

# MINUTES

Meeting date: Tuesday 31 March 2026

## IN ATTENDANCE ONLINE

### Members:

- Suzanne Vestri (Convener)
- Malcolm Bell
- Helen Donaldson
- Morag Ferguson
- Lezley Stewart

### Executive Team:

- Lorna Johnston (Executive Director)

ITEM	CONTENT	ACTION
<b>STANDING ITEMS</b>		
1.	<p><b>APOLOGIES</b> Apologies were received from Edward Fellows, Case Manager.</p> <p><b>DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST</b> The Executive Director declared an interest in item 15(e) and took no part in the discussion.</p>	
2.	<p><b>MATTERS ARISING</b> Members noted all matters arising from the last meeting, on 27 January 2026, were complete.</p>	
<b>CONSENT ITEMS</b>		
3.	<p><b>DRAFT MINUTE OF PREVIOUS MEETING</b> Members reviewed and, subject to some minor amendments being made to improve clarity, approved the minute of the meeting on 27 January 2026.</p> <p>Members agreed that, in future, minutes of Commission meetings should be more succinct; capturing only key bullet points of discussion and highlighting agreed actions.</p>	
<b>STRATEGIC MATTERS</b>		
4.	<p><b>PROMOTING THE ETHICAL STANDARDS FRAMEWORK AND UPDATE ON OUTREACH WORK</b> Members noted that since their last meeting:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Executive Director filmed a video on the role of NHS Board Standards Officers.</li> <li>• The Executive Director presented on the Standards Commission's interim suspension policy and experiences with interim suspensions to a stakeholder group set up by the Standards and Conduct team at the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government who are looking to strengthen the local government standards framework in England.</li> <li>• The Standards Commission held its annual Standards Officers' workshop online on 17 March 2026.</li> <li>• The Executive Director met with the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales and discussed experiences and any common trends and issues.</li> <li>• The Executive Director met the new Chief Executive of the Jo Cox Foundation and discussed the work and roles of the respective organisations and potential future collaboration.</li> <li>• Mr Bell attended a meeting of the Civility in Public Life Roundtable Group.</li> <li>• The Executive Director and Ms Donaldson delivered a training presentation on the Councillors' Code to elected members of Stirling Council in-person on 30 March 2026.</li> </ul>	

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>On 30 March 2026, Mr Bell attended a Scottish Government short-life Working Group set up to consider the composition and governance arrangements of Health and Social Care Integration Joint Boards.</li> </ul> <p><b>Members further noted that:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The Executive Director and Case Manager are to deliver a training event on the Model Code for Members of the Scottish Environment Protection Agency in April 2026.</li> <li>The Standards Commission is due to deliver online training on the Councillors' Code for Council Officers on 22 May 2026.</li> <li>The Executive Director and Case Manager are to deliver a training event on the Model Code for Members of the Crown Estates Scotland in May 2026 (date to be determined).</li> <li>The Executive Director is to deliver a training event on the Model Code for Members of Public Health Scotland in August 2026.</li> <li>The Standards Commission has agreed to deliver a training presentation on the Councillors' Code to elected members of Argyll &amp; Bute Council in-person in May 2027 (as part of its post-local government election induction programme).</li> </ul> <p><b>Open University E-Learning Course</b></p> <p>Members noted that the Improvement Service is partnering with the Open University (OU) to develop an e-Learning portal for councillors. Members noted the Executive Team was collaborating with the OU Design Team to develop content for a module on the Councillors' Code, with a first draft of the outlined script having been exchanged.</p>	
5.	<p><b>BUSINESS PLAN 2026/27</b></p> <p>Members reviewed and approved the draft Business Plan for 2026/27, which was based on the objectives outlined in the draft Strategic Plan for 2024/28 and followed its format. Members further noted that as the Standards Commission did not have any control over the timing of case referrals from the ESC, it may be that the indicated timescales for actions to be taken in respect of non-case related work may need to be altered during the year.</p> <p><b>Agreed action: A copy of the Business Plan is to be published on the website.</b></p>	Executive Team
6.	<p><b>RISK REGISTER 2026/27</b></p> <p>Members noted they had agreed the content of the Risk Register for 2026/27 at the previous meeting. Members reviewed and agreed suggested probability and impact scores for the current assessment of each individual risk, noting in particular the organisational risks posed by reliance on such a small staff team. Members further agreed the target scores for each risk. Members noted that actions taken to mitigate risk and reduce the scores would be formally reviewed by the Audit and Risk Committee, and thereafter by the Standards Commission, at meetings in May and July 2026, and in January 2027.</p>	
<b>BUSINESS MATTERS</b>		
7.	<p><b>STANDARDS UPDATE MARCH 2026</b></p> <p>Subject to some minor amendments, Members approved the Standards Update to be issued and published on 31 March 2026.</p> <p><b>Agreed action: Standards Update to be issued and published.</b></p>	Executive Team
8.	<p><b>HUMAN RESOURCES UPDATE</b></p> <p><b>Job Evaluation Framework</b></p> <p>Members noted the Standards Commission had adopted a job evaluation process earlier in the year. There was, however, no scoring mechanism in place for Standards Commission staff. Members agreed one was needed in order for the Standards Commission to have a</p>	

