

**Divisions Affected – ALL**

## **AUDIT AND GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE**

**26 November 2025**

### **Government Response to Strengthening the Standards and Conduct Framework for local authorities in England Consultation**

**Report by the Director of Law & Governance and Monitoring Officer**

#### **RECOMMENDATION**

1. To note the government's response to the Strengthening the Standards and Conduct Framework for local authorities in England Consultation and that legislation is intended to be brought through subject to parliamentary scheduling.

#### **Background**

2. The [Strengthening the Standards and Conduct Framework for local authorities in England consultation](#) which ran between 18 December 2024 and 26 February 2025, sought views on introducing a mandatory minimum code of conduct for local authorities in England, and measures to strengthen the standards and conduct regime in England to ensure consistency of approach amongst councils investigating serious breaches of their member codes of conduct, including the introduction of the power of suspension.
3. This Committee agreed a Council response to the Consultation at its meeting on 15 January 2025 which was subsequently submitted and formed part of the Consultation responses.
4. The government has reviewed all submissions, and feedback received from 2,092 respondents during the Consultation process. Responses were sought 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.

#### **Government Response**

5. In response, the government has indicated that "necessary legislation will be brought forward when parliamentary time allows". This statement reflects their

commitment to progressing legislative change, subject to parliamentary scheduling and priorities.

6. Initial observations are set out in the government's update: [Strengthening the standards and conduct framework for local authorities in England – consultation results and government response - GOV.UK](#), published on 11 November 2025.
7. Key findings were:
  - a. **94% support** for mandatory national code of conduct;
  - b. **91% agree** councillors must cooperate with investigations;
  - c. Strong backing for new, tougher sanctions, including suspension
8. The government has committed to legislating a mandatory code of conduct for all local authorities, alongside new powers for councils to suspend councillors.

## **New Mandatory Code of Conduct**

9. The government will introduce a mandatory minimum code for all local authorities in England. Councils may add local provisions but cannot amend core requirements.
10. The code will set clear, consistent standards of behaviour based on the *Nolan Principles*. It will include rules on discrimination, bullying, harassment, social media use, public conduct and use of council resources. It will also require councillors to cooperate with investigations into breaches.
11. Any changes will inevitably impact on the Council's Constitution. The changes will be discussed through existing mechanisms and be reported to Council for approval.

## **Process for Violation of Code**

12. Councillors will have a duty to cooperate with the standards investigation. The investigation will be conducted by a formal standards committee with impartial members appointed by the council.
13. There will be the right to appeal to a national appeals function.
14. The results of any investigation will be published for transparency.

## **New Powers of Suspension**

15. The Localism Act (2011) abolished council power to suspend councillors. This will be reversed. Councils will have the power to suspend councillors for up to 6 months for serious breaches of the code. Suspensions could include withholding allowances and bans on accessing council buildings.

16. Councillors suspended for the maximum period twice in 5 years can be disqualified from office.

## **Conclusion**

17. The government will legislate for these changes "as soon as parliamentary time allows" and has committed to provide training and detailed guidance to councillors.
18. The government has stated that the new code will help restore public trust and deliver fair, accountable local government.
19. Changes which arise from the consultation and supporting legislation may affect the current system of Councillor complaints, which is administered by the Director of Law and Governance and Monitoring Officer, and the sanctions available. The current Members' Code of Conduct is included in the council's constitution and is underpinned by the standards of conduct in public life (the "Nolan Principles", and all members agree to adhere to the Code of Conduct.
20. The Monitoring Officer will ensure the Committee are kept fully informed of all significant developments regarding the government's response to the Standards Consultation as new information emerges, including the progress and timing of any forthcoming legislation. Updates will be provided at future meetings and circulated as appropriate between sessions.

## **Financial implications**

21. There are no direct financial implications directly relating to, or arising from, the recommendation in this report.

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## **Legal implications**

22. There are currently no legal implications arising from the report. If the consultation leads to changes in legislation, this will have implications for the Council which will be reported on at the relevant time.

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