STANDARDS COMMISSION FOR SCOTLAND

INTEGRITY IN PUBLIC LIFE

MINUTES Meeting date: Monday 25 May 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
STANDING ITEMS		
1.	**APOLOGIES** No apologies were received. **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST** Mrs Ferguson and Ms Vestri declared interests in items 11e and g.	
2.	**MATTERS ARISING** Members noted work was ongoing in respect of a job evaluation process for staff roles. Members noted all other matters arising from the last meeting, on 31 March 2026, were complete.	
CONSENT ITEMS		
3.	**DRAFT MINUTE OF PREVIOUS MEETING** Members reviewed and approved the minute of the meeting on 31 March 2026.	
STRATEGIC MATTERS		
4.	**PROMOTING THE ETHICAL STANDARDS FRAMEWORK AND UPDATE ON OUTREACH WORK** Members noted that since their last meeting: • The Executive Director and Mrs Donaldson delivered a training presentation on the Councillors' Code to elected members of Stirling Council in-person on 30 March 2026. • The Executive Director delivered a training event on the Model Code for Members of the Scottish Environment Protection Agency on 22 April 2026. • The Executive Director attended the College Governance Professionals' annual development session on 7 May 2026 to facilitate a discussion on how to help college sector board members adhere to their Codes of Conduct. • The Executive Director met with Planning Aid Scotland on 21 May 2026 to discuss how the Standards Commission could assist with various aspects of the mandatory training on planning for Elected Members and, in particular, the module on Section 7 of the Councillors' Code of Conduct. • The Executive Director and Convener delivered online training on the Councillors' Code open to all council officers on 22 May 2026. Members noted that: • The Executive Director had agreed to deliver a training event on the Model Code for Members of the Crown Estates Scotland in early August 2026. • The Executive Director was to deliver a training event on the Model Code for Members of Public Health Scotland on 5 August 2026.	

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<tr><td></td><td>Members further noted that the Executive Team had continued to participate in a short-life Working Group set up by the Scottish Government to consider the composition and governance arrangements of Health and Social Care Integration Joint Boards (IJBs). The Executive Director had drafted an Advice Note for lived experience members, aimed at assisting them understand and comply with the provisions in the IJBs Codes of Conduct, and would consult with the Working Group on its contents. In addition, it had been agreed that the Standards Commission would produce a Card for lived experienced members of IJBs aimed at helping them manage the expectations of their colleagues and any group from which they had been appointed. The Standards Commission had further agreed to deliver some training sessions on the IJBs Code to lived experience members.

Members noted that the Executive Team was continuing to work with the Improvement Service and Open University (OU) to develop an e-Learning portal module for councillors on the Councillors’ Code of Conduct. Members noted that content had now been agreed, with work progressing on the format and design.</td><td></td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="3">BUSINESS MATTERS</td></tr>
<tr><td>5.</td><td>HUMAN RESOURCES COMMITTEE
Members noted the verbal report provided by Mrs Ferguson, the Chair of the Human Resources Committee, and the draft minutes of the Committee meeting on 21 April 2026.

Members undertook their annual review of the Committee’s Terms of Reference and agreed with the Committee that no changes were required.

In terms of its activities, Members noted that in 2025/26, the Committee had:
• Assisted with the recruitment of a temporary Case Manager.
• Reviewed the Staff Handbook and Code of Conduct.
• Reviewed policies and processes on Improving Performance Policy, Disciplinary Procedures and Grievances.
• Reviewed the Role Evaluation Factor Framework.
• Engaged with the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body regarding sharing of their Job Evaluation Framework scoring methodology.
• Conducted one to one meetings with staff to seek their views on the work of the organisation, particularly in respect of engagement and culture.
• Overseen staff attendance and any health and safety issues.
• Reviewed the performance management and development requirements of staff.
• Overseen the move from a 37 to 35-hour working week as of 1 March 2026.
• Provided assurance to the Commission that appropriate and adequate arrangements were in place to monitor performance and sickness absence and to encourage development in respect of both Members and staff.

The Chair confirmed that she was confident that the Committee had discharged its duties effectively in 2025/26, in accordance with the Terms of Reference.</td><td></td></tr>
<tr><td>6.</td><td>AUDIT AND RISK COMMITTEE
Members noted the verbal report provided by Ms Donaldson, the Chair of the Audit and Risk Committee, and the draft minutes of the Committee meeting on 19 May 2026.

Members undertook their annual review of the Committee’s Terms of Reference and agreed with the Committee that no changes were required.

