

**STRENGTHENING THE STANDARDS AND CONDUCT FRAMEWORK FOR
LOCAL AUTHORITIES IN ENGLAND**

Introduction

Until 26 February 2025, the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government is consulting on introducing measures to strengthen the standards and conduct regime in England and ensure consistency of approach amongst councils investigating serious breaches of their member codes of conduct, including the introduction of the power of suspension.

This report sets out the proposed draft response to the consultation for submission for the Council's approval.

Draft Consultation Response

Question 1

Please tick all [which] apply - are you responding to this consultation as:

a) an elected member – if so please indicate which local authority type(s) you serve on

Town or Parish Council
District or Borough Council
Unitary Authority
County Council
Combined Authority / Combined County Authority
Fire and Rescue Authority
Police and Crime Panel
Other local authority type - please state

b) a council officer – if so please indicate which local authority type

Town or Parish Council
District or Borough Council
Unitary Authority
County Council
Combined Authority / Combined County Authority
Fire and Rescue Authority
Police and Crime Panel
Other local authority type - please state

c) a council body – if so please indicate which local authority type

Town or Parish Council
District or Borough Council
Unitary Authority

County Council
Combined Authority / Combined County Authority
Fire and Rescue Authority
Police and Crime Panel
Other local authority type - please state
d) a member of the public

e) a local government sector body – please state

Question 2

Do you think the government should prescribe a mandatory minimum code of conduct for local authorities in England?

Yes

No

If no, why not? [Free text box]

Question 3

If yes, do you agree there should be scope for local authorities to add to a mandatory minimum code of conduct to reflect specific local challenges?

Yes – it is important that local authorities have flexibility to add to a prescribed code

No – a prescribed code should be uniform across the country

Unsure

Question 4

Do you think the government should set out a code of conduct requirement for members to cooperate with investigations into code breaches?

Yes

No

Unsure

Question 5

Does your local authority currently maintain a standards committee?

Yes

No

Any further comments [free text box]

Question 6

Should all principal authorities be required to form a standards committee?

Yes

No

Any further comments [free text box]

Question 7

In most principal authorities, code of conduct complaints are typically submitted in the first instance to the local authority Monitoring Officer to triage, before referring a case for full investigation. Should all alleged code of conduct breaches which are referred for investigation be heard by the relevant principal authority's standards committee?

Yes, decisions should only be heard by standards committees

No, local authorities should have discretion to allow decisions to be taken by full council
Unsure

Question 8

Do you agree that the Independent Person and co-opted members should be given voting rights?

Yes – this is important for ensuring objectivity

No – only elected members of the council in question should have voting rights
Unsure

Question 9

Should standards committees be chaired by the Independent Person?

Yes

No
Unsure

Question 10

If you have further views on ensuring fairness and objectivity and reducing incidences of vexatious complaints, please use the free text box below.

[Free text box]

Question 11

Should local authorities be required to publish annually a list of allegations of code of conduct breaches, and any investigation outcomes?

Yes - the public should have full access to all allegations and investigation outcomes

No - only cases in which a member is found guilty of wrongdoing should be published
Other views – text box

Question 12

Should investigations into the conduct of members who stand down before a decision continue to their conclusion, and the findings be published?

Yes

No

Unsure

Question 13

If responding as a local authority, what is the average number of complaints against elected members that you receive over a 12-month period?

0

Question 13a

For the above, where possible, please provide a breakdown for complaints made by officers, other elected members, the public, or any other source:

Complaints made by officers [Number box]

Complaints made by other elected members [Number box]

Complaints made by the public [Number box]

Complaints made by any other source [Number box]

Question 14

If you currently work, or have worked, within a local authority, have you ever been the victim of (or witnessed) an instance of misconduct by an elected member and felt that you could not come forward? Please give reasons if you feel comfortable doing so.

Yes

No

[Free text box]

Question 15

If you are an elected member, have you ever been subject to a code of conduct complaint? If so, did you feel you received appropriate support to engage with the investigation?

Yes

No

[Free text box]

Question 16

If you did come forward as a victim or witness, what support did you receive, and from whom? Is there additional support you would have liked to receive?

[Free text box]

Question 17

In your view, what measures would help to ensure that people who are victims of, or witness, serious councillor misconduct feel comfortable coming forward and raising a complaint?

[Free text box]

Question 18

Do you think local authorities should be given the power to suspend elected members for serious code of conduct breaches?

Yes – authorities should be given the power to suspend members

No – authorities should not be given the power to suspend members

Unsure

Question 19

Do you think that it is appropriate for a standards committee to have the power to suspend members, or should this be the role of an independent body?

Yes - the decision to suspend for serious code of conduct breaches should be for the standards committee

No - a decision to suspend should be referred to an independent body

Unsure

[Free text box]

Question 20

Where it is deemed that suspension is an appropriate response to a code of conduct breach, should local authorities be required to nominate an alternative point of contact for constituents during their absence?

