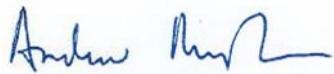


LONDON BOROUGH OF CAMDEN	WARDS: All
REPORT TITLE Update on Standards Matters – January 2026	
REPORT OF Borough Solicitor	
FOR SUBMISSION TO Standards Committee	DATE 26 January 2026
SUMMARY OF REPORT <p>This report brings to Members' attention recent matters concerning standards for information and updates on actions from previous Standards Committee meetings.</p> <p>Local Government Act 1972 – Access to Information</p> <p>No documents that require listing have been used in the preparation of this report.</p> <p>Contact Officer: Cheryl Hardman Principal Democratic Services Officer Camden Town Hall Judd Street London WC1H 9JE 020 7974 1619 cheryl.hardman@camden.gov.uk </p>	
RECOMMENDATIONS <p>That Standards Committee notes and comment on the contents of the report.</p>	

Signed:



Borough Solicitor

Date: 14 January 2026

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1. This report highlights recent matters concerning standards, which will be of interest to the Committee.

2. Updates from previous meetings

- 2.1. At its meeting on 21 October 2024, the Committee agreed to revise the Register of Interests form and accompanying guidance to explicitly draw a distinction in the form between the interests of the councillor and relevant others through the use of separate columns. This change was intended to enhance openness and provide a reminder to councillors of their obligations. Following the meeting, all councillors and co-opted Members were advised of the reformatting and all existing forms published on the Camden Council website updated. There was an action to monitor and feedback on reactions to the change after a year. It can be reported that there has been little reaction to the change although one councillor noted that they had been previously unaware of the requirement to include the interests of their spouse/partner. Their register was updated, indicating that the revision in format was a helpful reminder of obligations.

3. Related Party Disclosures

- 3.1. Local authorities are required to disclose details of related party transactions in their accounts. These are transactions between the Council and other bodies or individuals where those with control or significant influence over the Council – such as councillors – also have control or significant influence over another body. For example, there is a related party transaction if the Council buys services from or provides a grant to an organisation and a councillor is a director or trustee of that organisation. The purpose of disclosing these transactions is so that residents and other readers of the accounts can consider whether the transaction was in the best interests of the Council given there is a risk of a conflict of interest.
- 3.2. Due to the legal status of the Register of Members' Interests, that information is used to meet the requirements for the related party disclosures note. Each year, councillors are asked to review their Register prior to the end of the financial year to ensure they are up to date. Officers then review those disclosures against the Council's financial records to check for transactions.
- 3.3. External audit has now determined that they require enhanced assurance on the completeness of Members' registers, as Standards Committee members will be aware. Therefore, in September all Members were written to and asked to confirm their registers were up to date as of 31 March 2025. The process of collecting confirmations is ongoing and has required efforts by officers and Whips, delaying the completion of this part of the audit with a risk that, should not all confirmations be collected, the auditors will qualify this part of the audit, meaning they have not received sufficient assurance. While the outcomes of the audit are a matter for Audit and Corporate Governance Committee, given there will now need to be an annual process in March and April of reviewing

and confirming Members' registers, Standards Committee are invited to comment on this, and make suggestions on achieving an efficient process.

3.4. It should be noted that not updating registers within 28 days of any changes would technically be a breach of the Code of Conduct. In the case of Statutory Disclosable Pecuniary Interests this could be considered a criminal offence. While the failure to make minor amendments in time is unlikely to lead to a complaint or investigation, it is still important to comply with statutory requirements and the Councillor Code of Conduct. The requirement by external auditors is a demonstration of the use made of Registers of Interests by outside organisations and an example of the importance of regular review and updating by councillors.

4. Launch of the Ethics and Integrity Commission

4.1. The Ethics and Integrity Commission (EIC) was launched on 31 October 2025, replacing the Committee on Standards in Public Life (CSPL). It aims to promote high standards in public life, report to the Prime Minister on ethical standards issues, and advise public authorities on the development of clear codes of conduct and oversight arrangements¹. The EIC will be working on codes of conduct in relation to the upcoming statutory duty of candour².

