



INTEGRITY IN PUBLIC LIFE

BUSINESS PLAN

2025 / 2026

Strategic Aim 1: PROMOTION AND EDUCATION

The Standards Commission will take all opportunities to be a strong and consistent voice for the importance of the key principles of public life and to educate on the standards of conduct expected of councillors and members of devolved public bodies.

PROMOTION & EDUCATION	
Action 1: Use media and other public platforms to promote key principles, Codes and the standards expected of councillors and members of devolved public bodies.	
Risk Register References: 1: Promotion 2: Education 3: Stakeholders	
Activities	Measurement / Target
Proactive engagement with local and national media, and Parliament, on current issues arising in respect of the ethical standards framework and how provisions in the Code have been interpreted.	Monitor media (including social media) on ongoing basis and send requests for any substantial reporting inaccuracy about Standards Commission's role, work or decisions to be corrected within 3 working days of notification.
Invite local media outlets to awareness session on ethical standards framework and role of Standards Commission.	Send invitation in Q1 with view to holding by end of Q2.
Publish and disseminate standalone news items in respect of any high-profile or potentially controversial issues or when matters concerning public standards were the subject of media scrutiny and public debate.	Monitor media (including social media) on ongoing basis and, if appropriate, liaise with public relations company within 3 working days to determine appropriate course of action (i.e. to publish news article or provide quote / copy to media).
Give evidence before Local Government, Housing and Planning Committee on the work of the Standards Commission and issues concerning the ethical standards framework if and when invited (likely Q3 or 4).	Committee appearance successful in terms of its members being satisfied with answers provided and Standards Commission satisfied key points made and understood. Any follow-up correspondence to be issued within the agreed or promised timescale.
Publish regular blogs on the website on any topical and pertinent news stories	Publish at least one blog a month.
Engagement with CSPL and equivalent bodies in other nations to see if joint messaging / promotional opportunities	Hold at least one meeting with CSPL, Local Government Committee for Standards in NI and Public Services Ombudsman for Wales by end of Q4.

PROMOTION & EDUCATION

Action 1: Use media and other public platforms to promote key principles, Codes and the standards expected of councillors and members of devolved public bodies.

Risk Register References: 1: Promotion 2: Education 3: Stakeholders

Activities	Measurement / Target
Publish more information on website for public about standards expected and how to make a complaint.	Produce video on when the Councillors' Code applies, what it covers, and how to make a complaint on the website by end of Q2. Produce video on when the Model Code applies, what it covers, and how to make a complaint on the website by end of Q2. Produce Easy Read Guides on both the Model Code and the Councillors' Code by end of Q2.
Follow the recommendations from the Communications Plan.	Identify five case studies which demonstrate the impact of the Standards Commission and share on social media, website and in newsletter. Write an opinion piece about trends observed by the Standards Commission. Consider revising newsletter (Standards Update) to include shorter bite-size articles and links to longer information to provide engagement data.

PROMOTION & EDUCATION

Action 2: Seek feedback and undertake research to keep abreast of developments in respect of the ethical standards framework and developments in terms of how behaviours are perceived, in order to ensure training and educational material is relevant and up to date.

Risk Register References: 2: Education 3: Stakeholders 4: Training

Activities	Measurement / Target
Issue revised Guidance on Councillors' and Model Codes, and existing Advice Notes, in light of consultations, enquiries, cases and discussions with stakeholders.	Record any issues in respect of how the Codes are interpreted. Review these on a quarterly basis and, following consultation (if significant), revise and update Guidance and / or Advice Notes accordingly.
Review and update standard training presentations on the Codes in light of the revised Guidance and the Standards Commission's experience in interpreting their provisions.	Review and, if appropriate, update standard training presentations (including case examples and illustrations) by end of Q4.
Update case examples and illustrations in Guidance and Advice Notes in light of feedback and enquiries received and decisions made.	Review and update case examples and illustrations in Advice Notes in Q3.
Produce Advice Note on relevant aspects of Councillors' Code for independent elected members.	Issue draft for consultation in Q2, before finalising, issuing and publishing by end of Q3.

PROMOTION & EDUCATION

Action 3: Ensure information about Hearings, case decisions and any learning points from these, including the impact or potential impact of the conduct being considered, are published and disseminated as widely as possible.

