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Standards Committee

11 March 2026

**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