

North Yorkshire Council

Standards and Governance Committee

Minutes of the meeting held on Wednesday, 11 February 2026 commencing at 10.00 am.

Councillor Clive Pearson in the Chair plus Councillors Philip Broadbank (as a substitute), Nick Brown, Liz Colling (as a substitute), David Ireton, Nigel Knapton, Heather Phillips and Peter Wilkinson.

Officers present: Christine Phillipson, Principal Democratic Services Officer, Jennifer Norton, Assistant Director Legal and Deputy Monitoring Officer and Harriet Clarke, Senior Democratic Services Officer.

Other Attendees: Independent Person Louise Holroyd.

Other Attendees virtually: Elizabeth Jackson, Principal Democratic Services Officer.

Apologies: Councillors Melanie Davis, Mike Schofield, Monika Slater, Andy Solloway and Independent Person Richinda Taylor.

Copies of all documents considered are in the Minute Book

159 Apologies for Absence

Apologies were received from Councillors Melanie Davis, Mike Schofield, Monika Slater, Andy Solloway and Independent Person Richinda Taylor.

Councillor Liz Colling attended as a substitute for Councillor Melanie Davis and Councillor Phillip Broadbank attended as a substitute for Councillor Monika Slater.

160 Minutes of the Meeting Held on 17 September 2025

Resolved

The minutes of the meeting held on 17 September 2025 were agreed and signed as an accurate record.

161 Declarations of Interest

There were none.

162 Public Questions and Statements

There were none.

163 Draft Recommendations Following the First Phase of the 2025/26 Community Governance Review

Considered

A report of the Assistant Chief Executive Legal and Democratic Services and Monitoring Officer which presented the draft recommendations for the second phase consultation of the 2025/26 Community Governance Reviews (CGRs).

The Principal Democratic Services Officer outlined that the review of parish governance arrangements had been refined to 19 CGRs. A summary and analysis of the first phase consultation responses, together with the draft recommendations for each review area, were set out in Appendices 1-19. Each individual survey was attached at Annexes 1-19 A and a summary of consultation responses was provided at Annexes 1-19 B of the report. The Committee were invited to consider the draft recommendations collectively.

Members were reminded that the draft Terms of Reference for the CGRs had been approved by Full Council in July 2025. The results of the first phase of consultation, summarised on page 10 of the report, had generated a low response rate, which was noted not unusual for this type of consultation.

Every property within the areas under review was sent an explanatory letter in the post advising of the CGR. It was reported that some residents had experienced difficulty accessing the online surveys via the QR code provided in the letter, and as a result alternative formats for completing the survey were made available on request.

The consultation methodology was summarised at paragraph 4 of the report and the timeline for the review was set out at paragraph 5.2.

Subject to approval by Full Council, the second phase consultation would run for 12 weeks from 19 March 2026, with a further report scheduled to return to the Standards and Governance Committee in July. The Principal Democratic Services Officer advised that the second phase consultation would be conducted online only, given the limited response rate in phase one.

Two CGRs (Dunsforths Parish Meeting and Welburn Parish Council) were recommended not to progress to a second phase consultation. The draft recommendations for Lillings Ambo Parish Council were dependent on confirmation from Sheriff Hutton Parish Council regarding a potential amalgamation with Lillings Ambo. If this support is not provided, the CGR will also not proceed to a second phase consultation.

It was also noted that since the publication of the consultation results, Spennithorne Parish Meeting had requested that the proposed name for the new parish and parish council be amended to Harmby with Spennithorne, which if the Committee were in agreement would be included in the recommendations.

