



COTSWOLD

District Council

Council name	COTSWOLD DISTRICT COUNCIL
Name and date of Committee	AUDIT AND GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE – 27 JULY 2026
Subject	ANNUAL STANDARDS UPDATE
Wards affected	None
Accountable member	Councillor Helene Mansilla, Chair of the Audit and Governance Committee Email: helen.mansilla@cotswold.gov.uk
Accountable officer	Angela Claridge, Director of Governance & Development (Monitoring Officer) Email: angela.claridge@cotswold.gov.uk
Report author	Angela Claridge, Director of Governance & Development (Monitoring Officer) Email: angela.claridge@cotswold.gov.uk
Summary/Purpose	To present the Audit and Governance Committee with standards updates and issues, including Code of Conduct Complaints for the year ending 31 March 2026.
Recommendation(s)	That Committee resolves to: 1. Note the update for the financial year 2025/26.
Corporate priorities	Delivering Good Services
Key Decision	No
Exempt	No
Consultees/ Consultation	



1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY AND BACKGROUND

- 1.1** The Localism Act 2011 requires the Council to have complaint handling arrangements in place. These enable an individual to make a formal complaint that an elected or co-opted member of Cotswold District Council or a Town or Parish Council within the district area, has failed to comply with their Council's Code of Conduct for Members. The complaint handling arrangements seek to ensure that complaints are dealt with fairly and are resolved informally where appropriate.
- 1.2** As one of its functions, the Audit and Governance Committee is responsible for promoting and maintaining high standards of conduct and for the determination of complaints regarding the conduct of members. The Audit and Governance Committee previously received an annual update report for the financial year ending 31 March 2025 in relation to code of conduct complaints at its meeting on 27 May 2025.
- 1.3** One Standards Sub-Committee hearing was held on 6 November 2025 in relation to allegations against two Chipping Campden Town Councillors (these allegations arose in the previous financial year 2024/25). The Sub-Committee determined that both councillors had breached the Code of Conduct and recommended sanctions to the Town Council for implementation.
- 1.4** On 18 March 2026, the Council adopted an updated procedure for the Standards Hearing Sub-Committee. This Sub-Committee has the responsibility to conduct hearings following any formal investigation into an allegation that a member of the District Council or a Town or Parish Council within the district area has failed or may have failed to comply with their Council's Code of Conduct for Members.
- 1.5** This report provides an update on the number and status of code of conduct complaints.

2. GLOUCESTERSHIRE WIDE CODE OF CONDUCT

- 2.1** Full Council adopted the Gloucestershire-Wide Code of Conduct on 21 March 2023. Adopting a unified code of conduct has allowed greater clarity and consistency for members of the public about what behaviour they should expect from their representatives and has meant that if complaints are brought against a member at both District and County level the same considerations apply.



3. NUMBER AND STATUS OF CODE CONDUCT COMPLAINTS

- 3.1** The Monitoring Officer has delegated authority, after consultation with the Independent Person, to determine whether a complaint requires formal investigation. Wherever practicable, the Monitoring Officer seeks resolution of complaints without formal investigation.
- 3.2** The summary of received complaints is set out in the table below. Data recording is based upon the date the formal complaint was received. Some complaints received in 2024/25 and notified in last year's report, will have been managed during 2025/26 but are not included in the table.
- 3.3** In all cases where the Monitoring Officer has been required to consider a Code of Conduct complaint, they have consulted with an Independent Person, as required by the Localism Act 2011. During 2025/26, four Independent Persons were retained by the Council; Robert Cawley, Melvin Kenyon, Michael Paget-Wilkes and Phyllida Pyper. The Independent Persons continue to contribute in an invaluable and constructive manner. Individual discussions have been held between the Independent Persons and the Monitoring Officer reviewing how we can promote good conduct in parish and town councils to mitigate the increasing numbers of complaints.

3.4 Financial Year 1 April 2025 to 31 March 2026

Stage of complaints process resolved	Outcome	District	Town or Parish
Assessment stage	No action – complaint withdrawn/incomplete information	0	12
	No action - complaint dismissed	0	2
	In progress	0	1
Investigation stage	No action – complaint dismissed	1	22
	Local resolution	0	9
	In progress	0	7
Local hearing stage	No action – complaint dismissed	0	0
	Sanctions applied or recommended	0	0
Total		1	53



This is an increase of 39% from the previous financial year, predominantly in relation to complaints against town and parish councillors. Whilst there is no nationally collected dataset that definitively demonstrates an increase in complaints against town and parish councillors, national research undertaken by the Local Government Association indicates that complaints relating to parish and town councils continue to represent a significant proportion of standards casework managed by local authority Monitoring Officers.

