



Committee: COUNCIL BUSINESS COMMITTEE

Date: THURSDAY, 20 FEBRUARY 2025

Venue: MORECAMBE TOWN HALL

Time: 6.00 P.M.

A G E N D A

1. **Apologies for Absence**

2. **Minutes**

To receive as a correct record the Minutes of meeting held on 10 December, 2024 (previously circulated).

3. **Items of urgent business authorised by the Chair**

4. **Declarations of Interest**

To receive declarations by Councillors of interests in respect of items on this Agenda.

Councillors are reminded that, in accordance with the Localism Act 2011, they are required to declare any disclosable pecuniary interests which have not already been declared in the Council's Register of Interests. (It is a criminal offence not to declare a disclosable pecuniary interest either in the Register or at the meeting).

Whilst not a legal requirement, in accordance with Council Procedure Rule 9 and in the interests of clarity and transparency, Councillors should declare any disclosable pecuniary interests which they have already declared in the Register, at this point in the meeting.

In accordance with Part B Section 2 of the Code Of Conduct, Councillors are required to declare the existence and nature of any other interests as defined in paragraphs 8(1) or 9(2) of the Code of Conduct.

5. **Guidance on Personal Safety For Councillors** (Pages 3 - 12)

Report of the Corporate Health and Safety Manager.

6. **Updated Media Guidelines** (Pages 13 - 35)

Report of the Chief Officer – People and Policy.

7. **Invitation from the Mayor of Lublin** (Pages 36 - 38)

Report of the Senior Manager, Democratic Support and Elections.

Published 13 February 2025

8. **Councillor Training and Development** (Pages 39 - 45)

Report of the Senior Manager, Democratic Support and Elections.

9. **Consultation Response: Strengthening the Standards and Conduct Framework for Local Authorities in England** (Pages 46 - 63)

Report of the Senior Manager, Democratic Support and Elections.

ADMINISTRATIVE ARRANGEMENTS

(i) Membership

Councillors David Whitaker (Chair), Matthew Black (Vice-Chair), Suhir Abuhajar, John Livermore, Sarah McGowan, Jean Parr and Paul Stubbins

(ii) Substitute Membership

Councillors Prof Chris Harris (Substitute), Sally Maddocks (Substitute), Joyce Pritchard (Substitute) and Jason Wood (Substitute)

(iii) Queries regarding this Agenda

Please contact Phillip Abel, Democratic Support - email pabel@lancaster.gov.uk.

(iv) Changes to Membership, substitutions or apologies

Please contact Democratic Support, telephone 582000, or alternatively email democracy@lancaster.gov.uk.

MARK DAVIES,
CHIEF EXECUTIVE,
TOWN HALL,
DALTON SQUARE,
LANCASTER, LA1 1PJ

Published on 12 February 2025.

COUNCIL BUSINESS COMMITTEE**Guidance on Personal Safety for Councillors****Thursday 20th February 2025****Report of the Senior Corporate Health and Safety Manager****PURPOSE OF REPORT**

To enable the Committee to consider and approve a new Guidance Document.

This report is public.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- (1) That, following the Health and Safety Corporate Review, ongoing identification of key risk areas and consideration of the new draft health & safety policies and guidance documents by the Council, the Committee now consider and approve the new Guidance referred to in this report.

1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 Following the Health and Safety Corporate Review and appointment of the Senior Corporate Health and Safety Manager, there is an ongoing action to review renew or write new Health and Safety Policies and guidance documents to ensure they are up to date with current Legislation and to have sufficient Policy and or guidance for all areas of the Council.

- 1.2 As part of this the proposed following health and safety guidance is advised:

Personal Safety for Councillors Guidance

- 1.3 This new guidance document is presented to the Committee for their consideration.

2.0 Personal Safety for Councillors Guidance

- 2.1 This is a new corporate guidance document that has been developed following a corporate review of both Personal and Premise security. This is a framework project and has been initiated following internal employee customer facing conflict situations now being reported with trends analysed. It was identified in the infancy of the project that Councillors too, could be potentially at risk of experiencing such conflicting situations when undertaking Council duties.

The purpose of this guidance is to minimise the risk of future occurrences to support Lancaster City Councillors. This guidance document has been drafted for issue to Councillors to provide them with information on how to stay safe whilst undertaking council business. The guidance has been drafted in line with information readily available from the Local Government Association.

3.0 Options

3.1 The options available to the Committee are to approve the new and revised policies as drafted, to approve the policies with amendments, or not to approve the policies.

However, if substantial changes in respect of this Guidance are proposed at the Council Business Committee meeting, it may be appropriate for consideration of that Guidance to be deferred to a future meeting to enable Officers to consider the proposed amendment in more detail and to consult further.

4.0 Conclusions

4.1 Members are asked to consider and accept the Officer recommendations set out above in respect of the new drafted policy documents appended to this report.

RELATIONSHIP TO POLICY FRAMEWORK

The Council is committed to the health safety and welfare of all Councillors, employees and members of the community we support, and it is considered that the amended policies will raise the standard of the current health and safety practices across the organisation.

CONCLUSION OF IMPACT ASSESSMENT

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

As to be expected with any health and safety issue, future implications could occur, and these will be reported at the relevant time and any funding resources identified as appropriate.

SECTION 151 OFFICER'S COMMENTS

The s151 Officer has been consulted and has no further comments.

LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

The proposed new and updated policies will assist in compliance against the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974, the Management of Health and Safety Regulations 1999, The Reporting of Injuries, Disease and Dangerous Occurrence Regulations 2013 (RIDDOR). It also ensures that the Council is meeting its duty of care towards Councillors.

MONITORING OFFICER'S COMMENTS

The Monitoring Officer has been consulted and has no further comments to add.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

Guidance Document for Review

Contact Officer: Chelsie Gladstone

Telephone: 01524 582174

E-mail: cgladstone@lancaster.gov.uk

Guide to Personal Safety – For Local Councillors

The information that follows is personal safety advice aimed at individual councillors.



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Introduction

An important role of councillors is to keep in touch with their communities. This includes helping individuals with any problems they might have. Often this extends beyond just the delivery of council services. These contacts are usually rewarding and non-adversarial.

Councillors become adept at calming down and treating; with respect and sympathy, angry and frustrated residents who often contact their elected representative when they feel that they are getting nowhere in resolving their concerns through other channels.

Circumstances will vary and councillors will take their own decisions about how to conduct their duties as councillors while remaining easily accessible to their residents.

The purpose of this guide is not to make councillors nervous but to set out what personal safety measures can be taken to prevent and to deal with those rare circumstances when they might find themselves in situations where they become anxious for their safety.

In general terms, the guidance follows advice given to others who by virtue of public duties or employment meet many people whom they do not know.

Ward Surgeries

The arrangements each councillor makes will vary accordingly to local circumstances and it will be a fortunate councillor who can find premises for their surgery which meet every aspect of good practice and are also accessible to their constituents.

What follows are suggestions about how to make a surgery safe and effective – some apply wherever the surgery is held while others are good practice to be followed if the opportunity arises.

Most councillors will go through their entire time as an elected member without experiencing any problems. Giving a little time to preparation and planning can reduce the already small risk even further.

The basics:

- If possible do not hold surgeries alone in an otherwise empty building. Try to get someone to act as 'receptionist'. This not only makes you safer but makes it much easier to manage a busy surgery. If you are currently doing surgeries alone, arrange to discuss how this can be overcome with fellow councillors, in your ward or in your political group, other members of your local party or Democratic Support.
- If you cannot avoid doing surgeries on your own, make sure you remember a few simple guidelines. The layout of the room should suit you i.e. you should sit nearest to the door with the constituents seated on the other side of the table. Seating is best set out at an angle of 45 degrees (seating directly opposite can be confrontational).
- If there is no separate waiting room, try to ensure that the waiting constituents are as far as possible away from those whom you are talking to in order to provide some privacy.

- Make sure there are no heavy items in the room that could be used as weapons. If you are at the stage of looking for suitable premises in which to hold a surgery, try to get a space with as many of the following features as possible:
- Public buildings (for example a library, health centre, shopping centre) during opening hours or other premises where there are many other people about.
- Premises where the names of any visitors for councillors are recorded.
- Premises where there is a comfortable waiting area.
- The surgery (interviewing) room:
 - Is in view of the reception or public area.
 - Is connected to the reception by an alarm and there is a procedure for dealing with a call for assistance.
 - Has a vision panel in the door.
 - Is decorated in calming colours.
 - Has a swift means of escape and any visitors are not able to lock the door from the inside possibly trapping yourself inside with them.

Dealing with emotional constituents

It's inevitable that some of the people you will meet will be angry or upset.

You need to be prepared to handle all types of emotion.

Councillors must develop the quiet skill of being concerned about constituents' problems without being so involved that they become too emotional to be of help.

Calmness in the face of whatever comes up will help you and your constituents. You may find that racist, sexist, ageist or other offensive remarks are made. If they are directed at you – do not respond – this will only make the situation worse. Instead bring the interview to an end as quickly as possible.

If they are more general remarks, you should indicate that this is not acceptable and that you cannot continue the interview. Often this will elicit an apology. Otherwise ask the person to leave.

