

Standards Committee Annual Report 2025



Foreword from the Vice-Chair of the Standards Committee

The work of the Standards Committee continues to be central to the Council’s ethical and governance responsibilities. These responsibilities remain essential to maintaining the trust and confidence of the public we serve. This importance has only increased following the Secretary of State’s Directions were issued in May 2025.

I would like to express my sincere thanks to the Members of the Committee, our Independent Persons, and the officers of the Council for their continued commitment, hard work, and support throughout the year.

As we prepare for the Council’s transition into West Surrey, I remain mindful of the challenges that lie ahead. Maintaining high standards throughout this period of significant change will be essential to ensuring the Council concludes its work responsibly and effectively. This report has been structured around the calendar year to enable a full reflection on 2025 ahead of the Council’s conclusion.

Martin Hull
Co-opted Member

The Annual Report outlines the work of the Standards Committee during the calendar year 2025 and covers the following subjects:

Foreword from the Vice-Chair of the Standards Committee	2
1 Key achievements of the year	3
2 Role of the Committee.....	3
3 Membership	3
4 Independent Persons	4
5 Meetings	4
6 Councillor complaint procedure	4
7 Complaints received during 2025	5
8 Consideration of requests for dispensations	6
9 Policy and constitution review work	6
10 Councillor development.....	7
11 Register of interests	7
12 Gifts and hospitality	8
13 Government response to consultation	8
14 Local Government Reorganisation	8
15 Conclusion by Monitoring Officer	9
Appendix 1 – Terms of reference.....	10
Appendix 2 – Member complaint procedure flowchart	11

1 Key achievements of the year

- 1.1 During 2025, the Standards Committee made significant progress in strengthening the Council's ethical governance framework and ensuring high standards of conduct during a period of considerable organisational change and heightened public scrutiny following the issuing of Secretary of State's Directions:
- The Committee oversaw a comprehensive review and approval of revised arrangements for dealing with allegations under the Members' Code of Conduct, introducing clearer assessment criteria, enhanced public interest guidance, and more robust hearing procedures.
 - It also shaped and advanced a new protocol on relations between Members, promoting early and informal resolution of concerns through Group Leaders to support constructive working relationships.
 - Throughout the year, the Committee closely monitored trends in member complaints and played a leading role in constitutional and policy review work, recommending updates across multiple governance areas to ensure alignment with audit findings and current best practice.
 - Routine transparency measures—including the Registers of Interests and Gifts and Hospitality—were also actively maintained and reviewed.
- 1.2 Collectively, these achievements ensured that the Council upheld strong ethical standards, preserved public confidence, and remained well prepared for transition to the new West Surrey authority.

2 Role of the Committee

- 2.1 The Standards Committee's core role is to uphold ethical governance, ensure integrity in councillor behaviour, oversee conduct processes, advise on constitutional and standards issues, and support member training and development. The current Terms of Reference are set out at Appendix 1.

3 Membership

- 3.1 During 2025 the Committee's membership was

Gareth Young (Chair until 5 October 2025)
Martin Hull (Vice-Chair)
Councillor Maureen Attewell
Councillor Chris Bateson
Councillor John Boughtflower
Councillor Jon Button
Councillor Daniel Geraci
Councillor Michele Gibson
Councillor Kathy Grant
Councillor Matthew Lee
Councillor Sinead Mooney

3.2 The following Councillors were substitute members

Councillor Tony Burrell
Councillor Sandra Dunn
Councillor Anant Mathur
Councillor Lawrence Nichols

4 Independent Persons

- 4.1 In October 2025 the Council's Monitoring Officer advised the Committee that the previous Independent Chair Gareth Young had resigned and that the current Vice-Chair Martin Hull would assume the Chair's duties in the interim. Given the remaining tenure of the Council and the Vice-Chair's willingness to continue chairing the meetings a decision was made not to launch a recruitment process to fill the vacancy.
- 4.2 The Council has five Independent Persons who advise the Monitoring Officer on complaints against Borough Councillors and also advise Councillors who were the subject of complaints.

