



STANDARDS COMMITTEE

DATE:	Wednesday, 22 April 2026
TIME:	10.00 am
VENUE:	Town Hall, Station Road, Clacton-on-Sea, CO15 1SE

MEMBERSHIP:

Councillor J Henderson (Chairman)
Councillor Talbot (Vice-Chairman)
Councillor Alexander
Councillor Casey

Councillor Codling
Councillor S Honeywood
Councillor Wiggins

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DATE OF PUBLICATION: Monday, 13 April 2026

AGENDA

1 Apologies for Absence and Substitutions

The Committee is asked to note any apologies for absence and substitutions received from Members.

2 Minutes of the Last Meeting (Pages 7 - 14)

To confirm and sign as a correct record, the minutes of the meeting of the Standards Committee, held on Wednesday 11 March 2026.

3 Declarations of Interest

Councillors are invited to declare any Disclosable Pecuniary Interests, Other Registerable Interests of Non-Registerable Interests, and the nature of it, in relation to any item on the agenda.

4 Questions on Notice pursuant to Council Procedure Rule 38

Subject to providing two working days' notice, a Member of the Committee may ask the Chairman of the Committee a question on any matter in relation to which the Council has powers or duties which affect the Tendring District and which falls within the terms of reference of the Committee.

5 Town and Parish Councils Standards Sub-Committee (Pages 15 - 20)

The Committee will formally receive and note, for its information only, the minutes of the meeting of the Town and Parish Councils Standards Sub-Committee held on Thursday 12 February 2026.

6 Report of the Monitoring Officer - A.1 - Annual Report on Declarations of Interest and associated matters (Pages 21 - 28)

To present the Committee with an overview on the register of, and declarations of, interests made by Members from 1 April 2025 until 31 March 2026.

7 Report of the Monitoring Officer - A.2 - Review of the Members' Gifts and Hospitality Policy (Pages 29 - 42)

To present the Committee with a review of the Members' Gifts and Hospitality Policy conducted by Officers for the Committee's comment and suggestions along with subsequent approval of the review and any associated amendments.

8 Report of the Monitoring Officer - A.3 - Review of Social Media Guidance for Members (Pages 43 - 56)

To present the Committee with the outcome of a review of the Social Media Guidance for Members conducted by Officers for the Committee's comments and suggestions along with subsequent approval of the draft, following any associated adjustments.

9 Report of the Monitoring Officer - A.4 - Standards Committee Work Programme 2026/27 (Pages 57 - 62)

To present for approval the Standards Committee's proposed work programme covering the period April 2026 to March 2027.

10 Update by the Monitoring Officer covering Complaints and National Policy Changes
(Pages 63 - 64)

The Committee will receive the Monitoring Officer's update regarding standards complaints and an update on national policy changes, as necessary.

Date of the Next Scheduled Meeting

The next scheduled meeting of the Standards Committee is to be held in the Town Hall, Station Road, Clacton-on-Sea, CO15 1SE at 10.00 am on Wednesday, 15 July 2026.

Information for Visitors

FIRE EVACUATION PROCEDURE

There is no alarm test scheduled for this meeting. In the event of an alarm sounding, please calmly make your way out of any of the fire exits in the room and follow the exit signs out of the building.

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**MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE STANDARDS COMMITTEE,
HELD ON WEDNESDAY, 11TH MARCH, 2026 AT 10.02 AM
IN THE COMMITTEE ROOM - TOWN HALL, STATION ROAD, CLACTON-ON-SEA,
CO15 1SE**

Present:	Councillors J Henderson (Chairman), Talbot (Vice-Chairman), Alexander, Casey, S Honeywood and Wiggins
Also Present:	Councillor Oxley
In Attendance:	Lisa Hastings (Corporate Director (Law & Governance) & Monitoring Officer), Keith Simmons (Assistant Director (Corporate Policy & Support) & Deputy Monitoring Officer), Karen Hayes (Corporate Governance, Performance & Procurement Manager), Maddie Adger (Leadership Support Manager) and Bethany Jones (Democratic Services Officer)
Also in Attendance:	David Irvine (Independent Person), Shelia Murphy (Independent Person) and Jane Watts (Independent Person)

9. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND SUBSTITUTIONS

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Councillor Codling (with no substitution) and Sue Gallone (one of the Council's Independent Persons).

10. MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING

It was moved by Councillor Alexander, seconded by Councillor S Honeywood and:-

RESOLVED that the Minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on Wednesday, 9 July 2025 be approved as a correct record and be signed by the Chairman.

11. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no Declarations of Interest made on this occasion.

12. QUESTIONS ON NOTICE PURSUANT TO COUNCIL PROCEDURE RULE 38

No Questions on Notice had been submitted by Members pursuant to Council Procedure Rule 38 on this occasion.

13. REPORT OF THE MONITORING OFFICER - A.1 - PRE-ELECTION PERIOD GUIDANCE FOR TENDRING DISTRICT COUNCIL MEMBERS AND OFFICERS

Members heard that a Guidance Note that concerned publicity and resources had been routinely issued, to all District Council Members and Officers, in the run up to elections since 2014, in the format as shown in Appendix A of the Officer report (A.1). In readiness for the May 2026 Essex County Council elections, the Standards Committee was requested to provide any comments or seek clarification on the content of the guidance to ensure that it was clear, concise and easily understood. The Standards Committee feedback would be considered by the Chief Executive (who was also the Deputy Returning Officer for the elections) when issuing the revised guidance in March 2026.

The Committee was informed that the period just before local elections when there were restrictions on local authority publicity and rules concerning media reporting of the election campaign, was now known as the “pre-election period”, and commenced with the publication of the relevant Notice of Election. Whilst the upcoming election was not to Tendring District Council, given the close relationship, overlapping geography and number of anticipated candidates with Tendring connections, the provisions applied equally to the upcoming poll to Essex County Council. Likewise, several existing Tendring District Councillors held positions locally within registered political parties/groupings of independent candidates that were envisaged as standing in the election and that therefore necessitated these Protocol requirements being in place.

Members were also informed that, at all times, local authorities must ensure that any publicity complied with all applicable statutory requirements, including the Code of Recommended Practice on Local Authority Publicity (2011). Members were advised that particular care was required during periods of heightened sensitivity, such as the pre-election period, when these obligations became especially relevant. It was reported that, during this time, the Council would refrain from taking decisions or making policy announcements that were significant or potentially politically contentious. Members were further advised that, as with central government, “business as usual” would continue; however, in certain cases a local authority might act cautiously and defer decision-making until after the election had concluded.

The Committee was told that the Code of Practice made reference to the period before elections in paragraphs 33 – 35. Each local authority was able to adopt their own version of the convention in the period leading up to local elections. Paragraph 4 of the Code set out the following principles, which local authorities should follow:-

- be lawful;
- be cost effective;
- be objective;
- be even-handed;
- be appropriate;
- have regard to equality and diversity; and
- be issued with care during periods of heightened sensitivity.

Members were made aware that the Guidance Note included:-

- Introduction;
- Summary of Key Points;
- Duties of the Deputy Returning Officer;
- Council Decision Making;
- Publicity;
- Use of Resources;
- Security;
- Questions and Queries; and
- General.

The Monitoring Officer made the Committee aware that one of the Independent Persons (Shelia Murphy) had provided some helpful comments around making that paragraph clearer.

It was moved by Councillor Casey, seconded by Councillor Wiggins and unanimously:-

RESOLVED that the Standards Committee:

- a) notes the contents of this report, and following its consideration of the report, has no comments or recommendations to make to the Chief Executive prior to his approval and adoption of the Guidance but further notes that, with absence of the Chief Executive on leave, this delegation has now been given to the Monitoring Officer and the Assistant Director for Corporate Policy & Support;
- b) endorses the Guidance being circulated to all Tendring District Councillors together with a reminder of the contents of paragraph 3.8(b) of the Members' Code of Conduct; and
- c) supports the Guidance being circulated to all Town and Parish Councils in the District.

14. REPORT OF THE MONITORING OFFICER - A.2 - MANDATORY TRAINING FOR MEMBERS - ANNUAL UPDATE

Members heard that the Officer report (A.2) reiterated the Council's previous decision and constitutional requirement to make relevant training mandatory for Members, and their named substitutes, in respect of their membership on those Committees which provided regulatory type functions. The Officer report also detailed training undertaken and attendance to date for 2025/26.

Officers reminded Members that the Standards Committee, as part of its annual work programme since 2014, had received a report that provided details of the mandatory training provided to members of the Planning and Licensing and Registration Committees.

Mandatory Training in the context of Councillor Development more widely

The mandatory training referenced in the Officer report also formed part of the overall training provision for all Councillors within the framework established by the Council's "Councillor Development Statement" as reported to the Standards Committee on 2 October 2019 (Minute 14 referred).

From that point onwards the Council had established a programme of Councillor Development Sessions to support training for Councillors in a range of subjects. The subjects were supported by training needs analysis of Councillors undertaken periodically. The Calendar of Meetings now identified an annual programme of Development Sessions and those had been successfully delivered over recent years.

The completed and returned evaluation sheets, circulated following any training sessions provided, were used to assist the Council to refine and to improve its training offer.

In addition, a key element of the training offer for Councillors included access to relevant training through the Local Government Association online and in-person webinars and seminars.

Access to the Local Government Association's online training portal was available for all Councillors and that provided training modules including:-

- Community Engagement and Leadership;
- Councillor Induction;
- Commissioning Council services;
- Equality, Diversity and Unconscious Bias;
- The Effective Ward Councillor;
- Facilitation and Conflict Resolution;
- Handling Complaints for service improvement;
- Handling intimidation;
- Holding Council meetings online;
- Influencing skills;
- Licensing and Regulation;
- Local Government Finance;
- Planning;
- Police and Crime Panels;
- Scrutiny for Councillors;
- Stress management and personal resilience;
- Supporting mentally healthier communities; and
- Supporting your constituents with complex issues.

The above itself did not reference the training provided for Councillors through the All Members' Briefings. Further training opportunities were also delivered throughout the year as appropriate.

It was moved by Councillor Wiggins, seconded by Councillor Casey and unanimously:-

RESOLVED that the Standards Committee:-

- a) notes the contents of this Officer report (A.2) and the accompanying Appendix A; and
- b) continues to encourage members of the Planning, Licensing and Registration, Audit, Community Leadership Overview and Scrutiny, and Resources and Services Overview and Scrutiny Committees to attend all organised mandatory training events in order to comply with the requirements of the Council's Constitution.

15. UPDATE BY THE MONITORING OFFICER COVERING COMPLAINTS AND NATIONAL POLICY CHANGES

The Committee had before it the Monitoring Officer's update on existing and new conduct complaints cases.