- 3.5** There are numerous other cases where contact has been made with the Monitoring Officer but the complainant decides not to pursue a formal complaint for a variety of reasons typically: i) insufficient information is provided to assess the complaint, ii) the process doesn't allow the complainant to achieve the sanction they are looking for or iii) the complainant is anonymous (these are not logged as formal complaints and therefore not included in the summary above). The procedure does permit anonymous complaints in exceptional and compelling reasons where the allegation can be evidenced without reference to the complainant. However, local authorities should not normally allow anonymous complaints as that is against the principles of transparency and fairness and make matters much more difficult to investigate.

4. LEARNING RESULTING FROM CODE OF CONDUCT COMPLAINTS

- 4.1** Members will note that for the last four financial years, the number of complaints has risen considerably. The majority of complaints relating to town and parish councillors have arisen from five councils: Bourton on the Water Parish Council, Chipping Campden Town Council, Down Ampney Parish Council, Moreton in Marsh Town Council and Tetbury Town Council.
- 4.2** Both nationally and locally, the most common complaints against town and parish councillors relate to allegations of bullying and disrespectful behaviour, inappropriate use of social media, bringing the council into disrepute, failure to declare interests and conduct towards fellow councillors, clerks and members of the public. Research undertaken by the Local Government Association suggests that town and parish council complaints continue to represent a significant and resource-intensive element of standards casework for local authorities which reflects the situation in this district. Furthermore, there has been an increase in complex and lengthy complaints covering a number of allegations.



- 4.3** This Council adopted the Local Government Association's "Debate Not Hate" campaign in July 2022 which aims to raise public awareness of the role of councillors in their communities, encourage healthy debate and improve the responses and support for local politicians facing abuse and intimidation.
- 4.4** The National Association of Local Councils (NALC) and Society of Local Council Clerks (SLCC) have introduced the "Civility & Respect" campaign for their town and parish council sector. Throughout the sector, there are growing concerns about the impact bullying, harassment and intimidation are having on local (parish and town) councils, councillors, clerks and council staff and the resulting effectiveness of local councils.
- 4.5** Another theme emerging from complaints over the last year is the nature of the allegations have arisen or relates to matters where the councillor was not acting in their councillor capacity or as a representative of the authority and is a private matter. If this is the case, the Code of Conduct doesn't apply. Section 52(1) of the Local Government Act 2000 contains the duty for a Councillor to comply with the Code of Conduct. It requires every Councillor to sign a declaration of acceptance of office, in which they undertake that 'in performing his functions' they will observe the authority's Code of Conduct. As a general rule, the public expects councillors to uphold high standards of conduct and show leadership at all times whether in a councillor or other capacity.
- 4.6** There is a worrying theme of the misuse of the code of conduct complaints system as a weapon against others, particularly relating to planning issues. Some subject members (councillors subject to complaints) have suggested that complaints have sometimes been used for revenge or to disrupt processes, which have incurred significant investigation costs for Cotswold District Council as a result.
- 4.7** Complaints are received from a variety of sources including serving councillors, former councillors, town/parish clerks and members of the public. A significant proportion of complaints arise from interpersonal disputes within town and parish councils including disagreements between councillors, tensions between councillors/ clerks and issues arising following a councillor's departure from office. Complaints from members of the public commonly relate to concerns about councillor conduct at meetings, interactions with residents, social media activity and the declaration of interests.



- 4.8** The Monitoring Officer continues to meet quarterly with the Monitoring Officers of the other Gloucestershire Councils and the Gloucestershire Association of Local Councils (GALC) in order to review existing practice and keep abreast of national and regional developments.

5. STRENGTHENING THE STANDARDS AND CONDUCT FRAMEWORK FOR LOCAL AUTHORITIES IN ENGLAND.

- 5.1** No legislative changes took effect during 2025/26. However, the Government was actively developing reforms to the standards framework which are expected to require primary legislation and may result in significant changes to member conduct arrangements, sanctions and governance processes in future years

6. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1** There are no financial implications resulting directly from the report. However, the significant increase in code of conduct complaints is putting considerable pressure on existing resources. Should this trend continue, the Council will need consider if additional resource is required.

7. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1** The Localism Act 2011 requires the Council to have a Code of Conduct which sets out the standards expected of Members whenever they act in their official capacity. The Code must also have in place a suitable procedure at a local level to investigate and determine allegations that elected Members and co-opted Members of the district council or town and parish councils within the district area have breached the Code of Conduct.

8. RISK ASSESSMENT

- 8.1** If the Council fails to adopt and maintain a Code of Conduct and a process for the investigation of complaints that are fit for purpose, robust and transparent then there are risks to the Council's reputation and to the integrity of its corporate governance and decision-making processes.

9. EQUALITIES IMPACT

- 9.1** Equalities and Human Rights issues are taken into account in the handling of Code of Conduct complaints.



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10. CLIMATE AND ECOLOGICAL EMERGENCIES IMPLICATIONS

10.1 There are no climate and ecological implications arising directly from this report.

11. BACKGROUND PAPERS

11.1 None.

(END)