However, you must use your own judgement and if you are alone and in a vulnerable situation do not put yourself at risk no matter how angry the remarks make you.

Comprehensive training is available to help those who have to deal with aggressive and difficult people.

A wide range of advice is included in such training (e.g. dressing sensibly – not wearing anything around your neck (scarves etc.) that a person could get hold of.)

Please speak to Democratic Support to provide you with such training if you feel you would benefit.

Home and other site visits

Councillors sometimes wish to visit residents in their homes especially those who are elderly or disabled or where they simply want to see for themselves the conditions that may be the subject of a complaint.

It is for each councillor to decide whether a particular visit should be made, especially if the person to be visited is unknown to the councillor.

Most councillors trust their own instincts as to whether to meet someone alone.

Sometimes the councillor might prefer to be accompanied by a ward colleague or obtain an initial report from council officers or invite the person to a more public place.

It is always advisable for you to keep a record of your whereabouts. If necessary, you can let the person whom you are visiting know there is such a record or that you are expected at another place by a certain time etc.

Make a call on your mobile phone during the visit, or plan with a colleague to contact you at a specific time to check that you are okay. If you feel that you are vulnerable, then possibly use a code word to inform your colleague so that they can contact the emergency services or follow the procedure that has been mutually agreed.

Personal Callers

Most councillors seek to maintain a balance between their personal and public life and do not want to encourage any callers at their private homes.

Councillors occasionally get the odd nuisance or abusive call, although infrequently, they can become the target of a persistent anonymous caller, who may have a grudge against them, what they represent or the Council.

These calls need to be dealt with in accordance with police advice below:

- Keep the callers talking.
- Note any clues the caller may provide as to gender, accent etc.
- Listen for any clues as to the motive and intention of the caller.
- Write down the details immediately to assist police at a later stage.
- Listen for background noise which may provide valuable information (e.g. railway sounds industrial noises, machinery, music, animals).
- Inform the police.
- Inform the Monitoring Officer.

Mail/Parcels

As with telephone calls, councillors on rare occasions can become the target of a malicious anonymous letter.

Any such suspect letters should be given immediately to the police.

Caution needs to be taken with letters and parcels that maybe appear unusual or seem to contain unknown items/substances, if unsure seek advice from the police as to what action to take.

Car safety and parking

You need to take the same precautions as most car owners do:

- Consider whether an area will be dark and isolated when you return to your car, Park, where possible, under street lighting.
- Lock car doors as soon as you get into the car.
- Take boxes/bags to the car when other people are around.
- When parking, try to face the vehicle the way you would leave, this avoids unnecessary manoeuvring and losing precious time, if you need to make a quick escape.

Reporting Incidents

Any incidents of concern even if fairly minor or 'nearly happened' should be immediately reported to the Council's Monitoring Officer.

This enables the Authority to undertake proper monitoring and decide if any action needs to be taken to prevent a similar incident reoccurring.

You may also consider it advisable to warn ward colleagues, of an unsafe situation you have encountered so they are aware of the risk.

Training

Personal Safety training is covered in the induction training programme for new Councillors. The Democratic Support team is always your first point of contact for any training matters and refreshers training can be arranged on request. Any personal safety concerns can be raised with the team. Democratic Support aim is to support councillors in carrying out their work and staying safe.

The Local Government Association has resources available and their [Councillors' guide to handling harassment, abuse and intimidation](#) is particularly useful.

Using Social Media

Be careful what you put out on social media. It is unwise to post anything which will encourage anyone to rob your home by revealing a time when you will be away on holiday or out at an event. Knowing that your home may be empty is a temptation to burglars.

Stalking

Although very rare stalking can occur. This is a police matter, so report it to them and let the Monitoring Officer know immediately. Provide as much detail as possible such as time; date, location, description of person, any witnesses, and anything else that may be useful information for the police to follow up.

Animals

Be aware when entering a person's premise that if they have a dog, it is wise to ask them to put the animal in another room while you talk, especially if the person is emotional, dogs pick up on their owners' emotions and may react in a protective manner to their owner which may mean they will be aggressive to you.

Mobile phones, iPad/Tablets etc.

Be very aware of your surroundings whilst either on the phone or using ear plug listening devices.

Whilst absorbed on a phone conversation or listening to music, it is very easy to become oblivious to our surroundings.

This is when you are in danger from not being aware of what is happening around you.

There are people who take advantage of your distraction and use this opportunity to assault or rob you of your personal goods.

Public Transport

When using public transport be aware of people around you and make sure that you are not distracted.

If walking to a bus stop or station, always walk with confidence, and stay in areas with streetlights.

If you think you are being followed it may be useful to safely cross over the road or mingle into a group of people going in your direction.

If you still feel that you are in danger then contact someone you know on the phone and tell them your location, give a description of the person/s who you believe are following you and if necessary call the police and ask for assistance, its often possible for them to pick up the situation on CCTV.

Security

If you are unsure of your location, there is a free app called 'What3words' which when activated will give you 3 words and you can use them to inform emergency services of your location, these words are unique and can help them locate you quickly within a 2metre radius. The words change as you move around.

Election Time

When you are looking to canvass for elections, always think how this can be done safely. Those who are members of political groups will have their own personal safety guidelines for

this. Independent councillors will need to risk assess and consider how they can do this safely.

Reporting

Remember! In any event where you feel that your personal safety has been at risk, or you have felt at risk or intimidated, please notify the Monitoring Officer at your very earliest opportunity.

COUNCIL BUSINESS COMMITTEE**UPDATED MEDIA GUIDELINES
20th February 2025****Report of Chief Officer (People and Policy)****PURPOSE OF REPORT**

To present to the Committee the updated Media Guidelines, to replace the old version in the constitution.

This report is public.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- (1) That Council Business Committee approves the updated Media Guidelines Protocol for inclusion in the constitution.**

1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 The Media Guidelines form part of the council's constitution and supplement its Codes of Conduct. Amongst other matters they set out how the council manages its media relations, along with the principles for who is quoted in news releases and in response to enquiries. This ensures a consistent approach and provides officers working in the Communications Team with a clear and consistent framework to follow.
- 1.2 Although the current guidelines have had minor updates over the years as services and roles have changed, the last full review was in 2006. This was noted by the Local Government Association as part of a Communications Healthcheck.
- 1.3 Due to the length of time since the last full review, the opportunity has been taken to update the guidelines to ensure they consider changes to the media landscape over the years, particularly in relation to social media.

2.0 Proposal Details

- 2.1 It is good practice for policies and protocols to be reviewed from time to time to ensure they are up to date. As they form part of the constitution it is within the remit of the Council Business Committee to formally approve the updated version and Members are asked to endorse the proposed changes.

3.0 Details of Consultation

- 3.1 There has been no consultation. The guidelines have been updated to ensure they reflect the current position in relation to how the council manages its media relations

locally and any specific legislation or guidelines, such as the Code of Recommended Practice on Local Authority Publicity.

4.0 Conclusion

4.1 Council Business Committee’s terms of reference allow it to consider the guidelines and approve them to replace the current section in the Constitution. A revised draft is attached for comment and agreement.

<p>CONCLUSION OF IMPACT ASSESSMENT (including Health & Safety, Equality & Diversity, Human Rights, Community Safety, Sustainability and Rural Proofing):</p> <p>The revised guidelines are a local protocol and relate to how Lancaster City Council deals with the media. The proposed changes do not materially change how the council currently operates in this regard.</p>	
<p>LEGAL IMPLICATIONS</p> <p>There can be legal implications to the publication of material. The media guidelines ensure that the Council has adequate safeguards in place to ensure that publication is appropriate and compliant with its duties.</p>	
<p>FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS</p> <p>There are no direct financial implications arising from the report. The adherence to the guidelines will be met from within existing budgets and should the need for additional resources be required then this will be considered at the appropriate time.</p>	
<p>OTHER RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS, such as Human Resources, Information Services, Property, Open Spaces</p> <p>None. Minor</p>	
<p>SECTION 151 OFFICER’S COMMENTS</p> <p>The Section 151 Officer has been consulted and has no further comments.</p>	
<p>MONITORING OFFICER’S COMMENTS</p> <p>The Monitoring Officer will ensure that any agreed changes are incorporated into the Council’s published Constitution.</p>	
<p>BACKGROUND PAPERS</p> <p>Appendix (i) Current media guidelines Appendix (ii) Revised media guidelines for consideration by the Council Business Committee</p>	<p>Contact Officer: Michael Hill Telephone: 01524 582041 Email: mhill@lancaster.gov.uk</p>

Press and Media Guidelines

Aims and Objectives

1. The long-term aim of the Council's Communications Strategy is to build and maintain a positive reputation for Lancaster City Council in the eyes of the public, its Councillors and Officers as well as key partners in the public, private and voluntary sectors.

2. In order to achieve this aim a key area of our focus is on the local media.

3. Research carried out by MVA in the Lancaster District in 2002 found:

a. 71% of residents cited the local press as the main way in which they currently received information about the Council

b. 22% cited local radio.

4. When asked how they would like to receive information about the Council the local media was the most popular choice, followed closely by Council leaflets through the door and a Council newspaper

5. The media therefore plays a huge role in informing residents about what the Council does and how it spends their money. In return, it is important the City Council communicates effectively with this key provider of public information.

