APPENDIX 1

NORTH YORKSHIRE COUNCIL

20 May 2026

Annual Report of the Standards and Governance Committee

1.0 PURPOSE OF REPORT

1.1 To provide the Council with an Annual Report on the work of the Standards and Governance Committee for the period 1 April 2025 to 27 February 2026.

2.0 BACKGROUND

2.1 The Standards and Governance Committee is part of the Council's ethical framework under the Localism Act 2011 ("the Act").

2.2 The Committee has agreed that it would be helpful to publish an Annual Report on its work to the Council in order to raise the profile of the Committee and strengthen awareness of its work and ethical standards generally. An Annual Report also assists in discharging the Council's statutory duty to promote and maintain high standards of conduct and also ensures that the Council has an overview of work undertaken by the Committee in discharging the Council's standards responsibilities.

3.0 THE ETHICAL FRAMEWORK

3.1 The ethical framework introduced under the Act includes:

i. The Standards and Governance Committee: The Committee has three scheduled ordinary meetings per annum, but other meetings have been convened as required given the Committee's expanded role. During the period in question, the Committee met four times on 20 June 2025, 17 September 2025, 11 February 2026 and at the time of writing this report is scheduled to meet on 13 March 2026. The Committee is responsible for:

- Standards Functions:
  - All functions of the Council under the Act relating to ethical standards (save as delegated to the Monitoring Officer) including the granting of dispensations and certain elements of standards complaint handling as appropriate under the standards complaints procedure;
  - The Committee also has a role in relation to issues raised by or in relation to persistent and/or vexatious complainants.

- Governance Functions:
  - making temporary appointments to parish councils under section 91 Local Government Act 1972;
  - making recommendations to Council in relation to Community Governance reviews;
  - all functions of the Council relating to elections (save as may be delegated elsewhere through the Constitution and statute) including:
    - recommending to Council the appointment of an Electoral Registration Officer and the appointment of a Returning Officer for

local government elections under the Representation of the People Act 1983;
    - ❖ dividing Parliamentary constituencies into polling districts and dividing electoral divisions into polling districts at local government elections under the Representation of the People Act 1983;
  - ➢ recommending to Council the conferring of the title of Honorary Alderman or Alderwoman;
  - ➢ recommending to Council the opposition or approval of local or personal Bills under Section 239 of the Local Government Act 1972 (save as may be delegated elsewhere).

ii. **Standards and Governance Committee Hearings Panel:** During the period in question, the Hearings Panel met once on 6 November 2025. The Hearings Panel is responsible for undertaking all functions of the Standards and Governance Committee, in consultation with the Independent Person for standards, in relation to the consideration of complaint investigation reports and the holding of complaint determination hearings regarding matters referred by the Monitoring Officer, including (but not limited to) the making of findings and the imposition of sanctions (if appropriate) in respect of complaints that Members have breached the relevant Code of Conduct for Members. Further details of hearings' outcomes are set out later in the Complaints' section of this report.

iii. **Independent Persons for Standards:** Each relevant authority must appoint at least one "Independent Person" under the Act. At its meeting on 19 July 2023, full Council agreed to extend, for four years, the terms of office of the predecessor authority NYCC's two Independent Persons for Standards, Hilary Gilbertson MBE and Louise Holroyd (whose terms of office automatically continued post Vesting Day); and further approved the appointments, for four years, of Gillian Baker, Roy Martin (who has since resigned with effect from 31 December 2024), James Nelson and Richinda Taylor as additional Independent Persons for Standards for North Yorkshire Council. Full Council also delegated power to the Monitoring Officer to extend the Independent Persons' terms of office, in consultation with the Chair of the Standards and Governance Committee. Hilary Gilbertson MBE, one of the longest serving Independent Persons, resigned in 2025. Her considerable contribution both to the predecessor and successor authorities is acknowledged, and sincere thanks are recorded for all her hard work over many years. The Independent Persons are invited to all meetings of the Standards and Governance Committee and are consulted on all key standards matters including at all stages of standards complaints' handling.

iv. **Principal authority for parish and town councils regarding the Act's standards provisions**

v. **A statutory duty to promote and maintain high standards of conduct**

vi. **Members' Code of Conduct** - parish and town councils may adopt the Council's Code or their own. The Monitoring Officer has encouraged them to adopt North Yorkshire Council's Code (based on the voluntary LGA model code) in an aim to have standardised provisions across North Yorkshire for consistency and clarity;

vii. **Register of NYC Members' Interests and gifts and hospitality** and the publication on the Council's website of parish and town councils' registers of members' interests;

viii. **Complaint handling process** for Members and voting co-opted Members of North Yorkshire Council and parish and town councils in North Yorkshire;

ix. **Ethical Statements**

x. **Standards Bulletins**

xi. **Protocol re the role of the Leader and Chief Executive Officer in the Ethical Framework**

xii. **Protocol for Member/Officer Relations**

3.2 The **Monitoring Officer** and **Deputy Monitoring Officer** support the Committee in its work, including handling complaints that Members may have breached the relevant Code of Conduct for Members.