Risk Register References: 2: Education 3: Stakeholders

Activities	Measurement / Target
Produce information about Hearings in different formats.	Produce and publish video on website about the 'journey' of a complaint by end of Q1. Produce and publish video on website about the Hearing process by end of Q1.
Promote Hearings to be held and Hearings decisions in media, on website and on social media platforms.	Publish information about Hearings to be held within 2 working days of decision to hold. Publish and disseminate information about Hearing decisions within 2 working days of written decision being finalised and issued to parties.
Advise local and, if appropriate national, media of Hearings to be held. Liaise with any media in attendance at Hearings and issue press releases at conclusion of each Hearing.	Advise media of Hearings to be held within 2 working days of decision to hold. Monitor press coverage and liaise with journalists about case and Hearing arrangements. Issue and publish press releases within 2 working days of conclusion of Hearing.
Issue and publish a quarterly 'Standards Update' newsletter. Include information / articles on current issues arising in respect of the ethical standards framework and how provisions in the Code have been interpreted at Hearings or in appeal decisions.	Publish and disseminate a Standards Update at end of each quarter.

Strategic Aim 2: Stakeholders and Service Users

The Standards Commission will continue to develop strong relationships with its stakeholders and work with them to resolve issues and prevent breaches of the Codes.

STAKEHOLDERS AND SERVICE USERS	
Action 4: Proactive engagement with key stakeholders to identify and / or discuss any issues that have arisen or could arise.	
Risk Register References: 1: Promotion 3: Stakeholders 6: Service Users	
Activities	Measurement / Target
Hold meetings with Scottish Government's Public Bodies and Local Government Teams, SOLAR, the Improvement Service, CoSLA, the College Development Network, and SOLACE.	Meetings with both Public Bodies and Local Government Team in Qs 2 and 4. Quarterly meetings with SOLAR Liaison Group. Meetings with Improvement Service in Qs 1 and 3. Annual meetings with CoSLA, the College Development Network, and SOLACE.
Hold workshops with council Monitoring Officers and public body Standards Officers to determine whether any new e-Learning material, videos or Advice Notes content should be created, or any existing content amended.	Hold annual workshop with Council Monitoring Officers in Q3. Circulate any agreed actions and add to business plan. Hold annual workshop with public body Standards Officers in Q4. Circulate any agreed actions and add to business plan.
Respond fully to all enquiries about the Codes and how provisions should be interpreted timeously. Maintain a record of the nature of all enquiries and feedback received and about cases referred on an ongoing basis.	Respond to all enquiries within timescales outlined in the Service Charter. Record enquiries and report on performance against timescales in Service Standards and KPIs in Annual Report. Ongoing and Q2. General nature of enquiries and timescales for responses recorded. Report on these to be produced and considered in Q4, with any actions identified as a result being added to business plan.
Regular meetings with ESC to discuss trends and issues that emerge in order to develop (as far as possible) a common understanding of how provisions in Code should be interpreted.	Invite ESC to formal joint meetings to be held in June and December 2025. Fortnightly informal meetings to be held between Executive Team and ESC. Make / seek changes to educational materials and investigative processes as agreed.

STAKEHOLDERS AND SERVICE USERS

Action 4: Proactive engagement with key stakeholders to identify and / or discuss any issues that have arisen or could arise.

Risk Register References: 1: Promotion 3: Stakeholders 6: Service Users

Activities	Measurement / Target
Respond to any dispensation requests timeously and publish information about any that are granted.	Acknowledge any requests for dispensations within 3 working days and respond substantively within 1 month of receipt (following consultation with the ESC and Scottish Government). Dispensations granted to be issued and published on website within one week of being agreed. Report on performance against KPIs in Annual Report.

STAKEHOLDERS AND SERVICE USERS

Action 5: Review and update all educational and training material.

Risk Register References: 1: Promotion, 3: Stakeholders, 4: Training

Activities	Measurement / Target
Consider creating abridged / summary, digital, video, audio, Braille and / or BSL versions of case decisions, Standards Updates, Guidance and Advice Notes, or on specific provisions in the Codes.	Develop and agree a communication plan by end of Q1, outlining what is to be created, along with the timescales and any costs / resources involved. Add any actions to business plan. Produce a verbal version of the Guidance on the Councillors' Code by end of Q4.
Produce and publish on website an e-Learning module for councillors on Section 7 of the Councillors' Code (quasi-judicial and regulatory decision-making).	Produce and publish e-Learning module by end of Q3.
Ensure content on website accessible, relevant and up to date.	Ongoing monitoring of compatibility of website with Public Sector Bodies (Websites and Mobile Applications) (No. 2) Accessibility Regulations 2018). Update 'What we do' page of website by end of Q1.

STAKEHOLDERS AND SERVICE USERS

Action 6: Provision of tailored training sessions on the Codes and any ongoing issues.