TENDRING DISTRICT COUNCIL MONITORING OFFICER UPDATE February 2026				
Council	Complainant	Current status	Final outcome	Comments
Existing Cases from last update:				
Council	Complainant	Current status	Final outcome	Comments

TOWN	PUBLIC – received 05 Dec 2024	CLOSED	Subject Member resigned, therefore no longer subject to the Members’ Code of Conduct No further action	Matter relates to use of social media. Town and Parish Councils’ Standards Sub- Committee meeting was held, and social media recommendations determined by the Sub-Committee.
TOWN	PUBLIC – received 05 Dec 2024	CLOSED	No further action	Matter relates to public statements on the Town Council’s website. Relates to Town Council rather than individual Councillors.
PARISH	PARISH CLLR – received 05 Mar 2025	WITH MONITORING OFFICER FOR FINAL DECISION	Investigation has been concluded and parties notified	Matter relates to behaviour between Parish Councillors whilst acting in an official capacity.
DISTRICT	PUBLIC – received 11 Mar 2025	ONGOING	Investigation – internally appointed Investigator	Matter relates to communications between parties.
PARISH	PUBLIC – received 21 Jul 2025	CLOSED	No further action	Matter relates to communications between parties.
PARISH	PUBLIC – received 04 Sep 2025	CLOSED	Informal resolution – apology given by Subject Member	Matter relates to conduct at public meetings.
PARISH/ DISTRICT	PUBLIC x 2 – received 10 & 11 Oct 2025	CLOSED	No further action	Matter relates to use of social media.
PARISH x 3	PUBLIC – received 28 Oct 2025	ONGOING	External investigator appointed	Matter relates to conduct at public meetings and declaration of interests.
PARISH	PUBLIC –	ONGOING	External	Matter relates to use

	received 06 Nov 2025		investigator appointed (to be run in parallel with above investigation)	of social media.
DISTRICT x 3	PUBLIC – received 17 Nov 2025	CLOSED	No further action	Matter relates to operational matters outside the scope of Members.
TOWN x 2	PUBLIC – received 08 Dec 2025	CLOSED	No further action	Matter relates to use of social media.
DISTRICT	DISTRICT – CLLR received 02 Feb 2026	WITH MONITORING OFFICER FOR DECISION		Matter relates to declaration of interests.

New cases since last update - eight

General Notes – 2025/26 Summary:

Overall, eleven cases had been received so far in 2025/26.

Since the last update, one case remained being investigated by an internally appointed investigator and two cases were being investigated by an externally appointed investigator. One case remained ongoing and six cases had been closed with no further action and one case closed with informal resolution.

Requests for dispensations:

At the meeting of full Council on 17 February 2026, the Monitoring Officer had read out the following statement:

*“Tendring District Council adopted the LGA Model Members’ Code of Conduct which does not include the provisions confirming Members do not have a declarable interest which relates to the function of setting the Council Tax under the **Local Government Act 1992**. Therefore, to enable to you to debate and vote on the budget item to set the Council Tax, the email of 09 February 2026 provided all District Councillors with a dispensation under Section 33(2)(a) to (e) of the Localism Act 2011. Consequently, you will not be required to declare an interest based on the fact you live in the District and therefore have to pay Council Tax.*

*However, Members are importantly reminded of **section 106 of the Local Government Finance Act 1992**, which provides that any Member, who is in arrears by at least 2 months with their Council Tax payments cannot vote on matters concerning either the level of or administration of Council tax. It is important to note that this also covers Council Tax liabilities outside of the District and property which may not be your main residence. If present at the meeting, a Member to whom this provision applies must disclose the fact and may speak on the item but cannot vote. Non-compliance with this section is a criminal offence. Therefore, should this provision apply to any Member, this should be declared at the Declaration of Interest agenda item.*

*In 2014, the Government passed **The Local Authorities (Standing Orders) (England) (Amendment) Regulations 2014** making it mandatory for councils to amend their Standing Orders so as to include provisions requiring recorded votes at budget meetings. I can confirm that the Constitution reflects this requirement and the Council's Procedure Rules state at 19.5:*

"A recorded vote is mandatory on any decision relating to the budget or Council Tax. This includes not only on the substantive budget motions agreeing the budget and setting Council taxes, but also on any amendments proposed at the meeting."

I can inform Members that no budget amendments were submitted to the Council's Section 151 Officer by the deadline set out in Council Procedure Rule 2.

For other types of Interests, which need to be considered, Disclosable Pecuniary Interest (DPIs), other Registerable Interests (ORIs) or Non-Registerable Interests are defined in the Code of Conduct and for DPIs & ORIs, these have been (or should have been) registered in advance, and with the exception of the Council Tax exemption for residing in the District, you should still consider if any other interest do apply. A blanket exemption/dispensation has not been applied for all."

The Monitoring Officer also gave a verbal update to Members in relation to the Town and Parish Councils' Standards Sub-Committee meeting, that had been held on Thursday 12 February 2026, and that Members had given helpful recommendations in relation to social media guidance to go out to Town and Parish Councils. Officers planned to submit a review of the Social Media Guidance for District Councillors to the next meeting of this Committee.

Members were told that the case involving the Town and Parish Councils' Standards Sub-Committee had been reported nationally in the 'Local Government Lawyer' which was a national publication for lawyers interested in local government cases. The Council's press release that had been issued following the Sub-Committee's meeting had been used in that publication.

The Committee was made aware of a case in Tameside, that was in the public domain, whereby a complaint had been made against six District Councillors and 2 MPs that were part of a WhatsApp group, which was private but upon which they had commented on that group as Councillors and had made remarks about their residents, other Councillors and other individuals. A "Whistleblower" had 'leaked' this information which had led to a Code of Conduct complaint and an investigation. Tameside Council's relevant Committee and investigation had found that the social media guidance and the guidance that was issued to their Councillors did cover WhatsApp groups as it was a form of communication and that therefore their Code of Conduct had been engaged. The Code had been also engaged because they had acted in their official capacity as Councillors. It was found that the comments made were disrespectful and had put Tameside Council into disrepute. The case had also triggered a Parliamentary By-Election as one of the MPs has subsequently resigned.

The Committee **NOTED** the foregoing.

The meeting was declared closed at 10.43 am

Chairman

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE TOWN AND PARISH COUNCILS'
STANDARDS SUB-COMMITTEE,
HELD ON THURSDAY, 12TH FEBRUARY, 2026 AT 2.00 PM
IN THE COMMITTEE ROOM, TOWN HALL, STATION ROAD, CLACTON-ON-SEA,
CO15 1SE**

Present:	Councillors Alexander (TDC), F Belgrove (Alresford PC), Botterell (Little Clacton and Weeley PCs), Casey (TDC) and Codling (TDC)
Also Present:	Councillors Talbot (Vice-Chairman of the Standards Committee) and Wiggins
In Attendance:	Lisa Hastings (Corporate Director (Law & Governance) & Monitoring Officer), Karen Hayes (Corporate Governance, Performance & Procurement Manager), Ian Ford (Democratic Services Manager), Bethany Jones (Democratic Services Officer), Katie Koppenaal (Democratic Services Officer), James Dwan (Communications Officer) and Alex Brewer (Support Assistant (Governance))
Also in Attendance:	Sue Gallone, David Irvine and Jane Watts (three of the Council's four Independent Persons)

1. ELECTION OF A CHAIRMAN FOR THE MEETING

It was moved by Councillor Alexander, seconded by Councillor Codling and:-

RESOLVED that Councillor Casey be elected as Chairman for the meeting.

2. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND SUBSTITUTIONS

Apologies for absence were received on behalf of Councillor L Belgrove (Alresford Parish Council) and Shelia Murphy (one of Tendring District Council's Independent Persons).

3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest on this occasion.

4. REPORT OF THE MONITORING OFFICER - A.1 - RECOMMENDATIONS TO PARISH & TOWN COUNCILS: IMPROVING STANDARDS OR ACTIONS

The Sub-Committee considered a report of the Monitoring Officer (A.1) which made Members aware that a complaint had been received in November 2024, regarding the alleged behaviour of a Councillor ("the Subject Member"), under the local council's Members' Code of Conduct.

The Complaint referred to the behaviours of the Subject Member in relation to social media posts that as a result were alleged to have contravened the Members' Code of Conduct.

Members were told that complaints received relating to the Code of Conduct must be dealt with in accordance with the Council's formally adopted Complaints Procedure, as

set out in Part 6 of the Council's Constitution (Part 6.19 to 6.34), which had been adopted by the District Council on 26 November 2013 and recently updated in August 2025.

It was reported that the Monitoring Officer had decided that it was reasonable and appropriate that the Complaint merited further investigation. The parties had been informed of this decision and that an internal investigator would be appointed. The Council's Complaint Procedure set out how an investigation was conducted and that the Investigation Report must contain a conclusion as to whether the evidence supported a finding of failure to comply with the Code of Conduct.

The Sub-Committee was informed that, following a thorough investigation, it had been concluded that there was sufficient evidence to show that the Subject Member, based on a balance of probabilities and the evidence available, through the use of social media had breached Paragraphs 1.1 (respect), 5.1 (disrepute) and 6.1 (use of position) of the Members' Code of Conduct. The investigation had also concluded that Paragraph 2.2 had not been breached.

All parties had had the opportunity to comment on the Investigation Report and the findings contained therein. The report had been finalised on 6 October 2025.

Members were also made aware that, if an investigation concluded that there was evidence of a failure to comply with the Code of Conduct, then the Council's Complaints Procedure at Section 7.1 provided the Monitoring Officer with the authority to obtain an informal resolution, in consultation with the Independent Person (IP), where it could reasonably be resolved without the need for a hearing by the Town and Parish Councils' Standards Sub-Committee ("the Standards Sub-Committee").

Although the procedure did not require consultation with the IP if the Monitoring Officer considered informal resolution was not an appropriate course of action, and that the matter should be referred for a hearing before the Town and Parish Councils' Standards Sub-Committee, it was considered that seeking their view was still beneficial prior to making such a decision.

The Sub-Committee was also notified that, in accordance with 7.1.2 of the Council's Complaints Procedure, the Investigator's Report was kept confidential until the day of the hearing in order to protect the parties. The Standards Sub-Committee had been scheduled to hold a hearing on 12 February 2026.

However, the Monitoring Officer had recently been made aware the Subject Member had resigned from their position as a Councillor, and therefore consequently, they were no longer bound by the Members' Code of Conduct, and consequently, a hearing was no longer necessary. It was noted that, by resigning prior to the hearing, there was no determination that the Subject Member had failed to comply with the Code of Conduct. Only the Standards Sub-Committee could make that decision and that was not the purpose of this Officer report (A.1).

USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA & GUIDANCE:

As previously stated, the case had related to the use of social media, and the Subject Member in response to the Complaint had not disputed their use, however they believed

that their actions had been correct and that guidance on the use of social media by Councillors was outdated. The Local Government Association (LGA) – Guide to the role of Councillors on social media, was contained within the Officer's report for Members' reference.

The Monitoring Officer informed Members that the use of social media raised difficult issues and that there were differences of opinion on its use. On the one hand there were concerns that certain comments went against the grain of promoting civility in public life and amounted to no more than 'mere abuse' or personal attacks. On the other hand, the right to freedom of expression, as enshrined in Article 10 of the European Convention on Human Rights, was rightly seen as vital and that the Code of Conduct should not be used to 'police' unpopular opinions.

In recent 'Debate Not Hate Surveys', over a quarter of all comments had mentioned social media, making it the most frequently mentioned factor in levels of abuse. Respondents had explained that Councillors were easily accessible by social media and that the anonymity of social media platforms enabled users to abuse Councillors or spread disinformation without consequences. Some respondents had reported that they had come off, or reduced their use of, social media and that it had naturally led to a decrease of abuse online.

