



Chelmsford City Council Governance Committee

4 March 2026

Monitoring Officer's Report

Report by:
Monitoring Officer

Officer Contact:
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Purpose

To update members on the current position in relation to standards complaints and to update in relation to a number of other relevant areas, including the government response to consultation on the standards regime, a report in March 2025 by the Committee on Standards in Public Life, the new Ethics and Integrity Commission, training, gifts and hospitality records and the resignation of one of the Independent Persons.

Recommendations

1. To note the current statistical information and agree that Appendix 1 should be published on the Council's website to confirm this.
 2. To note the various updates set out in this report.
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1. Standards Complaints

1.1. The Appendix to this report sets out the latest statistical data related to standards complaints.

1.2. Members will see that there have been 2 new complaints since the last report in October 2025. The details of the current position in relation to the complaints are set out in the attached appendix. The investigation has now been completed and the matter will proceed to hearing. All the other complaints have been completed as set out in the appendix.

2. Other updates

2.1 In October 2025, the new Ethics and Integrity Commission was established. This will replace and build upon the work previously done by the Committee on Standards in Public Life.

2.2 In November 2025, Government also responded to the consultation on “Strengthening the Standards and Conduct framework for Local Authorities in England” in November 2025. It said “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. " The timeframe for this to be brought forward is not known.

2.3 An action arising from the annual governance statement was for the report by the Committee on Standards in Public Life on recognising and responding to early warning signs in public sector bodies to be considered. At appendix 2, 20 points for reflection have been attached to this report to assist the committee in understanding the type of issues that are highlighted in the report. Some of these areas overlap with the Corporate Peer Challenge which met again with the Council in January 2026 and recently reported its findings. The Monitoring Officer has now completed the review for the annual governance process in relation to this report and does not recommend that any further specific actions are necessary arising from this report.

2.4 Committee members have now received training in relation to standards hearings. This was delivered on 14th January by an external trainer.

2.5 Danny Lamb, who served as one of the Independent Persons to the Governance Committee has resigned. This will be reported to Annual Council in May. The Monitoring Officer has thanked Danny for his work supporting the committee and particularly the Monitoring Officer with initial assessment of complaints.

2.6 Finally, the Monitoring Officer has reviewed record keeping arrangements for gift and hospitality declarations. It is recommended that both officer and member declarations are kept normally for 4 years (this is equivalent to a term of office and so where a term of office is extended the records will be kept for a period equivalent to that term of office).

3. List of Appendices

Appendix 1 – Statistical information regarding complaints made

Appendix 2 – 20 points of reflection (pages 7&8) taken from the CSPL report (March 2025)

Background papers: MHCLG response to consultation on standards
[Strengthening the standards and conduct framework for local authorities in England – consultation results and government response - GOV.UK](#)

Committee on standards in public life report (March 2025) - [Recognising and responding to early warning signs in public sector bodies](#)

Corporate Implications

Legal/Constitutional: It is good practice for statistical information (and other updates) to be provided to Governance Committee. Where any complaints are referred to in the appendix, a summary of the complaint without any personal data is provided. The other updates are provided so that committee members are aware of recent developments including those relating to action arising from the Annual Governance Statement.

Financial: None

Potential impact on climate change and the environment: None

Contribution toward achieving a net zero carbon position by 2030: None

Personnel: None

Risk Management: Reviewing learning from the report from the Committee on Standards in Public Life referred to in the report helps reduce the risk of governance failure by the Council.

Equality and Diversity: None

Health and Safety: None

Digital: None

Other: None

Consultees: None

Relevant Policies and Strategies:

Complaints Procedure

Standards Enquiries and Investigations Statistics – Localism Act 2011

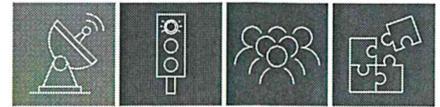
October 2025 – January 2026

Status of Complaint Categories	Total No.	Case No.	City, Parish tier Councillor	Date Issue First Raised	Alleged Breach or Issue Raised	Current Position
1. No formal complaint, invalid or withdrawn						
2. No further action required after consultation with one of the Independent Persons	2	13/25	Parish	Dec 25	Alleged disclosure of confidential information	Insufficient evidence of breach. NFA. Closed.
		1/26	Parish	Jan 26	Alleged disrespect & bullying	Unlikely to amount to breach of code of conduct. NFA. Closed