Risk Register References: 1: Promotion, 3: Stakeholders, 4: Training

Activities	Measurement / Target
Assist Scottish Government with induction of new members of devolved public bodies.	Present on Model Code at Scottish Government induction workshops in May and September 2025.
Provide training to boards of public bodies and elected members of councils on request.	Respond to all requests for assistance with training within timescales outlined in the Service Charter.
Conduct joint webinars with the Improvement Service on specific topics, such as social media.	Agree topics and dates for two webinars with Improvement Service by end of Q2 and hold by end of Q4.
Provide information on the requirements of the Councillors' Code to all council legal, governance and committee service officers.	Conduct an online session on Code by end of Q2.

Strategic Aim 3: ADJUDICATION

The Standards Commission will make clear, evidence-based and well-reasoned decisions on cases referred to it for adjudication to help improve standards and ensure any failure to meet those expected by the Codes is dealt with in a fair, consistent and proportionate manner.

ADJUDICATION

Action 7: Review and, if applicable, seek changes to the governing legislation to ensure the effective and proportionate disposals of complaints about breaches of the Codes of Conduct.

Risk Register References: 3: Stakeholders, 5: Decision Making

Activities	Measurement / Target
Continue to seek amendment to governing legislation so potential breaches of the Codes of Conduct can be dealt with in the most effective and proportionate manner.	Consult with ESC on any queries from the Scottish Government on the joint proposals submitted in 2024/25 within one week and respond within a month.
Liaise with Scottish Government / Ministers about request to amend the Councillors' Code and Register of Interests regulations to bring back the requirement to register gifts & hospitality (and registering offers that have been declined).	If not received, seek update on request sent in 2024/25. Respond to all queries or requests for information or assistance from Scottish Government on the issue within 1 week of receipt.

ADJUDICATION

Action 8: Proactive engagement with parties, witnesses, the Panel and others to ensure an efficient and effective adjudication process.

Risk Register References: 6: Service Users, 8: Availability

Activities	Measurement / Target
<p>Actively engage with parties before Hearings to ensure:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • issues are identified and resolved in advance; • deadlines for providing information are met; and • queries are answered timeously and fully. 	<p>Invite parties to pre-Hearing meetings to discuss and resolve any procedural or technical issues in advance. Review any feedback from parties and Panel to check Hearings conducted smoothly with the focus on all relevant and material considerations only.</p> <p>Executive Team to review ongoing cases on weekly basis to identify actions to be undertaken, including engagement with Panel, parties, witnesses and others involved in case.</p>
<p>Ensure Members and Hearing Panels are briefed fully on issues that may arise or have arisen, to ensure they have a sound understanding of matters to be resolved and addressed in order to make evidence-based, informed and well-reasoned decisions both at referral and Hearing stages.</p>	<p>Send Members requests for Section 16 decision within 1 working day of receipt of referral from ESC, with full briefing on issues that need to be considered. Report on achievement as part of report against KPIs.</p> <p>Send Panel Chair a checklist at least 2 working days before all pre-Hearing meetings, outlining matters to be discussed and resolved.</p> <p>Send Panel Members a briefing note at least 5 working days before each Hearing outlining the issues to be raised and considered at the Hearing. Report on achievement as part of report against KPIs.</p> <p>Panel reports at SCS meeting after Hearing that it was satisfied with assistance provided.</p>
<p>Actively consider all opportunities, and any requests, to vary normal Hearings procedures if possibility of reducing costs arises (provided there is no adverse impact in terms of access, openness and fairness).</p>	<p>Send Panel Members any request to vary Hearing procedure, with a recommended course of action, within 3 working days of receipt.</p>
<p>Analyse all decisions made in 2024/25, under Section 16 of the 2000 Act, and review policy, process document, templates, publication scheme and decision-making procedures.</p>	<p>Analysis of Section 16 decisions to be completed by end of Q1, with any improvement actions then added to business plan. Review all policies, processes, publication scheme and templates for issuing of decisions under Section 16 in Q2.</p>
<p>Review of any 'no action' decision as standing agenda item at the following Standards Commission meeting.</p>	<p>Review of 'no action' decisions to be included as standard agenda item, with any improvement actions to be recorded in meeting minutes and added to business plan or otherwise actioned within a month.</p>

ADJUDICATION

Action 8: Proactive engagement with parties, witnesses, the Panel and others to ensure an efficient and effective adjudication process.

