for considering the sanction of suspension would be most appropriate, whilst others felt that decisions around suspension should be taken by full council

- whilst the prevailing theme was in relation to impartiality, some respondents did note concerns that vesting this process in an independent body may lead to delays in the process

20: Where it is deemed that suspension is an appropriate response to a code of conduct breach, should local authorities be required to nominate an alternative point of contact for constituents during their absence?

There were 2027 responses to this question.

Total

Yes – councils should be required to ensure that constituents have an alternative point of contact during a councillor’s suspension	59.4%
No – it should be for individual councils to determine their own arrangements for managing constituents’ representation during a period of councillor suspension	31.2%
Unsure	6.3%
Not answered	3.1%

21: If the government reintroduced the power of suspension do you think there should be a maximum length of suspension?

There were 2010 responses to this question.

Total

Yes – the government should set a maximum length of suspension of 6 months	51.4%
Yes – however the government should set a different maximum length (please specify)	15.5%
No – I do not think the government should set a maximum length of suspension	21.1%
Unsure	8.1%
Not answered	3.9%

If you think the government should set a different maximum length, what should this be, in months?

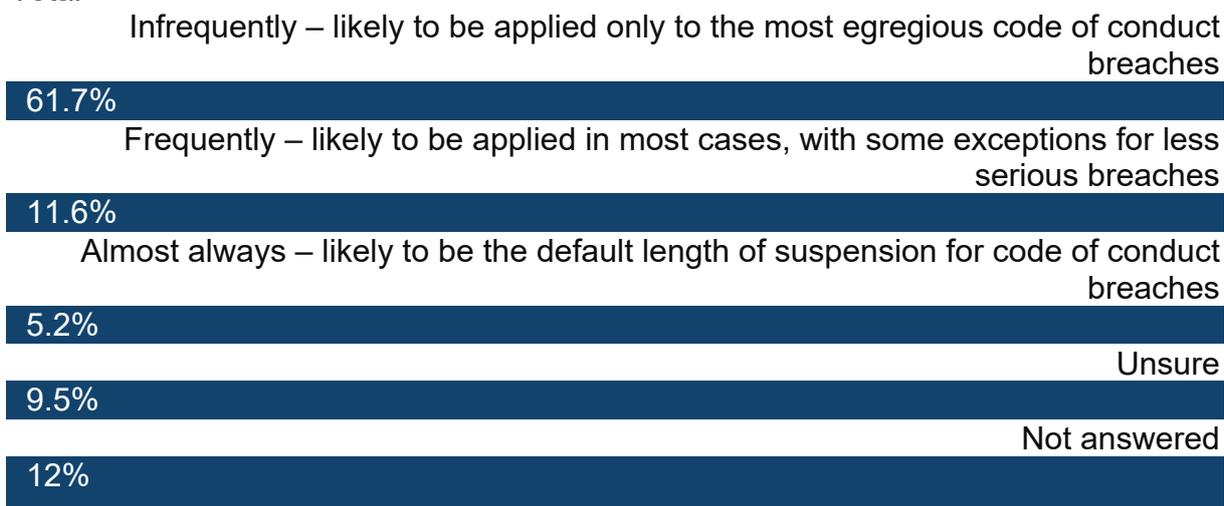
There were 371 responses to this part of the question. 51% of respondents were of the view that government should set a maximum of 6 months. 15% considered that the maximum period should be different and 21% did not think the government should prescribe the maximum period. Whilst there was a range of views, few

thought it should be less than 6 months with the most popular alternative length of maximum suspension suggested as 12 months.

22: If yes, how frequently do you consider councils would be likely to make use of the maximum length of suspension?

There were 1841 responses to this question.

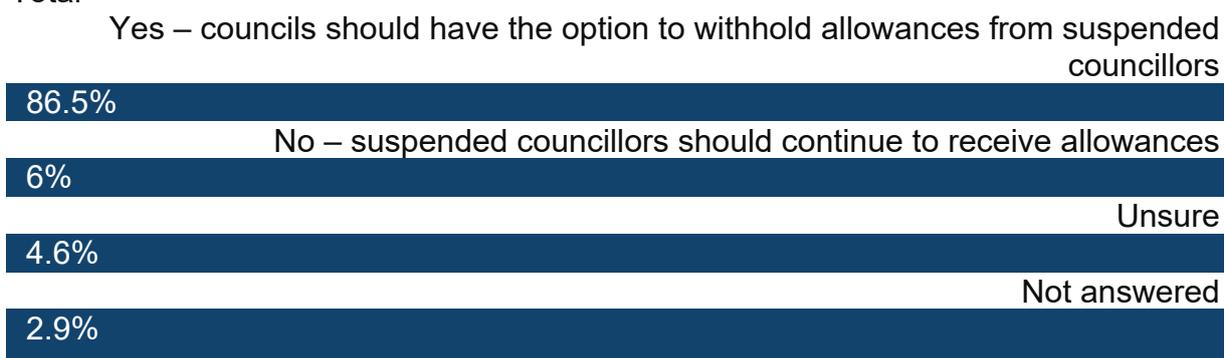
Total



23: Should local authorities have the power to withhold allowances from suspended councillors in cases where they deem it appropriate?

There were 2032 responses to this question.

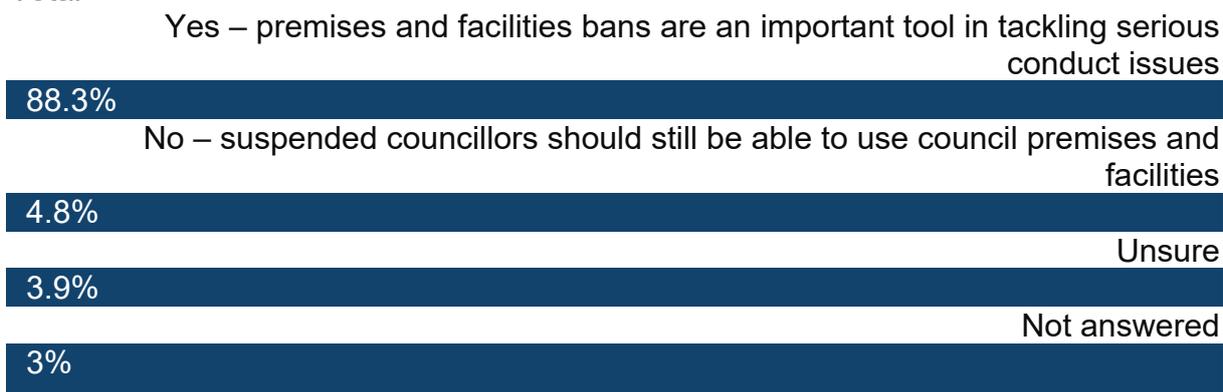
Total



24: Do you think it should be put beyond doubt that local authorities have the power to ban suspended councillors from council premises and to withdraw the use of council facilities in cases where they deem it appropriate?

There were 2030 responses to this question.

Total



25: Do you agree that the power to withhold members’ allowances and to implement premises and facilities bans should also be standalone sanctions in their own right?

There were 2029 responses to this question.

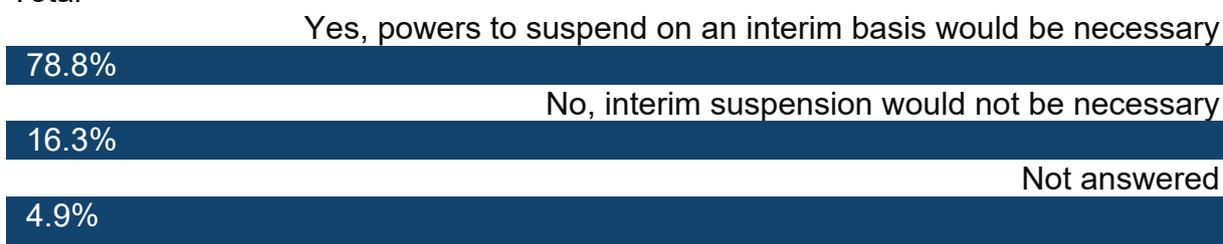
Total



26: Do you think the power to suspend councillors on an interim basis pending the outcome of an investigation would be an appropriate measure?

