Report to Standards Committee

Subject: Report of the Solace Commission on Professional Standards and Ethics

Date: 26th November 2026

Author: Monitoring Officer

Purpose

To advise members of the Solace report "Enough is Enough – A Blueprint for Rebuilding Standards in Local Government" ("the report") and the recommendations within the report.

To seek authority to establish a working group to review the Member/Officer Protocol and consider any further recommendations in the report and how they may be implemented.

Recommendation

THAT Committee:

1) Note the contents and recommendations within the report of the Solace Commission on Professional Standards and Ethics
2) Agree the establishment of a cross-party Working Group to review the Protocol on Member/Officer relations within the Constitution
3) Authorise the Working group to review and recommend any further actions arising from Solace report.

1 Background

1.1 In October 2026 Solace published a report entitled "Enough is Enough: A Blueprint for Rebuilding Standards in Local Government". The report was produced by the Solace Commission on Professional Standards and Ethics which was established in 2025 following rising concerns across the sector over increased incivility, inappropriate behaviour and declining standards nationally.

1.2 The report provides some high-level statistics as a result of evidence gathered through survey, round table discussions and public interest

reports. The results demonstrate a high level of unacceptable behaviour experienced by senior officers across the sector including 92% of Chief Executives and Senior Officers reporting that they have experienced poor standards or inappropriate behaviour in the last three years. The report is focused on an officer's perspective, however acknowledges that Councillors are also facing significant challenges in their roles through poor standards systems and increased public scrutiny and unacceptable treatment.

1.3 The report was commissioned to identify the issues arising and to provide practical actions that can strengthen ethical leadership, organisational culture and governance.

1.4 The recommendations at Appendix 1 to the report are broken down into actions for different parties, there are recommendations for officers, Councillors, the Police, Combined/Strategic Authorities, partners and Government including a recommendation for Government to co-design and implement an effective, modernised standards regime for local government.

1.5 The report highlights the difficulties of social media in exacerbating standards issues as well as the need to have Social Media guidelines and policies in place to support the Code of Conduct. This Council has adopted such guidelines for Councillors.

1.6 The report also recognises the importance of training for Councillors and Officers on standards and the need for dedicated support for officers who are subjected to abuse, harassment or intimidation. Whilst training for members on standards was undertaken on induction and is available to be viewed as a recording for new councillors, refresher training for councillors is currently being developed to be shared with Senior Officers and Councillors.

1.7 There is a recommendation that Councils should have member/Officer protocols in place which are regularly reviewed. Whilst this Council has such a protocol within the Constitution it is sometime since this was last reviewed.

1.8 There are further recommendations for Senior Officers within the report. These actions will be considered by Senior Leadership team.

2 Proposal

2.1 Having reviewed the recommendations for Councils set out within the report, there is a suggestion that Member/Officer Relations protocols should be reviewed annually. This Council's Protocol on Member/Officer relations contained within the constitution has not been reviewed for some time. It is proposed that a working group is established to review and suggest amendments to the Protocol that can be recommended to this Committee

and Council for adoption.

2.2 It is also proposed that the working group review the recommendations contained in the report in full and consider whether any further recommendations can be implemented or developed with findings being brought back to this Committee.

2.3 It should be noted that many of the recommendations have already been adopted by this Council, including regular reporting of standards complaints outcomes to this Committee as well as providing guidance on Social Media and adoption of the Model Code of Conduct. It should also be noted that standards complaints remain relatively low in number at the Council.

3 Alternative Options

3.1 Committee could determine not take any further action as a result of this report and not establish a working group to review the recommendations, however, the Member/Officer Protocol is in need of review and it is recommended that at least this action be taken forward.

4 Financial Implications

4.1 There are no additional costs associated with the recommendations in this report.

5 Legal Implications

5.1 There are no direct implications arising from the recommendations. Any proposed changes to the Member/Officer Protocol would require Council approval. Any other proposals arising from a review of the report by the Working Group can be brought back to Committee for consideration.

Any recommendations that relate only to officers may be considered by the Committee but may require separate approval.

6 Equalities Implications

6.1 It is proposed that equality impacts are assessed as part of any proposed recommendations or changes subsequently made.

7 Carbon Reduction/Environmental Sustainability Implications

7.1 There are no carbon reduction/environmental sustainability implications arising from this report.

8 Appendices

8.1 Appendix 1 – Enough is Enough: A Blueprint for Rebuilding Standards in

Local Government

9 Background papers

9.1 None identified.

10 Reasons for Recommendation

10.1 To support high standards of conduct

11 Local Government Reorganisation

10.1 As LGR progresses it will be essential to ensure that processes, procedures and policies are in place to maintain high standards of conduct across the new authorities. Having up to date protocols and trained members and officers supports high standards of conduct as we transition.

Statutory Officer approval

Approved by the Chief Financial Officer
Date: 17/11/2026

Drafted by the Monitoring Officer