

NORTH EAST LINCOLNSHIRE COUNCIL
STANDARDS AND ADJUDICATION COMMITTEE

ANNUAL REPORT

2025/26

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 2025/26 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 2025/26 Municipal Year.

Councillor Karen Swinburn (Conservative) (Chair)
Councillor Ian Lindley (Conservative)
Councillor Keith Brookes (Conservative)
Councillor Sophia Farren (Labour) (Chair)
Councillor Janet Goodwin (Labour)
Councillor Dan Humphrey (Labour)
Councillor Steve Holland (Independent)
Councillor Steve Beasant (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.

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.

Complaints

During the period covered by this report (14th May 2025 to 12th May 2026) 14 new complaints were received involving members, compared to 11 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
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
2025/26	11	3	14

Of the fourteen incidents, eleven related to members of North East Lincolnshire Council, and three related to members of Town and Parish Councils. It is to be noted that four of the complaints related to incidents involving both members of North East Lincolnshire Council and a parish council but they have been separated out in the above figures. All complaints related to one elected member each, except for the four mentioned above and one other complaint that related to the conduct of three elected members. In terms of complaints against individual councillors, three of the complaints named the same councillor, and two other councillors were named twice.

The complaints related to a wide range of alleged breaches of the Code of Conduct, including bringing their office into disrepute cited on 10 occasions, failure to treat others with respect and courtesy mentioned 9 times, and using their position as a member to improperly confer an advantage cited 7 times.

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.

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. Of the 11 complaints received concerning North East Lincolnshire Council Elected Members, 8 were assessed by the Monitoring Officer as not requiring any further action as it was clear that the assessment criteria had not been met. For one of the complaints, the Monitoring Officer did request that one councillor privately apologise for their behaviour. This has supported the efficiency and effectiveness of the complaints process.

The Independent Person

Andrew Middleton continues to support the committee as an interim Independent Person. Mr Middleton also conducts this role for a neighbouring authority. The Standards and Adjudication Committee would like to thank Mr Middleton for his valued support and advice.

Training

A refresh of the Code of Conduct training is due to be provided for elected members by September 2026. Following the elections in May 2026, all newly elected members of the Council have been provided with Code of Conduct training as part of their induction.

National and Regional Issues

An update on the government response to the consultation on strengthening the standards and conduct framework of local authorities was received by the Standards and Adjudication Committee at its meeting on 8th April 2026.

The government intends to implement a number of measures, which will require changes to existing legislation, to be brought forward as soon as parliamentary time allows. The measures include the introduction of a 'right for review' for both complainant and the subject elected member; powers for authorities to suspend elected members with the option to withhold allowances during suspension for the most serious breaches; the introduction of premises and facilities bans either in addition or as standalone sanctions; a new disqualification criterion for any elected member subject to the maximum period of suspension more than once within 5 years; and the creation of a new national appeals function. The committee asked to be kept updated on progress.

Work Programme

The Standards and Adjudication Committee has agreed to implement a work programme for the next municipal year in order to be proactive around standards and ethical matters. This will incorporate updates on the legislative changes to strengthening the standards and conduct framework, updates for casework oversight in relation to complaints dealt with by the Monitoring Officer and/or Referral Panel, supporting the member development programme, and receiving assurance around Code of Conduct best practice.

Simon Jones
Monitoring Officer

Eve Richardson-Smith
Deputy Monitoring Officer

July 2026