4.0 WORK UNDERTAKEN BY THE COMMITTEE

4.1 The work undertaken by the Standards and Governance Committee during the period 1 April 2025 to 27 February 2026 is set out below:

(a) **Review of national ethical framework developments**: the Committee has considered developments in the national standards regime and provided guidance to Members, for example in relation to:

i. The Government consultation on strengthening the standards regime, to which the Committee responded. The Committee has also considered the Government's response to the consultation whereby the Government has stated that it now intends to "legislate for a whole system reform of the current regime as set out in Localism Act 2011" and that the necessary legislative changes will be brought forward "when parliamentary time allows";
ii. Documents and blogs published by the Committee on Standards in Public Life (CSPL), for example CSPL's continued reflection on the 30th anniversary of the Nolan Principles; its submission to the Speaker's Conference on security of public office holders on the security of candidates, MPs and elections; its report on "recognising and responding to early warning signs in public sector bodies"; its Annual Report 2024-2025
iii. Documents published by the Local Government Association (LGA), for example, in relation to Intimidation in Public Life; the LGA's Debate not Hate campaign and its guide to disinformation for local councillors;
iv. The establishment of a new Ethics and Integrity Commission to oversee the ethical standards of ministers and public officials and "drive up standards in public life";
v. Action by other authorities to combat abuse, intimidation and harassment of, and support to, councillors and consideration of the work of the NYC Member Liaison Group on Councillor Safety.

(b) **Standards Training Plan**: The Committee maintains a Standards Training Plan which is reviewed at each ordinary meeting of the Committee.

(c) **Standards training**: The Committee ensures that Members receive appropriate training to maintain their awareness of ethical standards. Standards training was last provided to Members at a Members' seminar at the end of the previous financial year on 5 March 2025. Related standards training concerning Member's use of social media was delivered at a Members' Seminar held on 4 February 2026. Training on any new Code of Conduct and standards regime will be undertaken once any new regime is introduced and implemented. Guidance on the Code and standards regime is also provided in the Standards Bulletins. External training opportunities are also offered to the Independent Persons. Refresher training regarding Hearings Panel procedures was provided to the Committee's Hearings Panel on 6 November 2025.

(d) **Register of Members' Interests**: The NYC Register of Members' Interests is published on the Council's website. The Committee monitors the operation of the Register. The Council also publishes parish and town council registers of interests on the website.

(e) **Review of other related matters**: The Committee has received briefing reports on matters such as Members' attendance at meetings of the Council and its committees for the period 1 May 2024 until 30 April 2025

(f) **Dispensation requests**: the Committee has granted five connected dispensations to North Yorkshire Councillors. At the time of writing this report a further dispensation request is due to be considered at the Committee's meeting on 13 March 2026.

(g) **Standards Bulletin**: The Committee has issued three Standards Bulletins during the period covered by this Report, aimed at keeping Members and officers up to date regarding developments in the standards regime. Copies of the Bulletin are published on the website, circulated to YLCA and parish and town councils in North Yorkshire.

(h) **Work Programme**: The Committee has agreed a forward Work Programme which is reviewed at each ordinary meeting of the Committee.

(i) **Standards complaints**: The Committee receives a Complaints Update report at each scheduled ordinary meeting. Standards and Governance Committee reports are published on the website here - Browse meetings - Standards and Governance Committee | North Yorkshire Council. For the period 1 April 2025 to 27 February 2026 the Council has received **164** complaints that councillors may have breached the relevant authority's code of conduct for Members:

a) **27** of those complaints are complaints about Members of North Yorkshire Council.

Of those **27** complaints:

i. **2** were connected complaints from 1 NYC Councillor against two others;
ii. **6** were complaints regarding the same NYC Councillor, four of which were anonymous;
iii. **2** were connected complaints concerning the same NYC Councillor;
iv. a further **2** connected complaints concerning a different NYC Councillor;
v. **15** were separate unconnected complaints.

b) The other **137** complaints relate to complaints about parish and town councils in the North Yorkshire area.