Risk Register References: 6: Service Users, 8: Availability

Activities	Measurement / Target
Undertake review of all decisions made at Hearings in 2024/25 to identify trends and to ensure consistency and clarity in reasoning.	Annual review of Hearings decisions to be undertaken at a Standards Commission meeting in Q4, with any improvement actions added to business plan for 2025/26.
Review of any Hearings held as standing agenda item at the Standards Commission meeting following the conclusion of the Hearing. This to include analysis and discussion on what went well or otherwise, and what could have been done differently.	Review of Hearings to be included as standard agenda item, with any improvement actions to be recorded in meeting minutes and added to business plan or otherwise actioned within a month.
Proactively seek feedback from parties, witnesses, officers and observers at Hearings on adjudicatory decisions and how Hearings are conducted by including survey link in cover email to decision letters and by handing out hard copy of survey at Hearings.	Include any feedback in papers for consideration at next SCS meeting. Add any improvement actions identified to business plan.
Provide feedback to ESC on investigation reports and seek feedback from ESC on adjudicatory decisions.	Provide any agreed feedback to ESC on investigation reports within 3 days of a written decision (Hearing or 'no action') being issued.
Collaborate with other regulators and partner bodies across the UK to share experiences and inform best practice.	Hold meetings with analogous organisations in other nations to discuss experiences and any issues that have arisen. Executive Team to observe Hearing in either NI or Wales by end of Q3. Undertake biannual reviews (in Qs 2 and 4) of decisions, policies and procedures made and adopted by other regulators and partner bodies across the UK. Add any improvement actions identified to business plan.

Strategic Aim 4: GOVERNANCE

We will continue to invest in, engage with and empower its Members and staff to deliver our work effectively and efficiently.

GOVERNANCE	
Action 9: Provide Standards Commission staff with relevant and appropriate training and development opportunities.	
Risk Register References: 8: Availability 9: Governance	
Activities	Measurement / Target
Agree individual annual personal development plans for all Standards Commission staff.	Personal development plans to be agreed at annual appraisals in Q1. Agreed training and development to be completed by year end.
All staff to attend refresher training on cyber resilience and data protection.	Refresher training on cyber resilience and data protection to be completed by end of Q4
Undertake a review of the key person dependency risk analysis.	Review of the key person dependency risk analysis to be undertaken by Human Resources Committee in Q1. Actions to mitigate risks arising from the exercise to be undertaken by end of Q3 (including ensuring any written task instructions are up to date).

GOVERNANCE

Action 10: Training and induction of Members

Risk Register References: 8: Availability 9: Governance

Activities	Measurement / Target
Implement induction and training plan for new Member to be appointed in Q1.	Organise mentoring and complete induction and training in Q1. Seek feedback on induction and training and update induction and training plan accordingly in Q2.
Ensure Members receive refresher training on: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• the Codes of Conduct;• relevancy of material and submissions and how to weigh and assess evidence; and• good practice in decision-making and in conducting and managing Hearings	Training on conducting Hearings and written decisions to be provided on 24.2.25. Mock Hearing to provide general refresher training on Hearings and the Hearings process, Panel questioning and the relevancy of evidence to be held on 29.4.24.
Three development sessions for Members to be held in Qs 1, 2 and 4.	Development Session to be held in April 2025, with action plan to progress any suggestions arising from these to be created, by end of Q1. Development Session to be held in June 2025, with action plan to progress any suggestions arising from these to be created, by end of Q2. Development Session to be held in November 2025, with action plan to progress any suggestions arising from these to be created, by end of Q4.

GOVERNANCE

Action 11: Seek to share services where possible, to ensure best value.

Risk Register References: 7: Budget 9: Governance

Activities	Measurement / Target
Explore any and all opportunities to work jointly or in partnership with other public bodies to ensure the efficient delivery of the Standards Commission's functions, to eliminate duplication and to obtain best value in terms of shared services.	Review of service agreement with BIT in Q2. Participation in Officeholders Shared Services Network, FOISA Network Group and Data Protection Officer meetings.
Discuss shared training opportunities with other Officeholders	Hold regular discussions with other Officeholders and include as appropriate when seeking quotes for provision of training.
Implement recommendations and action points arising from external and internal audits.	Programme of audits and associated improvement actions to be completed by end of Q4. Audit & Risk Committee to consider and report on whether it is satisfied these have been completed.
Regular engagement with SPCB about budget and governance arrangements.	Executive Director to meet Officeholder Services to provide an update / discuss budget and governance matters on a quarterly basis. Members to meet SPCB in Q3 or Q4. Ensure all information sought and required is provided timeously.
Provide assistance to the SPCB Supported Bodies Landscape Review Committee	Respond to all requests for assistance or information from Committee within any set deadline. Share with other Officeholders / publish any response as any when appropriate.