SPELTHORNE BOROUGH COUNCIL

Committee Report Checklist

Please submit the completed checklists with your report. If final draft report does not include all the information/sign offs required, your item will be delayed until the next meeting cycle.

Stage 1
Report checklist – responsibility of report owner

ITEM	Yes / No	Date
Councillor engagement / input from Chair prior to briefing	**YES**	**21.04.26**
Relevant Group Head review	**YES**	**21.04.26**
MAT+ review (to have been circulated **at least 5 working days before Stage 2**)	**YES**	**21.05.26**
This item is on the Forward Plan for the relevant committee	**YES**	
	Reviewed by	
Finance comments (circulate to Finance)	**AB**	**22.05.26**
Risk comments (circulate to Lee O'Neil)	**LO**	**29.05.26**
Legal comments (circulate to Legal team)	**LH**	**28/05/26**
HR comments (if applicable)	**NA**	

For reports with material financial or legal implications the author should engage with the respective teams at the outset and receive input to their reports prior to asking for MO or s151 comments.

Do not forward to stage 2 unless all the above have been completed.

Stage 2
Report checklist – responsibility of report owner

ITEM	Completed by	Date rec'd
Monitoring Officer commentary – at least **5 working days before MAT**	**L Heron**	**28/05/26**
S151 Officer commentary – at least **5 working days before MAT**	**T. Collier**	**22/05/26**
Commissioner engagement	**L. Seary**	**08/06/26**
	Delete as applicable:	No issues
Confirm final report cleared by MAT		

Council

16 July 2026

Title	Standards Committee Annual Report
Purpose of the report	To make a decision
Report Author	Kirsty Hunt Governance Support Officer
Ward(s) Affected	All Wards
Exempt	No
Exemption Reason	NA
Corporate Priority	This item is not in the current list of Corporate Priorities but still requires a Committee decision.
Recommendations	**Committee is asked to:** Endorse the Standards Committee Annual Report 2025
Reason for Recommendation	This annual report highlights the activities of the Committee, describes how the Committee's functions have been discharged during the previous year, and provides details of the outcome of the Standards complaints.

1. Executive summary of the report

What is the situation	Why we want to do something
On 16 June 2026 the Standards Committee made a recommendation to Council to endorse the Standards Committee Annual Report 2025	The production of an annual report is intended to ensure there is a regular and consistent approach to the reporting and consideration of standards of conduct by elected members.
This is what we want to do about it	**These are the next steps**
Ask the Council to endorse the Standards Committee Annual Report 2025 in order to promote local ownership and collective responsibility by members for ensuring high standards of conduct within their authority	If endorsed by Council, the Standards Committee Annual Report 2025 will be published by 31 July 2026

2. Key issues

2.1 The Annual Report of the Standards Committee was considered by the Standards Committee on 16 June. Members commented on historic instances of handling of complaints under the Member Code of Conduct and expressed dissatisfaction with the process. Members also acknowledged changes introduced in the calendar year 2025 and the reduction of the overall number of complaints.

2.2 This is the first Annual Report of the Standards Committee and covers the calendar year 2025.

2.3 Changes to the Standards regime were introduced in July 2012 following the Localism ACT 2011. Although it was no longer a statutory requirement to have a Standards Committee, Full Council approved the retention of a committee to deal with complaints and adopted a Members' Code of Conduct and a Procedure for Dealing with Standards Complaints. The Council adopted a model code of conduct as recommended by the Local Government Association (LGA).

2.4 The standards framework comprises the statutory rules, ethical principles, and administrative procedures designed to ensure that elected councillors and council staff act with integrity, accountability, and transparency. At Spelthorne Borough Council it comprises a number of elements including the code of conduct for councillors, rules around disclosure of interests, procedure for dealing with complaints and sanction for breaches.

2.5 Monitoring complaint activity is an important part of monitoring governance, as an increase in complaints can act as an early indicator of the health of local democracy and of the quality of relationships within local government. Complaint trends should be considered alongside other aspects of governance, as they may signal deteriorating relationships between councillors, or between councillors and officers.

2.6 National case law shows that many complaints arise from public statements, meetings, or social media activity alleged to be disrespectful, bullying, or to bring the office of councillor into disrepute. While robust debate is a vital feature of democratic life, these cases illustrate how criticism can cross into personal attack or unsubstantiated allegation, creating a toxic environment and undermining public confidence.