In response to comments from Members, the below points were raised:

- Members thanked officers for the extensive work undertaken in producing the report and appendices.
- One Member commented that the low level of public engagement likely reflected a general lack of public awareness regarding parish governance arrangements, highlighting a need for broader education on parish responsibilities and election processes. Officers acknowledged these points and confirmed that work to raise awareness would continue.
- Officers reported that some consultation feedback related to matters outside the scope of the CGRs and would instead need to be addressed through the elections process.
- One Member, referring to Kirby Hill and District Parish Council, queried the use of 2024 electorate data for electorate forecasts, noting that significant population growth could arise from new developments. In response, officers advised that only

data available at the time could be used within the current review and that any substantial future changes would require a subsequent CGR. It was also confirmed that there are no statutory requirements governing the ratio of parish councillors to electorate numbers, unlike the rules applying to division boundaries.

It was moved by Councillor Nick Brown and seconded by Councillor David Ireton that the Committee endorse the below recommendations for submission to Full Council.

Resolved (unanimously)

- i. That the responses from the Stage 1 consultation process which took place following publication of the Terms of Reference in September 2025 be noted.
- ii. Subject to approval by Full Council that the draft recommendations as set out in Appendices 1-19 of the report be agreed and publicised as part of a second and final consultation commencing on 19 March 2026 for a further 12 weeks.
- iii. An additional recommendation was added that the draft recommendations in relation to Appendix 5 be amended so that the name of the parish is Harmby with Spennithorne and the parish council name is also Harmby with Spennithorne.

Councillor Philip Broadbank arrived at 10.11 am

164 Government Response to Standards Regime Consultation

Considered

A report of the Assistant Chief Executive Legal and Democratic Services and Monitoring Officer which provided an update on the consultation results and Government's response regarding the "Strengthening the standards and conduct framework for local authorities in England" consultation.

The Assistant Director Legal and Deputy Monitoring Officer reminded Members that the Committee had previously considered and responded to the Government consultation on strengthening the standards regime. The Government had since published a statement of intention for whole system reform of the current regime. The Committee was informed that any reforms would require legislation and that no parliamentary timetable or draft legislation had yet been published.

The key areas of proposed reform included the introduction of a mandatory code of conduct for councillors, a requirement for principal authorities to have a Standards Committee, and new powers allowing authorities to suspend councillors for up to 6 months. Additional intended reforms included strengthened sanctions for serious breaches, new disqualification criteria, and the creation of a national appeals mechanism for suspended councillors and for complainants.

In response to the report, the following comments were raised:

- Independent Person Louise Holroyd welcomed the proposed strengthened sanctions and expressed hope that clearer consequences would support improved Member conduct. Members endorsed this view, commenting that sanctions had long lacked effectiveness and that the Government's direction of travel was encouraging, even if immediate legislative action seemed unlikely.
- One Member noted the importance of cross-party support as all councillors would

be affected by the proposed reforms and expressed concern about the limited national attention dedicated to standards issues. The need to ensure that complainants, as well as subject members, receive fair and transparent treatment was also highlighted. Officers reflected on the role of complainants and noted that parish councillors were often the subject of vexatious complaints, which required careful handling.

- Officers noted the frequency and nature of complaints within North Yorkshire Council, attributed partly to the large number of parish councils.
- One Member observed that the rise in complaints and the challenges faced by councillors could deter people from standing for election.

Resolved (unanimously)

The Committee noted the contents of the report.

165 Investigations' Update

Considered

A report of the Assistant Chief Executive Legal and Democratic Services and Monitoring Officer which provided an update on completed investigations since the Committee's last meeting.

The Assistant Director Legal and Deputy Monitoring Officer advised that two investigations concerning a North Yorkshire Councillor had been completed since the last meeting.

In the first case, the Investigating Officer had found a breach of the Code of Conduct relating to the use of Council pool cars and mileage claims. This case had proceeded to a Hearings Panel and the decision notice has been published on the Council's website. The Hearings Panel decided that the Subject Member should repay mileage claims claimed in error and for personal use of pool cars at weekends and should be invited to return their Council mobile phone to the Council. The Panel also recommended that all Members with Council mobile phones should return them.

The second investigation had been determined without the need for a hearing, with the Investigating Officer agreeing that the matter could be resolved informally. Details of the decision notice were provided within Exempt Appendix 1.