	<p>comprehensive role evaluation framework and to meet best practice in terms of its governance arrangements.</p> <p>Members noted that the Standards Commission could either instruct external human resources consultants to develop a scoring mechanism and evaluation framework to enable any future roles to be evaluated appropriately, or it could seek external human resources support for the evaluation of any new roles and re-evaluation of existing roles as and when required.</p> <p>Members agreed that the Human Resources Committee Chair should identify the potential costs of both options and check the SPCB would be open to funding this work given no provision had been made for it in the agreed budget for 2026/27. Members agreed that, in the meantime, the Business Manager should contact other Officeholders to ask if they had used external consultants for any similar exercise and, if so, whether they could recommend any potential providers.</p> <p><b>Agreed Action: Further work to be undertaken in respect of identifying costs, how work could be funded and potential suppliers.</b></p> <p><b>35-Hour Working Week</b></p> <p>Members noted that the Standards Commission adopts the SPCB's staff terms and conditions. The Standards Commission therefore followed the SPCB in moving from a 37-hour to a 35-hour working week from 1 March 2026.</p> <p>Members noted the Committee determined that there was no need to issue new contracts of employment, but all staff were informed, in writing, of their new working hours. Annual leave entitlement was unchanged.</p>	<p><b>Human Resources Committee Chair</b></p> <p><b>Office Manager</b></p>
<p><b>9.</b></p>	<p><b>REVIEW OF ENQUIRIES RECEIVED 2025/26</b></p> <p>Members noted that during the period 1 April 2025 to 15 March 2026, the Executive Team received 182 enquiries, which was 5 more than the number of enquiries received during the last, comparable review period (being from 1 April 2024 to 26 March 2025).</p> <p>Members noted that, as with the last review period, the largest number of enquiries concerned the declaration and registration of interests, and the extent of the Codes of Conduct and how they applied.</p> <p>Members were pleased to note that as with the previous review period, all enquiries were responded to timeously, with responses to 174 out of 182 (96%) of enquiries being provided on the same day of receipt or within one working day, and responses to all being provided within five working days (100%).</p>	
<p><b>10.</b></p>	<p><b>SECTION 3 OF ANNUAL REPORT</b></p> <p>Members agreed the structure to be adopted for the Annual Report for 2025/26. Subject to the addition of some comments in respect of the impact, Members further agreed the content of Section 3, which comprises of a description as to how the Standards Commission has had a positive impact on ethical standards in public life through its:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• engagement with stakeholders;</li> <li>• promotional activity; and</li> <li>• training work and educational material.</li> </ul> <p><b>Agreed Action: Executive Director to add some additional commentary about the impact of the work undertaken.</b></p>	<p><b>Executive Director</b></p>
<p><b>11.</b></p>	<p><b>FREEDOM OF INFORMATION AND SUBJECT ACCESS REQUESTS</b></p> <p>Members noted the verbal update provided in respect of any freedom of information and subject access requests received since their last meeting.</p>	