Of those **137** complaints:

i. **24** were against parsh/town councillors which did not progress to an assessment as they were deemed to be outside the Monitoring Officer's jurisdiction as they related to matters of internal parish council governance and parish council employees;
ii. **12** were against 6 councillors of one town council which did not progress to an assessment as they were deemed to be outside the Monitoring Officer's jurisdiction as they related to matters of internal town council governance;
iii. **4** were against parish councillors where there was no evidence presented that the councillor was acting in their official capacity at the relevant times;

iv. **2** were against town councillors where there was no evidence that comments on social media complained of were posted whilst the councillor was acting in their official capacity;
v. **1** was against a town councillor which fell outside the Monitoring Officer jurisdiction as the councillor was no longer serving;
vi. **3** were against 3 councillors of the same council which were not progressed;
vii. **20** were unspecified complaints concerning governance issues at a particular parish council.

c) **70** of the **164** complaints pre-assessed by the Monitoring Officer/Deputy Monitoring Officer did not proceed to full assessment.

d) A further **87** complaints have so far progressed to a full assessment by the Monitoring Officer/Deputy Monitoring Officer in consultation with the Independent Person for Standards and of those:

i. **83** cases did not merit referral for formal investigation, for example:

- a parish councillor's failure to declare an interest, which had been addressed by them;
- allegations of a parish councillor bullying and harassing the clerk where insufficient evidence was provided of a potential breach of the relevant code of conduct;
- two concerned different NYC Councillors, one relating to levels of engagement with a parish council, and the other regarding alleged disrespect, whereby in both cases there was insufficient evidence presented of a potential breach of the Code of Conduct;
- two concerned the same NYC Councillor from the same member of the public - in both cases there was insufficient evidence presented of a potential breach of the Code of Conduct;
- an anonymous complaint regarding an NYC Councillor alleging illegal activity which was not evidenced;
- self-referrals by two councillors of two different councils which did not merit further action;
- nine complaints concerning four councillors belonging to the same Town Council – where mediation is being advocated by the Monitoring Officer to address the apparent ongoing dysfunctional working relationships between councillors and with members of the public.

ii. **1** complaint was recommended for informal resolution, with the parish councillor concerned being urged to consider apologising to the complainant;

iii. **3** complaints regarding 3 different councillors have been referred for investigation, 1 of which is still live. Of the other two investigations, one resulted in a breach of the code and the other found no evidence of a breach.

e) the remainder of the complaints are in preparatory stages or awaiting assessment by the Monitoring Officer/Deputy Monitoring Officer in consultation with the Independent Person for Standards.

Statistical information about complaints received and their outcomes, for the period 1 April 2023 to 31 March 2024, and 1 April 2024 to 31 March 2025, have been published on the Council's website - Councillors' code of conduct | North Yorkshire Council. Further years' statistics will be published in the future as they are finalised.

(j) **Standards Committee Annual Report**: the consideration of an Annual Report of the Committee for the year commencing 1 April 2025 for presentation to full Council on 20 May 2026.

(k) **Temporary appointments to Parish Councils**: The Committee has previously reviewed the arrangements for making temporary appointments to parish and town councils under Section 91 (1) of the Local Government Act 1972 and delegated the power to make temporary appointments to parish and town councils to the Assistant Chief Executive Legal and Democratic Services and Monitoring Officer. The Committee has received reports from the Monitoring Officer regarding temporary appointments made under such delegation.

(l) **Community Governance Reviews**: the Committee considered final recommendations to full Council regarding the Kirby Grindalythe and Duggleby Community Governance Review (CGR); and considered a proposed community governance review for a defined number of parish areas, proposed Terms of Reference and draft recommendations for publication as part of a final consultation to commence in March 2026.

(m) **Parish and Town Councils**: the Committee has previously received reports regarding the arrangements in place in the Democratic Services and Localities' teams to support parish and town councils in the North Yorkshire area. The Deputy Monitoring Officer and the Senior Governance Lawyer have previously undertaken online training sessions for parish and town councils as set out earlier. A recorded training session remains accessible to all. Further standards training will be provided by the Deputy Monitoring Officer to parish and town councils in North Yorkshire as and when the standards regime changes.

4.2 The Committee will continue its work in the promotion of high ethical standards and governance and in the training of officers and Members at an appropriate stage.

5.0 RECOMMENDATION

5.1 That the Council receives and notes the Annual Report of the Standards and Governance Committee.

COUNCILLOR CLIVE PEARSON
Chair of NYC Standards and Governance Committee

Background Papers:
Minutes of and reports to the Standards and Governance Committee meetings

3 March 2026