

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE STANDARDS COMMITTEE,
HELD ON WEDNESDAY, 22ND APRIL, 2026 AT 10.00 AM
IN THE COMMITTEE ROOM - TOWN HALL, STATION ROAD, CLACTON-ON-SEA,
CO15 1SE**

Present:	Councillors J Henderson (Chairman), Talbot (Vice-Chairman), Alexander, Casey and Wiggins
In Attendance:	Lisa Hastings (Corporate Director (Law & Governance) & Monitoring Officer), Karen Hayes (Corporate Governance, Performance & Procurement Manager), Bethany Jones (Democratic Services Officer) and Katie Koppenaal (Democratic Services Officer)
Also Present:	David Irvine (Independent Person) and Jane Watts (Independent Person)

16. 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).

17. MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING

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

RESOLVED that the Minutes of the last meeting of the Committee held on Wednesday, 11 March 2026 be approved as a correct record and be signed by the Chairman.

18. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no Declarations of Interest made on this occasion.

19. 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.

20. TOWN AND PARISH COUNCILS' STANDARDS SUB-COMMITTEE

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

21. REPORT OF THE MONITORING OFFICER - A.1 - ANNUAL REPORT ON DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND ASSOCIATED MATTERS

Members recalled that it had been 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 report now before the Committee covered the period from 1 April 2025 to 31 March 2026 and provided statistics on:

- *the number of Declarations of Interest made at meetings;*

- *the number of offers of gifts and hospitality that had been registered by Members during this period; and*
- *updates to the Members' Register of Interests.*

The data had been collated from the Committee system Modern.Gov which the Council had started using as of August 2016 and from Members' submissions.

Register of Members' Disclosable Pecuniary Interests

The Committee was made aware that the Council was required to publish the 'Register of Disclosable Pecuniary Interests' on its website in accordance with the Localism Act 2011 and The Relevant Authorities (Disclosable Pecuniary Interests) Regulations 2012, which prescribed the categories of interest.

It was confirmed that the Council's website included a Register of Disclosable Pecuniary Interests and Other Registerable Interests for all District Councillors and that this was updated when an individual Member provided details of an amendment directly to the Monitoring Officer. Any entry which was 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 had been granted by the Monitoring Officer.

The Committee was informed that there had been a dispensation for all District Members 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 9 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 that you live in the District and therefore have to pay Council Tax.*

*However, Members are importantly reminded of **Section 106 of the Local Government 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 were required to declare Disclosable Pecuniary Interests, 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 were set out in the Appendix A to the Monitoring Officer's report (A.1). The minutes of the relevant meetings also recorded the declarations.

Use of blanket dispensations

The Committee was reminded that this Council's Members' Code of Conduct did not include blanket dispensations. Consequently, the Monitoring Officer had provided District Members with a blanket dispensation for the purposes of setting Council Tax under the Local Government Finance Act 1992, at the District Council's budget meeting on 17 February 2026 (minute 108 referred) (as referred to earlier within the Officer report (A.1). The Monitoring Officer had also stated the following in relation to that 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's previous review of the Council's Gift and Hospitality Policy for Members, guidance and a notification form had been produced for all District Councillors in May 2016. Reference to declarations of offers/receipt of gifts and hospitality had been included within the mandatory Members' Code of Conduct training delivered by the Monitoring Officer in June and July 2023, and any subsequent Code of Conduct training.

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

Members' Register of Interests

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

It was reported that, at the conclusion of the May 2023 District, Town and Parish Council elections, all Members had 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 had been covered within the mandatory Members' Code of Conduct training delivered by the Monitoring Officer in June and July 2023 and the refresher training provided on 18 June 2025.

In line with the requirements of the Council's External Auditors, an annual reminder had been sent to all District Members to ensure that all interests were up to date and that remained ongoing. At the time of writing this Officer report (A.1), 23 out of 48 had been received; that figure was updated to 35 out of 48 at the meeting.

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

RESOLVED 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 Interests entries are up to date.

22. REPORT OF THE MONITORING OFFICER - A.2 - REVIEW OF THE MEMBERS' GIFTS AND HOSPITALITY POLICY

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

Members were informed that the Council had 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 stated:-

"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 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"*

The Committee was told that under the "protecting your reputation and the reputation of the local authority" heading within the Code, Members were required to register and disclose their interests and consider their position with regard to Gifts and Hospitality.

