

STANDARDS AND ADJUDICATION COMMITTEE

DATE	23 rd July 2025
REPORT OF	Monitoring Officer
SUBJECT	Annual Standards and Adjudication Committee Report
STATUS	Open

CONTRIBUTION TO OUR AIMS

Good governance arrangements and ethical standards contribute directly to the achievement of the Council's strategic aims.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report presents the Annual Standards and Adjudication Committee report.

RECOMMENDATIONS

That the annual report be approved.

REASONS FOR DECISION

Production of an annual report promotes transparency of the Council's standards arrangements.

1. BACKGROUND AND ISSUES

- 1.1 This report presents the latest annual report of the Standards and Adjudication Committee. In addition to general information about the committee, it provides an overview of the committee's work on handling complaints alleging breaches of the Members' Code of Conduct.
- 1.2 The annual report presents an opportunity for the committee to reflect on its work and to consider any further improvements to the local standards arrangements.

2. RISKS, OPPORTUNITIES AND EQUALITY ISSUES

The annual report provides an opportunity to promote the good governance and high standard of ethical behaviour in place in North East Lincolnshire. There is the risk of loss of credibility of the Council if these standards fall.

3. OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED

None.

4. REPUTATION AND COMMUNICATIONS CONSIDERATIONS

Setting high ethical standards is an important building block for councils in

developing their community leadership role and achieving the Council's objectives. Robust standards arrangements are needed to safeguard local democracy, maintain high standards of conduct, and to protect ethical practice in local government.

5. FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS

There are no direct financial considerations arising from the content of the annual report.

6. CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE IMPLICATIONS

There are no direct implications for children and young people arising from the recommendations in this report.

7. CLIMATE CHANGE, NATURE RECOVERY AND ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no direct climate change and environmental implications arising from the recommendations in this report.

8. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no financial implications arising from the recommendations in this report.

9. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

As set out in the main body of the report.

10. HUMAN RESOURCES IMPLICATIONS

There are no human resources implications arising from the recommendations in this report.

11. WARD IMPLICATIONS

All wards are affected.

12. BACKGROUND PAPERS

None.

13. CONTACT OFFICER(S)

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**SIMON JONES
MONITORING OFFICER
AND ASSISTANT DIRECTOR LAW AND GOVERNANCE**

NORTH EAST LINCOLNSHIRE COUNCIL
STANDARDS AND ADJUDICATION COMMITTEE
ANNUAL REPORT

2024/25

This report represents the annual report of the Standards and Adjudication Committee under the Council's Standards regime following the Localism Act 2011 and covers the 2024/25 Municipal Year.

Membership

The Council has determined that a Standards and Adjudication Committee comprising nine elected members should oversee its Standards arrangements. In addition, the Independent Person appointed to support the Committee would be invited to attend each Committee meeting. Accordingly, the following served on the Committee during the 2024/25 Municipal Year.

Councillor Sophia Farren (Labour) (Chair)
Councillor Karen Swinburn (Conservative) (Deputy Chair)
Councillor Ian Lindley (Conservative)
Councillor Keith Brookes (Conservative)
Councillor Malcolm Morland (Labour)
Councillor Dan Humphrey (Labour)
Councillor Steve Holland (Independent)
Councillor Nicola Aisthorpe (Liberal Democrat)
Councillor Oliver Freeston (Reform)

Role of Committee

The main role of the Standards and Adjudication Committee is to promote and maintain high standards of conduct, to set an example to other bodies it works with and to the community at large. The Standards and Adjudication Committee will promote, educate and support members in following the highest standards of conduct and ensuring that those standards are fully owned locally.

The role is not just about enforcing the Code of Conduct it is also about relationships both internally between members and staff and externally with the public and other stakeholders.

Under the Council's Standards Arrangements, the committee convenes, as appropriate, sub committees in the form of Referral Panels to consider complaints and Hearings Panels to determine complaints that have been investigated.

At the Annual Meeting of Council on 22nd May 2025 it was resolved to allow the Monitoring Officer to assess complaints about North East Lincolnshire Council Elected Members and take a decision, in consultation with the Independent Person as to whether it should be forwarded to a Referrals Panel for decision. This was aimed at

reducing the need for a Referrals Panel where it was clear that the assessment criteria had not been met.

The Standards Arrangements also enable the Council to retain responsibility for receiving and determining complaints against Town and Parish Council members.

The Standards and Adjudication Committee also considers appeals against dismissal and grievances by employees of the Council. This particular role is currently being reviewed by the Constitution Working Group.