There were 1990 responses to this question.

Total



Do you think the power to suspend councillors on an interim basis pending the outcome of an investigation would be an appropriate measure?

Comments.

There were 589 narrative responses to this question:

- a large number of responses to this question focused on the need to ensure that whilst interim suspension receives broad support, it should only be used in exceptional circumstances

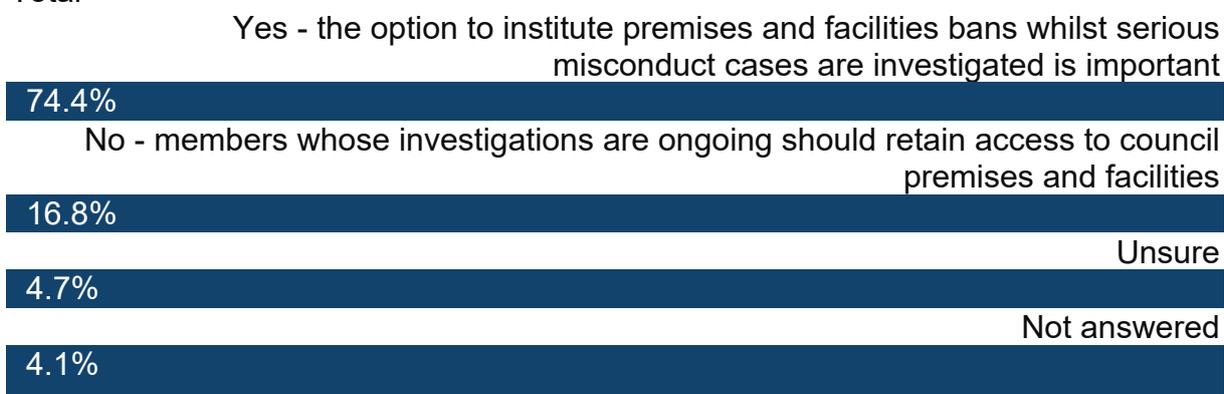
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- many respondents emphasised that it should be tied to the severity of the case, further reinforcing the view that interim suspension should not be invoked lightly, whilst some spoke of the value of guidance to support local authorities in understanding when interim suspension is or is not appropriate
- those respondents who do not favour the introduction of interim suspension noted the principle of assuming the accused is innocent until proven guilty

27: Do you agree that local authorities should have the power to impose premises and facilities bans on councillors who are suspended on an interim basis?

There were 2007 responses to this question.

Total



28: Do you think councils should be able to impose an interim suspension for any period of time they deem fit?

There were 1979 responses to this question.

Total



There were 632 narrative responses to this question:

- the most prevalent views expressed by respondents to this question focused on the need for appropriate safeguards
- many respondents noted that interim suspension should include clearly defined time limits, and that there should be a focus on quick resolutions to investigations to avoid protracted periods of interim suspension
- others noted the need for regular review points and reiterated the need for clear guidance. Those who are less keen on the introduction of interim

suspension cited concerns that it could be used as a sanction in and of itself

29: Do you agree that an interim suspension should initially be for up to a maximum of 3 months, and then subject to review?

There were 1965 responses to this question.

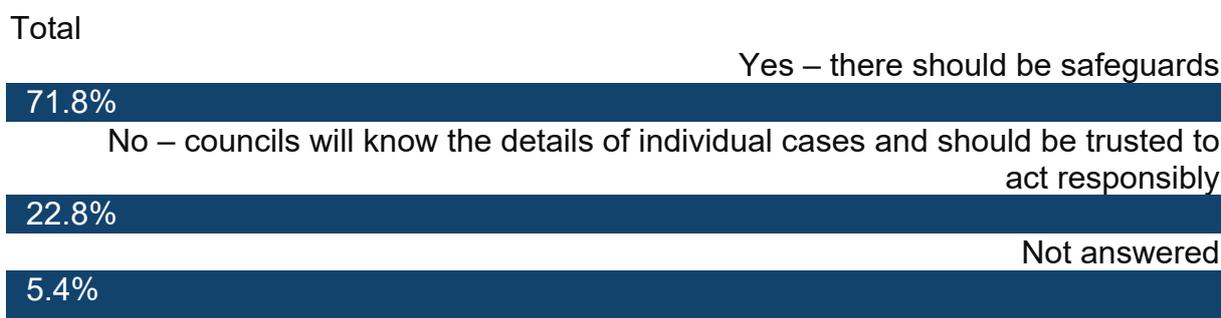


There were 350 narrative responses to this the question:

- respondents to this question again noted the importance of quick resolution to investigations to avoid protracted interim suspension periods, and reiterated that it is a measure which should only be used in exceptional circumstances
- some respondents expressed the view that there should be no extension to a period of interim suspension beyond the initial time allocated, whilst others believe that any interim suspension should never exceed the maximum length of full suspension

30: If following a 3-month review of an interim suspension, a standards committee decided to extend, do you think there should be safeguards to ensure a period of interim extension is not allowed to run on unchecked?

There were 1980 responses to this question.



30a: If you answered yes to above question, what safeguards do you think might be needed to ensure that unlimited suspension is not misused?

There were 1099 narrative responses to this question:

- many of the comments under this question reiterated the view that there should be time limits attached to interim suspension, alongside regular review points
- respondents also restated the view that any power of interim suspension should be accompanied by guidance, and that there should be an element of independence built into the process for deciding if interim suspension is appropriate in any given case

31: Do you think councillors should be disqualified if subject to suspension more than once?

There were 1956 responses to this question.

Total

59.6%	Yes – twice within a 5-year period should result in disqualification for 5 years
14.7%	Yes – but for a different length of time and/or within a different timeframe (please specify)
19.2%	No - the power to suspend members whenever they breach codes of conduct is sufficient
6.5%	Not answered

If you think councillors should be disqualified if subject to suspension more than once over a period different to 5 years, what should this be, in years?

There were 303 responses to this part of the question. The most common alternative the proposed 5 years was 3 years (24.7%), closely followed by 4 years (23.7%). A smaller number of respondents (17.5%) considered that disqualification should apply for more than one suspension over a period of 1 or 2 years, whilst some proposed 10 years (10.5%). 10.2% of respondents felt disqualification should be for more than one suspension over a period of greater than 10 years.

If you think the government should set a different disqualification period, what should this be, in years?

There were 203 responses to this part of the question. The most common alternative to the proposed 5 years' length of disqualification was 4 years (23.1%), followed by 3 years (14.8%). A smaller number of respondents (8.8%) considered that a disqualification period of 1 or 2 years was more appropriate, whilst 18.7% felt that a more punitive disqualification period of 10 years should be imposed. 16.2% of respondents felt disqualification should be for a period of greater than 10 years.

Do you think councillors should be disqualified if subject to suspension more than once? Comments

There were 485 narrative responses to this question:

- as with interim suspension, a significant proportion of those who left comments indicated that they believe disqualification should only be used in exceptional circumstances
- whilst there was support for disqualification for multiple breaches of the code of conduct which result in suspension, a number of respondents suggested that disqualification should be reserved for two or more lengthy periods of suspension to avoid situations in which a member is disqualified too readily
- in terms of the period of time for which the disqualification should apply, amongst the minority who do not support disqualification for a 5-year period, a number of respondents suggested that there should instead be alignment with the member’s term of office
- some comments suggest more consideration is needed before broadening the existing disqualification criteria, whilst some respondents expressed the view that only the public should decide who represents them

32: Is there a case for immediate disqualification for gross misconduct, for example in instances of theft or physical violence impacting the safety of other members and/or officers, provided there has been an investigation of the incident and the member has had a chance to respond before a decision is made?

There were 2018 responses to this question.



