

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 |
| Telephone | 01865 602767 |
| 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 |

This page is intentionally left blank