MINUTES Meeting date: Tuesday 29 September 2026

IN ATTENDANCE ONLINE

Members:

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

Executive Team:

- Lorna Johnston (Executive Director)

ITEM	CONTENT	ACTION
STANDING ITEMS		
1.	**APOLOGIES** Apologies were received from Mr Malcolm Bell. **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST** Ms Ferguson declared an interest in items 15n and 16h. Ms Vestri declared an interest in item 16h.	
2.	**MATTERS ARISING** Members noted matters arising from the last meeting, on 27 July 2026, were complete.	
CONSENT ITEMS		
3.	**DRAFT MINUTE OF PREVIOUS MEETING** Members reviewed and approved the minute of the meeting on 27 July 2026.	
STRATEGIC MATTERS		
4.	**PROMOTING THE ETHICAL STANDARDS FRAMEWORK AND UPDATE ON OUTREACH WORK** Members noted that since the last meeting: • The Executive Director met the Head of Ethical Standards and Deputy Legal Adviser of the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales to discuss the Standards Commission's approach to promoting and educating on the Councillors' Code of Conduct. • The Executive Director delivered training on the Model Code to Health and social Care Integration Joint Board (IJB) carer representatives at the Carer Representatives' National Meeting on 26 August 2026. • The Executive Director delivered online training on the Advice Note for IJB Members to Health and Social Care Alliance Scotland on 9 September 2026. Members noted that: • The Standards Commission was due to deliver an open online session on 7 October 2026 for all IJB board members. • The Executive Director was due to deliver an in-person training event on the Model Code for Members of Public Health Scotland on 21 October 2026. • The Standards Commission was due to hold its annual in-person workshop for Council Monitoring Officers on Monday, 26 October 2026. • The Executive Director and Convener were due to present on the Model Code at a College Development Network event for college board members on 29 October 2026. • The Executive Director was due to deliver an in-person training event on the Model Code for Members of the Crown Estates Scotland on 26 November 2026. In addition, Members noted that:	

	• The Standards Commission produced the content for a module on the Councillors' Code to be included in an Open University eLearning course for councillors that had been developed by the Improvement Service. This course was now live. • Following the Standards Commission's involvement in the Scottish Government's short-life Working Group on the forthcoming extension of voting rights to lived experience members of IJBs, and after consulting with its members, the ESC and Standards Officers, it issued and published a revised Advice Note for all IJB Members. This covered the key provisions in the Code and, in particular, provides advice on how to identify and manage potential conflicts of interest and reconcile their duty to act in the best interests of the IJB with any organisation or constituent group from which they are appointed. • The Standards Commission issued and published a card for Lived Experience Members of IJBs, aimed at helping them manage expectations of the groups from which they are appointed. • Following a consultation with the College Development Network, the Standards Commission reviewed and revised its Advice Note for College Board Members. • The Standards Commission reviewed and revised its Guidance for Unrepresented Respondents to provide more information on the process to be followed at the Hearing. Members noted it would be helpful to see how many councilllors or prospective candidates accessed the Open University eLearning course and asked the Executive Team to contact the Improvement Service to see if this information was available and could be shared in due course.	**Executive Team**
5.	**JUDICIAL REVIEW** Members noted they had decided to appeal against a decision made by the Courts in respect of a judicial review brought by a councillor involved in an upcoming case who disagreed with the Hearing Panel's decision to reject certain documents they had submitted before the Hearing. Members noted they had decided to appeal the ruling because they were concerned about the impact it could have on the Standards Commission's ability to conduct fair, proportionate and efficient Hearings. Members were also concerned that this judgment also has wider, serious implications for other organisations that regulate or discipline individuals.	
BUSINESS MATTERS		
6.	**PROGRAMME FOR MONITORING OFFICERS' WORKSHOP** Members agreed the programme for the Standards Commission's annual workshop with Council Monitoring officers, due to be held on 27 October 2026. Members noted the agreed programme would be issued to attendees, along with the September Standards Update. Members noted that one of the topics to be discussed was the surveys of Monitoring Officers and councillors that the Standards Commission intended to undertake in 2027, before the May local government election. Members agreed it would be helpful to send attendees, before the workshop, summaries of the previous surveys undertake in 2022, for comparison purposes.	**Executive Team**
7.	**SEPTEMBER 2026 STANDARDS UPDATE** Subject to a minor amendment and the formatting being checked, Members approved the Standards Update to be issued and published on 30 September 2026.	**Executive Team**
8.	**2027 DIARY DATES** Members agreed the dates for Standards Commission meetings, workshops and development days in 2027.	**Executive Team**
9.	**PROGRESS AGAINST BUSINESS PLAN 2026/27 QUARTER 2** Members reviewed the progress made in the first half of the year to date against the actions outlined in the Business Plan for 2026/27. Members were pleased to note the majority of tasks identified for quarters one and two had been completed or progressed.	