There were 476 narrative responses to this question:

- many of the responses to this question reiterated the view that disqualification should only be used in exceptional circumstances, and that there should be appropriate safeguards in place to protect against misuse

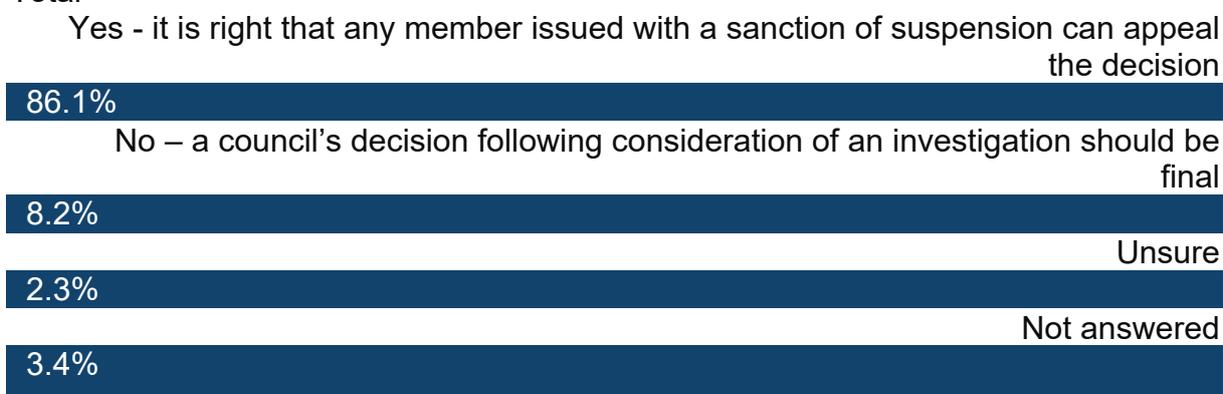
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- respondents who are unsupportive of disqualification raised a range of views, including the suggestion that serious misconduct should be dealt with via the criminal justice system, that it would be imperative for guilt to be proven, and that suspension may be more appropriate
- a number of respondents were supportive of disqualification for gross misconduct on the basis that there should be parity with what would happen in an employment setting

33: Should members have the right to appeal a decision to suspend them?

There were 2020 responses to this question.

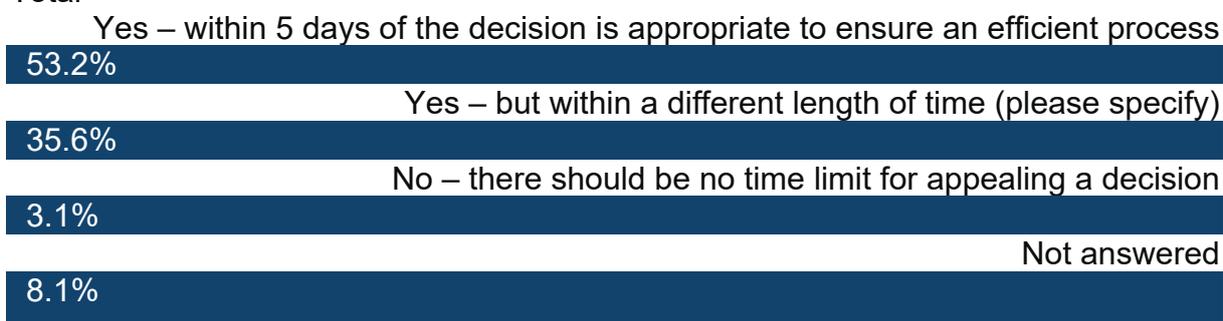
Total



34: Should suspended members have to make their appeal within a set timeframe?

There were 1922 responses to this question.

Total



If you think the government should set a different appeals timeframe, what should this be, in days?

There were 738 responses to this question. Views ranged between 7 working days to 100, with the most popular alternative to the proposed 5 working days being 10 or 14.

35: Do you consider that a complainant should have a right of appeal when a decision is taken not to investigate their complaint?

There were 2014 responses to this question.



36: Do you consider that a complainant should have a right of appeal when an allegation of misconduct is not upheld?

There were 2016 responses to this question.



37: If you answered yes to either of the previous two questions, please use the free text box below to share views on what you think is the most suitable route of appeal for either or both situations.

There were 755 narrative responses to this question:

- respondents to this question were keen to emphasise the importance of ensuring that there is an independent element to any appeals process, with a number suggesting that the appeals process should sit with an independent body, whether national or regional
- other views included the suggestion that appeals should be limited to specific cases, that the number of appeals that can be made in relation to a given decision, and that there should be no appeal for complaints that are deemed to be vexatious

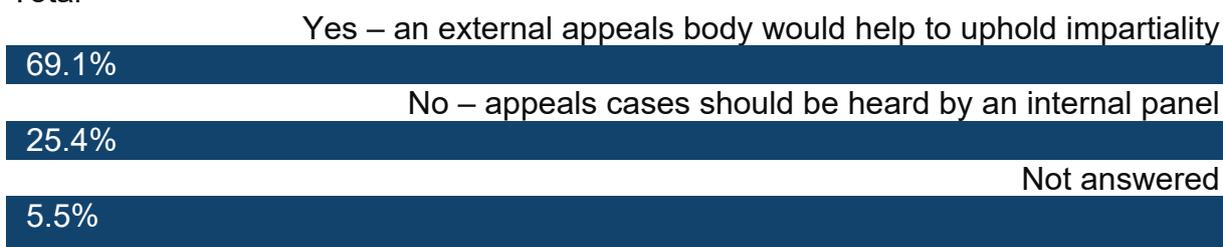
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- conversely, some respondents suggested that appeals should be heard in-house, either by the standards committee or full council, with a small number arguing that judicial review represents the most appropriate appeals route

38: Do you think there is a need for an external national body to hear appeals?

There were 1977 responses to this question.

Total



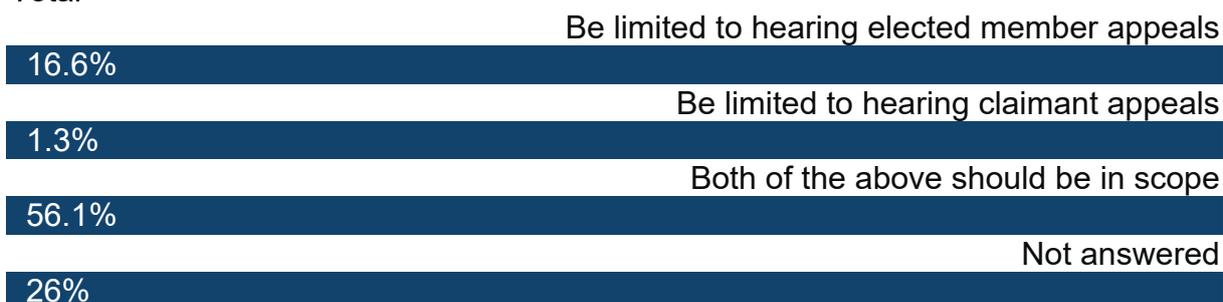
There were 481 narrative responses to this question:

- broadly in keeping with the quantitative responses, a large number of those who left a comment for this question were supportive of a national appeals body
- the reasons for this included the fact that it would bring greater impartiality to the process, as well as fairness and consistency of decision-making
- some respondents suggested that an external appeals process is important but only for significant sanctions such as suspension
- of those respondents who are opposed to the creation of a national body, a common rationale was that it would be overly expensive and bureaucratic
- some respondents suggested that appeals should be peer-led, or overseen by the principal authority

39: If you think there is a need for an external national appeals body, do you think it should:

There were 1548 responses to this question.