6. In doing so our objectives are to:-

a. enable the Council to be one which is open, accountable, accessible and which listens;

b. give information about the Council's policies and services and the democratic process so people feel more informed about the work of the Council;

c. build up the Council's role as community leader and advocate for the community;

d. handle negative issues clearly and decisively. Where we feel criticism of the Council is unfair we should use opportunities available to explain our case, either to the editors or to the readers/listeners. In cases where we are wrong we should hold our hands up and move the story forwards e.g. explain how we have already addressed the issues;

e. improve the Officers' view of the Council. Many Officers base their views of the Council on what they read in the paper. We recognise our staff can be our best ambassadors. Therefore, in addition to improvements in internal

communications, it is vital that all external communication regarding the Council bears this factor in mind.

7. Of course, this will require input on various fronts and ties in with the wider Communications Strategy as well as the Consultation Strategy.

8. This document sets out guidelines for:-

a. Dealing with media enquiries

b. Generating media interest

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c. Developing relationships with the local media

d. Managing negative issues

e. Monitoring and evaluating the media coverage of the Council

f. Providing media support to our partners

9. Co-ordinating Media Enquiries

1. The Council should ensure that local citizens are informed about the Council's policies, services and decisions. It must be open and transparent in its dealings with the press.

2. The Council receives approximately 1,200 enquiries from the media every year and issues approximately 500 press releases. It also organises dozens of press launches and photo opportunities. In order to co-ordinate and manage all of this activity it is important that it is all channelled through a central point, the Communications Office.

Media Enquiries – Officers

3. The Communications and Media Relations Manager and team will act as one-stop shop for all media enquiries. This will involve taking the enquiry, working with relevant Officers/Councillors to agree a response and then the Communications Team passing that response back to the relevant journalist.

4. Occasionally, the Communications Team will ask an Officer to talk directly with the media, for example to explain a technical issue or to give an in-depth background for a feature.

If you are approached for a comment by the media, other than on an occasion agreed with the Communications Team, please refer the journalist to the Communications and

Media Relations Manager.

Media Enquiries – Councillors

5. Where the journalist requires a quote from a politician, the Communications and Media Relations Manager will inform them of the appropriate Cabinet member/Overview and Scrutiny Committee Chair, Task Group Chairs or Committee Chairs.

2. Generating Media Interest

There are a number of ways of generating media interest – press releases, press launches, photo opportunities etc. The most commonly used form is the press release.

(A) Press Releases

1. In co-operation with the Communications and Media Relations Manager, Services should adopt a proactive approach to issuing service-specific press releases.
2. Press release writers should follow the Press Release Writing Guide available on the intranet.
3. Other than in exceptional circumstances all press releases should include just one quote (see below for guidance on who to quote).
4. Other than in exceptional circumstances all press releases should be emailed to the Communications and Media Relations Manager who will place them on the corporate template and issue them to the relevant media via the Newsflash Media Monitoring Lancaster City Council

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system. The Communications and Media Relations Manager will also place them on the website and intranet.

5. All press releases, and any other form of communication with the media, should be cleared with the Communications and Media Relations Manager and, if appropriate, relevant Cabinet members. In the case of matters relating to the Overview and Scrutiny Function, Planning, Licensing and the Standards Committee, they should be cleared with the Communications and Media Relations Manager and relevant Chair.

6. All media enquiries relating to that press release should be channelled through the Communications Office who will work with the appropriate Officer to put together an agreed response.

Press Releases Ahead of Cabinet/Committee/Council Consideration

7. The media "pick up" many stories from agendas and reports ahead of meetings. Whilst it would be inappropriate to offer a "comment" by the Council ahead of quasi judicial meetings, such as Licensing and Planning, it is appropriate for:

8. A Cabinet member who has submitted a report for the public part of a Cabinet meeting to issue a release or statement ahead of that meeting as long as it does not prejudice the decision.

9. For the Chairs of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, Budget and Performance Panel and Task Groups to issue a release or statement ahead of one of these meetings as long as it does not prejudice the decision.

10. However, these comments should be limited to providing information rather than anticipating an outcome or expressing a view as to a preferred outcome from the meeting.

11. It is also appropriate for Officers to issue a statement outlining a summary of a report. In this way reporters will be more likely to use the readily provided Council statement which provides a brief and accurate summary of a report or clarification of an issue.

12. Of course, there is no reason why a political group or political representative should not make a comment, should they wish to do so, which will not be on Council headed paper.

13. The Communications and Media Relations Manager and Senior Leadership Team will liaise before agendas and reports are issued to the media to discuss whether such an approach is required regarding specific items.

14. Press Releases following Cabinet/Overview and Scrutiny Committee/Task Group/Committee and Council Meetings.

15. When relevant, Chief Officers, appropriate Cabinet members, Chairs of Overview and Scrutiny Committee, Budget and Performance, Task Groups and Committees and the Communications and Media Relations Manager will liaise at the report deadline stage to discuss issuing positive press releases following a meeting. It is important that press releases are issued to the media as soon as possible after the conclusion of a meeting - not normally more than 24 hours after the conclusion of a meeting. (See below for who should act as spokesperson.).

Press Releases Requested by Councillors

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16. It is perfectly acceptable for a Cabinet member/Overview and Scrutiny Chair, Task Group Chair or Committee Chair to request an Officer to produce a press release relating to their role outlined above.

17. However, Officers should not produce press releases for Councillors on individual Ward or party political issues prejudging a decision of a properly constituted councillor meeting.

Logos

18. The City Council Logo forms part of the Press Release template and therefore all Council press releases carry the Council logo and crest. However, when issuing a press release with a partner it may be appropriate to create another press release template carrying both the Council logo and the logo(s) of the other partner(s) involved.

Equal Opportunities and Race Equality Policies

19. When drafting press releases or selecting photographs, all Officers should be mindful of the Council's Equal Opportunities and Race Equality Policies. Publicity should avoid stereotyping of roles and should demonstrate the Council's commitment to providing equality of services and opportunities to people of sex, any colour, sexuality, all races and people with disabilities. Advertisements and information about services should be circulated widely and, wherever necessary, communicated in appropriate community languages.

(B) Who should act as Official Spokesperson?

Technical/Factual Information

1. When providing information of a technical/factual nature (such as planning technicalities, new Benefits policies) on a topic yet to go to Cabinet/Overview and Scrutiny/Council/Committee of Council, which has been to one of the above or which does not go to any of them, it is appropriate to use an Officer.

Commenting on an Issue

2. Where a comment is required on a subject that has been to Cabinet/Overview and

Scrutiny/Task Group/Committee of Council/Council then the relevant Cabinet member, Overview and Scrutiny Chair/ Committee Chair, Task Group Chair or Council Chair will normally act as the Council's Spokesperson.

3. If the appropriate Councillor is not available/contactable for interview at the requested time it may be appropriate to use an Officer. In these circumstances Officers must clear this with the Communications Team before giving any interviews.

Partners

4. Where the Council is involved in issuing a press release as part of a partnership arrangement e.g. the Community Safety Partnership, the Partnership's arrangements for who to quote should be followed. This would normally be the Chair of that organisation. In the case of a press release being prepared on behalf of a number of partners it may be appropriate to offer each partner an opportunity to be quoted.

Political

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5. If it is necessary, from a factual point of view, for a press release to identify by name one or more of the political Groups on the Council, then either a spokesperson for that political group(s) should be provided with the opportunity to comment in the press release issued on behalf of the Council or no politicians should be quoted at all. Group Leaders contact details will normally be provided to the media on request and political groups will determine their own spokespersons.

(C) Media Events/Launches/Receptions

1. Anyone organising an event to which the media is to be invited should liaise with the Communications Team in the first instance, providing details of times, venues and who is being invited. This will ensure that no two events are taking place at the same time.

In this way the risk of spreading the media too thinly will be reduced and the opportunities of gaining positive publicity will be maximised. In addition it will ensure the Communications Team is fully up-to-speed in the event of any media enquiries.

2. Each occasion will require a different audience but, in general, one or more of a combination of the following would normally be invited: Cabinet member, Chair of the

Overview and Scrutiny Committee, Chair of the Regulatory Committees, Ward Councillor(s).

3. Guidelines to assist Officers setting up a media reception etc are available on the intranet. The Communications Team is also happy to help.

(D) Photo Opportunities

Creating Photo Opportunities

1. The general rule is that where photo opportunities arise the relevant Councillors are invited. Depending on the issue this could be one of a combination of the following: Cabinet member, Chair of Overview and Scrutiny Committee, Chair of the Regulatory Committees, Ward Councillor(s).
2. However, our goal is to achieve positive publicity for the Council as a whole and therefore some degree of flexibility is necessary in order to achieve that goal.
3. For example, photographic opportunities often arise at short notice. By needing to contact the relevant Councillors to arrange a time when all can be present, there are times when a photo opportunity and therefore positive publicity may be lost.
4. There are also times when it is appropriate to include Officers for photo opportunities (see examples below).
5. There are also times, depending on the story, when the photographer may wish to reduce or increase the number of people who would normally be invited to take part in a photo opportunity.
6. Anyone organising a photo opportunity should liaise with the Communications and Media Relations Manager to discuss how it should be handled.

