

Report to: Governance, General Purposes & LGR Committee – 5 February 2026

Lead Officer: Francesca Whyley, Monitoring Officer

Report Summary	
<b>Report Title</b>	Update from Governance, General Purposes & LGR Working Group - Arrangements for Dealing with Code of Conduct Complaints, Social Media Protocol and Member Development Plan
<b>Purpose of Report</b>	To update Members on the work undertaken by the Working Group to update the Arrangements for Dealing with Code of Conduct Complaints, the Social Media Protocol for Members and the Member Development Plan
<b>Recommendations</b>	That the Governance, General Purposes & LGR Committee: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) note the work undertaken to date by the Working Group;</li> <li>b) agree the changes to the Council's Arrangements for Dealing with Code of Conduct Complaints at Appendix 1 (to be circulated);</li> <li>c) approve the Member Development Plan at Appendix 2; and</li> <li>d) recommend the updated Social Media Protocol for Members at Appendix 3 to Full Council for adoption.</li> </ul>
<b>Reason for Recommendations</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) To keep Committee updated as to the work undertaken by the Working group in reviewing the above documents</li> <li>b) To ensure the Arrangements for Dealing with Code of Conduct Complaints are up to date and fit for purpose</li> <li>c) To provide a clear framework for the development and training of Members</li> <li>d) To ensure up to date guidance for Members on the use of Social Media in line with the Local Government Association guidance.</li> </ul>

## 1.0 Background

1.1 In November, this Committee agreed to establish a Working Group to review the following documents:

- Council Arrangements for dealing with Code of Conduct Complaints
- Social Media Protocol for Members
- Member/Officer Protocol
- Member Development Plan

Committee also agreed some immediate updates to the Arrangements for Dealing with Code of Conduct Complaints which enabled an initial filtering of complaints to enable invalid complaints to be dealt with without going through consultation with the Independent Persons.

- 1.2 The Arrangements for Dealing with Complaints, Social Media Protocol and Member Development Plan documents were updated and/or created by officers and were considered by the Working Group at a meeting on 26<sup>th</sup> January 2026. The Member Officer Protocol is yet to be circulated to the Working group but will be reviewed prior to the next Committee meeting. The Working Group included Councillor Linda Dales (Chair), Councillor Penny Rainbow, Councillor Andy Freeman, Councillor Paul Peacock, Councillor Kay Smith and Councillor Jean Hall.

#### Arrangements for Dealing with Code of Conduct Complaints

- 1.3 This document (to be circulated after publication of the agenda) has been reviewed and several changes are recommended. In summary the changes proposed include the following:

- Further detail provided to complainants in terms of what a complaint should contain
- Explanation of the Independent Person's role
- Clarification on complaints referred to the Police and potential delays to investigation where there is police investigation ongoing
- Explanation that complaints may be delayed where capacity is an issue due to volume of complaints
- A clear split in process from initial filtering to check validity to initial assessment where a complaint is valid
- Clarity on investigation timescales
- Updates to reflect reporting of Subject Member details to Committee where there is a breach found.
- Reference to the fact that all parish and Town Council complaints will be provided to the clerk
- Overall grammatical and terminology changes to ensure consistency throughout the document

Overall, the proposed changes recommended, following significant input from the Working Group aim to provide a set of arrangements which are clear for complainants, subject members, the public and investigators. The changes have been made having regard to the Local Government Associations Guidance and in particular the additional information about the reporting of the outcome of complaints to Committee will ensure stronger oversight of complaints.

#### Social Media Protocol for Members

- 1.4 The current Social Media Protocol for Members forms part of the Council's constitution. Work to review this document began earlier in the Autumn in consultation with the Communications team. The Protocol has been essentially re-written and has been prepared having regard to the Local Government Association's Social Media Guidance which is written in a clear and concise way,

providing guidance and support for frequent and non-frequent users of social media. The updated Protocol is at Appendix 3.

- 1.5 The draft Protocol was considered by the Working Group on 26<sup>th</sup> January with some minor recommendations for changes given. In particular, further emphasis was requested on the fact that as a Councillor, even posting on a private Facebook account could be construed as someone “acting in capacity” as a Councillor if the post relates to Council business. Additional minor changes to terminology were also agreed.
- 1.6 The updated Social Media Protocol promotes the use of social media by Councillors as well as providing guidance on how to use social media safely, including advice on privacy settings and disclosure of personal information. The Protocol also covers the responsibilities of Councillors using social media and the higher level of scrutiny that such posts come under. The Protocol is clear that Councillors are responsible for content posted on their accounts and stresses the importance of accuracy in posting. The Protocol also references which sections of the Code of Conduct may be relevant when considering social media posts. Any final adoption of the Protocol would be for Full Councils as this document forms part of the Constitution.