12.	<p><b>ANNUAL REVIEW OF CASE DECISIONS AND HEARINGS</b></p> <p>Members undertook their annual review of the decisions made under Sections 16 and 24 of the Ethical Standards in Public Life etc. (Scotland) Act 2000 (the Act), and at Hearings, in 2025/26 to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• identify and trends and issues;</li> <li>• check for fairness and consistency in decision-making; and</li> <li>• determine whether any improvements can be made to the decision-making process.</li> </ul> <p><b>Agreed Actions:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Members to advise the Executive Team of any feedback on reports referred by the Ethical Standards Commissioner (ESC) so that this could be passed on to him.</b></li> <li>• <b>Case Manager to have a brief call or meeting with the Hearing Panel Chair before any pre-Hearing meeting to ensure the Chair is aware of any issues or procedural matters that have been raised and might need to be resolved before the Hearing.</b></li> <li>• <b>In order to ensure Hearings are conducted as efficiently as possible, Panels to outline verbally, at Hearings, the key decisions with brief reasoning. Panels to explain that the full reasons for decisions made will be outlined in the written decision that will be issued and published within 14 days of the Hearing.</b></li> <li>• <b>Panels agreed that any written decisions of Hearings should be shortened and made more concise, so that they are more user friendly, accessible and easier to digest. When assisting with the drafting, the Executive Team is to focus on summarising the key points made by parties and witnesses, rather than trying to describe all submissions and evidence led.</b></li> </ul>	<p>Members</p> <p>Case Manager</p> <p>Hearing Panels</p> <p>Hearing Panels and Executive Team</p>
13.	<p><b>NOTES AND ACTIONS ARISING FROM THE STANDARDS OFFICERS' WORKSHOP</b></p> <p>Members reviewed the note summarising the matters discussed at the Standards Commission's annual workshop with public body Standards Officers on 17 March 2026 and agreed the actions to be taken as a result.</p> <p><b>Agreed Action: Executive Team to circulate the note to all Standards Officers and anyone else in attendance at the workshop and to thereafter add the agreed actions to the Business Plan.</b></p>	<p>Executive Team</p>
<b>CASES UPDATE</b>		
14.	<p><b>REPORTS FROM THE ESC &amp; SECTION 14 LETTERS</b></p> <p>(a) <b>LA/G/4414:</b> Members noted that a 'do neither' decision had been made on a report received from the ESC about a Glasgow City Councillor.</p> <p>(b) <b>LA/Fa/4317:</b> Members noted that a 'do neither' decision had been made on a report received from the ESC about a Falkirk Councillor.</p> <p>(c) <b>LA/PK/4479:</b> Members noted that a 'do neither' decision had been made on a report received from the ESC about a Perth and Kinross Councillor.</p> <p>(d) <b>LA/Fi/4391:</b> Members noted that a 'do neither' decision had been made on a report received from the ESC about two Fife Councillors.</p> <p>(e) <b>LA/AB/4402:</b> Members noted that a 'do neither' decision had been made on a report received from the ESC about an Argyll and Bute Councillor.</p> <p>(f) <b>LA/PK/4434:</b> Members noted that a 'do neither' decision had been made on a report received from the ESC about a Perth and Kinross Councillor.</p> <p>(g) <b>LA/NL/4437:</b> Members noted that a 'do neither' decision had been made on a report received from the ESC about a North Lanarkshire Councillor.</p> <p>(h) <b>LA/As/4466:</b> Members noted that a 'do neither' decision had been made on a report received from the ESC about an Aberdeenshire Councillor.</p>	