Total



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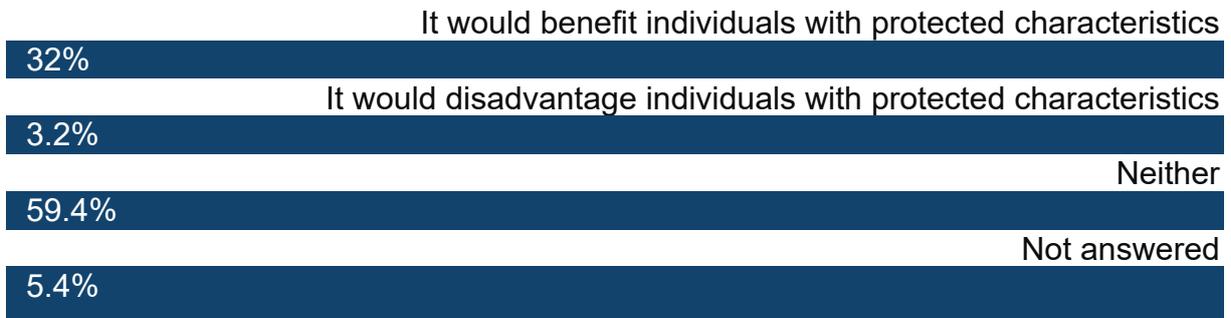
There were 480 narrative responses to this question:

- again, comments were largely consistent with the qualitative responses in advocating for both complainants and those subject to a complaint to be able to avail themselves of the appeals process, largely on the grounds of fairness
- of those who commented, a notable minority felt the appeals process should be limited only to members subject to a complaint or sanction, with no recourse to appeal for complainants

40: In your view, would the proposed reforms to the local government standards and conduct framework particularly benefit or disadvantage individuals with protected characteristics, for example those with disabilities or caring responsibilities?

There were 1978 responses to this question.

Total



There were 399 narrative responses to this question:

- most of those who commented indicated that they felt the measures would either be beneficial to those with protected characteristics, or neutral.
- some respondents used this comment field to stress the importance of PSED considerations

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To: Standards Committee
Date: 17 March 2025
Report of: Director of Law, Governance and Strategy (Monitoring Officer)
Title of Report: Update to the Committee on Standards in Public Life – Local Government Ethical Standards

Summary and recommendations	
Decision being taken:	This report informs the Committee of the progress in implementing the best practice recommendations of the Committee on Standards in Public Life report on Local Government Ethical Standards.
Key decision:	No
Cabinet Member:	N/A
Corporate Priority:	A Well Run Council
Policy Framework:	None

Recommendation(s): That the Standards Committee resolves to:
1. Note the progress made by the Council listed within the report.

Information Exempt from Publication	
N/A	N/A

Appendix No.	Appendix Title	Exempt from Publication
Appendix 1	List of Recommendations	No
Appendix 2	List of Best Practice Recommendations	No

Introduction and background

1. In 2018, the Government's Committee on Standards in Public Life ("the CSPL") undertook a review of local government ethical standards. The CSPL considers that robust standards arrangements are needed to safeguard local democracy, maintain high standards of conduct, and to protect ethical practice in local government.
2. The CSPL published the Local Government Ethical Standards report on 30 January 2019 (the CSPL report), which contained 26 recommendations listed in Appendix 1. Many of these recommendations require legislative change, which as of February 2026, the Government has yet to publish a formal response to the report.
3. Since July 2024, there has been a change of Government, which has seen the CSPL replaced with the Ethic and Integrity Commission (EIC), which launched on 13 October 2025. The EIC promotes the highest standards in public life, reports to the Prime Minister on matters concerning ethical standards and advises public authorities on the development of clear codes of conduct with effective oversight arrangements. It is an advisory non-departmental public body, which is sponsored by the Cabinet Office and due to recent changes, the recommendations the CSPL proposed may not be implemented.
4. However, as part of the proposed changes to the Localism Act 2011, on which the Government consulted with local authorities in 2025, some of these recommendations could be included as part of the updated legislation.

Implementation of the Best Practice recommendations

5. In addition to the 26 recommendations, the CSPL report includes 15 Best Practice recommendations for determination by all local authorities. The CSPL wrote to all local authorities in July 2020 confirming that it intended to review progress on the implementation of these best practice recommendations in the autumn of 2020. To date the Council has not heard anything further from the CSPL or its successor, the EIC.
6. Appendix 2 lists those best practice recommendations and summarises the Council's progress in implementing them. 14 of the recommendations are already in place. The remaining recommendation relates to the Code of Conduct, which is reviewed in consultation with the other local authorities within Oxfordshire (Oxfordshire County Council, Cherwell District Council, South Oxfordshire District Council, Vale of White Horse District Council, and West Oxfordshire District Council) who share a common code of conduct with the City Council.
7. The Council's ability to demonstrate compliance with the remaining best practice recommendation may not be possible until Government has responded to the CSPL report and enacted the necessary legislation, and also until such time as a new Code of Conduct, which addresses those points, is adopted by the Council and the other Oxfordshire local authorities.
8. The Monitoring Officer will continue to monitor this issue and report back to future meetings as appropriate.

Alternative Options Considered

9. There are no alternative recommendations, the Committee are asked to note the CSPL's recommendations and the Council's implementation of the best practice recommendations.
10. Councillors should be informed and up to date about the Councils' role in improving the Standards process for all City and Parish Councillors.

Implications of Local Government Reorganisation

11. While there are no implications arising through Local Government Reorganisation, any recommendations from the EIC would be subject to a future decision taken by the new Unitary Authority.

Financial implications

12. There are no financial implications arising from this report. Any future implementation of the CSPL's recommendations or any further proposals from the EIC would be subject to financial review as part of a wider implementation of the proposed changes.

Legal issues

13. There are no legal implications arising from this report. Any future implementation of the CSPL's recommendations or any further proposals from the EIC would be subject to legal review as part of a wider review of implementation of the proposed changes.

Report author	Jonathan Malton
Job title	Committee and Members Services Manager
Service area or department	Law, Governance and Strategy
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e-mail	jmalton@oxford.gov.uk

Background Papers:	
1	https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/local-government-ethical-standards-report
2	Local government ethical standards - GOV.UK
3	https://eic.independent-commission.uk/
4	Local Government Association Model Councillor Code of Conduct 2020

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Appendix 1

List of recommendations

#	Recommendation	Responsible body / Legislation required	OCC responsibility for implementation if/when appropriate	Status
1	The Local Government Association should create an updated model code of conduct, in consultation with representative bodies of councillors and officers of all tiers of local government.	Local Government Association	Monitoring Officer OSMOG (Oxfordshire Monitoring Officers' Group) Council	
77 2	The government should ensure that candidates standing for or accepting public offices are not required publicly to disclose their home address. The Relevant Authorities (Disclosable Pecuniary Interests) Regulations 2012 should be amended to clarify that a councillor does not need to register their home address on an authority's register of interests.	Government	Monitoring Officer Elections ROI form & guidance	Implemented in relation to election candidates – see paragraph and 4 and Appendix 2
3	Councillors should be presumed to be acting in an official capacity in their public conduct, including statements on publicly accessible social media. Section 27(2) of the Localism Act 2011 should be amended to permit local authorities to presume so when deciding upon code of conduct breaches.	Government Legislative	Monitoring Officer Code of Conduct & complaints	

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List of recommendations

	<p>4</p>	<p>Section 27(2) of the Localism Act 2011 should be amended to state that a local authority's code of conduct applies to a member when they claim to act, or give the impression they are acting, in their capacity as a member or as a representative of the local authority.</p>	<p>Government Legislative</p>	<p>Monitoring Officer Code of Conduct & complaints</p>	
	<p>5</p>	<p>The Relevant Authorities (Disclosable Pecuniary Interests) Regulations 2012 should be amended to include: unpaid directorships; trusteeships; management roles in a charity or a body of a public nature; and membership of any organisations that seek to influence opinion or public policy.</p>	<p>Government Legislative</p>	<p>Monitoring Officer</p>	
<p>78</p>	<p>6</p>	<p>Local authorities should be required to establish a register of gifts and hospitality, with councillors required to record any gifts and hospitality received over a value of £50, or totalling £100 over a year from a single source. This requirement should be included in an updated model code of conduct.</p>	<p>Government</p>	<p>Monitoring Officer OCC chose to introduce this at the start of 2019 OSMOG re Code of Conduct</p>	<p>Current practice for OCC To be included in future revised Code of Conduct</p>