#### Member Development Plan

- 1.7 Following the Peer Review in October 2024 one specific recommendation was to establish an ongoing Councillor Development Programme. The final Peer Review report acknowledged that the new cohort of Members elected in May 2023 received a sufficient induction programme, but ongoing training and development was needed. It was considered that an ongoing development plan would ensure that all Members were kept up to date with the many changes that are happening in local government and understand longer term budget pressures.
- 1.8 Officers have developed the Member Development Plan document at Appendix 2. The document pulls together existing training and development opportunities and outlines more formal support that will be offered to Members to enable them to fulfil their roles. It is important to note that whilst some training will be considered mandatory, for example Code of Conduct Training or specific training for Committees such as planning, the aim of the development plan is for Members to identify areas of training and development that would be beneficial to them through individual member development engagement with Democratic Services. The implementation of the plan would be overseen by this Committee.
- 1.9 The Working group considered the draft member Development Plan and were supportive of the document and recommended that be made clear that Democratic Services would be supporting Members in this process. It was considered by the Working Group to be a positive plan with the ability for members to positively engage in their own development. It was recommended by the group that clarity also be provided around the mandatory nature of Code of Conduct training.

## **2.0 Proposal /Options Considered**

- 2.1 It is proposed that Members note the work undertaken by the Working Group in reviewing the various protocols and procedures. The engagement from the group was key to ensure the documents were fit for purpose.
- 2.2 It is proposed that Members approve the updated Arrangements for Dealing with Code of Conduct Complaints at Appendix 1. The Committee could choose not to agree the updates or propose additional changes; however, the document has been developed in full consultation with officers and the Working Group and the amendments proposed are considered reasonable and necessary to ensure clarity around the process of handling Code of Conduct complaints.
- 2.3 It is proposed that Members approve the Member Development Plan at Appendix 2 to this report. The plan was recommended following peer review and has been reviewed by the Working Group. Again Members could determine not to adopt a plan and training would still be [provided, however the document is considered to provide a positive framework for member development.
- 2.4 It is proposed that Members recommend the Social Media Protocol for Members at Appendix 3 to Council for adoption. The Protocol has been developed with the Working Group and in line with the LGA Social media Guidance for Councillors. Members could determine not to recommend the document to Council as there is already a Social Media Protocol in place, however the document at Appendix 3 is recommended as an updated and easy to read protocol.

## **3.0 Implications**

In writing this report and in putting forward recommendations, officers have considered the following implications: Data Protection; Digital & Cyber Security; Equality & Diversity; Financial; Human Resources; Human Rights; Legal; Safeguarding & Sustainability and where appropriate they have made reference to these implications and added suitable expert comment where appropriate.

<b>Implications Considered</b>			
<b>Yes – relevant and included / NA – not applicable</b>			
Financial	NA	Equality & Diversity	Yes
Human Resources	NA	Human Rights	NA
Legal	Yes	Data Protection	Yes
Digital & Cyber Security	NA	Safeguarding	NA
Sustainability	NA	Crime & Disorder	NA
LGR	NA	Tenant Consultation	NA

### **3.1 Legal Implications LEG2526/5399**

The Localism Act requires Authorities to have appropriate arrangements in place for dealing with Code of Conduct complaints. Approval of these arrangements is within the remit of this committee. The Arrangements have been drafted to ensure ease of understanding and accessibility in the making of complaints. It also provides clarity around confidential information and what may be put in the public domain.

The Social Media Protocol for Members forms part of the Council's constitution and as such approval of Full Council is required for final adoption. This document provides guidance on data security and personal information in social media posts.

The Member Development Plan is a new document but falls under the remit of governance and supports the Committees function to ensure high standards for Member conduct.

### 3.2 Financial implications

There are no direct financial implications arising from the approval of these protocols. Budget for Member Training has already been agreed.

### **Background Papers and Published Documents**

Except for previously published documents, which will be available elsewhere, the documents listed here will be available for inspection in accordance with Section 100D of the Local Government Act 1972.

Appendix 1 – Updated Arrangements for dealing with code of Conduct Complaints (to follow)

Appendix 2 – Member Development Plan

Appendix 3 – Social Media Protocol