5 Meetings

- 5.1 The Committee met four times on 12 February, 9 April, 11 June and 22 October 2025.
- 5.2 Agenda items included:
- Amendments to the Constitution – see section 9 for further details
 - Updates on Member Complaints
 - New Protocol on relations between Members
 - Review of the Members Code of Conduct
 - Revised arrangements for dealing with allegations of a breach of the Members Code of Conduct following an independent review

6 Councillor Complaint Procedure

- 6.1 Under the Localism Act 2011, the Council has a statutory duty to promote and maintain high standards of conduct among councillors and co-opted members, and to adopt a procedure for handling matters related to the Code of Conduct.
- 6.2 In accordance with the Code, the Council has established arrangements for dealing with allegations of misconduct by councillors. These arrangements set out the process for submitting a complaint about a borough councillor and are available on the Council's website, together with a flowchart at Appendix 2. The arrangements also require the Monitoring Officer to report to the Standards Committee on complaints that are dismissed or referred for further action or investigation.
- 6.3 The Council's arrangements include provision for the Monitoring Officer to seek informal resolution at any stage in the complaints process, provided the criteria in Annex C to Appendix 2 are met.

- 6.4 Regular review of these arrangements supports the Council's statutory duty to uphold high standards of conduct. Clear and effective processes strengthen ethical governance, provide assurance to the public, and help protect the Council's reputation.
- 6.5 A review of the arrangements has been undertaken, and a revised process developed to reflect external recommendations and improve clarity for all parties involved in the complaints process.
- 6.6 The revised arrangements, subsequently agreed in February 2026, clarify the Monitoring Officer's role in the initial assessment stage and set out the circumstances in which a complaint may be dismissed - after consultation with the Independent Person - fairly, objectively, and without undue delay. They also retain the option of referring a matter to a Standards Sub-Committee where the Monitoring Officer has a conflict of interest or where the case is particularly high-profile. A non-exhaustive list of circumstances in which no further action will be taken appears at Appendix B of the arrangements.
- 6.7 In June 2025, the Committee considered a new protocol on relations between members. The Committee amended the protocol to reflect that, where a member is considering submitting a complaint about another member, they should first raise the matter with their Group Leader. The Group Leader will then liaise with the Group Leader of the other member to explore whether an informal resolution can be reached.

7 Complaints received during 2025

- 7.1 The Localism Act 2011 sets out the Council's duty to promote and maintain high standards of conduct by its councillors and any co-opted members. The Monitoring Officer is required to review all Code of Conduct Complaints received in respect of allegations concerning the conduct of borough councillors and co-opted members.
- 7.2 During the 2025 calendar year a total of ten complaints were received and are summarised as follows:

Received from	Summary of complaint	Outcome	Current status
Member of public	Procedural query	Dismissed - not in jurisdiction	Closed
Member of public	Comments made at Committee meeting	Informal resolution - apologise	Closed
Member of public	Comments in social media	Informal resolution - apologise	Closed
Member of public	Comments in correspondence	Informal resolution – meeting to resolve	Closed
Councillor	Comments at Council meeting	Informal resolution – reminded re. conduct	Closed
Councillor	Non-disclosure of interest	Dismissed – Outside Stage 2 criteria e.g. out of time	Closed

Councillor	Comments at Committee meeting	Informal resolution - Subject undertaking self-directed learning	Closed
Councillor	Failure to respond to resident	Dismissed – Outside Stage 2 criteria e.g. out of time	Closed
Member of public	Behaviour at Council meeting	Dismissed – No breach of Code	Closed
Member of staff	Disclosure of confidential information	Informal resolution – reminded of rules	Closed

7.3 The majority of complaints or queries raised related to “Behaviour at” and “Comments made” in either Council or Committee meetings. This reflects the observations of the conduct of councillors in meetings made in the first report from Spelthorne Borough Council Commissioners to the Secretary of State dated December 2025. However, the significant reduction from 20 complaints in 2024 positively reflect the implementation of the Protocol on relations between Members.

7.4 Where appropriate, the Monitoring Officer has sought to resolve complaints through informal means. In many cases once the substance of the concerns raised were clarified complaints did not progress beyond the initial assessment stage as per established arrangements.