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List of recommendations

	7	Section 31 of the Localism Act 2011 should be repealed, and replaced with a requirement that councils include in their code of conduct that a councillor must not participate in a discussion or vote in a matter to be considered at a meeting if they have any interest, whether registered or not, “if a member of the public, with knowledge of the relevant facts, would reasonably regard the interest as so significant that it is likely to prejudice your consideration or decision-making in relation to that matter”.	Government Legislative	Monitoring Officer OSMOG re Code of Conduct	
79	8	The Localism Act 2011 should be amended to require that Independent Persons are appointed for a fixed term of two years, renewable once.	Government Legislative	Monitoring Officer	OCC Independent Persons’ term expires 2030
	9	The Local Government Transparency Code should be updated to provide that the view of the Independent Person in relation to a decision on which they are consulted should be formally recorded in any decision notice or minutes.	Government	Monitoring Officer	
	10	A local authority should only be able to suspend a councillor where the authority’s Independent Person agrees both with the finding of a breach and that suspending the councillor would be a proportionate sanction.	Government	Monitoring Officer Update to complaints handling documentation	

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List of recommendations

11	Local authorities should provide legal indemnity to Independent Persons if their views or advice are disclosed. If needed, the government should require this through secondary legislation.	Government /all local authorities Legislative	Monitoring Officer
12	Local authorities should be given the discretionary power to establish a decision-making standards committee with voting independent members and voting members from dependent parishes, to decide on allegations and impose sanctions.	Government	Council
13	Councillors should be given the right to appeal to the Local Government Ombudsman if their local authority imposes a period of suspension for breaching the code of conduct.	Government	Monitoring Officer OSMOG re Code of Conduct Update to complaints handling documentation
14	The Local Government Ombudsman should be given the power to investigate and decide upon an allegation of a code of conduct breach by a councillor, and the appropriate sanction, on appeal by a councillor who has had a suspension imposed. The Ombudsman's decision should be binding on the local authority.	Government	Monitoring Officer OSMOG re Code of Conduct Update to complaints handling documentation

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List of recommendations

	<p>15 The Local Government Transparency Code should be updated to require councils to publish annually: the number of code of conduct complaints they receive; what the complaints broadly relate to (e.g. bullying; conflict of interest); the outcome of those complaints, including if they are rejected as trivial or vexatious; and any sanctions applied.</p>	Government	Monitoring Officer Standards Committee
	<p>16 Local authorities should be given the power to suspend councillors, without allowances, for up to six months.</p>	Government	Monitoring Officer
81	<p>17 The government should clarify if councils may lawfully bar councillors from council premises or withdraw facilities as sanctions. These powers should be put beyond doubt in legislation if necessary.</p>	Government	Monitoring Officer
	<p>18 The criminal offences in the Localism Act 2011 relating to Disclosable Pecuniary Interests should be abolished.</p>	Government Legislative	Monitoring Officer
	<p>19 Parish council clerks should hold an appropriate qualification, such as those provided by the Society of Local Council Clerks.</p>	Parish councils	Parish Councils Oxfordshire Association of Local Councils (OALC)

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List of recommendations

20	Section 27(3) of the Localism Act 2011 should be amended to state that parish councils must adopt the code of conduct of their principal authority, with the necessary amendments, or the new model code.	Government Legislative	Parish Councils OSMOG
21	Section 28(11) of the Localism Act 2011 should be amended to state that any sanction imposed on a parish councillor following the finding of a breach is to be determined by the relevant principal authority.	Government Legislative	Monitoring Officer OSMOG re Code of Conduct Update to complaints handling
22	The Local Authorities (Standing Orders) (England) (Amendment) Regulations 2015 should be amended to provide that disciplinary protections for statutory officers extend to all disciplinary action, not just dismissal.	Government Legislative	Monitoring Officer
23	The Local Government Transparency Code should be updated to provide that local authorities must ensure that their whistleblowing policy specifies a named contact for the external auditor alongside their contact details, which should be available on the authority's website.	Government	Monitoring Officer Section 151 Officer
24	Councillors should be listed as 'prescribed persons' for the purposes of the Public Interest Disclosure Act 1998.	Government	Monitoring Officer

Appendix 1

List of recommendations

25	Councillors should be required to attend formal induction training by their political groups. National parties should add such a requirement to their model group rules.	Political groups National political parties	Political groups
26	Local Government Association corporate peer reviews should also include consideration of a local authority's processes for maintaining ethical standards	Local Government Association	Monitoring Officer

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Appendix 2

List of Best Practice Recommendations

Best practice 1: Local authorities should include prohibitions on bullying and harassment in codes of conduct. These should include a definition of bullying and harassment, supplemented with a list of examples of the sort of behaviour covered by such a definition.

Oxford City Council position: this is now included within the code of conduct, where a Councillor should not bully or harass any person or not discriminate against any person.

Best practice 2: Councils should include provisions in their code of conduct requiring councillors to comply with any formal standards investigation, and prohibiting trivial or malicious allegations by councillors.

Oxford City Council position: This included in the revised [Code of Conduct complaints handling documentation](#), introduced in March 2019.

Best practice 3: Principal authorities should review their code of conduct each year and regularly seek, where possible, the views of the public, community organisations and neighbouring authorities.

Oxford City Council position: Although there is no formal annual review of the current Code of Conduct, it is subject to periodic review at meetings of the Oxfordshire Monitoring Officers' Group as it is a common document adopted by all the Oxfordshire local authorities. At Oxford City Council, the Code of Conduct is kept under regular review by the Monitoring Officer and the Council's Independent Persons as part of the process of investigating complaints about Councillors' behavior and when the Constitution is reviewed annually. Any identified shortfall in the current Code of Conduct would be referred to the Council's Standards Committee and to the Oxfordshire Monitoring Officers' Group.

Best practice 4: An authority's code should be readily accessible to both councillors and the public, in a prominent position on a council's website and available in council premises.

Oxford City Council position: The [Members' Code of Conduct](#) is published on the website and is available on request from the Monitoring Officer.

Best practice 5: Local authorities should update their gifts and hospitality register at least once per quarter, and publish it in an accessible format, such as CSV.

Oxford City Council position: Details of the "gifts and hospitality" received are available online by searching for the profile of an individual councillor. These are updated once the Councillor has notified the Monitoring Officer.

Appendix 2

List of Best Practice Recommendations

Best practice 6: Councils should publish a clear and straightforward public interest test against which allegations are filtered.

Oxford City Council position: It is included in the revised [Code of Conduct complaints handling documentation](#), introduced in March 2019.

Best practice 7: Local authorities should have access to at least two Independent Persons.

Oxford City Council position: The Council currently has six Independent Persons following a successful recruitment campaign in 2025. Their terms of office last for five years until 31 July 2030.

Best practice 8: An Independent Person should be consulted as to whether to undertake a formal investigation on an allegation and should be given the option to review and comment on allegations which the responsible officer is minded to dismiss as being without merit, vexatious, or trivial.

Oxford City Council position: This is covered by the revised [Code of Conduct complaints handling documentation](#), introduced in March 2019.

Best practice 9: Where a local authority makes a decision on an allegation of misconduct following a formal investigation, a decision notice should be published as soon as possible on its website, including a brief statement of facts, the provisions of the code engaged by the allegations, the view of the Independent Person, the reasoning of the decision-maker, and any sanction applied.

Oxford City Council position: It is included in the revised [Code of Conduct complaints handling documentation](#). Following a formal investigation the Monitoring Officer's Decision Notice is published on the website under the Standards Committee webpage.

Best practice 10: A local authority should have straightforward and accessible guidance on its website on how to make a complaint under the code of conduct, the process for handling complaints, and estimated timescales for investigations and outcomes.