Yes – councils should be required to ensure that constituents have an alternative point of contact during a councillor's suspension

No – it should be for individual councils to determine their own arrangements for managing constituents' representation during a period of councillor suspension

Unsure

Question 21

If the government reintroduced the power of suspension do you think there should be a maximum length of suspension?

Yes – the government should set a maximum length of suspension of 6 months

Yes – however the government should set a different maximum length (in months)

[Number box]

No – I do not think the government should set a maximum length of suspension

Unsure

Question 22

If yes, how frequently do you consider councils would be likely to make use of the maximum length of suspension?

Infrequently – likely to be applied only to the most egregious code of conduct breaches

Frequently – likely to be applied in most cases, with some exceptions for less serious breaches

Almost always – likely to be the default length of suspension for code of conduct breaches

Unsure

Question 23

Should local authorities have the power to withhold allowances from suspended councillors in cases where they deem it appropriate?

Yes – councils should have the option to withhold allowances from suspended councillors

No – suspended councillors should continue to receive allowances

Unsure

Question 24

Do you think it should be put beyond doubt that local authorities have the power to ban suspended councillors from council premises and to withdraw the use of council facilities in cases where they deem it appropriate?

Yes – premises and facilities bans are an important tool in tackling serious conduct issues

No – suspended councillors should still be able to use council premises and facilities

Unsure

Question 25

Do you agree that the power to withhold members' allowances and to implement premises and facilities bans should also be standalone sanctions in their own right?

Yes

No

Unsure

Question 26

Do you think the power to suspend councillors on an interim basis pending the outcome of an investigation would be an appropriate measure?

Yes, powers to suspend on an interim basis would be necessary

No, interim suspension would not be necessary

Any further comments [free text box]

Question 27

Do you agree that local authorities should have the power to impose premises and facilities bans on councillors who are suspended on an interim basis?

Yes - the option to institute premises and facilities bans whilst serious misconduct cases are investigated is important

No - members whose investigations are ongoing should retain access to council premises and facilities

Unsure

Question 28

Do you think councils should be able to impose an interim suspension for any period of time they deem fit?

Yes

No

Any further comments [free text box]

Question 29

Do you agree that an interim suspension should initially be for up to a maximum of 3 months, and then subject to review?

Yes

No

Any further comments [free text box]

Question 30

If following a 3-month review of an interim suspension, a standards committee decided to extend, do you think there should be safeguards to ensure a period of interim extension is not allowed to run on unchecked?

Yes – there should be safeguards

No – councils will know the details of individual cases and should be trusted to act responsibly

Question 30a

If you answered yes to above question, what safeguards do you think might be needed to ensure that unlimited suspension is not misused?

Breaches verified by independent, fair, transparent and accountable processes

Question 31

Do you think councillors should be disqualified if subject to suspension more than once?

Yes – twice within a 5-year period should result in disqualification for 5 years

Yes – but for a different length of time and/or within a different timeframe (in years)
[Number boxes]

No - the power to suspend members whenever they breach codes of conduct is sufficient

Any other comments [free text box]

Question 32

Is there a case for immediate disqualification for gross misconduct, for example in instances of theft or physical violence impacting the safety of other members and/or officers, provided there has been an investigation of the incident and the member has had a chance to respond before a decision is made?

Yes

No

Unsure

[Free text box]

Question 33

Should members have the right to appeal a decision to suspend them?

Yes - it is right that any member issued with a sanction of suspension can appeal the decision

No – a council's decision following consideration of an investigation should be final

Unsure

Question 34

Should suspended members have to make their appeal within a set timeframe?

Yes – within 5 days of the decision is appropriate to ensure an efficient process

Yes – but within a different length of time (in days) [Number box]

No – there should be no time limit for appealing a decision

Question 35

Do you consider that a complainant should have a right of appeal when a decision is taken not to investigate their complaint?

Yes

No

Unsure

Question 36

Do you consider that a complainant should have a right of appeal when an allegation of misconduct is not upheld?

Yes

No

Unsure

Question 37

If you answered yes to either of the previous two questions, please use the free text box below to share views on what you think is the most suitable route of appeal for either or both situations.

Formal appeal to the decision-making body

Question 38

Do you think there is a need for an external national body to hear appeals?

Yes – an external appeals body would help to uphold impartiality

No – appeals cases should be heard by an internal panel

Any further comments [free text box]: External national body in cases of controversy and/or complexity which renders a local procedure unable to determine.

Question 39

If you think there is a need for an external national appeals body, do you think it should:

Be limited to hearing elected member appeals

Be limited to hearing claimant appeals

Both of the above should be in scope

Please explain your answer [free text box]

Question 40

In your view, would the proposed reforms to the local government standards and conduct framework particularly benefit or disadvantage individuals with protected characteristics, for example those with disabilities or caring responsibilities?

Please tick an option below:

it would benefit individuals with protected characteristics

it would disadvantage individuals with protected characteristics

neither

Please use the text box below to make any further comment on this question.

[Free text box]

Recommendation

To agree to the consultation response.