5. Standards and conduct framework for local authorities

5.1. In December 2024, the Government began a consultation on strengthening of the local government standards framework. Information on the consultation was circulated to Standards Committee members and Group leaders to ensure that a full set of responses were received. On 11 November 2025, the Government published the results of the consultation and its response³.

5.2. The Government has set out its plans to reform the standards and conduct framework, including:

- Introducing a mandatory code of conduct;
- Requiring the establishment of formal standards committees;
- Requiring that principal authorities offer individual support during standards investigations to both the complainant and subject councillor;
- Introducing a 'right of review' for both complainant and subject councillor;
- Powers of suspension, withholding of allowances and the use of premises and facilities bans;
- Powers of disqualification for councillors subject to the maximum period of suspension more than once within 5 years; and
- Creation of a new national appeals function.

¹ Main website: <https://eic.independent-commission.uk/>

Terms of reference: <https://eic.independent-commission.uk/what-we-do/terms-of-reference/>

² <https://eic.independent-commission.uk/standards-require-regular-attention-and-upgrades/>

³ <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/strengthening-the-standards-and-conduct-framework-for-local-authorities-in-england/outcome/strengthening-the-standards-and-conduct-framework-for-local-authorities-in-england-consultation-results-and-government-response#ministerial-foreword>

- 5.3. It is worth noting that the Government supports local authorities developing their own guidance and protocols but not to add to the mandatory code to reflect local circumstances. This is to avoid “the risk of confusing or diluting the consistency of expected behaviour”.
- 5.4. Camden has long supported a strengthened standards regime. It retained a formal Standards Committee following the abolition of the statutory requirement for a committee by the Localism Act 2011. It maintained a comprehensive Code of Conduct that has been treated as a live document, reviewed regularly. Where a decision is taken to investigate a complaint, it is agreed that support should be offered to both the complainant and subject Member.

6. **Interests**

Cornwall Council

- 6.1. In June 2025, Cornwall Council published an assessment decision notice that concluded Louis Gardner, a former councillor and Cabinet Member for the economy, had failed to declare a non-registerable interest at a meeting of the Cornwall and Isles of Scilly Economic Prosperity Board in February 2025⁴. Gardner had accepted the role of Head of Air and Space at Cornwall Airport the day before the Board voted on £200,000 funding for a project owned by the Airport.
- 6.2. The employment became a disclosable pecuniary interest (DPI) upon commencement, which is believed to have been on 17 March 2025. Gardner made enquiries as to who to send the updated interest to on 11 April but made no further communication to update the register. He stepped down as a councillor on 1 May.
- 6.3. Gardner argued that he did not have an interest to declare at the time of the Board meeting in February 2025 and that the Monitoring Officer and council was aware of the employment. It was found that Gardner had breached the Code of Conduct although no sanction would be applied given that he was no longer a councillor. Mr Gardner apologised for the breach⁵.
- 6.4. The failure to register the DPI was referred to the police. Since then, the police have confirmed no further action would be taken against Mr Gardner⁶.

Northumberland County Council

- 6.5. Stephen Gerrard, Monitoring Officer at Northumberland County Council, has issued a warning to councillors regarding compliance with legal requirements

⁴ <https://localgovernmentlawyer.co.uk/governance/396-governance-news/61256-council-to-refer-to-police-failure-by-former-cabinet-member-to-register-disclosable-pecuniary-interest-correctly> [accessed 26 November 2025]

⁵ <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/c9dq40w6j91o> [accessed 26 November 2025]

⁶ <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/cp8mzgddep2o> [accessed 26 November 2025]

to register disclosable pecuniary interests⁷. While all councillors had submitted information, some had been told that additional information was required. At a meeting of the Audit and Standards Committee, the Monitoring Officer suggested a few councillors may be referred to the police regarding the failure.