Oxford City Council position: It is covered by the revised [Code of Conduct complaints handling documentation](#), introduced in March 2019.

Best practice 11: Formal standards complaints about the conduct of a parish councillor towards a clerk should be made by the chair or by the parish council as a whole, rather than the clerk in all but exceptional circumstances.

Appendix 2

List of Best Practice Recommendations

Oxford City Council position: This is a matter for the Parish Councils, and the Monitoring Officer will remind all Parish Councils of this best practice proposal.

Best practice 12: Monitoring Officers' roles should include providing advice, support and management of investigations and adjudications on alleged breaches to parish councils within the remit of the principal authority. They should be provided with adequate training, corporate support and resources to undertake this work.

Oxford City Council position: These arrangements are in place.

Best practice 13: A local authority should have procedures in place to address any conflicts of interest when undertaking a standards investigation. Possible steps should include asking the Monitoring Officer from a different authority to undertake the investigation.

Oxford City Council position: These arrangements are in place and available when required. Officers with the Law, Governance and Strategy team have been commissioned to undertake investigations for other local authorities.

Best practice 14: Councils should report on separate bodies they have set up or which they own as part of their annual governance statement and give a full picture of their relationship with those bodies. Separate bodies created by local authorities should abide by the Nolan principle of openness and publish their board agendas and minutes and annual reports in an accessible place.

Oxford City Council position: These arrangements are in place. The Council's Annual Governance Statement (AGS) explains, each year, how it manages its corporate governance arrangements, makes decisions, manages its resources, and promotes values and high standards of conduct and behaviour. The AGS sets out the annual spend, activity, and governance arrangements for each of the Council's companies.

The AGS includes details for the Council's wholly owned direct services companies Oxford Direct Services Ltd (ODSL) and Oxford Direct Services Trading Limited (ODSTL) as well as its three housing companies (Oxford City Housing Limited (OCHL), Oxford City Housing (Investment) Limited (OCH(I)L) and Oxford City Housing (Development) Limited (OCH(D)L)). OCHL is wholly-owned by the Council, and OCH(I)L and OCH(D)L are both wholly-owned subsidiaries of OCHL. The Council also holds a 50% share in Oxford West End Development Limited ("OxWED"), a company jointly owned with Nuffield College and in 2011 entered into a Joint Venture ("JV") with Grosvenor Developments Ltd, known as Barton Oxford LLP (BOLLP) to enable the delivery of a new housing development at Barton Park.

Each of the Council's companies hold regular Board meetings throughout the year. In addition, representatives of the housing companies and the direct service companies attended periodic reporting meetings with their shareholders. These shareholder meetings have been regularised into quarterly reporting meetings.

Appendix 2

List of Best Practice Recommendations

The activities of the Council's Shareholder group have been and will continue to be scrutinised throughout the year by the Finance and Performance Working Group (of the Scrutiny Committee).

Best practice 15: Senior officers should meet regularly with political group leaders or group whips to discuss standards issues.

Oxford City Council position: These arrangements are in place; a monthly meeting between the statutory officers and all political group leaders are scheduled.

To: Standards Committee
Date: 17 March 2026
Report of: Director of Law, Governance and Strategy (Monitoring Officer)
Title of Report: Dispensations under Section 33 of the Localism Act 2011

Summary and recommendations	
Decision being taken:	This report proposes the Committee approve the general dispensation as set out at section 2 of the report for a period of four years.
Key decision:	No
Cabinet Member:	N/A
Corporate Priority:	None
Policy Framework:	None

Recommendation(s): That Standards Committee resolves to:
1. Approve , under Section 33 of the Localism Act 2011, the general dispensations for all elected and co-opted Members of Oxford City Council to remain in force for a period of four years from 1 October 2026 to 30 September 2030

Information Exempt From Publication	
N/A	N/A

Appendix No.	Appendix Title	Exempt from Publication
N/A	N/A	N/A

Introduction and background

1. The Localism Act 2011 ('the Act') prevents Members from participating in any business of the Council where they have a Disclosable Pecuniary Interest (DPI) unless they have sought a dispensation under Section 33 of the Act. Applications must be made in writing, and dispensations may be sought for a period of up to four years. Dispensations may be sought on the following grounds:
 - a) That so many Members of the decision-making body have a disclosable pecuniary interest in a matter that the business of the meeting would be impeded
 - b) Without a dispensation the representation of different political groups on the body would be so upset as to alter the outcome of any vote
 - c) The dispensation is in the interests of persons living in the area
 - d) No Member of the Cabinet would be able to participate on the matter without a dispensation
 - e) It is otherwise appropriate to grant a dispensation

General Dispensations

2. The standing dispensations require reapproval and, as this is not delegated to the Monitoring Officer, this report is brought to the Standards Committee to seek approval. It is proposed that the general dispensations, outlined below, are extended to December 2028, to allow members to speak and vote on the following items:
 - a) **Determining an allowance** (including special responsibility allowances), travelling expense, payment or indemnity given to Members
 - b) **Housing**: where the Member (or spouse or partner) holds a tenancy or lease with the Council as long as the matter does not relate to the particular tenancy or lease of the Member (their spouse or partner);
 - c) **Housing Benefit/Universal Credit**: where the Councillor (or spouse or partner) receives housing benefit;
 - d) Any **Ceremonial Honours** given to Members;
 - e) Setting the **Council Tax** or a precept under the Local Government and Finance Act 1992 (or any subsequent legislation); and
 - f) Setting a **Local Council Tax Reduction Scheme** or Local scheme for the payment of business rates (including eligibility for rebates and reductions) for the purposes of the Local Government Finance Act 2012 (or any subsequent legislation)

Delegation to the Monitoring Officer

3. The power to grant individual dispensations is granted to the Monitoring Officer to ensure a timely consideration of an application for dispensation as set out in the Constitution.

Alternative Options Considered

4. To not approve the general dispensation to all elected and co-opted members of Oxford City Council, however this would not be considered to be appropriate and would prevent decision making in relation to issues such as Council Tax setting and budget setting. A general dispensation has been in place since 2018 (and renewed in 2022) which will expire later in the year.

Implications of Local Government Reorganisation

5. There are no direct implications of Local Government Reorganisation with this decision. Any future decision relating to general dispensations would be a matter for the new Unitary Authority.

Financial implications

6. There are no financial implications arising from this report.

Legal issues

7. The Legal implications are as outlined in the body of the report.

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Background Papers:	
1	Localism Act 2011
2	Part9RolesofOfficers.pdf

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To: Standards Committee

Date: 17 March 2026

Report of: Director of Law, Governance and Strategy (Monitoring Officer)

Title of Report: Code of Conduct: summary of complaints and individual dispensations – 1 November 2025 to 28 February 2026

Summary and recommendations	
Decision being taken:	<p>To advise the Committee of:</p> <p>The number and status of complaints received under the Members' Code of Conduct which have been, or are to be, considered by the Director of Law, Governance and Strategy (in her statutory capacity as the authority's Monitoring Officer) in consultation with one of the Council's Independent Persons.</p> <p>The number of dispensations to an individual member, granted under Section 33 of the 2011 Localism Act, by the Monitoring Officer, following consultation with an Independent Person.</p>
Key decision:	No
Cabinet Member:	N/A
Corporate Priority:	A Well Run Council.
Policy Framework:	None

Recommendation(s): That the Standards Committee resolves to:
1. Note the updates to the Code of Conduct complaints received by the Monitoring Officer since the previous committee.