Terms of Reference

- (a) Promoting and maintaining high standards of conduct by members and co-opted members as defined by section 27 of the Localism Act 2011 ('Act').
- (b) Assisting members and co-opted members to observe the Code of Conduct adopted by the Council pursuant to section 28 of the Act.
- (c) Advising the Council on the amendment or revision of the Code of Conduct and the appointment or removal of the Independent Person/s.
- (d) Monitoring the operation of the Code of Conduct and the local 'Arrangements' and making appropriate revisions to the 'Arrangements' as considered necessary.
- (e) Advising, training or arranging to train members, co-opted members and Independent Person/s on matters relating to the Code of Conduct and the Arrangements.
- (f) Granting dispensations to members and co-opted members pursuant to the provisions of section 33 (b), (c) and (e) of the Act and on such other grounds as referred by the Monitoring Officer.
- (g) Dealing with any referrals as considered appropriate by the Monitoring Officer and to receive regular reports from the Monitoring Officer on the discharge of any delegations afforded to that position.
- (h) To consider any complaints relating to an alleged breach of the Code of Conduct in accordance with the 'Arrangements' and to convene, as appropriate, sub-committees ('Referrals Panels') to consider such matters.
- (i) To make determinations in respect of complaints that members and co-opted members of the Council and Parish and Town Councils in the borough may have breached the Code of Conduct and to convene, as appropriate, subcommittees ('Hearings Panels') to consider such matters and to impose, or recommend the imposition of, the sanctions detailed in the 'Arrangements'.
- (j) To deal with the grant of exemptions from political restriction in respect of any post holder and give directions on any post to be included in the list of politically restricted posts maintained by the authority.

- (k) To consider appeals against dismissal and grievances by employees of the Council.
- (l) To hear and determine in accordance with the appropriate conditions of service appeals against disciplinary action and against grading assessments by the Director of Finance, Operations and Resources.
- (m) To hear and determine appeals in relation to grievances required to be settled under the Council's Grievance Procedure.
- (n) To hear and determine appeals arising under the appeal arrangements relative to car allowances.
- (o) To determine student awards appeals.
- (p) To hear and determine any other internal appeal or review within the Council not falling within the delegated powers of any other Committee.

Code of Conduct

Under its Standards Arrangements the Council had developed and adopted its own locally based Code of Conduct which was compliant with the Nolan principles and had incorporated the statutory requirements concerning Disclosable Pecuniary Interests.

The Code of Conduct was adopted by North East Lincolnshire Council with effect from 1st January 2023, in line with the Local Government Association's model code of conduct. The majority of Town and Parish Councils have also adopted the Council's Code of Conduct. The Code of Conduct was updated at the Annual Meeting of Council on 22nd May 2025 to require Elected Members to co-operate in all aspects of the complaints process (not just any investigation).

Complaints

During the period covered by this report 11 new complaints were received involving members, compared to 12 received during the previous Municipal Year. A breakdown of complaints received over the last eight years is included below:

Year	North East Lincolnshire Council	Town/Parish Councils	Total
2017/18	6	2	8
2018/19	5	3	8
2019/20	12	4	16
2020/21	2	5	7
2021/22	12	6	18
2022/23	2	0	2
2023/24	11	1	12
2024/25	10	1`	11

Of the eleven incidents, ten related to members of North East Lincolnshire Council, and one related to members of Town and Parish Councils. One complaint, relating to a member of North East Lincolnshire Council and a parish council member was withdrawn after being submitted.

The complaints related to a wide range of alleged breaches of the Code of Conduct, including bringing their office into disrepute and failure to treat others with respect and courtesy, with bullying and harassment cited. There were also accusations of breaching equality laws and using their position as a member to improperly confer an advantage.

The complaints were considered by the Referrals Panel or the Monitoring Officer using the published assessment criteria, and in all cases it was decided that no further action be taken. In the majority of cases, this was due to there being insufficient evidence to suggest a breach of the Code of Conduct and therefore, taking into account the assessment criteria, no merit or public interest to warrant an investigation or further action. The panel did request that one councillor privately apologise for their behaviour and that a reminder be given at full Council meetings for Elected Members to be respectful of each other during debates.

The Independent Person

Wayne Harvie, who had supported the work of the Standards and Adjudication Committee as the Council's Independent Person, resigned from his position during the course of the year. Sadly, the Council was informed that Alan Hall, the Reserve Independent Person, had passed away during the course of the year. The committee wished to pass on its sincere condolences to his family.

Since Mr Harvie's resignation, Andrew Middleton has been supporting the committee as an interim Independent Person. Mr Middleton continues to conduct this role for a neighbouring authority.

Training

A refresh of the Code of Conduct training was provided for elected members in June 2025.

National and Regional Issues

The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government announced a consultation on the standards and conduct regime for local authorities in England on 18th December 2024. The consultation closed on 26th February 2025 and was considered by the Standards and Adjudication Committee meeting on 5th February 2025.

The consultation sought views on introducing measures to strengthen the standards and conduct regime in England and ensure consistency of approach amongst councils investigating serious breaches of their member codes of conduct, including the introduction of the power of suspension.

The committee provided comments on the proposals and a final consultation response was submitted, on behalf of the committee, to the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government based on the views provided. The government's response to the consultation is awaited.

The Monitoring Officer and Deputy Monitoring Officer discuss emerging national standards issues with neighbouring authorities (particularly North Lincolnshire Council). The Deputy Monitoring Officer attends webinars on standards matters and has also attended an annual standards conference.

Simon Jones
Monitoring Officer

Eve Richardson-Smith
Deputy Monitoring Officer

July 2025