Borough Solicitor's Comment

- 6.6. With regard to both these cases, it is a criminal offence to fail to register or disclose a Statutory Disclosable Pecuniary Interest within 28 days of a new or change to a registered interest. The Interest categories are set out in the Relevant Authorities (Disclosable Pecuniary Interests) Regulations 2012⁸ and the Councillor Code of Conduct⁹. Members are reminded to notify the Monitoring Officer to ensure that updates are made in a timely fashion.
- 6.7. Camden's Councillor Code of Conduct includes a category of interests labelled Voluntary Registerable Non-Pecuniary Interests. These refer to interests that are not Statutory Disclosable Pecuniary Interests or Compulsory Registerable Non-Pecuniary Interests. A Member should consider whether a matter under discussion would affect such an interest to a greater extent than other inhabitants and whether a reasonable person would believe it would affect the impartiality of decision-making. Members are welcome to seek advice from the Monitoring Officer on the potential conflict between public duty and private interests such as employment offers.

7. Standards Cases

City of Wolverhampton Council

- 7.1. Councillor Greg Brackenridge has been found to have breached the Code of Conduct at City of Wolverhampton Council for falsely claiming to have served as a Royal Marine in a public speech¹⁰. He has since explained that while he had undertaken training, he had to withdraw before 'passing out'.
- 7.2. The Ethics and Governance Sub-Committee found that Councillor Brackenridge was acting in his official capacity when making the statements and had breached obligations to treat others such as those who had served in the military with respect, not to use his position improperly for advantage, and not to bring his role or Council into disrepute. The councillor was also found to have breached requirements to cooperate with the investigation. The Sub-Committee requested a public apology to the complainant and Armed Forces. It also recommended that the councillor be removed from the Resources and

⁷ <https://localgovernmentlawyer.co.uk/governance/396-governance-news/62397-monitoring-officer-threatens-to-refer-councillors-to-police-over-register-of-interests> [accessed: 17 December 2025]

⁸ <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ksi/2012/1464/made> [accessed: 26 November 2025]

⁹

<https://democracy.camden.gov.uk/documents/s129100/PART%2053%20Councillor%20Code%20of%20Conduct.pdf> [accessed: 26 November 2025]

¹⁰ <https://localgovernmentlawyer.co.uk/governance/396-governance-news/61903-former-mayor-accused-of-stolen-valour-breached-code-of-conduct-sub-committee> [accessed: 27 November 2025]

Equality Scrutiny Panel, given the local adoption of 'Armed Forces' as a protected characteristic. Councillor Brackenridge was suspended from the Labour Party in July and faced calls to resign at a council meeting in September¹¹. The council leader called for the option of stronger sanctions.

Borough Solicitor's Comment

- 7.3. Misleading the public with regard to previous military service could arguably be considered to breach the Code of Conduct with regard to respect and bringing the office and council into disrepute. Dishonesty could impact on the public's confidence in local government. It should be noted that failure to comply with a Code of Conduct investigation and/or determination would in itself be a breach of the Code.
- 7.4. Proposals to introduce stronger penalties such as suspensions have been linked by the Government to serious breaches, including where there would be a significant reputational risk to the council, public trust is undermined, or the health, wellbeing and safety of fellow councillors and officers are affected¹². Guidance on the use of sanctions will be issued by the Government.

Leicestershire County Council

- 7.5. Following reports in September 2025 that Leicestershire Police had launched an inquiry into allegations that a member of Leicestershire County Council had offered free ice cream to voters during local elections in May¹³, the police have confirmed it will take no further action¹⁴. The allegations concerned the parking of a replica 1920s ice cream van by then candidate Joseph Boam on Silver Street in Whitwick with a sign reading "free for real Brits". The leader of the opposition, Councillor Deborah Taylor, said when the inquiry was announced: "This serious allegation against Mr Boam states that he tried to influence voters by giving away ice creams outside a polling station in May 2025"¹⁵.