Example a:

Photograph as a result of a Cabinet/Committee/Overview and Scrutiny/Regulatory Committee Meeting:

The appropriate Cabinet member/s and Overview and Scrutiny Chairs/Task Group/Regulatory Committee Chairs would normally be invited.

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Example b:

Large/high profile events e.g. Bus Station Launch, Millennium Bridge Launch etc.

Appropriate Cabinet, Overview and Scrutiny Chairs and Regulatory Committee Chairs and Ward Councillor(s) would normally be invited.

Example c:

Civic-related photo opportunities e.g. Council signing up to a charter/declaration/handing over a cheque/receiving a cheque etc. The Leader of the Council or appropriate Cabinet member and the Mayor or Deputy Mayor should be invited to act as representative of the Council.

Example d:

Quirky photo opportunity to highlight a Council story/not high profile issue e.g. Environment Co-ordinator distributing Local Agenda 21 Consultation by bike or launch of Town Hall Tours, Children's Festival – Officers and/or Leader of the Council or appropriate Cabinet member would normally be invited.

7. Details of any photo opportunities should also be cleared with the Communications and Media Relations Manager ahead of any invites being sent out to the media.

Taking Photos for the Media

8. On occasions, the media will not be able to turn up to a photo opportunity but will accept contributed photographs. For advice about taking photographs for the media please contact the Communications Office. Similarly, photographs should be submitted to the media via the Communications Office.

(E) Recording/Filming of Council Meetings

9. In accordance with Council Procedure Rule 24, the press and media will be allowed to film and record meetings of Council, Cabinet, Audit Committee, Council Business Committee, Overview and Scrutiny Committee and Budget and Performance Panel, which are open to the press and public, so long as notice is given in advance to the Communications and Media Relations Manager .

(F) Campaigns/Sustained Coverage of Topic

10. The relevant Chief Officer and the Communications and Media Relations Manager will liaise to discuss the potential for sustained coverage of topics e.g. Recycling, Regeneration etc.

11. By drawing up a media strategy/campaign on a particular topic the Council can pinpoint

what particular aspect it wants coverage of and more accurately time when it wants any coverage to appear in the media.

12. Such a campaign can be targeted generally at all/majority of the local media locally or it can be targeted at a specific newspaper/radio as a 'joint' Council/newspaper and/or radio campaign.

(G) Success Stories

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All Officers should play their part in keeping the Communications and Media Relations Manager up-to-date on success stories e.g. successful grant bid, completion of a project, employee development etc.

(H) Human Interest Stories

1. The media is always interested in 'human interest' stories. These might not relate specifically to Council issues but are nevertheless an important tool in building up a positive image of the Council, its Councillors and Officers and making them appear 'human' to those outside the Council.

2. Examples of human interest stories: Unusual hobbies of individuals, special achievement of an individual e.g. first woman refuse collector, member of staff marrying another member of staff, bizarre holiday location/experience, two sets of twins born to staff on same day etc.

3. Officers and Councillors should take the initiative to inform the Communications and Media Relations Manager of relevant stories.

(I) Mayoral Publicity

1. The Communications and Media Relations Manager and Democratic Support will work closely to encourage increased publicity for mayoral activities. This will include:

2. The continued publication of the Weekly Mayoral List.

3. A weekly press release highlighting the key events in greater detail - to be sent to all media.

4. Asking the Mayor to alert us to any unusual/interesting experiences/incidents/events he/she comes across in his/her duties.

5. Enabling the Mayor to become more "interactive" in terms of photo opportunities whilst always recognising the need to maintain and follow the Mayoral protocol.

3. Developing Relationships with the Media

1. The City Council's Communications Team is in contact with a vast array of media from local papers to national and international television stations. However, the main day-to-day contact is with the local media:

- a. Lancaster Guardian
- b. Morecambe Visitor
- c. Lancashire Evening Post
- d. Westmorland Gazette
- e. Beyond Radio instead and Lancs Live
- f. Radio Lancashire
- g. Granada Television
- h. BBC North West
- i. Virtual Net (local web based newspaper)

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2. The Council's relationships with the local media are generally good. Take up of press releases is high and the percentage of media requests for Council comments is, on the whole, good and improving. However, it is important to maintain and develop relations with the media and to be responsive to their changing needs.

i) Deadlines

If we want a chance of getting our side of the story included in the media it is imperative that we meet the deadlines we are given. Further information on the local media deadlines is available from the Communications Section of the Intranet, but a basic rule of thumb is that all Officers contacted by the Communications Team regarding a media enquiry should treat it as a priority.

ii) Media Briefings/Press Launches

When relevant, media briefings should be arranged, to brief the press on an issue of importance to the public e.g. new Licensing Regulations, Budget, etc. This will also

provide an opportunity for lead Officers and Councillors to build relations with the media. Officers organising a media briefing or press launch should liaise with the Communications and Media Relations Manager regarding the organisation of the event.

iii) Annual Media Survey

An annual survey of the local media will continue to be carried out to ascertain the media's views on the level of service the Council provides and to learn how they feel we could improve that service.

iv) Councillor Contacts

A Council 'contacts' list of the Leader of the Council, Cabinet members, Overview and Scrutiny Chairs and Committee Chairs will be prepared and circulated to the local media. Photographs of all Councillors will also be provided to the photography departments of the local media.

v) Media Awareness Training

In-house Media Awareness Training courses are provided to all interested staff (please contact Human Resources for more details). This helps to improve the overall quality of service provided by the Council to the media.

4. Managing Negative Issues

From time-to-time the Council has to respond to negative issues. It is important that we 'manage' these situations so as to limit the potential for negative publicity.

i) Alerting the Communications Team

a. When the Chief Officers become aware of a potentially damaging/negative issue they should immediately alert the Communications and Media Relations Manager .

b. Chief Officers and the Communications and Media Relations Manager should work together to prepare an appropriate position statement/response. Wherever possible this should be done ahead of a story breaking. The response can then be used, if the
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potentially damaging issue is to be used by the media. In order to ensure that the Council's position is outlined to Councillors, briefings on difficult issues should be

circulated to appropriate Councillors and staff.

ii) Developing Database of Briefing Material

A database with briefing material on a wide range of issues will continue to be developed to assist this process.

iii) Briefing the Media

On occasion it may be necessary to brief the media personally or to hold a press briefing to 'manage' a breaking story. The Communications and Media Relations Manager will take a decision on this in conjunction with other relevant Officers.

iv) Correcting Inaccurate Reporting

a. The Council should make every effort to correct inaccurate reporting of Council issues.

Discussion with the Communications and Media Relations Manager should take place in order to examine the most appropriate form of action e.g. personal contact, personal letter to the editor, open letter, legal advice.

b. Officers should act as spokesperson on any factual information and the relevant Cabinet member should act as spokesperson should a comment be required.

c. Officers need to respond quickly to requests for information from the Communications and Media Relations Manager to provide an accurate and full briefing of an inaccurate report.

v) When the Council gets it wrong

a. Occasionally the Council will get something wrong. In terms of damage limitation the best policy is generally to hold our hands up, apologise and draw a line under the episode by moving the story forward, outlining how we are going to/are already learning from error/how we are putting it right. This kind of situation should be handled in consultation with the Communications and Media Relations Manager.

vi) Leaked Items

a. Occasionally 'confidential' Council items are 'leaked' to the media.

b. The Council policy is that normally it does not comment on leaked or confidential items.

c. However, if an item which is not 'confidential', but which has yet to go into the official public forum e.g. Cabinet/Overview and Scrutiny/Council, is 'leaked' it may be appropriate for the Council to issue a comment. Each case will be judged individually.

d. In both scenarios the Communications and Marketing Team Leader should be made

aware and be involved in discussions on how to/whether to respond.

vii) Political Issues

There are occasions where an issue becomes 'political'. In these circumstances an official Council response will not be given but Political Groups can comment directly.

5. Monitoring and Evaluating

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1. The Communications Team will continually monitor the media perception of the Council using the aims and objectives set out under aims and objectives section and a media monitoring software system, Newsflash.
2. Reports of news coverage, how enquiries and releases have been used (positive, neutral or negative) will be circulated electronically to all Group Leaders, Group Administrators, Cabinet members/Overview and Scrutiny Chair and Committee Chairs, individual Councillors upon request, the Chief Executive and Chief Officers on a twice weekly basis.
3. A more comprehensive report evaluating media coverage will be produced annually.
4. Detailed monitoring reports, specific to a service or subject, can be provided on request.
5. Press releases will also be circulated to the above list via email regularly.
6. All press releases will continue to be posted on the Intranet and website as soon as they are issued.
7. Copies of all newspapers are available for viewing in the Communications Office. Cuttings of any national coverage or reports of any radio or television interviews should be passed to the Communications Office.
8. The Communications Office supports all Council related media issues. However, it is unable to support Officer requests for support for non-Council related press releases and media enquiries.

Media guidelines

People and Policy (Communications)
V2.0 XX 20XX



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1.0 Introduction – aims and objectives

The long-term aim of the council is to build and maintain a positive reputation for Lancaster City Council in the eyes of the public, its councillors and employees as well as key partners in the public, private and voluntary sectors.

