

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.

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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