Information Exempt from Publication	
N/A	N/A

Appendix No.	Appendix Title	Exempt from Publication
N/A	N/A	N/A

Introduction and background

1. In compliance with legislation relating to the standards and conduct of elected councillors, the Council has in place complaints handling arrangements to enable an individual to make a formal complaint that an elected or co-opted member of the Council, or of a parish council within the Council's area, has failed to comply with the authority's Members' Code of Conduct.
2. The Standards Committee is responsible for promoting high standards of ethical behaviour by developing, maintaining and monitoring the Members' Code of Conduct. This report from the Monitoring Officer, which identifies any issues or learning points arising from the complaints received, contributes to that monitoring process.
3. The key stages of the complaints handling arrangements can be summarised as:

<p>Initial tests</p>	<p>The Monitoring Officer will apply the following "initial tests" to the complaint:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It is a complaint against one or more named councillors of Oxford City Council or a parish council within the city boundaries; • The named councillor was in office at the time of the alleged conduct, and the Code of Conduct was in force at the time; • The complaint, if proven, would be a breach of the Code under which the councillor was operating at the time of the alleged misconduct.
<p>Assessment</p>	<p>The complaint will be assessed and a decision made by the Council's Monitoring Officer in consultation with an Independent Person as to the next steps. At this stage the options open to the Monitoring Officer are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No further action • Informal resolution brokered by the Monitoring Officer and/or Group Leader • Referral for investigation • Referral to the police or other regulatory agency
<p>Investigation</p>	<p>A formal investigation may be conducted by an officer from Oxford City Council, an officer from another local authority or an independent investigator.</p> <p>The investigating officer will review the complaint and supporting evidence and may interview some or all the people concerned.</p> <p>The investigating officer will then produce a draft report. The complainant and the councillor concerned will normally have an</p>

	opportunity to comment on the draft report. The investigating officer will then submit the report to the Monitoring Officer.
Action to be taken	<p>The Monitoring Officer will consider the findings of the investigation and, in consultation with the Independent Person(s), determine what action to take. At this stage the options open to the Monitoring Officer are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local Hearing – complaint to be determined by the Standards Committee; • Local Resolution - a fair resolution of the complaint which is acceptable to all parties brokered by the Monitoring Officer; or • No action - complaint dismissed

Complaints made against members of Oxford City Council or a Parish Council

4. In the period 1 November 2025 up to and including 28 February 2026 the Monitoring Officer dealt with the following ten complaints comprising of eight separate complaints for city councillors and two separate complaints for parish councillors.
5. The Monitoring Officer, in consultation with the Independent Person(s), where appropriate, considered the complaints contained in the table below and made the following decisions:

Ref	Received	City/Parish	Code – alleged breach in behaviour	Action taken	
				Complaint heard at:	Outcome:
1	September 2024	City	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Honesty and Integrity • Bullying 	Monitoring Officer	Concluded – complaint dismissed
2	January 2025	Parish Council	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Objectivity • Accountability • Openness • Honesty and Integrity • Respect for others • Bullying • Impartiality 	Monitoring Officer	Ongoing
3	March 2025	City	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leadership • Respect of others 	Monitoring Officer, in consultation with the Independent Person	Concluded – complaint dismissed

4	May 2025	City	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Accountability • Honesty and Integrity • Council Resources 	Monitoring Officer, in consultation with the Independent Person	Concluded – complaint dismissed
5	May 2025	City	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Honesty and Integrity • Respect for others • Bullying • Confidential Information 	Monitoring Officer, in consultation with the Independent Person	Concluded – complaint dismissed
6	November 2025	City	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Selflessness • Accountability • Respect for others • Council resources 	Monitoring Officer, in consultation with the Independent Person	Concluded – complaint dismissed
7	December 2025	Parish	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Selflessness • Objectivity • Accountability • Openness • Honesty and Integrity • Leadership • Respect for others • Bullying • Impartiality 	Monitoring Officer, in consultation with the Independent Person	Concluded – complaint dismissed
8	January 2026	City	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Honesty • Integrity and Confidentiality 	Monitoring Officer, in consultation with the Independent Person	Concluded – informal resolution
9	January 2026	City	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Respect for others 	Monitoring Officer, in consultation with the Independent Person	Concluded – informal resolution
10	January 2026	City	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bullying • Respect for others • Disrepute • Openness 	Monitoring Officer, in consultation with the Independent Person	Concluded – complaint dismissed

Summary of complaints and learning points

6. The first complaint concerned an allegation that an Oxford City Councillor had made post on the social media platform X, that was unbecoming of a member of Oxford City Council. The Monitoring Officer, following a review of the complaint with the Independent Person, determined the case closed due to insufficient evidence.
7. The second complaint concerned an allegation that a Parish Councillor had interfered with the appointment of a Parish Councillor. The Monitoring Officer is currently investigating the complaint with the Independent Person.
8. The third complaint concerned an allegation that an Oxford City Councillor had made a post on the social media platform Facebook, that was unbecoming of a member of Oxford City Council. The Monitoring Officer, following a review of the complaint with the Independent Person, closed the complaint as it was similar to a case that had progressed through a Local Hearing Panel.
9. The fourth complaint concerned an allegation that an Oxford City Councillor had made posts on the social media platform BlueSky, that was unbecoming of a member of Oxford City Council. The Monitoring Officer, following a review of the complaint with the Independent Person, closed the complaint and determined it concerned with election practices, which are not within the remit of the Code of Conduct.
10. The fifth complaint concerned an allegation that an Oxford City Councillor had made posts on the social media platform Facebook that was unbecoming of a member of Oxford City Council. The Monitoring Officer, following a review of the complaint with the Independent Person, closed the complaint and determined it concerned with election practices, which are not within the remit of the Code of Conduct.
11. The sixth complaint concerned an allegation that an Oxford City Councillor had not responded to emails from a local resident. The Monitoring Officer, following a review with the Independent Person, concluded that the complaint did not meet the threshold for a complaint.
12. The seventh complaint an allegation that a Parish Councillor had disrupted the process for the complainant to be co-opted to the Parish Council. The Monitoring Officer, following a review with the Independent Person, while confirming they were acting as a Councillor at the time of the complaint, there was no evidence that they broke the code of conduct, and the complaint was dismissed.
13. The eighth complaint alleged a City Councillor was misusing their social media account of Facebook to imply someone who is not a City Councillor was undertaking case work. The Monitoring Officer, following a review with the Independent Person, determined that the complaint would be concluded by an informal resolution.
14. The ninth complaint alleged a City Councillor was disrespectful to an Officer at a Committee. The Monitoring Officer, following a review with the Independent Person, determined that the complaint would be concluded by an informal resolution.
15. The tenth complaint alleged a City Councillor was using their position to bully and harass a member of the public. The Monitoring Officer, following a review with the Independent Person, determined that the complaint was dismissed as it was outside of their role as a City Councillor.

Dispensations granted to an individual Member

16. The Localism Act 2011 prevents members from participating in any business of the Council where they have a Disclosable Pecuniary Interest (DPI) unless they have sought a dispensation under Section 33 of the Act. Applications must be made in writing, and dispensations may be sought for a period of up to four years.
17. On 1 October 2022 Council granted a general dispensation, to remain in force for a period of 4 years (ending on 30 September 2026), to all Oxford City Council members and co-opted members, to speak and vote where they would otherwise have a DPI in the following matters:
- **Determining an allowance** (including special responsibility allowances), travelling expense, payment or indemnity given to Members
 - **Housing**: where the Member (or spouse or partner) holds a tenancy or lease with the Council as long as the matter does not relate to the particular tenancy or lease of the Member (their spouse or partner);
 - **Housing Benefit/Universal Credit**: where the Councillor (or spouse or partner) receives housing benefit;
 - Any **Ceremonial Honours** given to Members;
 - Setting the **Council Tax** or a precept under the Local Government and Finance Act 1992 (or any subsequent legislation); and
 - Setting a **Local Council Tax Reduction Scheme** or Local scheme for the payment of business rates (including eligibility for rebates and reductions) for the purposes of the Local Government Finance Act 2012 (or any subsequent legislation)
20. In October 2018 Council delegated the granting of dispensations to individual members under Section 33 of the Localism Act 2011 to the Monitoring Officer, following consultation with an Independent Person.
21. In the period covered by this report there have been no requests for an individual dispensation under Section 33 of the Localism Act 2011.