10.	**REVIEW OF PERFORMANCE AGAINST KPIs** Members reviewed performance in the first five months of the year against the agreed key performance indicators and percentage targets, as published on the Standards Commission's website. A report on these would be included in the 2026/27 Annual Report. Members noted they were due to review the key performance indicators at their meeting in January 2027 to ensure these covered all aspects of the Standards Commission's remit and, in particular, its promotional and educational work.	
BUSINESS MATTERS (PRIVATE AND VERBAL)		
11.	**JOB EVALUATION SCHEME** Members noted the anticipated cost of instructing external consultants to create a bespoke job evaluation process. Given the Standards Commission adopted the staff grading system used by the Scottish Parliament, Members agreed the Convener and Chair of the Human Resources Committee should write to the Parliament's Chef Executive and ask whether its People Services Team could assist with evaluating Standards Commission staff roles, using the methodology they already have in place.	**Convener**
12.	**FREEDOM OF INFORMATION AND SUBJECT ACCESS REQUESTS** Members noted the Standards Commission had received an unusually high volume of lengthy and detailed subject access (SAR) and freedom of information (FOI) requests. Members noted that, at the date of the meeting, SAR requests received in the first half of 2026/27 represented a 467% increase on the 2025/26 full year, with FOI requests received in the first half of 2026/27 to date representing a 136% increase on 2025/26 full year. Members noted the Standards Commission was seeking funding for more resources to deal with these requests.	
13.	**COMMUNICATIONS** Members agreed a contingency request should be submitted to the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body (SPCB) requesting funds to time-limited communications support in respect of promoting the importance of the Codes of Conduct and ethical standards framework.	**Executive Team**
14.	**STAFFING UPDATE** Members noted that staff were already working at full capacity before the influx of SAR and freedom of information requests (see item 12 above). Members agreed a contingency request should be submitted to the SPCB requesting funds to recruit a temporary Caseworker for the remainder of the year. Members further agreed that the cost of a new permanent Caseworker should be included in the budget submission for 2027/28.	**Executive Team**
CASES UPDATE		
15.	**REPORTS FROM THE ESC & SECTION 14 LETTERS** (a) **LA/AB/4580**: 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/H/4573:** Members noted that a 'do neither' decision had been made on a report received from the ESC about a Highland Councillor. (c) **LA/Fa/4562**: Members noted that a 'do neither' decision had been made on a report received from the ESC about a Falkirk Councillor. (d) **LA/D/4566 and NB/DHS/4594:** Members noted that a 'do neither' decision had been made on a report received from the ESC about a Dundee City Councillor.	