2.7 Viewed more broadly, this pattern reflects a wider concern about growing incivility in public life. The long-held expectation that politicians should have "thick skins" is increasingly strained in an era of heightened and sometimes hostile debate, both in person and online. At the same time, although codes of conduct are essential to maintaining ethical standards and public trust, their misuse as tools of political dispute can damage individual rights and the effective functioning of local government.

2.8 The Council's arrangements for handling Code of Conduct complaints allow the Monitoring Officer to filter out complaints that amount to tit for tat exchanges or otherwise fail to meet the public interest threshold required to justify formal investigation.

2.9 It is intended that the Committee will receive this information on a yearly basis with a final report being produced in time for consideration in March 2027.

3. Options appraisal and proposal

3.1 The preferred option is for the Annual Report to be endorsed by Council to demonstrate the Council's commitment to continually learning and improving as well as promoting local ownership and collective responsibility by members for ensuring high standards of conduct within their authority.

3.2 An alternative option would be for Council not to endorse the report – this option meets the requirement of a regular approach to the reporting and consideration of standards of conduct but does not escalate the responsibility for members conduct to the whole Council.

4. Risk implications

4.1 Risk 1: Without active monitoring poor conduct can go unnoticed, become normalised and deteriorate relationships within the Council.

Mitigation: Underpinning the Improvement and Recovery Plan is weaved a workstream of improving behaviours and relationships both between councillors and between councillors and officers.

4.2 Risk 2: If councillors disengage from the standards framework, decision-making becomes inconsistent or influenced by personal conflicts.

Mitigation: Reinforcing the standards framework through the improvement activities within the Improvement and Recovery Plan are aimed to help ensure councillors work respectfully, follow processes, and make evidence-based decisions.

4.3 Risk 3: A weak standards regime and governance arrangements could lead to the erosion of stakeholder confidence or risk to future relationships and partnerships

Mitigation: Even the perception that complaints are not handled or standards are not enforced can damage the Council's reputation – publicising the Committee's activities through the Annual Report demonstrates accountability and transparency to maintain trust in the framework.

5. Financial implications

5.1 There are no financial implications associated with this report.

5.2 Code of Conduct complaints are managed by the Monitoring Officer and her deputy. The complaints covered in this report required officer time, in addition to their core duties.

5.3 While no complaints were referred for external investigation in 2025, it should be noted that the cost of any such investigations is not included within the annual revenue budget. As a result, any external investigation would create a budget pressure for the Council, as costs would need to be met from existing budgets.

6. Legal comments

6.1 The Localism Act 2011 imposes a statutory duty on the Council to promote and maintain high standards of conduct of Members and co-opted Members in public office. By establishing and maintaining a Standards Committee, the Council demonstrates compliance with this duty.

6.2 Reporting on the activities of the Standards Committee further demonstrates compliance with the requirements of the Localism Act 2011, and although it is not a statutory requirement to make an annual report to the Standards Committee or Full Council, it is considered to be good practice for such matters to be considered by both the Standards Committee and the Council as a whole.

Corporate implications

7. Commissioners' comments

7.1 It is good to see the reduction in the number of complaints from the previous year, which this report captures.

8. S151 Officer comments

8.1 The S151 Officer notes that there are no direct financial implications arising from the report and as the report states any investigations are funded from within existing budgets.

9. Monitoring Officer comments

9.1 The Monitoring Officer confirms that the relevant legal implications have been taken into account.

10. Procurement comments

10.1 There are no procurement implications associated with this report.

11. Equality and Diversity

11.1 There are no equality and/or diversity implications arising directly from the report.

12. Sustainability/Climate Change Implications

12.1 There are no sustainability / Climate Change implications arising from this report.

13. Timetable for implementation

13.1 If endorsed by Council, the report will be published by 31 July 2026.

14. Contact

14.1 Kirsty Hunt, Governance Support Officer k.hunt2@spelthorne.gov.uk

14.2 Linda Heron, Group Head Corporate Governance and Monitoring Officer
L.Heron@spelthorne.gov.uk

Please submit any material questions to the Committee Chair and Officer Contact by two days in advance of the meeting.

Background papers: There are none.

Appendices:

Appendix A – Standards Committee Annual Report 2025