Members learned that each case would be dependent upon its own merits and individual circumstances, but that Councillors should take note of their Council's own guidance and protocols which should raise awareness of a number of tools available to assist Councillors in their use of social media.

This case had highlighted that not all Town and Parish Councils were reviewing their own guidance or raising awareness on the use of social media by Councillors but were relying solely on the District Council's previous Social Media Guidance. Although, the principles still aligned with the guidance published by the LGA, the latter was more recent and directly applied to the model Code of Conduct adopted by the vast majority of Town and Parish Councils. The Sub-Committee was therefore requested to give consideration as to whether any recommendations to Town and Parish Councils should be made in that regard.

The Monitoring Officer also made Members aware of the LGA guidance for use of social media by Councillors which was as follows:

- *Having a measured response to online opinions;*
- *Engaging in healthy debate and tackling misinformation;*
- *Abide by the golden rule;*
- *Encouraging positive, polite and constructive debate;*
- *Remember – your behaviour influences others;*
- *Use your voice to tackle misinformation and inaccuracy;*
- *Consider the Code of Conduct while being active on social media;*
- *Is information already in the public domain?;*
- *Be aware of what you share;*
- *The Councillor Code of Conduct still applies;*
- *Keeping your personal and family life private;*
- *Your responsibilities as a Councillor – the Golden Rule to follow; and*
- *How to deal with negativity and abuse online.*

Following the introduction of the Officer report (A.1), the Sub-Committee Members and IPs had an opportunity to discuss, question and debate the Officer report and debate. The outcome of the discussion and questions was:-

Councillor F. Belgrove supported the Officer's report, stating that it covered all necessary points. He stressed the importance of Town and Parish Councils having strong social media policies, noting that the Local Government Association's Code of Conduct (section 3.7 on "compliance with law") required Councillors to follow such policies and that Councils should ensure they had adequate social media policies in place.

Councillor Botterell highlighted the need for Town and Parish Councillors to fully understand the social media policy. He suggested that additional training might be required to ensure Councillors recognised the implications of using social media. He also proposed that Councillors could be asked to sign a document confirming they had read and acknowledged the policy.

Councillor Alexander questioned what social media training had been given to the Town and Parish Councils.

Councillor Alexander then noted that District Councillors themselves relied heavily on the protection offered by the Code of Conduct, which helped ensure accountability. He emphasised that the Code of Conduct made clear that Councillors must follow its rules.

Councillor F. Belgrove reassured Members that the Essex Association of Local Councils offered tutors and a range of media and social media training courses, with participants receiving a certificate upon completion. He emphasised that having clear policies was important, as they required Councillors to collectively adhere to the agreed standards.

Councillor Alexander noted that, with Tendring District Council moving towards Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) and a Unitary Authority, there was uncertainty among Members and Officers about what responsibilities or requirements might be placed on Town and Parish Councils in the future and that the need of training on the Code of Conduct would be more important.

IP Jane Watts emphasised how important it was that all Local Councils took ownership and responsibility for policies.

IP Sue Gallone also stressed the importance that the guidance was kept up through training sessions and having a regular review of it.

IP David Irvine asked if all of the Town and Parish Councils had not adopted a Code of Conduct.

The Monitoring Officer at this juncture read out to Members for the public record, an email that had been sent to her by the IP Shelia Murphy that stated:-

"I have read the paper attached to the agenda and would comment that my view would be that if there is any learning that can be taken from this matter that would assist the Town and Parish Councils it should be shared with them. Therefore, I think a reminder of the importance of their responsibility in having and implementing a policy that reflects

current guidance, recommendations and which is regularly reviewed to keep it up with social media development, would be appropriate. Perhaps along with links to relevant guidance.”

Councillor F. Belgrove sought reassurance about whether a Councillor was still able to take office if they had not signed the Code of Conduct.

The Monitoring Officer responded to all of the questions and comments stated above, as appropriate.

The Town and Parish Council Sub-Committee, following consideration of the Officer report and its debate agreed that it wished to make the following recommendations to advise and assist Town and Parish Councils and Councillors to maintain high standards of conduct.

It was therefore moved by Councillor Codling, seconded by Councillor Alexander and unanimously:-

RESOLVED that this Sub-Committee recommends that:-

- a) Town and Parish Councils take on a more fuller education programme on the Code of Conduct and its terms of reference;
- b) Town and Parish Councils should be aware of the available social media guidance but that also they should adopt adequate policies and procedures for the use of social media in their respective Councils;
- c) the appropriate training be delivered to ensure that the requirements of the guidance and the social media policies are at the forefront of Councillors' minds to ensure that they understand and acknowledge its requirements; and
- d) Town and Parish Councils should take ownership of introducing the right policies for their own Town and Parish Council.

The Monitoring Officer thanked the Sub-Committee members and Independent Persons for their time and patience during the lengthy delays and 'false starts' whilst this meeting had been arranged.

The meeting was declared closed at 2.46 pm

Chairman

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STANDARDS COMMITTEE

22 APRIL 2026

REPORT OF THE MONITORING OFFICER

A.1 ANNUAL REPORT ON DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND ASSOCIATED MATTERS

PART 1 – KEY INFORMATION

PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

To present the Committee with an overview on the register of, and declarations of, interests made by Members from 1 April 2025 until 31 March 2026.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

It was agreed at the meeting of the Standards Committee held on 29 June 2016 that as part of its annual work programme, the Committee would receive an annual report on declarations of interest and associated matters. The Standards Committee included this item in its work programme for 2025/26 at its meeting held on 9 April 2025 (minute no. 44 refers).

RECOMMENDATION(S)

It is recommended that the Committee requests that Members be formally reminded to keep their Register of Interests' entries up to date and to respond to Officer requests to confirm that their Members' Register of Interest entries are up to date.

REASON(S) FOR THE RECOMMENDATION(S)

To provide a timely update to the Committee as part of its agreed work programme.

ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED

There are no alternative options associated with this report.

PART 2 – IMPLICATIONS OF THE DECISION

DELIVERING PRIORITIES

Declarations of Interest, in accordance with the Members' Code of Conduct, forms part of effective and positive governance, being a theme of Financial Sustainability and Openness within the Corporate Plan for 2024-28, adopted by full Council at its meeting in November 2023 (minute no.76).

Members' Declarations of Interests fall within Principle A of the Council's Annual Governance Statement, namely behaving with integrity, demonstrating strong commitment to ethical values and respecting the rule of law.

LEGAL REQUIREMENTS (including legislation & constitutional powers)	
The Council's Members' Code of Conduct sets out the requirements for Councillors regarding the registration and disclosure of interests. The relevant legislation is the Localism Act 2011 and the Relevant Authorities (Disclosable Pecuniary Interests) Regulations 2012. The District Council adopted the Local Government Association's Model Code of Conduct with effect from May 2023, with interests defined as Disclosable Pecuniary Interests, Other Registerable Interests and Non-Registerable Interests. The Council has approved and adopted a Local Code of Corporate Governance, which is consistent with the principles of the CIPFA / SOLACE <i>Delivering Good Governance in Local Government Framework (2016 Edition)</i>. A copy of the Council's Code is available to be viewed or downloaded from the website (www.tendringdc.gov.uk) or can be obtained by contacting the Corporate Director – Law and Governance. The Annual Governance Statement explains how the Council has complied with the Code and also meets the requirements of the Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015, Regulation 6(1), which requires an authority to conduct a review, at least once a year, of the effectiveness of its systems of internal control and include a statement reporting on the review with any published Statement of Accounts.	
FINANCE AND OTHER RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS	
There are no finance or resource implications associated with this report.	
USE OF RESOURCES AND VALUE FOR MONEY	
The following are submitted in respect of the indicated use of resources and value for money indicators:	
A) Financial sustainability: how the body plans and manages its resources to ensure it can continue to deliver its services;	-
B) Governance: how the body ensures that it makes informed decisions and properly manages its risks, including; and	The agendas for the Council, Cabinet and Committee meetings include declarations of interest as a formal item of business.
C) Improving economy, efficiency and effectiveness: how the body uses information about its costs and performance to improve the way it manages and delivers its services.	This is an annual report presented to the Standards Committee for openness and transparency in its decision making.
MILESTONES AND DELIVERY	
This is an annual report presented to the Committee in accordance with the work programme.	
ASSOCIATED RISKS AND MITIGATION	
Not presenting this information could have a detrimental impact on the Council's reputation.	
OUTCOME OF CONSULTATION AND ENGAGEMENT	
None undertaken.	
EQUALITIES	
Equality considerations are taken into account for each decision made.	

SOCIAL VALUE CONSIDERATIONS	
Social value considerations are taken into account for each decision made.	
IMPLICATIONS FOR THE COUNCIL'S AIM TO BE NET ZERO BY 2050	
This is taken into account for each decision made.	
OTHER RELEVANT IMPLICATIONS	
Consideration has been given to the implications of the proposed decision in respect of the following and any significant issues are set out below.	
Crime and Disorder	Not applicable
Health Inequalities	Not applicable
Area or Ward affected	No Wards are directly affected by the contents of the report.
ANY OTHER RELEVANT INFORMATION	
None	

PART 3 – SUPPORTING INFORMATION

BACKGROUND
In accordance with the Committee's Work Programme, this is an annual report detailing Declarations of Interest and associated matters. This report covers the period from 01 April 2025 to 31 March 2026 and provides statistics on: • The number of Declarations of Interest made at meetings; • The number of offers of gifts and hospitality that have been registered by Members during this period; and • Updates to the Members' Register of Interests. The data has been collated from the Committee system Modern.gov which the Council started using as of August 2016 and from Members' submissions. <u>Register of Members' Disclosable Pecuniary Interests</u> The Council is required to publish the 'Register of Disclosable Pecuniary Interest' on its website in accordance with the Localism Act 2011 and The Relevant Authorities (Disclosable Pecuniary Interests) Regulations 2012, which prescribes the categories of interest. It is confirmed that the Council's website includes a Register of Disclosable Pecuniary Interests and Other Registerable Interests for all District Councillors and that this is updated when a Member provides details of an amendment directly to the Monitoring Officer. Any entry which is relevant to a business item on an agenda, must be declared by the individual Member and they must subsequently remove themselves from the meeting, unless a prior dispensation has been granted by the Monitoring Officer. A dispensation for all District Members was granted by the Monitoring Officer at full Council on 17 February 2026 for the purpose of the report of the Corporate Director (Finance & IT) as

follows:

*Tendring District Council adopted the LGA Model Members' Code of Conduct which does not include the provisions confirming Members do not have a declarable interest which relates to the function of setting the Council Tax under the **Local Government Act 1992**. Therefore, to enable you to debate and vote on the budget item to set the Council Tax, the email of 09 February 2026 provided all District Councillors with a dispensation under Section 33(2)(a) to (e) of the Localism Act 2011. Consequently, you will not be required to declare an interest based on the fact you live in the District and therefore have to pay Council Tax.*

*However, Members are importantly reminded of **Section 106 of the Local Government Finance Act 1992**, which provides that any Member, who is in arrears by at least 2 months with their Council Tax payments cannot vote on matters concerning either the level of or administration of Council Tax. It is important to note that this also covers Council tax liabilities outside of the District and property which may not be your main residence. If present at the meeting, a Member to whom this provision applies must disclose the fact and may speak on the item but cannot vote. Non-compliance with this section is a criminal offence. Therefore, should this provision apply to any Member, this should be declared at the Declaration of Interest agenda item.*

Declarations of Interest at meetings

Members are required to declare Disclosable Pecuniary Interest, Other Registerable Interests and Non-Registerable Interests at meetings and those recorded on the Committee system, as declared by District Councillors for the period 1 April 2025 to 31 March 2026 are set out in **Appendix A** to this report. Minutes of meetings also record the declarations.