The media, traditional and new, plays a huge role in informing residents about what the council does and how it spends their money. In return, it's important that the city council communicates effectively with these key providers of public information.

2.0 Local councils and publicity

Whatever methods we use to communicate, we are governed by provisions in the Local Government Acts 1972 & 1986 and the Code of Recommended Practice on Local Authority Publicity 2011. The code is based around seven principles to ensure all communications activity:

- Is lawful.
- Is cost effective.
- Is objective.
- Is even-handed.
- Is appropriate.
- Has regard to equality and diversity.
- Is issued with care during periods of heightened sensitivity.

[The latest code was published in March 2011.](#)

3.0 How we manage media relations

The council's relationship with the media, including online, is generally good, but it is important to maintain and develop our relations with the media and to be responsive to their changing needs.

There are a number of ways of generating media interest and publicising its services – press releases, press launches, photo opportunities etc.

The council runs a centralised 'press office' through the communications team.

This means:

- All media enquiries (including requests to film/photograph on council premises) to the council will be directed, at least in the first instance, to the Communications Team (councillors may be contacted by the media and respond directly)
- All news releases (information aimed at giving a news 'story' to the media) on behalf of the council will be issued through the Communications Team.

- All media statements (outlining the council's response to a particular issue) on behalf of the council will be issued through the Communications Team
- All media photocalls will be arranged through the Communications Team

However, every single member of staff within the council is responsible for ensuring the Communications Team is kept informed about services and projects, which could generate positive news stories, as well as about issues which may create adverse publicity.

3.1 Preparing press releases

Officers requiring communications support for their project should contact the Communications Team to discuss the most appropriate method and channel of communicating their announcement/news.

This may include the issuing of a news release or press statement, organising a press briefing, inviting the press to a council event, or placing an announcement on the homepage of the council's website,

It is also appropriate for officers to issue a statement/s outlining a summary of a report. In this way reporters will be more likely to use the readily provided council statement which provides a brief and accurate summary of a report or clarification of an issue.

However, officers should not produce press releases for councillors on individual ward or party political issues.

The Communications Team, department heads, and relevant officers will liaise before agendas and reports are issued to the media to discuss whether such an approach is required regarding specific items.

The media "pick up" many stories from agendas and reports ahead of meetings. Whilst it would be inappropriate to offer a "comment" by the council ahead of quasi judicial meetings, such as Licensing and Planning, it is appropriate for:

- A Cabinet member who has submitted a report for the public part of a Cabinet meeting to request a media release or statement ahead of that meeting
- For the chair of Overview and Scrutiny Committee, Budget and Performance Panel and Task Groups to request a media release or statement ahead of one of these meetings.

However, media releases should be limited to providing information rather than anticipating an outcome or expressing a view as to a preferred outcome from the meeting.

Such media releases will be of a factual nature and will contain nothing that could be construed as politically motivated or biased.

Final approval for news releases (after they have been written/edited) will be sought from the originator in most cases, or relevant SLT member where an issue is of a high

profile nature. Councillors will be asked to approve any quotes that are attributed to them.

The Communications Team will seek approval on the factual content of releases and articles. Matters of style, presentation, punctuation, grammar etc are the responsibility of the Communications Team.

3.2 Responding to media enquiries

The Communications Team act as a one-stop shop for **all** media enquiries received by the council. This involves taking the enquiry and working with relevant officers/councillors to agree a response which will be passed back to the relevant journalist.

Officers should immediately alert the Communications Team when they become aware of an issue that could potentially lead to a negative news item.

Senior Leadership Team, relevant councillors and the Communications Team, should work together to prepare an appropriate position statement/response. Wherever possible this should be done ahead of a story breaking. The response can then be used if the potentially damaging issue is to be used by the media.

Occasionally, the Communications Team will ask an officer to talk directly with the media, for example to explain a technical issue or to give an in-depth background for a feature.

If an officer is approached for a comment or request by the media, other than on an occasion agreed with the Communications Team, the journalist should be immediately referred to the Communications Team. Under no circumstances should individual officers respond to enquiries themselves.

To help maintain our relationship with the media, responding to media enquiries should be a top priority for all officers and councillors. The sooner a response is provided, the greater the likelihood of contributing to the media angle and ensuring the council's position is reflected.

The council's policy is to always comment on matters which are relevant to us, although there will be occasions when we are limited in what we can say, especially if there are legal proceedings underway.

3.2.1 Correcting inaccurate reporting

The council should make every effort to correct inaccurate reporting of council issues. Discussion with the Communications Team should take place in order to examine the most appropriate form of action e.g. personal contact, personal letter to the editor, open letter, legal advice.

3.2.2 – Leaked items

Occasionally 'confidential' council items are 'leaked' to the media. The council's policy is that it does not normally comment on leaked or confidential items. However, if an item which is not 'confidential', but which has yet to go into the official public forum e.g. Cabinet/ Council, is 'leaked' it may be appropriate for the council to issue a comment. Each case will be judged individually and on its merits.

In both scenarios the Communications Team should be made aware and be involved in discussions on how to/whether to respond.

3.2.3 Commenting on employment matters

As a matter of policy the council does not comment on issues affecting individual members of staff, including those relating to disciplinary matters.

3.3 Media briefings

When relevant, media briefings should be arranged, to brief the press on an issue of importance to the public eg new licensing regulations, budget, etc.

This will also provide an opportunity for lead officers and councillors to build relations with the media.

Officers wishing to organise a media briefing or press launch should liaise with the Communications Team.

3.4 Photocalls

Photocalls, like news releases, are used to promote the work of the council, publicise council decisions and highlight developments in services. The relevant portfolio holder or committee chair will be asked to attend.

If a photocall is specific to one ward (such as the opening of a new children's play area) the ward councillors may also be asked to attend.

4. Spokespeople

Nearly all press releases and responses to media enquiries should be attributed to a named person, rather than a council spokesperson, as this helps to promote transparency and accountability.

4.1 Who should act as spokesperson?

Highlighting the link between elected representatives and council decisions helps residents understand the decision-making process and increase local accountability.

Quotes in news releases, attendance at photocalls and interviews will usually be offered to the relevant cabinet member or committee chair in the first instance, particularly when the story relates to council policy, new initiatives or major issues or events.

In the absence of individual cabinet members, or for matters where the council as a whole needs to be represented, the leader of the council will act as official spokesperson.

For any issues relating to the council's civic function the official spokesperson will be the mayor.

If the appropriate councillor is not available/contactable for interview at the requested time, or during the pre-election period, an officer may be considered.

Any quotes/interviews conducted by officers should keep to the technical and factual details and refrain from straying into matters of policy.

4.2 Partners

Where the council is involved in issuing a press release as part of a partnership arrangement e.g. the Community Safety Partnership, the partnership's arrangements for who to quote should be followed. This would normally be the chair of that organisation. In the case of a press release being prepared on behalf of a number of partners it may be appropriate to offer each partner an opportunity to be quoted.

Unless in exceptional circumstances, it is expected that the city council will take the lead on any joint press releases where a project has involved a piece of council land or building.

For example, if a play area has been refurbished, the council would expect to take the lead on any publicity, involving other partners (such as Friends groups) as appropriate.

4.3 Political press releases

While the Communications Team supports all council related media activity, it is unable to advise on any matters related to party politics. All press releases or responses to media enquiries will therefore be factual and avoid any political bias.

If it is necessary, from a factual point of view, for a press release to identify by name one or more of the political groups on the council, then either a spokesperson for that political group(s) should be provided with the opportunity to comment in the press release issued on behalf of the council or no politicians should be quoted at all.

Group leaders' contact details will normally be provided to the media on request and political groups will determine their own spokespersons.

4.4 Commenting in the public domain

Officers and councillors should always be aware of the comments they make when attending public meetings, as these may be recorded by the public or media, attended by the media and legitimately quoted as *on the record*.

Comments made via social media can equally and legitimately be used by the media so special care should be taken.

5.0 Elections

Communications during the run-up to local elections is particularly sensitive and there are restrictions which cover the period from the day when formal notice of an election is given, up to and including the day of the election (the pre-election period).

The Monitoring Officer will provide detailed guidance prior to the start of each pre-election period.

6.0 Social media

The council has a number of social media channels available corporately, and officers wishing to make use of these channels should consult the Social Networking Protocol.

Councillors may have their own social media accounts to inform residents of news from their ward and discuss issues with constituents.

If a councillor creates an account in their capacity as a Cabinet member or committee chairman, the account should be limited to their role on the council and avoid the promotion of party politics.

The use of social media, including Twitter and Facebook, in council meetings is permitted by councillors as long as it does not disrupt meetings and councillors give the proceedings their full attention.

The use of social media by the press and public is permitted so long as the proceedings are not disrupted.

7.0 Filming enquiries

The council regularly provides assistance to film production companies interested in filming in the district. Any officers who are contacted by a company wishing to film in the district should direct the enquiry to the Communications Team.

7.1 Filming at council meetings

Rule 24 of the council's constitution outlines the position with regard to filming or audio recording of council meeting.