	<p>(i) <b>LA/G/4115:</b> Members noted that a ‘do neither’ decision had been made on a report received from the ESC about a Glasgow City Councillor.</p> <p>(j) <b>LA/Fa/4395:</b> Members noted that a ‘do neither’ decision had been made on a report received from the ESC about a Falkirk Councillor.</p> <p>(k) <b>LA/ER/4382:</b> Members noted that a ‘do neither’ decision had been made on a report received from the ESC about an East Renfrewshire Councillor.</p> <p>(l) <b>LA/AC/4454:</b> Members noted that the ESC had sent a draft breach report to an Aberdeen City Councillor under Section 14 of the Ethical Standards in Public Life etc. (Scotland) Act 2000.</p> <p>(m) <b>LA/ER/4506:</b> Members noted that the ESC had sent a draft breach report to an East Renfrewshire Councillor under Section 14 of the Ethical Standards in Public Life etc. (Scotland) Act 2000.</p> <p>(n) <b>LA/SB/4477:</b> Members noted that a ‘do neither’ decision had been made on a report received from the ESC about a Scottish Borders Councillor.</p> <p>(o) <b>LA/DG/4408:</b> Members noted that the ESC had sent a draft breach report to a Dumfries and Galloway Councillor under Section 14 of the Ethical Standards in Public Life etc. (Scotland) Act 2000.</p>	
<p><b>15.</b></p>	<p><b>CASES</b></p> <p>(a) <b>LA/DG/4304:</b> Members noted the Standards Commission imposed an interim suspension on a Dumfries and Galloway Councillor in August 2025. The interim suspension was renewed in November 2025 and February 2026. Members noted that, having received new and material information from the Respondent and an update from the ESC in March 2026, the Standards Commission determined that the interim suspension should be discontinued as of 24 March 2026. This was because the Standards Commission was satisfied that it was no longer in the public interest and proportionate for an interim suspension to be in place. In particular, the Standards Commission noted the ESC had ingathered the information he considered necessary for the investigation and, as such, it was unlikely the ESC’s investigation would be prejudiced if the interim suspension was discontinued.</p> <p>(b) <b>LA/DG/4041:</b> Members noted that a Hearing was held on 3 February 2026 in the Municipal Chambers, Dumfries. The Respondent was found to have breached the Code.</p> <p>(c) <b>NPA/LLT/4184:</b> Members noted that Loch Lomond and The Trossachs National Park Authority had confirmed that it had formally considered a decision the Standards Commission made at a Hearing held on 10 February 2026.</p> <p>(d) <b>LA/G/4182:</b> Members noted that the Hearing scheduled to take place on 26 February 2026 in Glasgow City Chambers was postponed after the Respondent lodged a judicial review against a decision to exclude certain proposed productions.</p> <p>(e) <b>LA/E/4130:</b> Members noted that a Hearing was held on 11 March 2026 in the City Chambers, Edinburgh. The Respondents were found to have breached the Code.</p> <p>(f) <b>NPA/LLT/4230:</b> Members noted that a Hearing was scheduled to take place on 10 June 2026 in Loch Lomond and The Trossachs National Park Authority’s Headquarters, Balloch.</p>	

