

 <b>Brent</b>	<b>Audit and Standards Advisory Committee</b> 24 March 2026
	<b>Report from Director of Law – Monitoring Officer</b>
	<b>Lead Member – Deputy Leader &amp; Cabinet Member for Finance &amp; Resources</b> <b>(Councillor Mili Patel)</b>
<b>Annual Standards and Governance Report for 2025 (including quarterly updates on gifts and hospitality)</b>	

<b>Wards Affected:</b>	All
<b>Key or Non-Key Decision:</b>	Not applicable
<b>Open or Part/Fully Exempt:</b> <small>(If exempt, please highlight relevant paragraph of Part 1, Schedule 12A of 1972 Local Government Act)</small>	Open
<b>No. of Appendices:</b>	Two Appendix A - Summary Members' Code of Conduct complaints received in 2025 Appendix B - Gifts and hospitality register for Q3 and Q4
<b>Background Papers:</b>	None
<b>Contact Officer(s):</b> <small>(Name, Title, Contact Details)</small>	Marsha Henry Director of Law 020 8937 4078 <a href="mailto:marsha.henry@brent.gov.uk">marsha.henry@brent.gov.uk</a>

## 1.0 Executive Summary

1.1 This is the Monitoring Officer's Annual Report to the Audit and Standards Advisory Committee (ASAC) for 2025. It provides an update on Member conduct issues and the work of the Audit and Standards Advisory Committee, the Audit and Standards Committee (ASC) and the Monitoring Officer during 2025; together with the quarterly reports on gifts and hospitality registered by Members.

1.2 The report also recommends an amendment to the Members' Code of Conduct Complaints Procedure.

## 2.0 Recommendations

- 2.1 That the Committee note the contents of the report.
- 2.2 That the Committee recommend to the Audit and Standards Committee that the normal deadline for carrying out an initial assessment under the Members' Code of Conduct Complaints Procedure be extended to 15 working days.

### **3.0 Detail**

#### Contribution to Borough Plan Priorities & Strategic Context

- 3.1. The reviewing and maintenance of high standards of member conduct supports the delivery of the borough plan by promoting confidence in the operation and good governance of the council.

#### Committee's Work during 2025

- 3.2 The ASAC met on seven occasions during 2025 six of which discussed standards related matters as follows:
  - (a) On 04.02.25 the Committee considered the Monitoring Officer's Annual Report on Code of Conduct Complaints and the Complaints Procedure. The report also advised members of the Government's consultation on potential changes to the current Standards regime.
  - (b) On 24.02.25 the Committee discussed and agreed the Council's response to the Government's consultation on potential changes to the current Standards regime.
  - (c) On 25.03.25 the Committee considered the Annual Report on Standards from the Monitoring Officer providing an update on Member conduct issues along with the quarterly update on gifts and hospitality registered by Members.

The Committee also considered the annual review of the Member Learning & Development Programme (including Member Expenses and the financial and procedural rules for governing the Mayors Charity) along with the Council's use and conduct of surveillance techniques in accordance with the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act (RIPA) 2000.

- (d) On 16.06.25 the Committee considered a Standards Update including the quarterly report on gifts and hospitality registered by Members, attendance record for Members in relation to mandatory training sessions and details on a standards case relating to the King's Lynn and West Norfolk Borough Council regarding the perception of undue influence on members of their Planning Committee.

The report also included an update on the recommendation made as part of the Council's External Audit Value for Money (VFM) Report (to accompany the 2023-24 accounts) that the Council consider strengthening provisions within the Members Code of Conduct regarding

the registration of gifts and hospitality (G&H) to include more information for exceptional items to ensure transparency. The report detailed the outcome of the review undertaken by officers in response and subsequent change agreed to the provisions within the Members Code of Conduct relating to the registration of gifts and hospitality (approved by Full Council on 14 May 2025) requiring members accepting any gift or hospitality valued at £500 or more to provide reasons to the Monitoring Officer as to why they considered it appropriate to accept the gift or hospitality.

In addition, the Committee also received and considered the Annual Governance Statement 2024-25 which was subsequently referred to the Audit & Standards Committee for formal approval.

- (e) On 25.9.25 the Committee considered a further Standards Update including the quarterly report on gifts and hospitality registered by Members and the attendance record for Members in relation to mandatory training sessions as well as details of a standards decision made by Cornwall Council regarding the failure of a former councillor to correctly register a disclosable pecuniary interest (DPI) on being appointed to a new role and the Government's announcement of the Ethics and Integrity Commission, replacing the long-standing Committee on Standards in Public Life.
- (f) On 3.12.25 the Committee considered a Standards Update including the quarterly report on gifts and hospitality registered by Members and the attendance record for Members in relation to mandatory training sessions. The report also updated the Committee in respect of the responses to the Consultation on "Strengthening the standards and conduct framework for local authorities in England" and the Government's intended legislative response.

- 3.3 During January to December 2025, the Audit & Standards Committee met on one occasion on 25 March 2025 to consider and approve standards matters, namely, changes to the financial and procedural rules governing the Mayor's Charity Appeal.