Use of blanket dispensations

The Council's Members' Code of Conduct does not include blanket dispensations. Consequently, the Monitoring Officer provided District Members with a blanket dispensation for the purpose of setting Council Tax under the Local Government Finance Act 1992, at the District Council's budget meeting on 17 February 2026 (minute no.108) (referred to earlier within this report). The Monitoring Officer also stated the following in relation to this item:

A recorded vote is mandatory on any decision relating to the budget or Council Tax. This includes not only on the substantive budget motions agreeing the budget and setting Council Taxes, but also on any amendments proposed at the meeting.

I can inform Members that no budget amendments were submitted to the Council's Section 151 Officer by the deadline set out in Council Procedure Rule 2.

For other types of Interest, which need to be considered, Disclosable Pecuniary Interests (DPIs), Other Registerable Interests (ORIs) or Non-Registerable Interests, are defined in the Code of Conduct and for DPIs and ORIs, these have been (or should have been) registered in advance, and with the exception of the Council Tax exemption for residing in the District, you should still consider if any other interest do apply. A blanket exemption/dispensation has not been applied for all."

Declarations of offers/receipt of gifts and hospitality

Following the Standards Committee review of the Council's Gift and Hospitality Policy for Members, guidance and a notification form was produced for all District Councillors in May 2016. Reference to declarations of offers/receipt of gifts and hospitality was included within the mandatory Members' Code of Conduct training delivered to the Monitoring officer in June and July 2023, and any subsequent Code of Conduct training.

There has not been any recorded declaration of offers/receipt of gifts and hospitality made by District Councillors in the time period covered by this report.

Members' Register of Interests

Pursuant to the Localism Act 2011, within 28 days of becoming a Member or re-election or re-appointment to Officer, Members must register with the Monitoring Officer the interests which fall within the categories set out in Table 1 of the Members' Code of Conduct, namely Disclosable Pecuniary Interests (DPIs) which are as described in the 'Relevant Authorities (Disclosable Pecuniary Interests) Regulations 2012'. Members should also register details of other personal interests which fall within the categories set out in Table 2, namely Other Registerable Interest (ORIs).

At the conclusion of the May 2023 District, Town and Parish Council elections, all Members received the relevant Disclosable Pecuniary Interest and Other Registerable Interests form as part of their induction procedure, to complete and return to the Monitoring Officer, for inclusion on the Council's website within a central register. Registration and the obligations to disclose DPIs, ORIs and Non-Registerable Interests and the effect on participation was covered within the mandatory Members' Code of Conduct training delivered by the Monitoring Officer in June and July 2023 and refresher training on 18 June 2025.

In line with the requirements of the Council's External Auditors, an annual reminder has been sent to all District Members to ensure that all interests are up to date and to confirm this is the position, this process remains ongoing. At the time of writing the report 23 out of 48 have been received, this figure will be updated at the meeting.

PREVIOUS RELEVANT DECISIONS TAKEN BY COUNCIL/CABINET/COMMITTEE ETC.

It was agreed at the meeting of the Standards Committee held on 29 June 2016 that, as part of its annual work programme, the Committee would receive an annual report on declarations of interest and associated matters.

Full Council on 22 November 2022 (minute no. 51) - **RESOLVED** that Council approves:-

- (a) the adoption of the Local Government Association's Model Members' Code of Conduct, as set out in Appendix 2, for the purposes of Sections 27 & 28 of the Localism Act 2011, with a commencement date of the Annual Meeting of the Council in May 2023.

BACKGROUND PAPERS AND PUBLISHED REFERENCE MATERIAL

There are no background papers associated with this report.

APPENDICES

Appendix A – Table of Members' Declarations of Interest made at Council, Cabinet or Committee meetings 1 April 2025 to 31 March 2026.

REPORT CONTACT OFFICER(S)

Name	Lisa Hastings
Job Title	Corporate Director Law & Governance and Monitoring Officer
Email	lhastings@tendringdc.gov.uk
Name	Karen Hayes
Job Title	Corporate Governance, Performance and Procurement Manager
Email	khayes@tendringdc.gov.uk

Appendix A - Declarations of Interest in the Period of 1 April 2025 – 31 March 2026

Committee/ Sub-Cttee	No. of Meetings	Disclosable Pecuniary Interest	Other Registerable Interest	Non- Registerable Interest	Public Record Declarations (Points of Information)	Pre- Determined Planning Application (Planning Committee only)
Audit	7	0	0	0	0	N/A
Cabinet	10	0	0	0	2	N/A
Community Leadership O&S	8	0	0	0	1	N/A
Full Council	7	2	3	0	1	N/A
HR & Council Tax	3	0	0	0	0	N/A
Licensing & Registration	2	0	0	0	1	N/A
Miscellaneous Licensing Sub-Cttee	4	0	0	0	4	N/A
Planning	10	0	0	0	19	7
Planning Policy & Local Plan	4	0	2	0	1	N/A
Premises / Personal Licences Sub- Cttee	8	0	0	1	5	N/A
Resources and Services O&S	7	0	1	0	0	N/A
Standards	3	0	0	0	0	N/A
Tendring / Colchester Borders Garden Community Joint Cttee	2	0	0	0	0	N/A
Town & Parish Councils' Standards Sub-Cttee	1	0	0	0	0	N/A

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STANDARDS COMMITTEE

22 APRIL 2026

REPORT OF THE MONITORING OFFICER

A.2 REVIEW OF THE MEMBERS' GIFTS AND HOSPITALITY POLICY

PART 1 – KEY INFORMATION

PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

To present the Committee with a review of the Members' Gifts and Hospitality Policy conducted by Officers for the Committee's comment and suggestions along with subsequent approval of the review and any associated amendments.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The current Members' Gifts and Hospitality Policy (the Policy) was last considered by the Standards Committee at its meeting on 14 March 2016.

The Council adopted the Local Government Association's Model Members' Code of Conduct (the Code) with effect from May 2023, which Members must adhere to. The General Principles of Councillor conduct state:

"Everyone in public office at all levels; all who serve the public or deliver public services, including ministers, civil servants, councillors and local authority officers; should uphold the Seven Principles of Public Life, also known as the Nolan Principles. Building on these principles, the following general principles have been developed specifically for the role of councillor.

In accordance with the public trust placed in me, on all occasions:

- I act with integrity and honesty*
- I act lawfully*
- I treat all persons fairly and with respect; and*
- I lead by example and act in a way that secures public confidence in the role of councillor.*

In undertaking my role:

- I impartially exercise my responsibilities in the interests of the local community*
- I do not improperly seek to confer an advantage, or disadvantage, on any person*
- I avoid conflicts of interest*
- I exercise reasonable care and diligence; and*
- I ensure that public resources are used prudently in accordance with my local authority's requirements and in the public interest"*

Under "protecting your reputation and the reputation of the local authority" heading within the Code, Members are required to register and disclose their interests (paragraph 9) and consider their position with regards to Gifts and Hospitality (paragraph 10).

***“10. Gifts and Hospitality
As a Councillor:***

10.1 I do not accept gifts or hospitality, irrespective of estimated value, which could give rise to real or substantive personal gain or a reasonable suspicion of influence on my part to show favour from persons seeking to acquire, develop or do business with the local authority or from persons who may apply to the local authority for any permission, licence or other significant advantage.

10.2 I register with the Monitoring Officer any gift or hospitality with an estimated value of at least £50 within 28 days of its receipt.

10.3 I register with the Monitoring Officer any significant gift or hospitality that I have been offered but have refused to accept.

In order to protect your position and the reputation of the local authority, you should exercise caution in accepting any gifts or hospitality which are (or which you reasonably believe to be) offered to you because you are a councillor. The presumption should always be not to accept significant gifts or hospitality. However, there may be times when such a refusal may be difficult if it is seen as rudeness in which case, you could accept it but must ensure it is publicly registered. However, you do not need to register gifts and hospitality which are not related to your role as a councillor, such as Christmas gifts from your friends and family. It is also important to note that it is appropriate to accept normal expenses and hospitality associated with your duties as a councillor. If you are unsure, do contact your Monitoring Officer for guidance.”

Section 2 of the Bribery Act 2010 makes it a criminal offence for a person to request, agree to receive, or accept a financial, or other advantage, to improperly perform or not perform, whether by her/himself or another, a relevant function or activity. In the context of the Council, the relevant function or activity means a public activity which a reasonable person would expect to be performed in good faith, impartially, or in a particular way by a person performing it in a position of trust.

The Members' Gifts and Hospitality Policy, as attached at Appendix A, is based upon the previous guidance which essentially remains unchanged however, the Code provisions have been replaced with the current Code of Conduct requirements, which are set out above.

The Policy aims to provide a clear set of rules for the protection of both Members and the Council, and which set out the General Principles to be applied when deciding whether it would be proper to accept any gift or hospitality; along with the procedure for declaring any such gift or hospitality.

The Policy includes at section (b)(viii) a list of circumstances, which the Committee is requested to agree, were appropriate for Members to choose to accept gifts and hospitality. Declarations will still be required in accordance with the Policy.

It is the responsibility of each individual Member to observe the Policy, but that the Monitoring Officer and Leadership Support Officers would assist where possible.

RECOMMENDATION(S)

It is recommended that the Committee:

- (a) notes the outcome of the review of the Members' Gifts and Hospitality Policy, as set out in Appendix A; and
- (b) subject to any comments or recommendations that the Committee may wish to make following its consideration of the report and its debate, approves the updated Members' Gifts and Hospitality Policy for circulation to all District Councillors.

REASON(S) FOR THE RECOMMENDATION(S)

To provide a timely update to the Committee as part of its agreed work programme.

ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED

There are no alternative options associated with this report.

PART 2 – IMPLICATIONS OF THE DECISION**DELIVERING PRIORITIES**

Declarations of Interest, in accordance with the Members' Code of Conduct, forms part of effective and positive governance, being a theme of Financial Sustainability and Openness within the Corporate Plan for 2024-28, adopted by full Council at its meeting in November 2023 (minute no.76).

Members' Declarations of Interests fall within Principle A of the Council's Annual Governance Statement, namely behaving with integrity, demonstrating strong commitment to ethical values and respecting the rule of law.

LEGAL REQUIREMENTS (including legislation & constitutional powers)

The Council's Members' Code of Conduct sets out the requirements for Councillors regarding the registration and disclosure of interests. The relevant legislation is the Localism Act 2011 and the Relevant Authorities (Disclosable Pecuniary Interests) Regulations 2012.