	<p><b>(g) LA/S/4312:</b> Members noted that a Hearing was scheduled to take place on 2 June 2026 in the Council Chambers, Stirling.</p>	
<p><b>16.</b></p>	<p><b>INVESTIGATIONS EXCEEDING 3 MONTHS – INTERIM REPORTS</b></p> <p><b>(a) LA/DG/4304:</b> Members noted the contents of an interim report from the ESC advising that an investigation into a complaint about a Dumfries and Galloway Councillor had taken more than six months to investigate.</p> <p><b>(b) LA/Mi/4405:</b> Members noted the contents of an interim report from the ESC advising that an investigation into a complaint about a Midlothian Councillor had taken more than three months to investigate.</p> <p><b>(c) NHS/MiIJB/4415:</b> Members noted the contents of an interim report from the ESC advising that an investigation into a complaint about a Midlothian IJB member had taken more than three months to investigate.</p> <p><b>(d) LA/EL/4360:</b> Members noted the contents of an interim report from the ESC advising that an investigation into a complaint about an East Lothian Councillor had taken more than six months to investigate.</p> <p><b>(e) LA/DG/4408:</b> Members noted the contents of an interim report from the ESC advising that an investigation into a complaint about a Dumfries and Galloway Councillor had taken more than three months to investigate.</p> <p><b>(f) LA/EA/4438:</b> Members noted the contents of an interim report from the ESC advising that an investigation into a complaint about an East Ayrshire Councillor had taken more than three months to investigate.</p> <p><b>(g) LA/SL/4470:</b> Members noted the contents of an interim report from the ESC advising that an investigation into a complaint about a South Lanarkshire Councillor had taken more than three months to investigate.</p> <p><b>(h) LA/As/4458:</b> Members noted the contents of an interim report from the ESC advising that an investigation into a complaint about an Aberdeenshire Councillor had taken more than three months to investigate.</p> <p><b>(i) NB/HES/4282:</b> Members noted the contents of an interim report from the ESC advising that an investigation into a complaint about a former member of Historic Environment Scotland had taken more than nine months to investigate.</p> <p><b>(j) LA/AB/4265:</b> Members noted the contents of an interim report from the ESC advising that an investigation into a complaint about an Argyll and Bute Councillor had taken more than nine months to investigate.</p> <p><b>(k) LA/H/4469:</b> Members noted the contents of an interim report from the ESC advising that an investigation into a complaint about a Highland Councillor had taken more than three months to investigate.</p> <p><b>(l) LA/Fi/4293:</b> Members noted the contents of an interim report from the ESC advising that an investigation into a complaint about a Fife Councillor had taken more than nine months to investigate.</p> <p><b>(m) LA/H/4991:</b> Members noted the contents of an interim report from the ESC advising that an investigation into a complaint about a Highland Councillor had taken more than three months to investigate.</p>	

	<p><b>(n) LA/EA/4394:</b> Members noted the contents of an interim report from the ESC advising that an investigation into a complaint about an East Ayrshire Councillor had taken more than six months to investigate.</p>	
<b>17.</b>	<p><b>FEEDBACK INCLUDING ANY HEARINGS SURVEY RESPONSES</b> Members noted the feedback received on the Executive Director’s input to the UK Government’s Task and Finish Group on Scotland Standards Framework and interim suspensions.</p>	
<b>ANY OTHER BUSINESS</b>		
<b>18.</b>	<p><b>ANY ONGOING APPEAL OR JUDICIAL REVIEW PROCEEDINGS</b> NPA/LLT/4184: Members noted that the Respondent had lodged an appeal against both the breach and sanction findings. Members noted the Standards Commission was defending this.</p> <p>LA/G/4182: Members noted that the Hearing scheduled to take place on 26 February 2026 in Glasgow City Chambers was postponed after the Respondent lodged a judicial review against a decision to exclude certain proposed productions. Members noted that the Standards Commission was defending this.</p> <p><b>ANY EMERGING RISKS</b> None identified.</p> <p><b>AGENDA ITEMS FOR NEXT SCS MEETING</b> Members to advise the Executive Director of any items to be included in the agenda for discuss at the next meeting.</p>	
<b>19.</b>	<p><b>2026/27 DIARY DATES AND WORKPLAN</b> Members noted the diary dates and ongoing workplan.</p> <p><b>DATE OF NEXT MEETING</b> Members noted that the next meeting of the Standards Commission was scheduled to take place online on Monday 25 May 2026.</p>	