7.5 Comparison with previous years

	2023	2024	2025
Outcome of total complaints:	11	20	10
No further action	2	2	0
Dismissed	6	9	4
Informal resolution	3	5	6
Upheld	0	4	0
Complainant:			
Member of Public	4	5	5
Member of Staff	0	3	1
Councillor	7	12	4

8 Consideration of requests for dispensations

8.1 During this period, the Monitoring Officer has not received or considered any dispensation requests to speak and vote on Council decisions.

8.2 If a request is submitted, the Monitoring Officer, in consultation with the Independent Person, will assess the merits of the application on a case-by-case basis.

9 Policy and Constitution Review Work

- 9.1 One of the functions of the Standards Committee is to monitor and review the operation of the Council's Constitution in accordance with Article 13 to ensure it is up to date and in line with legislation and current circumstances.
- 9.2 In November 2025 the Council's internal auditor Southern Internal Audit Partnership (SIAP) undertook an audit of the Council's Decision Making and Accountability. This audit returned overall Reasonable Assurance opinion, but made certain observations which necessitated changes to the Constitution in order to address the points made.
- 9.3 Areas reviewed in this period included:
- review of Finance Regulations
 - delegations to Officers
 - a new protocol on relations between members
 - Update to Terms of Reference for Climate Change Working Group, Audit Committee and Standards Committee
 - Review of the Members Code of Conduct
 - Changes to Contract Standing Orders
 - an independent review of the Hearing process.
- 9.4 In 2026, work will continue to ensure that the Constitution remains fit for purpose and reflects current legislation and best practice. The extent of review activity will be proportionate to the impact within the timescale of the transition to West Surrey Council.

10 Councillor Development

- 10.1 One of the functions of the Standards Committee is to promote, manage and agree a programme of member development.
- 10.2 Details of all training and development sessions undertaken by an individual Councillors are published on their individual Councillor webpage.
- 10.3 As part of the Improvement and Recovery Plan to respond to Secretary of State Directions a programme of member development has been designed and Councillors were consulted to prioritise delivery. Progress on the delivery of the plan will be reported to future meetings.

11 Register of Interests

- 11.1 The registers of interest for members and officers were maintained and regularly updated to ensure transparency and compliance with the Council's policies.
- 11.2 Each individual Member's Register of Interests is published online other than where their interest has been deemed to be a sensitive interest by the Monitoring Officer, in accordance with the Localism Act.
- 11.3 In addition, the Related Parties returns are undertaken as part of the statutory requirements associated with the preparation of the Statement of Accounts, providing assurance that all related party relationships and transactions are identified, reviewed, and disclosed in line with regulatory and reporting standards.

12 Gifts and Hospitality

- 12.1 The Council's Constitution specifies detailed arrangements for the registering of gifts and hospitality made to Councillors and officers. The register of Gifts and Hospitality is also published on the Council's website.
- 12.2 Councillors are reminded on agendas for public meetings that the register is available for signing at all public meetings.
- 12.3 Councillors are reminded that advice is available from the Monitoring Officer, Legal Services and Democratic Services and in relation to any offer of gift or hospitality and Councillors and officers are encouraged to seek this advice where they were unsure.

13 Government response to consultation

- 13.1 In November 2025, the Government published its response to the national consultation on strengthening the standards and conduct framework for local authorities in England. The response confirmed the intention to introduce a comprehensive reform of the current regime, including a mandatory national Code of Conduct, a requirement for all principal authorities to convene formal standards committees, and stronger support for both complainants and councillors involved in code of conduct investigations. It also set out plans for a new "right for review" of local standards decisions, the introduction of stronger sanctions including suspension of councillors for serious breaches and the creation of a national appeals function to ensure consistency and fairness across the sector. These reforms are intended to address longstanding concerns about the limited effectiveness of the existing framework and to promote greater accountability, public confidence, and high standards of conduct within local government.
- 13.2 These changes represent the most significant reform to local government standards since 2011 and will require coordinated organisational planning, which will become a key responsibility for the new authority as part of its transition arrangements.