The District Council adopted the Local Government Association's Model Code of Conduct with effect from May 2023, with interests defined as Disclosable Pecuniary Interests, Other Registerable Interests and Non-Registerable Interests. Paragraph 10 details Gifts and Hospitality.

FINANCE AND OTHER RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

There are no finance or resource implications associated with this report.

USE OF RESOURCES AND VALUE FOR MONEY

The following are submitted in respect of the indicated use of resources and value for money indicators:

A) Financial sustainability: how the body plans and manages its resources to ensure it can continue to deliver its services;	
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B) Governance: how the body ensures that it makes informed decisions and properly manages its risks, including; and	
C) Improving economy, efficiency and effectiveness: how the body uses information about its costs and performance to improve the way it manages and delivers its services.	
MILESTONES AND DELIVERY	
This report is presented to the Committee in accordance with the work programme.	
ASSOCIATED RISKS AND MITIGATION	
Not presenting this information could have a detrimental impact on the Council's reputation.	
OUTCOME OF CONSULTATION AND ENGAGEMENT	
None undertaken.	
EQUALITIES	
Equality considerations are taken into account for each decision made.	
SOCIAL VALUE CONSIDERATIONS	
Social value considerations are taken into account for each decision made.	
IMPLICATIONS RELATED TO DEVLOUTION AND/OR LOCAL GOVERNMENT REORGANISATION	
Through the review Officers gave consideration to Colchester City Council's Guidance for Councillors regarding Gifts and Hospitality last updated in 2020 and Braintree District Council's Guidance contained within its constitution. Although the formats were different, the messages, principles and elements covered were broadly similar.	
IMPLICATIONS FOR THE COUNCIL'S AIM TO BE NET ZERO BY 2050	
This is taken into account for each decision made.	
OTHER RELEVANT IMPLICATIONS	
Consideration has been given to the implications of the proposed decision in respect of the following and any significant issues are set out below.	
Crime and Disorder	Not applicable
Health Inequalities	Not applicable
Area or Ward affected	No Wards are directly affected by the contents of the report.
ANY OTHER RELEVANT INFORMATION	
None	

PART 3 – SUPPORTING INFORMATION

BACKGROUND

In accordance with the Committee's Work Programme, this is a review of the Members' Gifts and Hospitality Policy

Following the Committee's review of the Council's Members' Gifts and Hospitality Policy at its May 2016 meeting, guidance and a notification form was produced for all District Councillors. Reference to declarations of offers/receipt of gifts and hospitality was included within the mandatory Members' Code of Conduct training delivered by the Monitoring Officer in June and July 2023, and any subsequent Members' Code of Conduct training sessions.

PREVIOUS RELEVANT DECISIONS TAKEN BY COUNCIL/CABINET/COMMITTEE ETC.

Standards Committee on 14 March 2016 (minute no.16) **RESOLVED** that:

- a) The Monitoring Officer takes into account the Committee's proposed amendments and suggestions (including that all offered or received Gifts be declared but only Hospitality offered or received over £50 in estimated value) in redrafting the Gifts and Hospitality Policy;
- b) The Monitoring Officer circulates the revised Gifts and Hospitality Policy to the members of the Committee for their comments;
- c) The Monitoring Officer, in consultation with the Chairman of the Committee, be authorised to publish and publicise the final version of the Gifts and Hospitality Policy having taken the aforementioned comments into account.

Full Council on 22 November 2022 (minute no. 51) **RESOLVED** that Council approves:

- a) The adoption of the Local Government Association's Model Members' Code of Conduct, as set out in Appendix 2, for the purposes of Sections 27 & 28 of the Localism Act 2011, with a commencement date of the Annual Meeting of the Council in May 2023;
- b) That all Town and Parish Councils in the Tendring District be invited by the Monitoring Officer to adopt the same Code for their own Councils;
- c) That all duly elected Tendring District Council members at the Council's elections in May 2023 attend mandatory training sessions on the new Code of Conduct; and
- d) That the new Code of Conduct be incorporated into Part 6 of the Council's Constitution in due course.

BACKGROUND PAPERS AND PUBLISHED REFERENCE MATERIAL

There are no background papers associated with this report.

APPENDICES

Appendix A – Members' Gifts and Hospitality Policy – updated & reviewed 2026

REPORT CONTACT OFFICER(S)	
Name	Lisa Hastings
Job Title	Corporate Director (Law & Governance) and Monitoring Officer
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Name	Karen Hayes
Job Title	Corporate Governance, Performance and Procurement Manager
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A.2 APPENDIX A

Tendring ***District Council***



MEMBERS' GIFTS AND HOSPITALITY POLICY **April 2026**

Introduction

This Policy has been approved by the Council's Standards Committee and sets out elected Members' obligations to declare gifts and hospitality received in their capacity as members of the Council and to provide guidance on those obligations. A breach of this Policy amounts to a breach of the Council's Code of Conduct, and a complaint can be reported to the Monitoring Officer and dealt with in accordance with the Members' Complaints Procedure.

The Code and Legislation

Paragraph 10 Gifts and Hospitality states:

As a Councillor:

10.1 I do not accept gifts or hospitality, irrespective of estimated value, which could give rise to real or substantive personal gain or a reasonable suspicion of influence on my part to show favour from persons seeking to acquire, develop or do business with the local authority or from persons who may apply to the local authority for any permission, licence or other significant advantage.

10.2 I register with the Monitoring Officer any gift or hospitality with an estimated value of at least £50 within 28 days of its receipt.

10.3 I register with the Monitoring Officer any significant gift or hospitality that I have been offered but have refused to accept.

In order to protect your position and the reputation of the local authority, you should exercise caution in accepting any gifts or hospitality which are (or which you reasonably believe to be) offered to you because you are a Councillor. The presumption should always be not to accept significant gifts or hospitality. However, there may be times when such a refusal may be difficult if it is seen as rudeness in

which case, you could accept it but must ensure it is publicly registered. However, you do not need to register gifts and hospitality which are not related to your role as a Councillor, such as Christmas gifts from your friends and family. It is also important to note that it is appropriate to accept normal expenses and hospitality associated with your duties as a Councillor. If you are unsure, do contact your Monitoring Officer for guidance.

Section 2 of the Bribery Act 2010 makes it a criminal offence for a person to request, agree to receive or accept a financial or other advantage, to improperly perform or not perform, whether by her/ himself or another, a relevant function or activity. In the context of the council the relevant function or activity means a public activity which a reasonable person would expect to be performed in good faith, impartially or in a particular way by a person performing it in a position of trust. Prosecution under the Act could lead to a criminal conviction and an unlimited fine or up to 10 years imprisonment (or both).

The Policy

This Policy aims to provide:

- (a) a clear set of **Rules** for the protection of both Councillors and the Council and sets out:
- (b) the **General Principles** you should apply whenever you decide whether it would be proper to accept any gift or hospitality; and
- (c) the **Procedure** for declaring any gift or hospitality which you receive and for accounting for any gift to the authority.

This Policy does not apply to the acceptance of any facilities or hospitality which may be provided to you by the Council, in your role as a Councillor.

This Policy applies to all Members including, the Chairman and Vice-Chairman of the Council. It is inevitable that during the holding of either office, the opportunity to receive gifts and hospitality offered may be greater, hence office holders must be ensure openness and transparency by declaring any offer or acceptance.

The Council's Standards Committee in approving the Policy wished to express that it considered all gifts should be declared irrespective of value due to public perception and the obligation to be open and transparent.

(a) THE RULES – Every Member must:

- (i) Register every individual **GIFT** received
- (ii) Register **HOSPITALITY RECEIVED OVER £50** in value
- (iii) Ensure the registration is made *within 28 days of the date you received it*, by completing and sending the attached form for the attention of the Council's Monitoring Officer

(iv) Declare the:

- o *value and details* of the gift or hospitality received on the form
- o whether the donor has or has had in the past or likely to have in the future, *dealings with the Council*
- o whether the gift or hospitality has been *accepted*
- o the *reason* for that acceptance.

(v) Sign the form *personally*. Forms will be checked and returned if not completed properly.

- Even if all members, or a large number of them, received the same gift or were invited to the same event, they must each make *individual* notifications.
- Failure to comply with these rules is a breach of the Members' Code of Conduct.
- The press and public have the right to inspect your gift and hospitality declaration forms. The Register is also public via the Council's web site at www.tendringdc.gov.uk (follow link to 'Councillors' page). Councillors and officers may also gain access through the Council's intranet (TED). You should have this in mind when completing declaration forms, as your comments will not be edited.

(b) GENERAL PRINCIPLES

In deciding whether it is proper to accept any gift or hospitality, you should apply the following principles. Even if the gift or hospitality comes within one of the general consents set out below, you should not accept it if to do so would be in breach of one or more of these principles

(i) Should I accept gifts and hospitality?

Registering and declaring gifts or hospitality received does not automatically mean it is appropriate or sensible to accept them in the first place.

Particular care should be taken in relation to gifts and hospitality offered by current or potential:

- contractors for the Council;
- developers within the district; or
- businesses associated with the district.

In certain cases, the acceptance of a gift or hospitality from these sources could constitute a criminal offence, even if declared. If there is any suspicion that any offer is intended as an inducement, then the matter should be reported in accordance with established procedures.

(ii) Never accept a gift or hospitality as an inducement or reward for anything which you do as a Member;

(iii) Only accept a gift if there is a commensurate benefit to the Council;

The only proper reason for accepting any gift or hospitality is that the councillor reasonably believes that there may be a benefit for the authority.

Unless the benefit to the authority is clear and proportionate to the value of that gift or hospitality, the presumption must be that the gift or hospitality is purely for your personal benefit.

(iv) Never accept a gift or hospitality which might be open to misinterpretation;

The appearance of impropriety can be just as damaging to the authority and to you as a Councillor as actual impropriety. The Council's reputation is based on ensuring it acts fairly and in the public interest. You must therefore consider whether the acceptance of the gift or hospitality is capable of being interpreted as a sign that you or the Council favours any particular person, company or section of the community or as placing you under any improper obligation to any person or organisation. If there is any possibility that it might be so interpreted, you must refuse either the gift or hospitality.

(v) Never accept a gift or hospitality which puts you under an improper obligation; and

(vi) Never solicit a gift or hospitality

You must never solicit or invite an offer of a gift or hospitality in connection with your position as a Councillor unless the acceptance of that gift or hospitality would be permitted under this Protocol. You should also take care to avoid giving any indication that you might be open to such any improper offer.

(vii) Must I register all gifts and hospitality which I receive or am offered?

You **MUST register:**

- **any gifts;** and/or
- **hospitality worth over £50**
- **that you receive & accept** in connection with your official duties as a Member.

Where the value of any **hospitality is under £50 you MAY wish to** declare receiving it.

You **SHOULD register the offer of:**

- **Any gift;** and/or
- **hospitality over £50**

- **which you have declined**, since this protects both your position and that of the Council.

Only gifts and hospitality offered to you in your official capacity must be registered. Gifts and hospitality offered to you in your private capacity, of whatever value, should not be registered at all. You do not need to register gifts and hospitality which are not related to your role as a Member. However, you should always consider whether any gifts or hospitality could be seen as being connected with your public role as a Member.