Whilst no prior permission is required, anyone wishing to film or audio-record a meeting is requested to contact the Communications Team in advance so that necessary arrangements can be made.

COUNCIL BUSINESS COMMITTEE**Invitation from the Mayor of Lublin****20 February 2025****Report of Senior Manager, Democratic Support
and Elections****PURPOSE OF REPORT**

For the Committee to consider a request from the Mayor of Lublin to host a visit from the Mayor of Lancaster.

This report is public.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- (1) The Committee notes that the Mayor of Lublin, Mr Krzysztof Żuk, has requested the Mayor of Lancaster to visit him.**
- (2) The Committee is asked to consider whether a visit is appropriate, to enable Democratic Support to respond to the Mayor of Lublin.**

1.0 Background

- 1.1 The Mayor has received a letter from the Mayor of Lublin inviting her to his city to talk about the two city's future partnership and to get to know Lublin. The letter is attached.
- 1.2 It should be noted that the Mayor of Lublin is an elected, decision-making Mayor, not a ceremonial Mayor. He was first elected Mayor in 2010 and has been in place ever since, being re-elected several times. Obviously this is a very different role to our Ceremonial Mayor which is non-political, is appointed by the Council itself and has a one year term of office.

2.0 Travel Abroad and Twinning Events

- 2.1 Any trip abroad which the Mayor makes should be funded by the Council and tickets for travel would normally be booked by Democratic Support. There is an expectation, when an invitation is made, that the host country will provide the accommodation, so there will be no cost to the Council for that element of the trip.
- 2.2 Democratic Support has contacted the Mayor of Lublin to find out how long the visit would last and what dates are being suggested and it is hoped that this information can be provided to Committee members before or at the meeting. Lublin is, of course, twinned with Lancaster, and whilst the City Council ceased most twinning events some

years ago when the twinning budget was abolished, the Council continues to send the Mayor to the Youth Games each year if they wish to go.

- 2.3 The current Mayor was invited to the Youth Games in Rendsberg last year, however due to illness, was unable to attend and missed out on the trip. She is now feeling well enough to go to Lublin as Mayor, should the Committee think this is appropriate.
- 2.4 The cost of flights for the Mayor and Consort would be £115 each. The Mayor has her own annual travel insurance policy in place, and there would be no cost to the Council for this element of the trip.

3.0 Conclusion

- 3.1 The Committee is asked to consider whether the Mayor should make an official visit to Lublin as per the invitation from the Mayor of Lublin.

LEGAL IMPLICATIONS None identified.	
FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS If the visit is approved, the cost of travel would be met from the existing budget for Civic and Mayoral events.	
OTHER RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS, such as Human Resources, Information Services, Property, Open Spaces None identified.	
SECTION 151 OFFICER'S COMMENTS The S151 Officer has been consulted and has no comment.	
MONITORING OFFICER'S COMMENTS The Monitoring Officer has been consulted and has no comment.	
BACKGROUND PAPERS	Contact Officer: Debbie Chambers Telephone: 01524 582057 Email: dchambers@lancaster.gov.uk

Krzysztof Żuk Mayor of Lublin



WM-PR.0340.2.2025

Lublin, 21 January 2025

**The Honourable
Councillor Abi Mills
Mayor of Lancaster
ENGLAND**

Dear Ms Mayor,

Last year we were celebrating 30th anniversary of signing the partnership between Lublin and Lancaster. It is one of the oldest partnerships of Lublin City. On that occasion our representatives visited beautiful and historic Lancaster having the occasion to meet you personally. I know you were talking about the past but also about what we can do together in the future. Despite the distance the cooperation between Poland and Great Britain starts developing on many levels. It shows that both sides have many things to offer each other.

We noticed that cooperation between Lublin and Lancaster, even though less robust in recent years, is still one of the most recognisable cooperation between cities in Poland and England.

I think that it is good moment to talk about our future. On that occasion I would like to invite you to Lublin personally. It would be a good moment not only to talk but also to get to know our magic city. The city which developed so much during last few years, which became inspiring and a leader in many fields.

I warmly invite you to Lublin at your earliest convenience. The person to contact is Mr Iwo Weremko from International Cooperation Center: iwo.weremko@lublin.eu

Waiting for your visit I am sending you best greetings.

COUNCIL BUSINESS COMMITTEE**Councillor Training and Development****20 February 2025****Report of Senior Manager, Democratic Support
and Elections****PURPOSE OF REPORT**

For the Committee to review the current arrangements for requesting training or conferences which require funding and to consider whether an annual strategy or policy document for Councillor Training and Development should be re-introduced.

This report is public.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- (1) The Committee notes the current arrangements for requesting funding for training or conferences, set out in paragraph 1.1 below, which were last reviewed in 2019.**
- (2) The Committee is asked to**
 - (a) Review the arrangements in light of information in this report;**
 - (b) Consider whether an annual strategy or policy document for Councillor Training and Development should be re-introduced and, if so, what format that might take.**

1.0 Background

- 1.1 During the recent LGA Peer Review, Member Development was identified as an area for action, to “Invest further in member development to support Councillors (particularly new members) in their Council and community leadership roles.” A number of actions have been agreed to support improvement in this area. In the Member Satisfaction survey last year the following topics were identified for training: Community Leadership, Questioning, Negotiating and Chairing skills as well as IT. Those areas will be prioritised over the coming months, as well as providing diversity training, which was specifically requested some time ago. Finding a provider for the diversity content requested has proved challenging, however Democratic Support hope be able to arrange a session in the next couple of months. Members have already been invited to drop into a laptop training day at Lancaster Town Hall on 19th March 2025.

- 1.2 As part of the overall review of Member Development, the Committee is asked to look again at the criteria for accessing funding for courses and consider whether an overarching strategy is required going forward.

2.0 Current Arrangements – Requesting Funding for Training and Development

- 2.1 The current arrangements for accessing funding for training and development were agreed by this committee in October 2019. These are as follows:

- i. There are two tier levels of amounts that can be spent on events (depending on role) of up to £500 for Chairs of Committees or Cabinet members, and up to £300 for all other Members;
- ii. A Training Request form (**Appendix A**) has to be filled in by any Councillor wishing to attend a course/event/conference, and their application has to be forwarded via their group leader (if they have one) to Democratic Support;
- iii. After a Councillor has been to their event, they should complete an evaluation form (**Appendix B**) to say what benefits to the Council / taxpayers have been achieved by their attendance at the course / conference.

2.0 Current Arrangements – Councillor Training and Development Strategy

- 2.1 The City Council used to produce a Member Development Strategy which was refreshed every year. As Members are aware, the terms of reference for this Committee include “to manage issues relating to Councillors, including monitoring training and development undertaken”. As such the Strategy was developed and endorsed by this Committee each year.

- 2.2 The Strategy had been a necessary part of a process followed in 2008 to apply for the North West Employers’ (NWE) Member Development Charter. Details of the Charter can be found on this link: [North West Charter for Elected Member Development - NW Employers](#) Leading up to the award a small group of Councillors on this Committee, who were all very committed to getting the Charter award for the Council and keeping it, worked hard to fulfil the requirements for the award. They each championed Member Development with their political groups to keep attendance at training events as high as possible. At that point, political groups always appointed their group administrators to sit on this Committee in. That custom no longer seems to be in place. Groups now appoint any member(s) they choose.

- 2.3 The core group of Councillors who had championed Member Development retired one by one over the years and the strength of the lead on Member Development diminished through a number of factors; the focus on making savings and cuts in Member Development budget, lower attendance at training and reduction in staffing in Democratic Support being some of those factors. The number of meetings of this Committee was halved from six to three per year following the 2015 elections, too.

- 2.4 The last strategy to come to this Committee was for 2014/15. This is available to view in the Council’s online agenda/minutes [Agenda for Council Business Committee on Thursday, 26th June 2014, 6.00 p.m.](#)

- 2.5 In summary, the City Council no longer has a strategic document in place for Member Development.

3.0 Consultation with Councillors

- 3.1 On 27 November 2024, the Senior Manager, Democratic Support and Elections emailed all Councillors to consult on the arrangements for accessing funding. Only one

response was received to the email, from Councillor Maddocks. The lack of response could be for a variety of reasons. It could indicate that Councillors are happy with the current arrangements and have nothing to add, or perhaps that this topic is not at the forefront of their priorities at this time. It could be that Councillors have fed their views, via their groups, to the Members of this committee to put forward at the meeting.

- 3.2 The response which was received suggested that a Councillor Development Policy, with aims and objectives connected to the Council Plan be developed and adopted.

4.0 Options for Consideration - Requesting Funding for Training and Development

- 4.1 The Committee may set any parameters it chooses regarding accessing funding, from the very loosest 'first come, first served' approach, to a cap on amounts and a procedure for applying, similar to the current arrangements. A simple rule that no member should be able to receive more than a set % of the year's total budget could also be put in place. There are many options which could be put forward. The Senior Manager, Democratic Support and Elections will be in attendance at the meeting to discuss practical application of any proposals which are suggested.