Members noted the Committee’s activities during 2025/26 included:
• Reviewing the draft Annual Accounts for approval by the Standards Commission.
• Reviewing the Risk Register and identifying and reviewing actions to be taken to mitigate risks;</td><td></td></tr>
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	• Recommending changes to the Risk Register and the individual risk scores in light of developments and actions taken. • Suggesting risks and mitigating actions to be included in the Risk Register for 2026/27. • Reviewing and recommending the external audit plan (including the timetable and fee). • Reviewing internal and external audit reports and any management responses. • Reviewing the budget bid for 2026/27. • Reviewing the structure and frequency of Standards Commission meetings. Members noted that the Committee had reviewed the Risk Register for 2026/27. Members agreed with the Committee's recommendations in respect of some amendments to the probability score for some of the risks, in light of actions taken to date. Members asked the Executive Team to update the Risk Register accordingly. The Committee's Chair confirmed that she was confident that the Committee had discharged its duties effectively in 2025/26, in accordance with the Terms of Reference.	**Executive Team**
7.	**EXPENDITURE AGAINST BUDGET 2025/26** Members noted the report outlining the expenditure in 2025/26 against the final agreed budget, including that there had been a small underspend. Members noted the final expenditure figure to be disclosed in the Annual Accounts would take account of year end accruals for services incurred before 31 March 2026 but not paid by this date (and the reversal of amounts accrued in the prior year).	
8.	**COMMITTEE MEMBERSHIP AND MEMBERS' PERFORMANCE REVIEW 2025/26** Members reviewed the composition of the Standards Commission's committees and agreed they would continue to comprise of the following members: • Audit and Risk Committee: Ms Donaldson (Chair), Mr Bell • Human Resources Committee: Mrs Ferguson (Chair), Dr Stewart Members agreed to review the Committee membership again in May 2027. Members confirmed they had undertaken their annual self-performance review at a meeting in April 2026. Members advised they had agreed that it would be helpful for Panel chairs to arrange a debriefing session with fellow Panel Members and staff after each Hearing to identify any potential learning points or areas for improvement. Members advised that they were committed to learning and developing, and agreed to use the scheduled development sessions later in the year to undertake refresher training on Article 10 of the European Convention on Human Rights (the right to freedom of expression) and conducting effective Hearings.	
9.	**SECTIONS 1 AND 4 OF ANNUAL REPORT 2025/26** Subject to some minor amendments, Members agreed the proposed content of Sections 1 and 4 of the Annual Report for 2025/26, being the Convener's Introduction and the section on the Standards Commission's adjudicatory role and work. Members noted the remaining section on Finance and Governance would be circulated by email for approval once drafted.	**Executive Team**
10.	**BUSINESS CLASSIFICATION SCHEME, DOCUMENT RETENTION SCHEDULE AND DISPOSAL POLICY** Members reviewed and agreed changes to the following Standards Commission governance documents: • The Business Classification Scheme, which sets out the Standards Commission's file management arrangements and how records should be saved. • The Document Retention Schedule, which sets out the retention periods for the different types of records held.	

	• the Disposal Policy, which outlines the arrangements for disposal of Standards Commission records. This was in order to ensure that all record types contained a suitable level of detail, retention periods were in line with statutory and business requirements, and that policies reflected current practice.	**Executive Team**
CASES UPDATE		
11.	**REPORTS FROM THE ESC & SECTION 14 LETTERS** (a) **LA/AB/4373**: Members noted that a 'do neither' decision had been made on a report received from the ESC about an Argyll and Bute Councillor. (b) **LA/NA/4504**: Members noted that a 'do neither' decision had been made on a report received from the ESC about a North Ayrshire Councillor. (c) **LA/AC/4454**: Members noted that a 'do neither' decision had been made on a report received from the ESC about an Aberdeen City Councillor. (d) **LA/AB/4265:** Members noted that the ESC had sent a draft breach report to an Argyll and Bute Councillor under Section 14 of the Ethical Standards in Public Life etc. (Scotland) Act 2000. (e) **LA/EL/4472**: Members noted that, following receipt of a referral report, the Standards Commission had directed the ESC to conduct further investigation in respect of a complaint about an East Lothian Councillor. After the further investigation report was received, a 'do neither' decision had been made. (f) **LA/H/4491**: Members noted that a 'do neither' decision had been made on a report received from the ESC about a Highland Councillor. (g) **LA/EL/4360**: Members noted that a 'do neither' decision had been made on a report received from the ESC about an East Lothian Councillor. (h) **LA/NL/4478:** Members noted that the ESC had sent a draft breach report to a North Lanarkshire Councillor under Section 14 of the Ethical Standards in Public Life etc. (Scotland) Act 2000. (i) **LA/EA/4394:** Members noted that the ESC had sent a draft breach report to an East Ayrshire Councillor under Section 14 of the Ethical Standards in Public Life etc. (Scotland) Act 2000. (j) **LA/G/4505**: Members noted that a 'do neither' decision had been made on a report received from the ESC about a Glasgow City Councillor. (k) **LA/H/4469:** Members noted that the ESC had sent a draft breach report to a Highland Councillor under Section 14 of the Ethical Standards in Public Life etc. (Scotland) Act 2000. (l) **NB/HES/4282:** Members noted that the ESC had sent a draft breach report to a former member of Historic Environment Scotland under Section 14 of the Ethical Standards in Public Life etc. (Scotland) Act 2000. (m)**LA/AB/4265**: Members noted that a 'do neither' decision had been made on a report received from the ESC about an Argyll and Bute Councillor.	