Members were informed that a full complaints update report would be brought to the Committee's March meeting.

In response to the report, Members raised the below comments:

- The Committee held a detailed discussion on councillor use of pool cars and mobile phones. One Member expressed surprise that pool cars were available for councillors and sought clarity on the policy and visibility of information. In response, it was confirmed that the pool car policy did not preclude Members from using the pool cars but they were primarily for use by staff, and in both instances were available for Council business as set out in internal policy documents. The Hearings Panel had since recommended that councillors should not use pool cars without express permission from the Monitoring Officer.
- One Member added that some councillors had previously been issued with mobile phones to address poor connectivity. It was confirmed that the Hearings Panel had recommended that all Members with Council mobile phones should return them.
- Members raised concerns about the awareness of policies on Member resources. The Committee was assured that there were clear policies on what resources can

or cannot be used by Members and that any issues brought to the Monitoring Officer's attention were addressed promptly.

Resolved (unanimously)

The Committee noted the contents of the report.

166 Dispensation Requests

Considered

An urgent report of the Assistant Chief Executive Legal and Democratic Services and Monitoring Officer on dispensation requests relating to the upcoming Full Council meeting on Friday 13 February. Members were provided with paper copies of the urgent report at the meeting.

The Assistant Director Legal and Deputy Monitoring Officer introduced the report and explained that a motion was expected at Friday's Full Council meeting concerning funding for the North Yorkshire Citizens Advice and Law Centre.

A number of councillors held Other Registrable Interests (ORIs) relating to their involvement with the organisation and while these were not Disclosable Pecuniary Interests (DPIs), they would prevent affected Members from participating in debate or voting.

Written requests for dispensations had been received from Councillors Carl Les, Caroline Goodrick and John Ritchie. The Monitoring Officer also sought delegated authority to grant similar dispensations, in consultation with the Chair of Full Council, to any other councillors who might disclose relevant ORIs for the same meeting, to avoid the risk of Members being unfairly excluded from participating in a key budget decision.

During the discussion of this item, Members noted that failing to grant the dispensations could result in a significant number of Members being unable to vote on the overall budget.

Officers clarified that dispensation requests must be made in writing to the Monitoring Officer under the Localism Act 2011 and that the proposed delegation to grant similar dispensations related solely to the Full Council meeting on 13 February 2026. Members sought clarification regarding financial benefit, and it was confirmed that none of the interests concerned DPIs.

It was moved by Councillor Nigel Knapton and seconded by Councillor Peter Wilkinson that the Committee resolves the below recommendations.

Resolved (unanimously)

- i. That Members consider and determine:
 - a. The dispensation request submitted by Councillor Les as set out at Appendix 1 for a dispensation, until the next local government elections in 2027, to enable him to speak, vote and be included in the quorum in meetings of full Council when debating and approving the Council's budget and any associated motions;
 - b. The dispensation requested by Councillor Ritchie as set out in Appendix 2 received by the Monitoring Officer and any other such dispensation requests from Councillors who are trustees of North Yorkshire Citizens Advice and Law Centre, by the date of the Committee's meeting, for a

dispensation until the next local government elections in 2027 to enable him/them to speak, vote and be included in the quorum in meetings of full Council when debating and approving the Council's budget and any associated motions; and

- c. If minded to grant the dispensation(s) as set out above, that the Committee authorises the granting of similar dispensations for any further requests received by the Monitoring Officer after the Committee's meeting but prior to the Council meeting on 13 February 2026.
- ii. That the Committee delegates to the Monitoring Officer, in consultation with the Chair of full Council, the power to grant similar analogous dispensations, on similar terms, as may be requested by Members (and confirmed by them in writing), who are also members of other registered organisations whose financial interests may directly relate to the budget setting process, at the meeting of full Council on 13 February 2026.

167 Any Other Business

There was no urgent business.

168 Date of the Next Meeting

The next scheduled meeting of the Committee is 13 March 2026.

The meeting concluded at 10.52 am.