	(e) **LA/E/4529a**: Members noted that a 'do neither' decision had been made on a report received from the ESC about seven City of Edinburgh Councillors. (f) **LA/AB/4521**: Members noted that a 'do neither' decision had been made on a report received from the ESC about an Argyll and Bute Councillor. (g) **LA/As/4482**: Members noted that a 'do neither' decision had been made on a report received from the ESC about an Aberdeenshire Councillor. (h) **LA/C/4564:** Members noted that a 'do neither' decision had been made on a report received from the ESC about a Clackmannanshire Councillor. (i) **LA/NL/4574**: Members noted that a 'do neither' decision had been made on a report received from the ESC about three North Lanarkshire Councillors. (j) **LA/H/4600**: 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. (k) **LA/I/4423**: Members noted that the ESC had sent a draft breach report to an Inverclyde Councillor under Section 14 of the Ethical Standards in Public Life etc. (Scotland) Act 2000. (l) **LA/EA/4438:** 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. (m)**LA/PK/4577:** Members noted that the ESC had sent a draft breach report to a Perth and Kinross Councillor under Section 14 of the Ethical Standards in Public Life etc. (Scotland) Act 2000. (n) **LA/EL/4634:** Members noted that a 'do neither' decision had been made on a report received from the ESC about an East Lothian Councillor. (o) **LA/OI/4575:** Members noted that a 'do neither' decision had been made on a report received from the ESC about an Orkney Islands Councillor. (p) **LA/H/4600:** Members noted that decision was still to be made on a report received from the ESC about a Highland Councillor.	
16.	**CASES** **(a) LA/EA/4394**: Members noted that a Hearing was held online on 1 September 2026. The Respondent was found to have breached the code and was censured. **(b) LA/DG/4408**: Members noted that a Hearing was held on 15 September 2026. The Respondent was found to have breached the code and was suspended. **(c) LA/An/4457**: Members noted that a Hearing was scheduled to take place on 30 September 2026 in Angus House, Forfar. **(d) LA/E/4529**: Members noted that a Hearing was scheduled to take place on 14 October 2026 in the offices of Lothian Valuation Joint Board, Edinburgh. **(e) NB/HES/4282**: Members noted that they had directed further investigation be undertaken in respect of a referral made by the ESC about a former member of Historic Environment Scotland. Members noted the ESC advised he expected to conclude the further investigation in mid-October. The parties had been updated accordingly.	

	(f) LA/DG/4304: Members noted that they had directed further investigation be undertaken in respect of a referral made by the ESC about a Dumfries and Galloway Councillor. Members noted the ESC advised he expected to conclude the further investigation in 6-8 weeks. The parties had been updated accordingly. **(g) LA/SL/4470**: Members noted that a Hearing was scheduled to take place on 27 October 2026 in South Lanarkshire Council Headquarters, Hamilton. **(h) LA/EL/4546**: Members noted that a Hearing was scheduled to take place on 4 November 2026. The venue is to be confirmed. **(i) NPA/LLT/4230**: Members noted that a Hearing was scheduled to take place on 9 December 2026 in Loch Lomond and The Trossachs National Park Authority Headquarters, Balloch. **(j) LA/G/4182**: Members noted the Hearing was postponed untilt he appeal on the associated judicial review was heard. **(k) LA/ER/4506:** Members noted that East Renfrewshire Council had confirmed that it had formally considered a decision the Standards Commission made at a Hearing held on 7 July 2026.	
17.	**INVESTIGATIONS EXCEEDING 3 MONTHS – INTERIM REPORTS** **(a) LA/CES/4565**: Members noted the contents of an interim report from the ESC advising that an investigation into a complaint about Comhairle nan Eilean Siar Councillor had taken more than three months to investigate. **(b) LA/AB/4602**: 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 three months to investigate. **(c) LA/AB/4572**: 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 three months to investigate. **(d) LA/NL/4498**: Members noted the contents of an interim report from the ESC advising that an investigation into a complaint about a North Lanarkshire Councillor had taken more than six months to investigate.	
18.	**FEEDBACK INCLUDING ANY HEARINGS SURVEY RESPONSES** **(a)** Members noted the feedback received from Fife IJB following the Executive Director's presentation on IJB voting rights for lived experience members. **(b)** Members noted the feedback received from Glasgow Disability Alliance. **(c)** Members noted the feedback received from the Scottish Government. **(d)** Members noted the feedback received from the Health and Social Care Alliance following the Executive Director's presentation on the IJB Advice Note for Members. **(e)** Members noted the Evaluation Surveys received following the training session on the IJB Advice Note for the Health and Social Care Alliance.	
ANY OTHER BUSINESS		
19.	**ANY EMERGING RISKS** No additional risks identified. **DATE FOR DATA PROTECTION OFFICER TO ATTEND SCS MEETING**	

	Members agreed to invite the Data Protection Officer to provide his annual update at their meeting and development day on 2 November 2026, failing which the following meeting on 14 December 2026. **AGENDA ITEMS FOR NEXT SCS MEETING** Members agreed to advise the Executive Director of any items to be included in the agenda for discuss at the next meeting.	**Executive Team**
20.	**2026/27 DIARY DATES AND WORKPLAN** Members noted the diary dates and ongoing workplan. **DATE OF NEXT MEETING** Members noted that the next meeting of the Standards Commission was scheduled to take place online on Monday, 2 November 2026.	