¹¹ <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/c24r7jdq5o> [accessed: 27 November 2025]

¹² <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/strengthening-the-standards-and-conduct-framework-for-local-authorities-in-england/outcome/strengthening-the-standards-and-conduct-framework-for-local-authorities-in-england-consultation-results-and-government-response#introducing-the-sanction-of-suspension> [accessed: 27 November 2025]

¹³ <https://localgovernmentlawyer.co.uk/governance/396-governance-news/62169-reform-uk-councillor-who-offered-ice-cream-to-voters-facing-electoral-malpractice-inquiry> [accessed: 17 December 2025]

¹⁴ <https://www.localgovernmentlawyer.co.uk/governance/396-governance-news/98890-police-take-no-further-action-after-investigation-into-allegation-councillor-offered-free-ice-cream-to-voters-on-polling-day> [accessed: 17 December 2025]

¹⁵ <https://localgovernmentlawyer.co.uk/governance/396-governance-news/62169-reform-uk-councillor-who-offered-ice-cream-to-voters-facing-electoral-malpractice-inquiry> [accessed: 17 December 2025]

7.6. The police investigation considered the allegations in relation to ‘treating’ under the Representation of the People Act 1983. It later confirmed that no criminal offences were identified, and no action would be taken¹⁶.

Borough Solicitor’s Comment

7.7. With elections approaching, it is worth reiterating the law with regard to ‘treating’. This is defined in Section 114 of the Representation of the People Act 1983 as follows:

- (1) A person shall be guilty of a corrupt practice if he is guilty of treating.
- (2) A person shall be guilty of treating if he corruptly, by himself or by any other person, either before, during or after an election, directly or indirectly gives or provides, or pays wholly or in part the expense of giving or providing, any meat, drink, entertainment or provision to or for any person—
 - (a) for the purpose of corruptly influencing that person or any other person to vote or refrain from voting; or
 - (b) on account of that person or any other person having voted or refrained from voting, or being about to vote or refrain from voting.
- (3) Every elector or his proxy who corruptly accepts or takes any such meat, drink, entertainment or provision shall also be guilty of treating.

7.8. The essence of the offence is that it must have a ‘corrupt’ motive.

7.9. Recognising that ‘treating’ could also be considered a breach of the Councillor Code of Conduct, the Council has explicitly included an obligation at Section 7.2:

“I will not engage in ‘treating’ as defined by Section 114 of the Representation of the People Act 1983”.

Newcastle City Council

7.10. The former leader of Newcastle City Council, Councillor Nick Kemp, has been found not to have breached the Code of Conduct following an external investigation¹⁷. The findings were accepted by the Monitoring Officer following consideration by the council’s Independent Persons.

¹⁶ <https://www.localgovernmentlawyer.co.uk/governance/396-governance-news/98890-police-take-no-further-action-after-investigation-into-allegation-councillor-offered-free-ice-cream-to-voters-on-polling-day> [accessed: 17 December 2025]

¹⁷ <https://localgovernmentlawyer.co.uk/governance/396-governance-news/62267-former-council-leader-cleared-in-code-of-conduct-complaint> [accessed: 17 December 2025]

7.11. Councillor Kemp had been accused of bullying a council officer, breaching requirements regarding respect, bullying and bringing the council into disrepute. The details of the investigation remain confidential¹⁸.

Borough Solicitor's Comment

7.12. Councillors are obliged via the Code of Conduct not to bully or harass any person. A separate report is included on the agenda considering this requirement in more detail.

7.13. In accordance with the council's procedure for Dealing with Misconduct Complaints Against Councillors, where a formal investigation finds no breach of the Code of Conduct, the Borough Solicitor will inform the subject councillor and complainant. The report will also be provided to the Independent Persons. The Borough Solicitor could decide to ask the Investigating Officer to reconsider the report if not satisfied with the conduct of the investigation or could refer the 'no breach' report to Standards Committee if considered appropriate.

7.14. Where an investigating officer has found no breach of the Code, it is likely that the details of the investigation would remain confidential.

8. Comments of the Director of Finance

8.1. The Director of Finance has been consulted and has no comments to add.

9. Legal Comments of the Borough Solicitor

9.1. This is a report of the Borough Solicitor and there are no other legal comments.

10. Environmental Implications

10.1. There are no environmental implications.

REPORT ENDS

¹⁸ <https://localgovernmentlawyer.co.uk/governance/396-governance-news/62428-council-leader-refuses-requests-to-publish-confidential-report-into-former-leader> [accessed: 17 December 2025]