DETERMINING THE VALUE OF THE GIFT/ HOSPITALITY

You may have to estimate how much a gift or some hospitality is worth. The form requires you to give an estimate of the value. It is suggested that you take a common sense approach and consider how much you reasonably think it would cost a member of the public to buy the gift, or provide the hospitality in question.

If as a result you estimate that the value of hospitality is greater than £50, then you should declare receipt.

Where hospitality is concerned, you can disregard catering on-costs and other overheads, e.g. staff and room hire. If the sandwiches or your meal, including drinks and alcohol, would cost £50 in a comparable establishment providing food of comparable quality, register it.

If you are not certain whether the value is under £50, the safest course is to register it and give an approximate value.

(viii) Gifts which have been considered acceptable by the Standards Committee

Decisions on declarations must be made by individual members. The Standards Committee has however agreed that in appropriate circumstances members may choose to accept gifts and hospitality in the following circumstances:

- Civic hospitality provided by this or another authority;
- modest refreshments received in the ordinary course of duties as a member e.g. at formal meetings or when in contact with residents/community;
- tickets for sporting, cultural events which are sponsored or supported by the Council;
- small gifts of low intrinsic value, which are branded with the name of the company or organisation making the gift (e.g. pens, diaries, calendars etc);
- modest souvenir gifts with a value below £50 from another public body given on the occasion of a visit by or to that body;
- hospitality received in the course of an external visit or meeting which has been authorised by the Council. In such cases the arrangements

should be made by officers rather than the members who will be benefiting, and hospitality should be commensurate with the nature of the visit; and

- other unsolicited gifts where it is impracticable to return them or where refusal would in the circumstances cause offence. **In such cases you may wish to pass the gift to the Chairman's charitable fund.**

Members should not receive publicity for passing gifts or hospitality onto the Chairman's charity, as this is also perceived as a personal benefit.

Receipt of gifts and hospitality of this type is still subject to the requirements of the Policy regarding the notification to the Monitoring Officer of all gifts and hospitality (greater than £50 in value). The appropriateness of acceptance should always be considered beforehand. It should also be noted that the mere fact that a gift or hospitality does not have to be notified under the Policy does not necessarily mean that it is appropriate to accept it.

Members are reminded to ensure that the Council's Protocol on Planning is followed with regards to declarations of lobbying for planning applications.

(C) PROCEDURE FOR REGISTRATION & DECLARATION

Note: Registration refers to completion of the form and declaration refers to the procedure at meetings.

(i) How do I register gifts and hospitality I receive?

You must give Leadership Support (working on behalf of the Monitoring Officer) written details about the gifts and hospitality you are offered. The Standards Committee endorses the use of a standard form for this purpose, which is attached and available on the Council's website.

The best advice is to get into the habit of registering things as soon as possible, and if in doubt, register receipt. The appropriate form is available on the Council's website.

(ii) How do I declare any gift and/or hospitality with an estimated value of £50 or over?

You must also disclose the existence and nature of the gift or hospitality at any meeting at which business that relates to, or is likely to affect, the donor of that gift or hospitality is considered.

You need not disclose the interest if it was registered more than 6 years before the date of the meeting. You should follow the provisions of paragraphs 7 to 10 of Appendix B of the Members' Code of Conduct on how you treat this interest in a meeting.

(iii) Gifts and hospitality that have been refused

The Council's Register of Gifts and Hospitality for Councillors has provision for showing where a gift or hospitality has been offered but you have refused it. Although there is no legal or other requirement to notify such an offer/refusal, you are able to register it if you prefer to put your refusal on the public record.

Definitions

- (a) "Gift or hospitality" includes:
 - i. the gift of any goods or services
 - ii. the offer of food, drink, accommodation or entertainment, or the opportunity to attend any cultural, sporting or entertainment event, free of charge or at a reduced rate
 - iii. the opportunity to obtain any goods or services which are not available to the general public
 - iv. the opportunity to acquire any goods or services at a discount or on terms which are more advantageous than those which are available to the general public.
- (b) References to the "value" or "cost" (estimated or actual) of any gift or hospitality are to be assessed against the open market price which a member of the public would have to pay for the gift or hospitality, if it were made available commercially to the public.

Further assistance and Gifts and Hospitality Form

<https://tedtdc.co.uk/child-pages/gifts-and-hospitality-form>

It is each Member's own individual responsibility to observe this Policy, but the Monitoring Officer and their staff will assist where possible. If you have any questions at all please contact Leadership Support, the Monitoring Officer or Deputy Monitoring Officer for advice and assistance.

Monitoring Officer

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STANDARDS COMMITTEE

22 APRIL 2026

REPORT OF THE MONITORING OFFICER

A.3 REVIEW OF SOCIAL MEDIA GUIDANCE FOR MEMBERS

PART 1 – KEY INFORMATION

PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

To present the Committee with the outcome of a review of the Social Media Guidance for Members conducted by Officers for the Committee's comments and suggestions along with subsequent approval of the draft, following any associated adjustments.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The current Social Media Guidance for Members (the Guidance) was last considered by the Standards Committee at its meeting held on 2 February 2022 and is attached as Appendix A, detailing Officers' comments after conducting their review.

Whilst the 2022 guidance was not incorrect it was felt necessary to produce a new draft based on current uses of social media platforms and terminology. The draft Social Media Guidance for Members is included as Appendix A.

The Council recognises the benefits of communication between Members and residents that social media platforms afford and is utilised by most Members with varying frequency. Social media can reach a demographic of society that may not always be reached by more traditional methods, along with the speed with which communication can take place, providing both potential benefit and pitfall, than traditional correspondence.

As part of its work programme, the Committee is requested to review the Guidance in association with Officers, to ensure that it is clear in order to assist elected Members in understanding social media and their use of it.

Members last received dedicated social media training on 27 January 2022 which broadly covered the following topics:

- Identifying strengths and weaknesses of major social media channels
- Working within the majors 'dos' and 'don'ts' of social media
- Finding and targeting an audience
- Building a 'brand' across social media platforms
- Managing trolls and keyboard warriors
- Applying the Seven Principles of Public Life (Nolan Principles) and Members' Code of Conduct to the use of social media
- Identifying Tendring District Council's existing policies for social media use (and development of future policies)
- Identifying the point for reporting misuse of social media

Through the Members' induction programme in 2023, Code of Conduct training (which was

refreshed again in 2025) referenced the Council's Social Media Guidance and the Local Government Association's published Social Media Guidance for Councillors.

The review undertaken by officers has considered the Local Government Association's Model Social Media Guidance, <https://www.local.gov.uk/our-support/communications-and-community-engagement/social-media-guidance-councillors> and the published Social Media Guidance for Councillors [Social media guidance for councillors | Local Government Association](#).

Following the Committee's consideration of the draft Social Media Guidance for Members, it is planned to develop an updated training session in association with the Council's Communications Team, to deliver to Members to accompany the reviewed Guidance, taking into consideration this review and the Committee's subsequent comments.

The Guidance and proposed training package will highlight that inappropriate use of social media could amount to a breach of the Members' Code of Conduct, and that it is the individual responsibility of each Member to consider the Guidance when using social media.

It is proposed that the training be delivered to District Councillors on the draft, to seek feedback and comments on the draft Guidance, in particular whether anything else needs to be covered, and report back to the Committee, to approve a final version.

RECOMMENDATION(S)

It is recommended that the Committee:

- (a) notes the contents of this report and the new draft Social Media Guidance for Members, as set out in Appendix A;**
- (b) subject to any comments or recommendations on Appendix A through the Committee's debate, approves Appendix A, as draft guidance for the purposes of training with District Councillors; and**
- (c) receives feedback following that training with Members, to approve a final version of the Social Media Guidance to ensure it is comprehensive and clearly understood.**

REASON(S) FOR THE RECOMMENDATION(S)

To provide a timely update to the Committee as part of its agreed work programme.

ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED

There are no alternative options associated with this report.

PART 2 – IMPLICATIONS OF THE DECISION

DELIVERING PRIORITIES

Declarations of Interest, in accordance with the Members' Code of Conduct, forms part of effective and positive governance, being a theme of Financial Sustainability and Openness within the Corporate Plan for 2024-28, adopted by full Council at its meeting in November

2023 (minute no.76).

Members' Declarations of Interests fall within Principle A of the Council's Annual Governance Statement, namely behaving with integrity, demonstrating strong commitment to ethical values and respecting the rule of law.

LEGAL REQUIREMENTS (including legislation & constitutional powers)

Whilst there is no additional legal or ethical burden around using social media, the usual rules still apply and need to be considered in this context. Predominantly, Members have the same legal duties online as anyone else, but failure to comply with the law may have more serious consequences. There are additional duties around using websites for electoral campaigning and extra care needs to be taken when writing on Council business, for example Planning or Licensing matters. Consideration should also be given during any pre-election period, guidance for which the Council produces for Members for each relevant period.

Libel – If an untrue statement is published about a person, which is damaging to their reputation, they may take a libel action against the Councillor (not the Council). This will also apply if the Councillor allows someone else to publish something libellous on their social media if the Councillor knew about it and didn't take prompt action to remove it. A successful libel claim will result in award of damages, even if only repeating statements made by others.

Copyright – Placing images or text on social media from a copyrighted source (for example extracts from publications or photos) without permission is likely to breach copyright. Councillors should avoid publishing anything they are unsure about or seek permission in advance. Breach of copyright may result in an award of damages.

Data Protection – Avoid publishing the personal or sensitive data of individuals unless express written permission has been obtained in advance.

Equality – Care must be taken in publishing anything that could breach Councillors' duties and responsibilities to have due regard to the principle that there should be equality of opportunity for all people taking into account protected characteristics.

Obscene Material – Councillors should avoid publishing anything on social media that people would consider to be obscene. Publication of obscene material is a criminal offence.

FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION

It is important for the Committee to understand the principles of the right to freedom of expression and its restrictions. Article 10 provides:

“(1) Everyone has the right to freedom of expression. This right shall include freedom to hold opinions and to receive and impart information and ideas without interference by public authority and regardless of frontiers.....

(2) The exercise of these freedoms, since it carries with it duties and responsibilities, may be subject to such formalities, conditions, restrictions or penalties as are prescribed by law and are necessary in a democratic society, in the interests of.....the protection of the reputation or rights of others....”

It is also important to note the words of **Collins J in Livingstone v The Adjudication Panel**

for England [2006] EWHC 2533 (Admin) [at para.39]:

“The burden is on [the Adjudication Panel for England] to justify interference with freedom of speech. However offensive and undeserving of protection the appellant’s outburst may have appeared to some, it is important that any individual knows that he can say what he likes, provided it is not unlawful, unless there are clear and satisfactory reasons within the terms of Article 10(2) to render him liable to sanctions”.

The right to freedom of expression is a crucially important right in a democratic society and it is clear that it may only be interfered with where there are convincing and compelling reasons within the terms of Article 10(2) justifying that interference. Comments made on social media related to matters within legitimate concerns as a Councillor (political or quasi-political comment) would benefit from a high level of protection under Article 10.