Status of Complaint Categories	Total No.	Case No.	City, Parish tier Councillor	Date Issue First Raised	Alleged Breach or Issue Raised	Current Position
3. Other action after consultation with one of the independent Persons	3	10-11/25 12/25	Parish Parish	July 25 Sept 25	Alleged disrespect (social media) and failure to update register of interests Various allegations including alleged disrespect, breach of confidentiality, disrepute	Matters of complaint (except failure to update register of interest) below threshold for action to be taken. Councillor final reminder to update their register of interest. Register of Interest updated. NFA closed Clarification as to capacity sought from complainant. Response provided. Initial assessment determined below threshold NFA but reminder issued to councillor on one aspect for future
4. Complaint on hold						.
5. Decision as to appropriate action still awaited						.
6. Complaints being investigated	1	8/25	City	June 2025	Alleged disrespect and improper use of position	Met threshold for investigation. Investigation complete. Pre-hearing matters complete. Scheduled for hearing 11 th March 2026.
Total	6					

Formal Complaint Outcomes

	Case No. and Councillor	Committee Date and Decision	Date Issue First Raised	Current Position
Outcome of Investigations				
Other Action				



Points for reflection

Building accountable organisations

1. How do you support your employees in understanding how their role, and the purposes of your organisation, serves the public?
2. Is it clear to your employees how decisions are made within your organisation and who is accountable for them?
3. What do you do to build strong relationships with those bodies that report to your organisation as well as those bodies you are accountable to?

Identifying and assessing risks

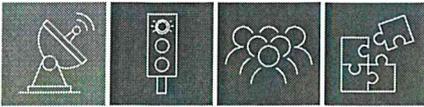
4. How do you know that the arrangements you have in place for the identification and mitigation of risks are effective?
5. How do you assure yourself that the data your organisation collects to assess its activities is of a high quality and that there is sufficient capability within the organisation to interpret the data intelligently?
6. How do you ensure your organisation views complaints as valuable feedback reflecting the public's experience of its service and uses that data to spot systemic issues and make improvements?

Speaking up

7. What do you do to build an open culture where people feel comfortable raising issues, asking questions and sharing their ideas?
8. How do you help your employees to understand that everyone in your organisation has a responsibility to speak up when they see something going wrong?
9. Are there clear and well-understood ways for people to raise concerns formally? How do you know these routes are trusted? How do you ensure that when people speak up, they are protected and not victimised?

Development and performance management

10. How does your organisation support the development of leaders who have the skills and confidence to handle a crisis appropriately?
11. How is listening to feedback and embedding learning incorporated into the process for assessing your organisation's executive and non-executive leaders?



Public scrutiny

12. Is your organisation as transparent as it can be when deciding what information to publish about its activities, including the provision of contextual detail where appropriate?
13. Could your organisation do more to engage proactively with the public and to understand the public's perspectives on how to improve your organisation's public services?
14. When things go wrong, how quickly do you acknowledge the failure and offer a meaningful apology?

Learning lessons

15. Does your organisation have mechanisms in place to support a robust corporate memory of why previous decisions were or were not taken?
16. How do you ensure that the lessons learned from evaluating projects and policies are shared within the organisation and that these lessons inform future decisions?
17. How do you ensure that your organisation regularly considers what it can learn from the successes and failures of other public bodies?

Board scrutiny

18. How do you ensure that your board receives the information it needs about risks and issues in a format that is most useful to board members, enabling them to evaluate the significance of that information?
19. How is your board encouraged to scrutinise robustly the decisions made by your organisation? Is it sufficiently curious? Does it listen to the views of public service users?
20. What do you do to ensure that your board has the right balance of skills, backgrounds, experiences and independence of judgement? Is understanding prospective board members' values and commitment part of the recruitment process?