	(n) **LA/Fi/4293**: Members noted that a 'do neither' decision had been made on a report received from the ESC about a Fife Councillor. (o) **LA/DG/4304:** 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) **LA/SL/4465:** Members noted that the ESC had sent a draft breach report to a South Lanarkshire Councillor under Section 14 of the Ethical Standards in Public Life etc. (Scotland) Act 2000.	
12.	**CASES** **(a) LA/S/4312**: Members noted that a Hearing was scheduled to take place on 27 May 2026 in the Council Chambers, Stirling. **(b) LA/As/4458**: Members noted that a Hearing was scheduled to take place on 24 June 2026 in the Council Headquarters, Aberdeen. **(c) LA/ER/4506**: Members noted that a Hearing was scheduled to take place online on 7 July 2026. **(d) LA/DG/4408**: Members noted that a Hearing was scheduled to take place on 28 July 2026 in the Municipal Chambers, Dumfries. **(e) NPA/LLT/4230**: Members noted that the Hearing scheduled to take place on 10 June 2026 in Loch Lomond and The Trossachs National Park Authority's Headquarters, Balloch was adjourned, following a request made on behalf of the Respondent. Members noted that a review would be undertaken in June, with a view to identifying a new date for the Hearing.	
13.	**INVESTIGATIONS EXCEEDING 3 MONTHS – INTERIM REPORTS** **(a) LA/An/4457**: Members noted the contents of an interim report from the ESC advising that an investigation into a complaint about three Angus Councillors had taken more than three months to investigate. **(b) LA/SA/4134, LA/SA/4220, LA/SA/4222**: Members noted the contents of an interim report from the ESC advising that an investigation into a complaint about three South Ayrshire Councillors had taken more than 12 months to investigate. **(c) LA/SL/4470**: 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 five months to investigate. **(d) LA/Mi/4405**: 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 six months to investigate. **(e) NHS/MiIJB/4415**: 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 six months to investigate. **(f) LA/As/4482**: 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.	

	(g) LA/I/4423: Members noted the contents of an interim report from the ESC advising that an investigation into a complaint about an Inverclyde Councillor had taken more than three months to investigate.	
14.	**FEEDBACK INCLUDING ANY HEARINGS SURVEY RESPONSES** **a)** Members noted the Hearings Survey received on case LA/E/4130. **b)** Members noted the feedback received from the Complainer in case LA/G/4505. **c)** Members noted the feedback received on the Executive Director's input to the College Development Network's training session.	
ANY OTHER BUSINESS		
15.	**ANY ONGOING APPEAL OR JUDICIAL REVIEW PROCEEDINGS** **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, with the Court yet to fix a date to hear the matter. **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 and that the Court was due to consider the merits of the matter at a hearing in the summer (date yet to be fixed). **LA/AC/3994:** Members noted that an appeal lodged in September 2025 regarding a decision made at a Hearing in August had now been served. Members noted the Standards Commission was defending this and was awaiting a date for the Court hearing. **ANY EMERGING RISKS** None identified. **JOINT MEETING WITH ETHICAL STANDARDS COMMISSIONER** Members noted that they were due to meet with the ESC on 29 June 2026. Members agreed to add to the agenda a discussion on the best ways to promote the importance of the Codes of Conduct and ethical standards framework. **AGENDA ITEMS FOR NEXT SCS MEETING** Members to advise the Executive Director of any items to be included in the agenda for discuss at the next meeting.	
16.	**2026/27 DIARY DATES AND WORKPLAN** Members noted the diary dates and ongoing workplan. **DATE OF NEXT MEETING** Members noted that they were due to hold a development session on 29 June 2026, with the next meeting of the Standards Commission scheduled to take place online on Monday 27 July 2026. Members agreed to use the development session to discuss best practice and undertake refresher training on conducting Hearings effectively.	