- 4.2 For information, the amount Council agreed in the budget for Member Development for 2024/25 was £6,500, which is more than adequate since very few requests for to access the training budget are made. As the Committee will be aware, Democratic Support often offer free to attend, or low cost training courses provided by NWE, the Local Government Association and other providers. These are largely virtual or remote training events on Teams or Zoom. As Members sign up for these free courses themselves, Democratic Support do not always have numbers for take-up of these courses although it should be noted that even though the courses are free or very low cost to attend, many do state that they will still charge a fee for Councillors registering who fail to attend, unless they cancel their place in advance. Democratic Support are aware that last September several Councillors registered for a short Media Training course provided by NWE but failed to attend, which is concerning. The Council paid £495 for nine Councillors to attend (£55 per place) but understand that only four did attend.

5.0 Options for Consideration – Councillor Training and Development Strategy

- 5.1 The Committee is asked whether it would like to develop a policy or strategy for Councillor Training and Development, similar to the one suggested by Councillor Maddocks and the Member Development Strategy which was produced from 2008-2015. Officers could share documents from other Councils with the Committee to allow you, as Councillors, to develop your own training strategy over email, to ensure that it is entirely Member-led, in line with best practice and the NWE Charter. This will entail some work for Committee Members over email outside the meeting. If a draft can be produced that could be brought to the next meeting of the Committee for consideration. Any such strategy could be for 2025/26 or until May 2027 when the next elections are scheduled.

6.0 Conclusion

- 6.1 The Committee is asked to discuss and make decisions regarding
- the arrangements for requesting funding for training and conferences; and
 - whether the Committee wishes to develop a policy or strategy for Councillor Training linked to the Council Plan.

LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

None identified.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

Councillor Training will be met from within the existing budgets.

OTHER RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS, such as Human Resources, Information Services, Property, Open Spaces

None identified.

SECTION 151 OFFICER'S COMMENTS

The S151 Officer has been consulted and has no comment.

MONITORING OFFICER'S COMMENTS

The Monitoring Officer has been consulted and has no comment.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

Contact Officer: Debbie Chambers
Telephone: 01524 582057
Email: dchambers@lancaster.gov.uk



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**Councillor Training and Development
Request Form**

(to be forwarded via Group Leaders to Democratic
Support
email: democracy@lancaster.gov.uk)



1. COUNCILLOR INFORMATION

Name: _____ Group: _____

2. COURSE INFORMATION

Name of Course: _____

Offered by: _____ Delivery Location: _____

Date of Course (if known) _____

Brief summary of course content INCLUDING COST (or provide link to online details):

3. WHAT I HOPE TO GAIN BY ATTENDING THIS COURSE:

What skills, knowledge or abilities do you hope to gain or improve by attending this event? How will it benefit you, or your constituents? Continue overleaf if necessary.

Signed: _____ Date: _____

4. GROUP LEADER'S COMMENTS:

Signed: _____ Date: _____

For Completion by Senior Manager, Democratic Services
BUDGET APPROVED/NOT APPROVED and COUNCILLOR INFORMED

Signed: _____ Date: _____



CONFERENCE/SEMINAR MONITORING AND EVALUATION FORM



COUNCILLORS

This overview will be submitted to the next meeting of the Council Business Committee.

Conference Title	
Councillor's Name	
Date	

1. Were the objectives of the event met?

Please comment and provide details of the objectives (as set out in the event literature) and how they were met, or not met and why. If they were exceeded, met, partially met or unmet.

2. Benefits to you and the Council

**Please comment on how you feel the event benefitted you as a community representative/leader and decision-maker.*

3. The time allocated for the event was (please tick box):

Too much*	<input type="checkbox"/>
Sufficient	<input type="checkbox"/>
Too little*	<input type="checkbox"/>

**Please comment and provide details of how the duration of the event could be improved.*

4. Please rate the relevance of the event (please tick box):

	Excellent	Good	Average	Poor
Relevance of the event	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

5. Please give your feedback on the event, particularly whether you think it provided value for money and any matters that would be of interest to fellow Councillors.

6. Will you be sharing the course materials and what you have learnt with other Councillors (please tick box)?

Yes	
No	

7. Would you recommend this event to other Councillors (please tick box)?

Yes	
No	

8. Please set out any additional comments you may have about the event in the space below.

Thank you for completing this Monitoring and Evaluation Form

Completed forms should be returned to Democratic Support, Town Hall, Lancaster, LA1 1PJ
(email: democracy@lancaster.gov.uk), as soon as possible.

COUNCIL BUSINESS COMMITTEE**Consultation Response: Strengthening the Standards and Conduct Framework for Local Authorities in England****20 February 2025****Report of Senior Manager, Democratic Support and Elections****PURPOSE OF REPORT**

For the Committee to consider responding to the Government consultation on Strengthening the Standards and Conduct Framework for Local Authorities in England published on 18 December 2024.

This report is public.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- (1) The Committee notes that:
 - (a) the Government is consulting on Strengthening the Standards and Conduct Framework for Local Authorities in England, with a deadline date for responses of 26 February 2025;
 - (b) individual Councillors, political groups, council officers and members of the public may make their own responses.

- (2) The Committee is asked to:
 - (a) Consider making a response to the online consultation on behalf of the City Council, working through the consultation questions reproduced at Appendix A of this report during the meeting;
 - (b) That, if agreement on a response cannot be reached at the meeting tonight, the response be agreed by email, following the meeting.

1.0 Consultation

- 1.1 On 18 December 2024, the Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government opened their consultation on Strengthening the Standards and Conduct Framework for Local Authorities in England. The closing date for this consultation is the 26th of February, hence this meeting has been brought forward to allow the Committee time to make a response. The consultation page can be accessed [here](#)

1.2 Measures to ensure consistency of approach amongst councils investigating serious breaches of their member codes of conduct, including the introduction of the power of suspension are being consulted on. A link to the consultation was emailed to all Councillors by Democratic Support when the consultation was released, to allow Members to make individual or group responses if they so wish.

2.0 Draft Response

2.1 As the consultation is online, the appendix reproduces the 40 questions and the choices that are offered online for the Committee to work through at the meeting with the Senior Manager, Democratic Support and Elections.

3.0 Conclusion

3.1 The Committee is requested to consider making a response to the consultation. The questions are appended to the report for the Committee to go through.

3.2 If the Committee needs more time following the meeting to formulate a response, this can be done via email following the meeting, should the Committee resolve to do so.

LEGAL IMPLICATIONS	
As this is simply a response to a consultation, no legal implications have been identified.	
FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS	
As above.	
OTHER RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS, such as Human Resources, Information Services, Property, Open Spaces	
None identified.	
SECTION 151 OFFICER'S COMMENTS	
The S151 Officer has been consulted and has no comment.	
MONITORING OFFICER'S COMMENTS	
The Monitoring Officer has been consulted and has no comment.	
BACKGROUND PAPERS	Contact Officer: Debbie Chambers Telephone: 01524 582057 Email: dchambers@lancaster.gov.uk
<u>Strengthening the standards and conduct framework for local authorities in England - Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government - Citizen Space</u>	

1. In what capacity are you responding to this consultation?

- An elected member of a council body
- A council officer
- A council body
- A member of the public
- A local government sector body

Mandatory minimum prescribed code of conduct

The government proposes to legislate for the introduction of a mandatory minimum code of conduct which would seek to ensure a higher minimum standard of consistency in setting out the behaviours expected of elected members. The Government will likely set out the mandatory code in regulations to allow flexibility to review and amend in future, this will also provide the opportunity for further consultation on the detail.

Codes of conduct play an important role in prescribing and maintaining high standards of public service, integrity, transparency, and accountability. At their best, they establish clear guidelines for behaviour and expectations that members always act ethically in the public's best interest. Currently, there is significant variation between adopted codes, ranging from those who choose to adopt the LGA's full model code to those who simply conform with the minimum requirement of restating the Nolan principles.

A prescribed model code which covers important issues such as discrimination, bullying, and harassment, social media use, public conduct when claiming to represent the council, and use of authority resources could help to uphold consistently high standards of public service in councils across the country and convey the privileged position of public office. It could also provide clarity for the public on the consistent baseline of ethical behaviour they have a right to expect.

We would be interested in understanding whether councils consider there should be flexibility to add to the prescribed code to reflect individual authorities' circumstances. They would not be able to amend the mandatory provisions.

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?

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

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

Standards Committees

Currently, there is no requirement for local authorities to constitute a formal standards committee. The only legal requirement is for local authorities to have in place “arrangements” to investigate and make decisions on allegations of misconduct.

The Government believes that all principal authorities should be required to convene a standards committee. Formal standards committees would support consistency in the handling of misconduct allegations, applying the same standards and procedures to all cases and providing a formal route to swiftly identify and address vexatious complainants. Furthermore, having a formal standards committee in place could support the development of expertise in handling allegations of misconduct, leading to more informed decision-making. Removing the scope for less formal and more ad hoc arrangements would also enhance transparency and demonstrate to the public that standards and conduct issues will always be dealt with in a structured and consistent way.

This section of the consultation seeks views on two specific proposals to enhance the fairness and objectivity of the standards committee process. Firstly, it considers whether standards committee membership would be required to include at least one Independent Person, as well as (where applicable) at least one co-opted member from a parish or town council. Secondly, it seeks views on whether standards committees should be chaired by the Independent Person.