The question as to whether information is fair and balanced should be, in the first instance, the stuff of political debate and journalistic analysis. A clear distinction exists between ‘rough and tumble’ politicking, which is aimed squarely at the competence of political opponents and making statements which would fall foul of the legal consideration set out above. In a democratic system the actions or omissions of any governing body must be subject to the close scrutiny not only of the legislative and judicial authorities but also of the press and public opinion.

In *Heesom v Public Service Ombudsman for Wales*, Mr Justice Hickinbottom considered a Councillor’s right to free speech in some detail. His considerations drew attention to a number of earlier cases in which the following propositions could be derived:

- While freedom of expression is important for everyone, it is especially so for an elected representative of the people. They represent their electorate, draw attention to their preoccupations and defend their interests.
- The enhanced protection applied to all levels of politics, including local.
- Article 10 protects not only the substance of what is said, but also the form in which it is conveyed. Therefore, in the political context, a degree of the immoderate, offensive, shocking, disturbing, exaggerated, provocative, polemical, colourful, emotive, non-rational and aggressive, that would not be acceptable outside the context, is tolerated.
- Whilst, in a political context, Article 10 protects the right to make incorrect but honestly made statements, it does not protect statements which the publisher knows to be false.
- The protection goes to “political expression”, but that is a broad concept in this context. It is not limited to expressions of or critiques of political views, but rather extends to all matters of public administration and public concern including comments about the adequacy or inadequacy of performance of public duties by others.
- Past cases draw a distinction between facts on the one hand, and comment on matters of public interest involving value judgement on the other. As the latter is unsusceptible of proof, comments in the political context amounting to value judgements are tolerated even if untrue, so long as they have some – any – factual basis. What amounts to a value judgement as opposed to fact will be generously construed in favour of the former; and even where something expressed is not a value judgement but a statement of fact (e.g. that a council has not consulted on a project), that will be tolerated if what is expressed is said in good faith and there is some reasonable (even if incorrect) factual basis for saying it, “reasonableness” here taking into account of the political context in which the thing was said.
- As Article 10(2) expressly recognises, the right to freedom of speech brings with it duties

and responsibilities, however any restriction must respond to a “pressing social need”.

There have been other cases in which the courts have given consideration to freedom of expression, the public interest in such a freedom, and on the other side of the balance the public interest in proper standards of conduct by elected members. The Article 10 balancing process is highly fact sensitive and while decisions will provide valuable guidance on the general approach, the courts have stressed that it is important to keep in mind the particular facts in any one case. What is essential is who comments are directed to, who is involved in the debate and if the recipient is not part of the political environment, the impact of the comments on them. In addition, it is possible to justify interference with the right to freedom of expression if the intention or impact results in civil or criminal activity, such as defamation, inciting public disorder or breach of equality duties.

FINANCE AND OTHER RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

There are no finance or resource implications associated with this report.

USE OF RESOURCES AND VALUE FOR MONEY

The following are submitted in respect of the indicated use of resources and value for money indicators:

A) Financial sustainability: how the body plans and manages its resources to ensure it can continue to deliver its services;

B) Governance: how the body ensures that it makes informed decisions and properly manages its risks, including; and

C) Improving economy, efficiency and effectiveness: how the body uses information about its costs and performance to improve the way it manages and delivers its services.

Through this report the Best Value Theme of Culture is demonstrated, describing how the established governance procedures and leadership are exercised.

The culture of a local authority is determined by an agreed set of shared values, ethics and beliefs, how decisions are made, as well as how elected members and officers behave, interact and carry out their roles.

Characteristics of a well-functioning authority

- Members and officers promote and demonstrate the highest ethical standards and appropriate working behaviours through established shared values and ways of working.
- A culture of cooperation, respect and trust between members and officers, and between departments exists, along with a commitment to transparent decision-making.
- A culture of compliance with legislation, strategies, policies and procedures throughout the organisation.

MILESTONES AND DELIVERY

This report is presented to the Committee in accordance with the work programme.

ASSOCIATED RISKS AND MITIGATION

Not presenting this information could have a detrimental impact on the Council's reputation.

OUTCOME OF CONSULTATION AND ENGAGEMENT	
None undertaken.	
EQUALITIES	
Equality considerations are taken into account for each decision made.	
SOCIAL VALUE CONSIDERATIONS	
Social value considerations are taken into account for each decision made.	
IMPLICATIONS RELATED TO DEVOLUTION AND/OR LOCAL GOVERNMENT REORGANISATION	
Through the review Officers have considered the guidance provided to Members on use of social media at both Braintree and Colchester Councils, both of which refer to the LGA's published Social Media Guidance for Councillors.	
IMPLICATIONS FOR THE COUNCIL'S AIM TO BE NET ZERO BY 2050	
This is taken into account for each decision made.	
OTHER RELEVANT IMPLICATIONS	
Consideration has been given to the implications of the proposed decision in respect of the following and any significant issues are set out below.	
Crime and Disorder	Not applicable
Health Inequalities	Not applicable
Area or Ward affected	No Wards are directly affected by the contents of the report.
ANY OTHER RELEVANT INFORMATION	
None	

PART 3 – SUPPORTING INFORMATION

BACKGROUND
An ever-increasing number of Councillors use social media to communicate with residents regarding any issues that residents may have and also to promote the work that individual Councillors, or the Council as a whole, are doing. This is an efficient and fast paced means of communicating and information can be received by far reaching audiences. Social media is the term for online tools, websites and interactive media that enables users to interact with each other, share information, opinions, knowledge and interest. The various terms that social media describe are referred to throughout this report. The principles applied to using social media may also apply to any electronic communication. District Councillors are in a position whereby they may request information from Officers that may not be publicly available, in addition to being included on information sent out to all Members. Often this is privileged and sometimes sensitive information that is being provided in order that Councillors are aware of local issues to enable them to fulfil their role as a District Councillor. It must be considered how this information is used and Councillors should

check before posting or sharing this information on social media. Anything posted on social media becomes a publication and will be in the public domain, even if it subsequently deleted by the originator.

With social media being an important and increasingly utilised tool in which Councillors may represent their residents, it is important that they use social media responsibly and consider not only the legal ramifications but also adhere to, and be mindful of, the Members' Code of Conduct.

MEMBERS' CODE OF CONDUCT

The Code of Conduct applies to you when you are acting in your capacity as a Councillor which may include when:

- You misuse your position as a Councillor
- Your actions would give the impression to a reasonable member of the public with knowledge of all the facts that you are acting as a Councillor

The Code applies to all forms of communication and interaction, including:

- At face-to-face meetings
- At online or telephone meetings
- In written communication
- In verbal communication
- In non-verbal communication
- In electronic and social media communication, posts, statements and comments

You are also expected to uphold high standards of conduct and show leadership at all times when acting as a Councillor.

The Code also applies if a Councillor conducts themselves in a manner which could reasonably be regarded as bringing their office or that of the Council into disrepute. It is important to understand that Councillors can have 'blurred identities'. This means they may have a social media account and comment both as a Councillor and as an individual, posting about personal events and also Council business. It may be clear to the Councillor whether they are posting in an official or private capacity but could be less clear to others.

Such blurred identities might have serious implications where a Councillor's views are taken by either as those of the Council rather than a personal opinion. It is recommended that Councillors consider making social media accounts/profiles clear on the capacity in which they are commenting. It is expected that Councillors will communicate and comment politically, but in the same way in which they are required to act in Council meetings or within their communities.

It is not permissible to use Council resources for personal or political purposes and during the pre-election period.

PREVIOUS RELEVANT DECISIONS TAKEN BY COUNCIL/CABINET/COMMITTEE ETC.

Full Council on 22 November 2022 (minute no. 51) **RESOLVED** that Council approves:

- a) The adoption of the Local Government Association's Model Members' Code of Conduct, as set out in Appendix 2, for the purposes of Sections 27 & 28 of the Localism Act 2011, with a commencement date of the Annual Meeting of the Council in

May 2023;

- b) That all Town and Parish Councils in the Tendring District be invited by the Monitoring Officer to adopt the same Code for their own Councils;
- c) That all duly elected Tendring District Council members at the Council's elections in May 2023 attend mandatory training sessions on the new Code of Conduct; and
- d) That the new Code of Conduct be incorporated into Part 6 of the Council's Constitution in due course.

The Town and Parish Councils' Standards Sub-Committee meeting held on 12 February 2026 recommended that:

- a) Town and Parish Councils take on a fuller education programme on the Code of Conduct and its terms of reference;
- b) Town and Parish Councils should be aware of the available social media guidance but that also they should adopt adequate policies and procedures for the use of social media in their respective Councils;
- c) The appropriate training be delivered to ensure that the requirements of the guidance and the social media policies are at the forefront of Councillors' minds to ensure that they understand and acknowledge its requirements; and
- d) Town and Parish Councils should take ownership of introducing the right policies for their own Town and Parish Council.

BACKGROUND PAPERS AND PUBLISHED REFERENCE MATERIAL

There are no background papers associated with this report.

APPENDICES

Appendix A – Social Media Guidance for Members 2026

REPORT CONTACT OFFICER(S)

Name	Lisa Hastings
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Tendring
District Council



TENDRING DISTRICT
COUNCIL

SOCIAL MEDIA GUIDANCE
FOR MEMBERS

Social Media Guidance for Members (Revised 2026)

This guidance supports Members in using social media safely, effectively and responsibly. It incorporates relevant elements from the Local Government Association (LGA) model guidance on social media and their Guide to the role of Councillors on social media.

Purpose and Scope

This guidance applies to all elected Members when using social media **in their capacity as Councillors**, including circumstances where they are *reasonably perceived* as acting in an official role. It supports:

- Public confidence in local democracy
- Members' ability to communicate with residents
- Safe, lawful and respectful online engagement

Social media includes (but is not limited to): Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, X, WhatsApp, blogs, YouTube, TikTok, Reddit, and any other platform where content can be published or shared.

Members should be able to use social media to promote their 'council work' without fear of harassment, bullying, defamation or other hate speech; this is finely balanced with comment (and criticism) based upon freedom of speech and political debate. Members are reminded that all activity must align with:

- **Tendring District Council Members' Code of Conduct:**
<https://legacy.tendringdc.gov.uk/sites/default/files/TENDRING%20DISTRICT%20COUNCIL%20NEW%20CODE%20OF%20CONDUCT%20MAY%202023.pdf>
 - **The Seven Principles of Public Life (The Nolan Principles)**
 - **Equality and data protection law**
 - **Copyright and defamation law**
 - **Article 10 (Freedom of Expression) of the European Convention on Human Rights.**
-

Key Principles

Acting as a Councillor

Because others judge whether you appear to be acting as a Councillor, assume your online activity may be linked to your role. Online actions and posts must not bring the Council into disrepute.

Personal Responsibility

You are personally responsible for the content you publish on any social media or messaging platform. Even if content is deleted, it may already have been copied, shared or archived.

Inappropriate use of social media can be a **criminal offence** and may also lead to a **breach of the Members' Code of Conduct**.