"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."

Members were made aware that Section 2 of the Bribery Act 2010 made 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 meant 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.

Officers also made the Committee aware that the Members' Gifts and Hospitality Policy had been based upon the previous guidance which had essentially remained unchanged; however, the Code provisions had been replaced with the current Code of Conduct requirements.

Members also heard that the Policy aimed 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.

It was reported that the Policy included at section (b)(viii) a list of circumstances, which the Committee was requested to agree, in which it would be appropriate for Members to choose to accept gifts and hospitality. Declarations would still be required in accordance with the Policy.

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

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

RESOLVED that the Committee:-

- 1) notes the outcome of the review of the Members' Gifts and Hospitality Policy, as set out in Appendix A of the Officer report (A.2); and
- 2) approves the updated Members' Gifts and Hospitality Policy for circulation to all District Councillors.

23. REPORT OF THE MONITORING OFFICER - A.3 - REVIEW OF SOCIAL MEDIA GUIDANCE FOR MEMBERS

Members heard that the current Social Media Guidance for Members (the Guidance) had been last considered by the Standards Committee at its meeting held on 2 February 2022 and was attached as Appendix A of the Officer report (A.3), detailing Officers' comments after conducting their review.

The Committee was informed that, whilst the 2022 guidance was not incorrect, it was felt necessary to produce a new draft based on current use of social media platforms and terminology.

Members were also informed that the Council recognised the benefits of communication between Members and residents that social media platforms afforded and utilised by most Members with varying frequency. Social media could reach a demographic of society that might not always be reached by more traditional methods, along with the speed with which communication could take place, providing both potential benefit and pitfall, than traditional correspondence.

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

The Committee was made aware that Members had last received dedicated social media training on 27 January 2022 which had 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 Tending District Council's existing policies for social media use (and development of future policies)*
- *Identifying the point for reporting misuse of social media*

Officers reported that, through the Members' induction programme in 2023, Code of Conduct training (which had been refreshed in 2025) had referenced the Council's Social Media Guidance and the Local Government Association's published Social Media Guidance for Councillors.

Following the Committee's consideration of the draft Social Media Guidance for Members, it was 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 the review and the Committee's subsequent comments.

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

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

The Committee and the Independent Persons present put forward the following comments/views/suggestions/requests et cetera:-

- *The percentage of how many complaints related to social media;*
- *A few training sessions on the Social Media Guidance such as a morning session, evening and one on MS Teams;*
- *Would more training be provided after the Guidance came back to the Committee?; and*
- *Would there be Freedom of Expression training?*

The Monitoring Officer responded to the points made as appropriate.

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

RESOLVED that the Committee:-

- 1) note the contents of the Officer report (A.3) and the new draft Social Media Guidance for Members, as set out in Appendix A of that report;
- 2) following the comments as mentioned above, approves Appendix A of the report, as draft guidance for the purposes of training with District Councillors; and
- 3) 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.

24. REPORT OF THE MONITORING OFFICER - A.4 - STANDARDS COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME 2026/27

The Committee considered the following draft Work Programme for 2026/27:-

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 the 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 the 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 the Monitoring Officer and review of administrative delegated powers

February 2027

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

Members were made aware that the above meeting dates were provisional pending ratification at the Annual Meeting of the Council to be held on 19 May 2026 and that, in addition, individual matters might be referred to those meetings by the Monitoring Officer, in accordance with the Committee's Terms of Reference as necessary, for example, an appeal against a dispensation decision or a Code of Conduct hearing.

Having duly considered and discussed the contents of the draft work programme:-

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

RESOLVED that the Work Programme for the Standards Committee for 2026/27 be approved and adopted.

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

The Committee had before it, as set out below, the Monitoring Officer's update on existing and new conduct complaints cases.

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 had 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.
<u>General Notes – 2025/26 Summary:</u>				
Overall, eleven cases had been received in 2025/26. In 2026/27, so far, no complaints had been received.				
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 had been closed with no further action as the complaint was politically motivated. One investigation had been concluded and closed with no further action. No breaches of the Members' Code of Conduct had been identified, but recommendations had been given to the relevant Parish Council relating to training needs and fully adhering to operating procedures.				

Those had been acknowledged by the Clerk.
Requests for dispensations:
None since the last update.

The Committee **NOTED** the foregoing.

The meeting was declared closed at 10.57 am

Chairman