

NORTH LINCOLNSHIRE COUNCIL

STANDARDS COMMITTEE

REPORT TITLE

Consultation on Strengthening the standards and conduct framework for local authorities in England

1. OBJECT AND KEY POINTS IN THIS REPORT

- 1.1 The Government are consulting on proposals to strengthen the standards and conduct framework. The Standards Committee are likely to wish to respond to this consultation, to ensure local members' views are considered.
- 1.2 Legislation is expected in 2025, which may require amendments to the Code of Conduct and the local standards arrangements.

2. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

- 2.1 On 18 December 2024 the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government launched an open consultation entitled "Strengthening the Standards and Conduct Framework for Local Authorities in England".
- 2.2 The consultation sets out various policy options that the government are considering, inviting views from elected members, Monitoring Officers, and others.
- 2.3 The main issues that the government are consulting on are as follows:
 - Introducing a mandatory minimum prescribed Code of Conduct,
 - Requiring local authorities to have a Standards Committee,
 - Requiring local authorities to publish investigation outcomes,

- Requiring investigations to be concluded where the member resigns,
- Empowering individuals affected by councillor misconduct to come forward,
- Introducing the power of suspension with related safeguards,
- Ensuring that any new arrangements align with the Public Sector Equality Duty.

2.4 North Lincolnshire Council has robust arrangements in place to deal with standards issues and complaints and has excellent relationships with town and parish councils.

2.5 A summary of the questions posed by Government, along with suggested responses, is contained at Appendix 1.

3. **OPTIONS FOR CONSIDERATION**

3.1 Any changes introduced by the government would need to be implemented locally, agreed by Council, and communicated to town and parish councils.

3.2 Members may wish to complete the attached consultation.

3.3 Members may agree not to complete the consultation.

4. **ANALYSIS OF OPTIONS**

4.1 Considering and completing the consultation would ensure that the Standards Committee's views are considered by Government.

4.2 Not completing the consultation risks the loss of a local voice on important issues related to standards.

5. **FINANCIAL AND OTHER RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS (e.g. LEGAL, HR, PROPERTY, IT, COMMUNICATIONS etc.)**

5.1 There are no direct resource implications to completing the consultation. There may be some resource implications if legislation is passed by Parliament, although it is considered that these can be met with existing resources.

5.2 Details of the consultation have been circulated to all elected members, and each town and parish council in North Lincolnshire.

6. **OTHER RELEVANT IMPLICATIONS (e.g. CRIME AND DISORDER, EQUALITIES, COUNCIL PLAN, ENVIRONMENTAL, RISK etc.)**

6.1 Strengthening local arrangements could assist the Standards Committee in ensuring good governance, dealing with poor conduct, and ensuring we comply with our equalities duties.

7. **OUTCOMES OF INTEGRATED IMPACT ASSESSMENT (IF APPLICABLE)**

7.1 Not required at this stage.

8. **OUTCOMES OF CONSULTATION AND CONFLICTS OF INTERESTS DECLARED**

8.1 This report sets out details of the consultation, including the process and timescales.

9. **RECOMMENDATIONS**

9.1 That the Standards Committee consider the questions posed by Government, and submit a formal response.

DIRECTOR OF TRANSFORMATION AND OUTCOMES

Church Square House
SCUNTHORPE
North Lincolnshire
Post Code
Author: Charlotte McKay / Dean Gillon
Date: 20 December 2024

Background Papers used in the preparation of this report – Strengthening the standards and conduct framework for local authorities in England – Open Consultation. Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government, December 2024.