Implications of Local Government Reorganisation

22. The Code of Conduct for which the Members of the new Unitary Authority will follow will be a decision for the new authority ahead of the vesting day of 1 May 2028.

Legal Implications

23. The Localism Act 2011 requires the Council to have a Code of Conduct which sets out the standards expected of Members whenever they act in their official capacity. The Code must also have in place a suitable procedure at a local level to investigate and determine allegations against elected members and co-opted members. The Council is also responsible for having arrangements in place to investigate and determine allegations against parish councillors.

Financial Implications

24. There is a cost to the authority when a complaint is referred for external investigation this is determined by market factors in terms of the availability of investigators identified through complaint procurement processes.

Risk Management

25. If the Council fails to adopt and maintain a Code of Conduct and process for the investigation of complaints which is fit for purpose, robust and transparent then there are risks to the Council's reputation and also to the integrity of its corporate governance and decision-making processes as it will not be compliant with legislation. Formal consideration of requests for dispensation minimises the risk of the Council not following lawful procedures in respect of members' interests.

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Background Papers:	
1	Oxford City Council Constitution Part22MembersCodeofConduct.pdf
2	Local Government Association Model Councillor Code of Conduct 2020
3	Standards - Complaints Handling Arrangements
4	Hearing Procedure.doc
5	Oxford City Council Constitution Part23Codeoncouncillorofficerrelations.pdf

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To: Standards Committee
Date: 17 March 2026
Report of: Director of Law, Governance and Strategy (Monitoring Officer)
Title of Report: Member Training Update – March 2026

Summary and recommendations	
Decision being taken:	To update the Standards Committee on the delivery of Member training from November 2026 to February 2026.
Key decision:	No
Cabinet Member:	N/A
Corporate Priority:	A Well Run Council.
Policy Framework:	None

Recommendation(s): That the Standards Committee resolves to:
1. Note the updates to the Councillors training since the previous committee.

Information Exempt from Publication	
N/A	N/A

Appendix No.	Appendix Title	Exempt from Publication
N/A	N/A	N/A

Introduction and background

1. The Standards Committee has responsibility in the Council's Constitution for receiving reports from, and advising the Monitoring Officer on, training for members.
2. The rules relating to compulsory member training are set out in the Councillors' Allowances Scheme which forms Part 26 of the Council's Constitution. The Allowances Scheme requires that members who fail to attend the following training will have a reduction applied to their basic allowances:
 - Induction for newly elected members (new Members only)
 - Compulsory planning training (every two years for all Members)
 - Compulsory code of conduct training (annually for all Members)
 - Compulsory licensing training (annually for members of General Purposes Licensing Committee and Licensing and Gambling Acts Committee)

Additional Non-Compulsory Training

3. Table 1 sets out the additional (non-compulsory) training sessions and briefings that have been scheduled since November 2025.

Table 1: Additional training and briefings offered in 2025/2026 to date

Topic	Date	# of attendees
Risk Register Training	15 October 2025	2
Devolution	4 November 2025	5
Social Media	12 November 2025	2
Local Plan Briefing	3 December 2025	9
Tenancy Management - Area Based Working Model	17 December 2025	6
Annual Briefing: Thames Valley Police Chief Constable and Police and Crime Commissioner	15 January 2026	6

4. Committee and Member Services also advertised a free Local Government Association (LGA) training session to Members in relation to mis/disinformation on Tuesday, 25 November, 10:00-12:00.

Member Training and Development for 2025/2026

5. Officers continue to look at ways to improve the level and quality of information provided to members about the work and priorities of different Council services, to

make it easier for all members to understand how the organisation is structured and what work is already underway.

6. The Committee and Member Services team conducted a survey for Members in March 2025, with 11 responses received.
7. Topics for Member Training were submitted as follows, as seen by the Standards Committee in March 2025, and have been updated once completed:
 - Legal developments and national policy changes which impact OCC
 - Planning – Completed in May 2025
 - Committee relevant training
 - Oxford Direct Services (ODS) systems
 - Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) expenditure applications, how to manage CIL – Completed in May 2025
 - Use of IT systems and computers in Town Hall
 - Case work and reporting/solving issues
 - Rights of social and private tenants
 - Budget
 - Media training and public speaking
 - Housing allocation systems
8. Topics for Member Briefings were submitted as follows:
 - Planning, changes to national regulations which affect Oxford City Council
 - Renter's rights bill
 - Procurement, social value
 - Community wealth building
 - Property/estates/ODS
 - CIL expenditure applications, how to manage CIL – Completed in May 2025
9. There was also a request to review the online training schemes, to make training more interactive and a preference for written briefing notes to compliment the sessions. Mentimeter was used for the Code of Conduct Training and was positively received.
10. The requests will be reviewed by the Corporate Leadership Team for consideration and will be scheduled for the 2026/2027 schedule.

Member Induction following Local Election 2026

11. Half of the City Council's Members will be up for election, due to be held on Thursday, 8 May 2026. Committee and Member Services are currently reviewing the induction for new, returning and current Members, which will include a Welcome Event, for all Members to meet with Officers across the Council, a revised Members Guide to Services and a refreshed Induction programme.
12. As per the Induction Programme, mandatory training for all Members will include planning, code of conduct and, for the Members who have been appointed to the General Purposes Licensing Committee and Licensing and Gambling Acts Committee, three separate modules for licensing to ensure Members can review the different types of casework at the Sub-Committees. This is following a request from

the Standards Committee to also include training to determine street trading applications.

Implications of Local Government Reorganisation

13. The Member Development programme is only for Oxford City Council members. A separate training programme will be organised once the new Unitary Authority arrangements have been confirmed by the Government.
14. Officers will develop briefings for all Members on the implementation of Local Government Reorganisation and the next steps over the two years.

Financial implications

15. Ordinarily most member training is delivered by officers of the Council in the Town Hall. Services are responsible for service-based training (e.g. planning, licensing) and may use external trainers where service budgets allow.
16. There is a small budget for member training held by Committee and Member Services which has been used to pay for one or two external trainers per year as required to meet members' training and development needs in particular areas that the Council cannot deliver (e.g. chairing skills, inclusive behaviours). This budget is also used to fund individual members' attendance at external training courses that are relevant to their special responsibilities or the reasonable learning and development of a councillor, with the agreement of their Group Leader.
17. Any move away from the provision of in-house training or an increase in the number of specialist external training courses would result in an additional financial cost to the Council which has not been budgeted for.
18. Ahead of the 2026 elections it will be considered if there is any additional funding available for training for members post-election who are new or hold new positions. This will be updated on as it is confirmed.

Legal issues

19. There is no legal requirement for the Council to adopt a scheme for member training but doing so is considered good corporate governance and member support practice.
20. Council has collectively agreed that members who fail to attend the applicable compulsory induction and training (detailed in paragraph 3) will forego a portion of their allowances, as set out in Part 26.2 of the Council's Constitution.

Level of risk

21. There is a risk that if members undertaking regulatory functions are not equipped to undertake those roles, then the Council's decision making could be undermined and subject to an increased risk of challenge, which, if successful, could be very costly for the Council. Similarly, if members are not trained on the Code of Conduct there is a

risk of an increase in the number of complaints that members have breached the Code of Conduct.

22. Ensuring all Councillors have attend training for Planning Committee allows a wider pool of Members who can substitute for committee members. However, updated legislation from the Government means that those appointed to the Committee will be the only Councillors to attend the training and determine planning applications. This is similar to the legislative requirements for the Councillor appointed to the Licensing Committees and the training arrangement to allow those Members to determine applications at Sub-Committees.

Equalities impact

23. All newly elected councillors are invited to declare any special requirements relating to the provision of training and Committee and Member Services will work with the individual to ensure that those needs are met.

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Background Papers:	
1	Oxford City Council Constitution Part26Councillorsallowances.pdf
2	Oxford City Council Constitution Part24PlanningCodeofPractice.pdf

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