

**Report of Helen Bradley, Director of Legal and Democratic Services  
and Monitoring Officer**

**Electoral division(s) affected:**

None

**Purpose of the Report**

- 1 To inform Members of the national picture on standards issues affecting Local Government.

**Executive summary**

- 2 This report is for information to update the Committee on national developments and cases which relate to the work of the Committee since the last meeting on 24 March 2025.

**Recommendation(s)**

- 3 The Standards Committee is recommended to:
  - (a) note the report and request that Officers monitor the progress of the matters referred to and keep the Committee updated; and
  - (b) consider any recommendations it wishes to make arising out of the contents of the report.

## **Background**

- 4 As agreed by the Committee on 24 March 2025, as part of the Annual Work Programme, this is a standing agenda item with a quarterly update to the Committee.

### **Councillor who messaged fellow planning committee member during a meeting he could not attend has breached Code of Conduct**

- 5 A recommendation to remove a councillor from the Planning Committee at King's Lynn at West Norfolk Borough Council has been made following the councillor sending emails to a peer who was sitting in a meeting which he could not attend.
- 6 The councillor allegedly sent the recipient several messages before and during the meeting and it was alleged that the emails may have constituted influencing or attempting to influence the recipient's decision-making.
- 7 An investigation found that while the councillor did not instruct the recipient how to act and there was no evidence that the emails altered any decision, the nature and timing of the emails could be interpreted as attempts to unduly influence the decision-making process. The complaint was upheld as part of the investigation report.
- 8 A Standards hearing was convened. While the councillor apologised and did state that he only intended to communicate his opinions to his peer rather than apply any influence on them, the Panel ultimately found that the emails created the perception of undue influence and additionally failed to respect the recipient or anyone else in the Planning Committee.
- 9 While the councillor's apology and his general contributions to the Council were acknowledged by the Panel, their final decision was to recommend that he be removed from the Planning Committee entirely.

### **Councillor breached Code of Conduct when calling interim Chief Executive 'buffoon'**

- 10 A Southampton councillor has been found to be in breach of the authority's Code of Conduct as a result of calling the interim Chief Executive a 'buffoon' as part of a comment on LinkedIn.
- 11 The Deputy Monitoring Officer presented a report to the council's governance committee in relation to a complaint regarding the councillor's behaviour and conduct within both a full council meeting and comments which he made on LinkedIn.
- 12 The complaint regarding the councillor's behaviour in the full council meeting was not upheld. However, the comments made regarding the authority's interim Chief Executive on LinkedIn were subject to further consideration.
- 13 Informal resolution was attempted, but this failed. An independent investigation was subsequently commissioned, which cost £18,964.31. The Deputy Monitoring Officer stated that this cost was unfunded and would have to be found from the council's reserves.

- 14 The councillor argued that the ‘buffoon’ comment was made in a personal capacity rather than his capacity as a councillor. He also stated that he was in fact commenting on the role of returning officer, not the chief executive.
- 15 The report stated that “*considerable*” time was spent regarding the councillor’s suggestion that the term ‘buffoon’ was not pejorative by considering the 1638 Oxford English Dictionary definition as compared to the modern understanding of the word and in particular the conclusions a member of the public might infer from the use of the term.
- 16 The investigation concluded that the councillor was acting within his capacity as a councillor and determined that the language used subjected the Chief Executive to ridicule. This would give a reasonable member of the public the impression that the council was being led by someone incapable of fulfilling their duties in a competent way.
- 17 The councillor offered an apology and a retraction of the post to the Chief Executive, and both of these were accepted.
- 18 The independent Investigator recommended that Southampton Council should consider adopting the Local Government Association’s Model Code to replace its current code to strengthen elements and supporting guidance.

## **Background papers**

[Councillor who messaged fellow planning committee member during meeting he could not attend breached code](#)

[Councillor breached code of conduct when calling interim chief executive a “buffoon”](#)

## **Other useful documents**

None.

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## **Appendix 1: Implications**

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### **Legal Implications**

The Council has a duty under section 27 of the Localism Act 2011 to promote and maintain high standards of conduct by its Members and to adopt a code of conduct that is consistent with the Nolan Principles. Ensuring that the Standards Committee is kept up to date with national Standards issues is expected to facilitate compliance with this duty.

### **Finance**

None.

### **Consultation**

None.

### **Equality and Diversity / Public Sector Equality Duty**

None.

### **Climate Change**

None.

### **Human Rights**

None.

### **Crime and Disorder**

None.

### **Staffing**

None.

### **Accommodation**

None.

### **Risk**

None.

### **Procurement**

None.