

MINUTES OF THE GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE

4 March 2026 at 7.00pm

Present:

Councillor K. Franks (Chair)

Councillors H. Ayres, I. Fuller, M. Steel and S. Young

Also in attendance –

Parish Councillor P. Jackson

Parish Councillor K. Bentley

Independent Person –

Ms P. Mills

Mr P. Jeremiah

1. Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor A. Thompson and B. Massey

2. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 15 October 2025 were confirmed as a correct record.

3. Declarations of Interest

All Members were reminded to declare any disclosable pecuniary interests or other registerable interests where appropriate in any items of business on the meeting's agenda, none were made.

4. Public Question Time

No questions or statements were received from members of the public.

5. Chair's Announcements

No Announcements were received.

6. Monitoring Officer Report

The Monitoring Officer presented an update on the current position regarding standards complaints, alongside several wider governance updates. Members were advised that three new complaints had been received since the last report in October

2025, and that the investigation in one case had been completed and would proceed to a hearing. All other complaints had been concluded as set out in the appendix.

Members were informed that since publication of the agenda there had been an additional complaint received and was invalid, this related to a request for Monitoring Officer intervention in a parish matter. The Monitoring Officer does not have such legal powers, and the complainant has been informed of this. The Committee noted that the new Ethics and Integrity Commission had been established in October 2025, replacing and building upon the work of the Committee on Standards in Public Life. Government had also issued its response to the consultation on strengthening the standards and conduct framework in November 2025, indicating an intention to legislate for comprehensive reform of the regime under the Localism Act 2011.

Members were further informed that the Monitoring Officer had completed a review of the March 2025 Committee on Standards in Public Life report on early warning signs in public sector bodies, and no additional actions were recommended. Training for committee members on standards hearings had been delivered on 14 January 2026. The Committee also noted the resignation of Danny Lamb, one of the Independent Persons, which would be reported to Annual Council in May, Members thanked Mr Lamb for his contributions.

Finally, the Monitoring Officer reported that record-keeping arrangements for gifts and hospitality declarations had been reviewed. It was recommended that both officer and member declarations be retained for a standard period of four years, or for the full period of any extended term of office.

RESOLVED that the update be noted and that the standards enquiries and investigations statistics for the period of October 2025 – January 2026 be published online.

(7.03pm to 7.07pm)

7. Annual Update on Register of Interests in City and Parish tier Councils

The Monitoring Officer presented an update on the register of interests for City and Parish tier authorities, including city council officers. Members were advised that the annual assurance process introduced in 2022 continued to support improved oversight and compliance. Following the May 2023 elections, city councillors were required to complete a new online register of interests form, and the annual reminder to update entries had been issued in January 2026. Parish councils continued to use a scanned form submission process, and parish clerks had similarly issued annual reminders in January. Officers were also required to review and update their declarations each year, with the next reminder scheduled for March.

The Committee was informed of the current position regarding the completion of register of interests forms, which showed full or near-full compliance across the majority of city and parish councils. Since publication of the agenda only one parish council had an outstanding form. All other councils had submitted complete returns, taking account of existing vacancies. The Monitoring Officer would follow up on the outstanding form and update members at the next meeting.

RESOLVED that the annual report be noted.

(7.08pm to 7.11pm)

8. Annual Gifts and Hospitality Report

The Committee received the annual update on offers of gifts and hospitality received between January and December 2025. Members were reminded that the requirement for an annual report had been established by the Standards Committee in January 2010 and continued under the Governance Committee's remit. The Committee noted that five declarations had been made by Members during the year, and two offers had been recorded for officers. The Monitoring Officer confirmed that it had been appropriate for all offers to be accepted.

RESOLVED that the report be noted.

(7.11pm to 7.13pm)

9. Annual Whistleblowing Report

The Committee received a report detailing whistleblowing activity for the 2025 calendar year. Seventeen reports were received in total. Four reports were directed to the wrong body or related to individuals not working for the Council. Five reports related to service provision, with two redirected to the complaints process and three investigated with appropriate responses provided. Eight reports alleged staff misconduct such as fraud, intoxication, bullying and harassment; two of these cases, received in December 2025, were still under investigation. A further eight whistleblowing allegations had been received during 2026, most of which had been concluded. Of the 2025 matters, two did not meet the public-interest test, eleven were investigated as whistleblowing complaints, and four fell outside the Council's jurisdiction.

In response to questions it was shared that:

- Officers could explore how to present outcomes more clearly in future reports, noting that outcomes could involve various staffing actions and that care would be needed in reporting such information.
- Whistleblowers were informed of the outcome in a general manner, without disclosing sensitive details but only if the whistleblower was not anonymous.

RESOLVED that the update be noted.

(7.13pm to 7.21pm)

10. Work Programme

The Committee received an update on the work programme for 2025/26.

It was noted that the Community Governance Review (CGR) would be removed from the work programme due to this item being discussed at the Connectivity and Local

Democracy Working Group. The CGR was not required to be taken at Governance Committee.

RESOLVED that the work programme of the Committee be noted.

(7.21pm to 7.25pm)

11. Urgent Business

There were no matters of urgent business.

The meeting closed at 7.25pm

Chair