#### Independent/Co-opted members

- 3.4 During 2025 Rhys Jarvis and Stephen Ross continued as Independent Co-opted Members, (Standards focussed) on the Committee with their current term of office due to expire in 2027. In addition, Sebastian Evans was appointed in February 2025 as an additional Independent Co-opted Member (for Audit) with his term of office due to expire in 2029.
- 3.5 The council also has three existing Independent Persons for Standards matters - Julie Byrom, William Goh and Keir Hopley who it is anticipated will continue their roles in the next municipal year.

#### Complaints against Members

- 3.6 Complaints under the Member Code of Conduct are submitted to the Director of Law - Monitoring Officer. Following consideration of the complaint the Monitoring Officer will decide the appropriate course of action in accordance with the Members' Code of Conduct Complaints Procedure.
- 3.7 During 2025, the Monitoring Officer received ten complaints alleging breaches of the Members' Code of Conduct. Of these complaints: a) three did not progress beyond the Initial Assessment Stage; b) six did not progress beyond the Assessment Criteria Stage; and c) one did not progress beyond the Review Stage. Attached as **Appendix A** is a summary of the complaints received in 2025.
- 3.8 The experience of dealing with the complaints received last year is that they are time consuming and demanding of focussed attention. The disposal of complaints even at relatively early stages of the process often requires enquiries to be made and consultations with an Independent Person. Currently, the Members' Code of Conduct Complaints Procedure requires the Monitoring Officer to carry out an initial assessment of complaints within 10 working days normally. The number and nature of complaints dealt with last year suggests that expectations should be set more realistically. It is proposed therefore that this Committee recommend to the Audit and Standards Committee that the normal timeframe for carrying out initial assessments be increased to 15 working days.

#### Gifts & Hospitality

- 3.9 Members are required to register gifts and hospitality received in an official capacity worth an estimated value of at least £50. This includes a series of gifts and hospitality from the same person that add up to an estimated value of at least £50 in a municipal year.
- 3.10 Gifts and hospitality received by Members are published on the Council's website and open to inspection at the Brent Civic Centre.
- 3.11 The Committee will note there has been regular declarations regarding gifts and hospitality during 2025.
- 3.12 For Q3 & Q4 (to date) 2025-26, there have been 5 gifts and hospitality recorded as being received. A summary of gifts & hospitality received for this period is set out in **Appendix B**.
- 3.13 The Committee will recall that hospitality accepted by the Mayor in their civic role are recorded separately and published on the Council's website.

#### Monitoring Officer Advice Notes (MOANs)

- 3.14 During 2025 one Monitoring Officer Advice Note (MOAN) was issued in March providing practical guidance on the behaviours that do and do not constitute bullying (see paragraph 8 of the Code) and intimidation (see paragraph 9 of the Code). This MOAN is part of a series addressing all aspects of the Code in turn.

A list of all MOANs issued since 2015 is available on the Member's internal SharePoint portal as are copies of those which are still relevant.

### Member Training Attendance

- 3.15 At this Committee's request reports updating it on the attendance records for Members in relation to mandatory training sessions has become a standard reporting item.
- 3.16 The Committee will know that:
- a) It is a requirement of the Members' Code of Conduct that all members' *"must attend mandatory training sessions on this Code or Members' standards in general, and in accordance with the Planning Code of Practice and Licensing Code of Practice"*.
  - b) The schedule for all mandatory sessions is ordinarily published and approved in the Council calendar at the May Annual Council meeting.
  - c) All internal training sessions attended by Members are published on the Council's Website and on individual Member profile pages.
  - d) For face-to-face training sessions, reminders are sent via email, calendar invitations, and text messages and, on some occasions, direct telephone calls to Members. The same reminder process is employed for re-run(s) of sessions, where applicable, to take account of personal circumstances like work commitments and childcare arrangements etc.
- 3.17 A detailed report on member training is elsewhere on the agenda for this evening's meeting and members of the committee are referred to this for further details. That said, officers are able to confirm all mandatory training for members as completed in 2025.

## **4.0 Financial Considerations**

- 4.1 There are no financial implications arising out of this report.

## **5.0 Legal Considerations**

- 5.1 Pursuant to the Localism Act 2011, the Council has to have arrangements in place to deal with any allegations of failure to comply with the Brent Members' Code of Conduct (as set out in Part 5, of the Council's Constitution) and must appoint an Independent Person whose views are sought and taken into account by the council before it makes its decision on an allegation that it has decided to investigate.
- 5.2 The Council, individual Members and co-opted Members are required to promote and maintain high standards of conduct in accordance with s27 of the Localism Act 2011. The attendance at mandatory training sessions is a means

to achieve this and a requirement pursuant to the Brent Members' Code of Conduct.

## **6 Additional Considerations**

- 6.1 There are no
- a) Equity, Diversity & Inclusion considerations
  - b) Stakeholder and ward member consultation and engagement
  - c) Climate Change and Environmental considerations
  - d) Human Resources/Property considerations (if appropriate)
  - e) Communication considerations

**Report sign off:**

**Marsha Henry**  
Director of Law – Monitoring Officer