14 Local Government Reorganisation

- 14.1 During Local Government Reorganisation (LGR), the Council's statutory obligations to uphold high standards of conduct remain in full force, even as governance arrangements evolve. The Standards Committee therefore plays a crucial stabilising role, ensuring continuity of ethical oversight throughout the transition.
- 14.2 Maintaining high standards is essential to sustaining public trust, particularly during periods of devolution and structural reform. Standards Committees help foster and maintain ethical organisations by shaping positive relationships between members, officers, and the public. In practice, this means ensuring that existing authorities conclude their work responsibly while supporting preparations for integration into the new council.
- 14.3 Reorganisation can lead to heightened workloads, increased tensions, and more complex decision making. The Standards Committee provides essential oversight of

conduct processes to ensure these pressures do not compromise behaviour or decision making, helping to prevent any deterioration in standards at a time when governance risk is at its highest.

- 14.4 Looking ahead, significant activity will focus on harmonising Codes of Conduct, protocols, and constitutional arrangements across the authorities involved in LGR. Legacy frameworks may require review, updating, and rationalisation to support the establishment of a coherent ethical governance structure for the new organisation.
- 14.5 As shadow authority operations begin, councillors from different councils, each bringing different practices and organisational cultures, must work together within a single structure. The Standards Committee will have an important role in promoting respectful and constructive behaviours to minimise conflict during political negotiation and structural change. This will be vital to maintaining public confidence during what is inevitably a disruptive and high-profile period of transition.

15 Conclusion by Monitoring Officer

- 15.1 This year has been one of continued progress, strengthened governance, and sustained commitment to ethical standards across the Council. The Standards Committee has played a vital role in supporting transparency, integrity, and accountability during a period of significant organisational transition and increasing external scrutiny.
- 15.2 Throughout the year, the Committee has overseen improvements to conduct processes, implemented clearer and more robust arrangements for handling complaints, and provided guidance on a range of constitutional and policy matters.
- 15.3 The level of complaints relating to interpersonal conduct at Council and Committee meetings underlines the continuing importance of councillor development in maintaining constructive working relationships and upholding public confidence in the Council's decision making. The expanded training programme introduced as part of the Improvement and Recovery Plan will continue to support councillors in navigating their responsibilities in an increasingly complex environment.
- 15.4 As preparations for transition to West Surrey progress, the Council's ethical framework must remain stable, transparent, and resilient. The second Annual report of the Standards Committee will be prepared ahead of the Council's conclusion to provide a full review of 2026. The Standards Committee will continue to play an essential role in ensuring that high standards of conduct are maintained throughout the transition period and that the organisation concludes its work with professionalism and integrity.

Linda Heron

Monitoring Officer and Head of Governance and Legal Services

Appendix 1 – Terms of Reference

The Standards Committee is made up of 9 councillors reflecting political balance and two independent non-voting members who sit as the Chair and Vice-Chair of the Committee.

Functions

Promoting the maintenance of high standards of conduct by councillors and any co-opted members of the Council.

In addition to the broad functions of the Committee set out in Article 8 it is also delegated to undertake the following work on behalf of the Council:

- to keep an overview on the arrangements for dealing with complaints under the code of conduct, making alterations and publishing them where it considers necessary;
- to devise such further protocols and procedures as are necessary for the efficient management of complaints which have to be considered by a hearings panel;
- to consult with the Independent Person on any matters which have broad implications for the promotion of high standards by the Council;
- to make recommendations to Council on standing orders for the registration and declaration of Disclosable Pecuniary Interests and other interests; and,
- to make recommendations to Council on any revisions to the Members' Code of Conduct and the registration of interests.
- to consider any issues referred by the Monitoring Officer under the Disclosure and Barring Service Checks for Members Protocol (Part 5m).
- to establish the Committee System Working Group with the Terms of Reference set out below.
- to monitor and review the operation of the Constitution in accordance with Article 13.
- to promote, manage and agree a programme of member development.

Prior to 27 May 2021 the Standards Committee was known as the Members Code of Conduct Committee.

Appendix 2 – Member Complaint Procedure Flowchart