Respect and Civility

Comments must be respectful to:

- Other Members
- Officers and partner organisations
- Members of the public
- Volunteers

Members must comply with equality legislation and avoid harassment, bullying, discriminatory or offensive language. Some online behaviour may constitute a criminal offence.

Confidentiality and Information Security

Do not disclose confidential, personal, sensitive or privileged information. Information provided to you as a Councillor may not be publicly available and should not be shared unless you are certain it is appropriate to do so.

If notified of a potential safeguarding issue via social media, you must follow the Council's safeguarding procedures without delay.

Bias, Predetermination and Decision-Making

Where Members are involved in planning, licensing or other quasi-judicial decisions, they should avoid social media activity that could give the impression they have made up their mind in advance.

While expressing a preliminary view is not unlawful in itself, Members must be able to demonstrate that they approach formal decision-making with an open mind.

Staying Safe Online

The LGA highlights risks faced by Councillors online, including abuse, harassment and exposure of personal information. Members are encouraged to:

- Use strong, unique passwords
- Enable two-factor authentication
- Use secure email addresses that are not shared across platforms

If you feel harassed or unsafe, report concerns to Essex Police via 101.

Defamation, Libel and Copyright

Defamation and Libel

Defamation (including libel) occurs when an untrue statement is published about a person that damages their reputation. A person may take legal action against the **individual Councillor**, not the Council.

Members should note:

- Posting false or unverified allegations can be defamatory
- Repeating, sharing or re-posting a libellous statement can create the same legal liability as the original post
- Legal action may result in significant personal financial and reputational consequences

Members should exercise particular care when commenting on individuals, organisations and ongoing disputes.

Copyright

Copyright law applies to social media content. Members must not use text, images, videos or other material created by others unless:

- Permission has been granted
- The material is clearly licensed for reuse
- Use falls within a lawful exception

Always credit original sources where appropriate and ensure content is accurate.

Members' Code of Conduct

Failure to follow this guidance **may amount to a breach of the Members' Code of Conduct**, depending on the circumstances.

Even when using personal accounts, Members must ensure that:

- Comments are lawful
- Confidential information is not disclosed
- The Council is not brought into disrepute

Disclaimers such as "views my own" may help provide clarity but **do not remove responsibility** or disapply the Code of Conduct.

Do and Don't Guidance for Members on Social Media

Do	Don't
Listen to online conversations and engage where appropriate	Publish anything you would not say in traditional media, a public meeting, or in person
Remember that libel and copyright laws apply	Bring the Council or your role into disrepute
Clearly state when you are speaking personally, as a Councillor, or on behalf of a political group.	Say how you will vote on an issue where it creates a risk of predetermination
Be respectful and professional in all communications	Disclose confidential or privileged information
Share verified information from the Council's corporate accounts, particularly during major incidents	Use social media when angry, tired or under the influence of alcohol or other substances
Consider how the public may perceive who you follow or what you share	Use social media during committee meetings if it distracts from Council business
Think carefully before posting – content is persistent and shareable	Assume everyone shares your sense of humour or understands sarcasm

Managing Abuse, Harassment and Online Conflict

Members should be able to use social media without fear of harassment, bullying or hate speech.

If you experience online abuse:

- Use platform reporting and moderation tools
- Block or mute accounts where appropriate
- Keep records, including screenshots
- Seek legal advice in serious cases

Training and Further Support

Members may access:

- **LGA Model Guidance for Councillors' Use of Social Media**

<https://www.local.gov.uk/our-support/communications-and-community-engagement/social-media-guidance-councillors>

- Council-led training sessions
 - Support from the Corporate Communications Manager
-

Approved and adopted by the Standards Committee on **[Insert Date] 2026**.

STANDARDS COMMITTEE

22 APRIL 2026

REPORT OF THE MONITORING OFFICER

A.4 STANDARDS COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME 2026/27

PART 1 – KEY INFORMATION

PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

To present for approval the Standards Committee's proposed work programme covering the period April 2026 to March 2027.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

A work programme covering the period April 2026 to March 2027 has been prepared which reflects the activity required falling within the responsibilities of the Standards Committee's Terms of Reference.

RECOMMENDATION(S)

It is recommended that the Standards Committee approves its Work Programme for 2026/27, as set out in Appendix A.

REASON(S) FOR THE RECOMMENDATION(S)

To provide a work programme which reflects the activity required falling within the responsibilities of the Standards Committee's Terms of Reference.

ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED

There are no alternative options associated with this report.

PART 2 – IMPLICATIONS OF THE DECISION

DELIVERING PRIORITIES

The existence of sound governance, internal control and financial management practices and procedure are essential to the delivery of the Corporate Priorities supported by effective management and forward planning within this overall framework.

LEGAL REQUIREMENTS (including legislation & constitutional powers)

Statutory and regulatory requirements have been recognised within the work programme.

FINANCE AND OTHER RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

Finance and other resources

Although there are no significant financial implications associated with the work programme of the Committee, additional officer time or resources may be required to support the activities of

the Committee and existing budgets will be reviewed as appropriate if the potential for additional costs arises.

USE OF RESOURCES AND VALUE FOR MONEY

The following are submitted in respect of the indicated use of resources and value for money indicators:

A) Financial sustainability: how the body plans and manages its resources to ensure it can continue to deliver its services;	-
B) Governance: how the body ensures that it makes informed decisions and properly manages its risks, including; and	The work programme of the Committee covers the function of the Committee to promote and maintain high standards of conduct by Members and Co-Opted Members of the Authority. The work programme aims to address these areas of responsibility within related timescales and deadlines to support, protect and enhance the Council's reputation and Standards framework.
C) Improving economy, efficiency and effectiveness: how the body uses information about its costs and performance to improve the way it manages and delivers its services.	-

MILESTONES AND DELIVERY

With the implementation of the work programme the Committee will be able to satisfactorily carry out its required activities.

ASSOCIATED RISKS AND MITIGATION

The work programme reflects a number of functions and activities that form part of the Council's wider governance arrangements that includes risk and assurance.

OUTCOME OF CONSULTATION AND ENGAGEMENT

There is no requirement to seek consultation on this report. This is a public document to be presented to the Standards Committee.

EQUALITIES

There are no direct implications associated with this report.

SOCIAL VALUE CONSIDERATIONS

There are no direct implications associated with this report.

IMPLICATIONS RELATED TO DEVOLUTION AND/OR LOCAL GOVERNMENT REORGANISATION

There are no direct implications associated with this report although it is important to recognise that policies and procedures will be reviewed with predecessor councils prior to Vesting Day, where possible and feasible to do so. Once the Structural Changes Order is passed in Parliament and becomes legislation, Tendring District Council remains responsible for its statutory duties up to 31st March 2028.

IMPLICATIONS FOR THE COUNCIL'S AIM TO BE NET ZERO BY 2050	
There are no direct implications associated with this report.	
OTHER RELEVANT IMPLICATIONS	
Consideration has been given to the implications of the proposed decision in respect of the following and any significant issues are set out below.	
Crime and Disorder	Not applicable
Health Inequalities	Not applicable
Area or Ward affected	All Wards could be affected
ANY OTHER RELEVANT INFORMATION	
None	

PART 3 – SUPPORTING INFORMATION

BACKGROUND
The Standards Committee functions include promoting and maintaining high standards of conduct by Members and Co-opted Members of the Authority; along with developing a culture of openness, transparency, trust and confidence between Members and in Member and Officer relationships, embedding a culture of strong ethical and corporate governance at all levels of the Council. In addition to the above the Standards Committee will advise the Council on the adoption or revision of the Members' Code of Conduct and the requirements for codes/protocols/other procedures relating to standards of conduct throughout the Council; therefore, assessing the operation and effectiveness of the Members' Code of Conduct and other elements of the Standards Framework. In addition to the items set out in Appendix A, other matters may be presented to the Committee for consideration as determined by the Monitoring Officer in consultation with the Chairman. Taking into account the responsibilities of the Standards Committee as highlighted above, the proposed work programme covering the period from April 2026 up to and including March 2027 is set out in Appendix A.
PREVIOUS RELEVANT DECISIONS TAKEN BY COUNCIL/CABINET/COMMITTEE ETC.
The work programme is presented to the Standards Committee annually for its consideration and approval.
BACKGROUND PAPERS AND PUBLISHED REFERENCE MATERIAL
None

APPENDICES
Appendix A – Standards Committee Work Programme 2026/27

REPORT CONTACT OFFICER(S)	
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DRAFT COMMITTEE WORK PLAN 2026/27 – STANDARDS COMMITTEE

April 2026

- Annual report on Declarations of Interest (including meetings, gifts and hospitality)
- Updates by Monitoring Officer covering complaints and national policy changes
- Annual Work programme for 2026/27
- Social Media Guidance review
- Gifts and Hospitality Policy review

July 2026

- Updates by Monitoring Officer covering complaints and national policy changes
- Social Media Guidance review update
- Case review and guidance update for the Committee on decisions and actions taken nationally
- Update on mandatory Members' Code of Conduct training
- Licensing and Registration Probity Protocol

October 2026

- Updates by Monitoring Officer covering complaints and national policy changes
- Town and Parish Councils' Code of Conduct and Interests review – including Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) implications
- Role of Monitoring Officer and review of administrative delegated powers

February 2027

- Updates by Monitoring Officer covering complaints and national policy changes
- Update on mandatory training for Members

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Individual matters may be referred to these meetings by the Monitoring Officer in accordance with the Committee's Terms of Reference as necessary, for example, an appeal against dispensation decision or a Code of Conduct hearing.

Use 26/27 to review neighbouring policies to achieve join up for LGR

TENDRING DISTRICT COUNCIL MONITORING OFFICER UPDATE April 2026				
Council	Complainant	Current status	Final outcome	Comments
Existing Cases from last update:				
Council	Complainant	Current status	Final outcome	Comments
PARISH	PARISH CLLR – received 05 Mar 2025	CLOSED	No further action as the investigation did not identify evidence of a breach of the Code. Recommendations have been given to the Parish Council for training and operating procedures.	Matter related to behaviour between Parish Councillors whilst acting in an official capacity.
DISTRICT	PUBLIC – received 11 Mar 2025	ONGOING	Investigation – internally appointed Investigator	Matter relates to communications between parties.
PARISH x 3	PUBLIC – received 28 Oct 2025	ONGOING	External investigator appointed	Matter relates to conduct at public meetings and declaration of interests.
PARISH	PUBLIC – received 06 Nov 2025	ONGOING	External investigator appointed (to be run in parallel with above investigation)	Matter relates to use of social media.
DISTRICT	DISTRICT CLLR – received 02 Feb 2026	CLOSED	No further action – complaint was without merit & politically motivated	Matter related to declaration of interests.
New cases since last update – none at the time of writing				
<u>General Notes – 2025/26 Summary:</u> Overall eleven cases have been received so far in 2025/26. Since the last update, one case remains being investigated by an internally appointed investigator and two cases are being investigated by an externally appointed investigator. One case has been closed with no further action as the complaint was politically motivated. One investigation has been concluded and closed with no further action. No breaches of the Members' Code of Conduct were identified, but recommendations have been given to				

the Parish Council relating to training needs and fully adhering to operating procedures. These have been acknowledged by the Clerk.

Requests for dispensations:

None since the last update.