5. Does your local authority currently maintain a standards committee?

- Yes
- No

Add any further comments

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

- Yes
- No
- Add any further comments

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.

7. 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

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

9. Should standards committees be chaired by the Independent Person?

- Yes
- No
- Unsure

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

Publishing investigation outcomes

To enhance transparency, local authorities should, subject to data protection obligations, be required to publish a summary of code of conduct allegations, and any investigations and decisions. This will be accompanied with strong mechanisms to protect victims' identity to ensure complainants are not dissuaded from coming forward for fear of being identified.

There may be a range of views on this, as publishing the outcome of an investigation that proves there is no case to answer could still be considered damaging to the reputation of the individuals concerned, or it could be considered as helpful in exposing instances of petty and vexatious complaints.

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 (add your comments)

Requiring the completion of investigations if a member stands down

In circumstances where a member stands down during a live code of conduct investigation, councils should be required to conclude that investigation and publish the findings. The Government is proposing this measure to ensure that, whilst the member in question will no longer be in office and therefore subject to any council sanction, for the purposes of accountability and transparency there will still be full record of any code of conduct breaches during their term of office.

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

Empowering individuals affected by councillor misconduct to come forward

The Government appreciates that it can often be difficult for those who experience misconduct on the part of elected members, such as bullying and harassment, to feel that it is safe and worthwhile to come forward and raise their concerns. If individuals believe there is a likelihood that their complaint will not be addressed or handled appropriately, the risk is that victims will not feel empowered to come forward, meaning misconduct continues without action. We recognise that standing up to instances of misconduct takes an emotional toll, particularly in unacceptable situations where the complaints processes are protracted and do not result in meaningful action. We are committed to ensuring that those affected by misconduct are supported in the right way and feel empowered to come forward.

This section seeks feedback from local authorities with experience of overseeing council complaints procedures, or sector bodies and individuals with views on how this might be carried out most effectively. We are also keen to hear from those who work, or have worked, in local government, and who have either witnessed, or been the victim of, member misconduct.

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?

Number of complaints

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
- Complaints made by other elected members
- Complaints made by the public
- Complaints made by any other source

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?

- Yes
- No

Please give reasons if you feel comfortable doing so.

15. If you are an elected member, have you ever been subject to a code of conduct complaint?

- Yes
- No

If so, did you feel you received appropriate support to engage with the investigation?

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?

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?

Introducing the power of suspension with related safeguards

The Government believes that local authorities should have the power to suspend councillors for serious code of conduct breaches for a maximum of six months, with the option to withhold allowances and institute premises and facilities bans where deemed appropriate. This section of the consultation explores these proposed

provisions in greater detail.

While the law disqualifies certain people from being, or standing for election as, a councillor (e.g. on the grounds of bankruptcy, or receipt of a custodial sentence of three months or more, or it subject to the notification requirements of the Sexual Offences Act 2003 - meaning on the sex offenders register) councillors cannot currently be suspended or disqualified for breaching their code of conduct.

Feedback from the local government sector in the years since the removal of the power to suspend councillors has indicated that the current lack of meaningful sanctions means local authorities have no effective way of dealing with more serious examples of member misconduct.

The most severe sanctions currently used, such as formally censuring members, removing them from committees or representative roles, and requiring them to undergo training, may prove ineffective in the cases of more serious and disruptive misconduct. This may particularly be the case when it comes to tackling repeat offenders.

The Government recognises that it is only a small minority of members who behave badly, but the misconduct of this small minority can have a disproportionately negative impact on the smooth running of councils. We also appreciate the frustration members of the public and councillors can feel both in the inability to deal decisively with cases of misconduct, and the fact that offending members can continue to draw allowances.

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

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

Add your comments

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

The length of suspension

The Committee on Standards in Public Life recommended in their 2019 Local Government Ethical Standards (CSPL) report that the maximum length of suspension, without allowances, should be six months and the Government agrees with this approach. The intent of this proposal would be that non-attendance at council meetings during a period of suspension would be disregarded for the purposes of section 85 of the Local Government Act 1972, which states that a councillor ceases to be a member of the local authority if they fail to attend council meetings for six consecutive months.

The Government believes that suspension for the full six months should be reserved for only the most serious breaches of the code of conduct, and considers that there should be no minimum length of suspension to facilitate the proportionate application of this strengthened sanction.

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 (please specify)
- No – I do not think the government should set a maximum length of suspension
- Unsure

If you think the government should set a different maximum length, what should this be, in months?

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

Withholding allowances and premises and facilities bans

Giving councils the discretion to withhold allowances from members who have been suspended for serious code of conduct breaches in cases where they feel it is appropriate to do so could act as a further deterrent against unethical behaviour. Holding councillors financially accountable during suspensions also reflects a commitment to ethical governance, the highest standards of public service, and value for money for local residents.

Granting local authorities the power in legislation to ban suspended councillors from local authority premises and from using council equipment and facilities could be beneficial in cases of behavioural or financial misconduct, ensuring that suspended councillors do not misuse resources or continue egregious behaviour. Additionally, it would demonstrate that allegations of serious misconduct are handled appropriately, preserving trust in public service and responsible stewardship of public assets. These measures may not always be appropriate and should not be tied to the sanction of suspension by default. The government also recognises that there may be instances in which one or both of these sanctions is appropriate but suspension is not. It is therefore proposed that both the power to withhold allowances and premises and facilities bans represent standalone sanctions in their own right.

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

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

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

Interim suspension

Some investigations into serious code of conduct breaches may be complex and take time to conclude, and there may be circumstances when the misconduct that has led to the allegation is subsequently referred to the police to investigate. In such cases, the Government proposes that there should be an additional power to impose

interim suspensions whilst and until a serious or complex case under investigation is resolved.

A member subject to an interim suspension would not be permitted to participate in any council business or meetings, with an option to include a premises and facilities ban.

We consider that members should continue to receive allowances whilst on interim suspension and until an investigation proves beyond doubt that a serious code of conduct breach has occurred or a criminal investigation concludes. The decision to impose an interim suspension would not represent a pre-judgement of the validity of an allegation.

We suggest that:

- Interim suspensions should initially be for up to a maximum of three months. After the expiry of an initial interim suspension period, the relevant council's standards committee should review the case to decide whether it is in the public interest to extend.
- As appropriate, the period of time spent on interim suspension may be deducted from the period of suspension a standards committee imposes.

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

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

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

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

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

30a. If you answered yes to above question, what safeguards do you think might be needed to ensure that unlimited suspension is not misused?

Disqualification for multiple breaches and gross misconduct

When councillors repeatedly breach codes of conduct, it undermines the integrity of the council and erodes public confidence. To curb the risk of repeat offending and continued misconduct once councillors return from a suspension, the Government considers that it may be beneficial to introduce disqualification for a period of five years for those members for whom the sanction of suspension is invoked on more than one occasion within a five-year period.

This measure underlines the Government's view that the sanction of suspension should only be used in the most serious code of conduct breaches, because in effect a decision to suspend more than once in a five-year period would be a decision to disqualify an elected member. However, we consider this measure would enable councils to signal in the strongest terms that repeated instances of misconduct will not be tolerated and would act as a strong deterrent against the worst kind of behaviours becoming embedded.

Currently a person is disqualified if they have been convicted of any offence and have received a sentence of imprisonment (suspended or not) for a period of three months or more (without the option of a fine) in the five-year period before the relevant election. Disqualification also covers sexual offences, even if they do not result in a custodial or suspended sentence.

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 (please specify)
- No - the power to suspend members whenever they breach codes of conduct is sufficient

If you think councillors should be disqualified if subject to suspension more than once over a period different to 5 years, what should this be, in years?

If you think the government should set a different disqualification period, what should this be, in years?

Any other comments

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

Any other comments

Appeals

The Government proposes that:

- A right of appeal be introduced for any member subject to a decision to suspend them.
- Members should only be able to appeal any given decision to suspend them once.
- An appeal should be invoked within five working days of the notification of suspension; and
- Following receipt of a request for appeal, arrangements should be made to conduct the appeal hearing within 28 working days.

The Government believes that were the sanction of suspension to be introduced (and potentially disqualification if a decision to suspend occurs a second time within a five-year period) it would be essential for such a punitive measure to be underpinned by a fair appeals process.

A right of appeal would allow members to challenge decisions that they believe are unjust or disproportionate and provides a safeguard to ensure that the sanction of suspension is applied fairly and consistently.

We consider that it would be appropriate to either create a national body, or to vest the appeals function in an existing appropriate national body, and views on the merits of that are sought at questions 38 and 39 below. Firstly, the following questions test opinion on the principle of providing a mechanism for appeal.

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

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 (please specify)
- No – there should be no time limit for appealing a decision

If you think the government should set a different appeals timeframe, what should this be, in days?

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

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

- Yes
- No
- Unsure

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.

Potential for a national appeals body

There is a need to consider whether appeals panels should be in-house within local

authorities, or whether it is right that this responsibility sits with an independent national body. Whereas an in-house appeals process would potentially enable quicker resolutions by virtue of a smaller caseload, empowering a national body to oversee appeals from suspended members and complainants could reinforce transparency and impartiality and help to ensure consistency of decision-making throughout England, setting precedents for the types of cases that are heard.

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

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

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