

Press release: Local government ethical standards: Committee publishes report

The Committee on Standards in Public Life today published its report and recommendations on ethical standards in local government, following a year-long review and wide consultation. Key recommendations include:

- a new power for local authorities to suspend councillors without allowances for up to six months
- revised rules on declaring interests, gifts and hospitality
- local authorities retain ownership of their own Codes of Conduct
- a right of appeal for suspended councillors to the Local Government Ombudsman
- a strengthened role for the Independent Person
- greater transparency about the number and nature of Code complaints.

Launching the report, Lord Evans, Chair of the Committee on Standards in Public Life, said:

“Local government impacts the lives of citizens every day, providing front-line services to those it serves. Its decisions directly affect the quality of life of local people. High standards of conduct in local government are needed to demonstrate that those decisions are taken in the public interest and to maintain the public’s confidence.

“The evidence we received supports the view that the vast majority of councillors and officers maintain high standards of conduct. There is, however, clear evidence of misconduct by some councillors. Most of these cases relate to bullying or harassment, or other disruptive behaviour. There is also evidence of persistent or repeated misconduct by a minority of councillors. “We are also concerned about a risk to standards under the current arrangements, as a result of the current rules around declaring interests, gifts and hospitality, and the increased complexity of local government decision-making.”

“We believe that the benefits of devolved arrangements should be retained, but that more robust safeguards are needed to strengthen a locally determined system. We are also clear that all local authorities need to develop and maintain an organisational culture which is supportive of high ethical standards. A system which is solely punitive is not desirable or effective; but, in an environment with limited external regulation, councils need the appropriate mechanisms in place to address problems when they arise.

“Our recommendations would enable councillors to be held to account effectively and would enhance the fairness and transparency of the standards process. Introducing a power of suspension and a model code of conduct will enable councillors to be held to account for the most serious or repeated

breaches and support officers to address such behaviour, including in parish councils. Strengthening the role of the Independent Person and introducing a right of appeal for suspended councillors will enhance the impartiality and fairness of the process, which is vital to ensure that councillors are protected from malicious or unfounded complaints. And greater transparency on how complaints are assessed and decided in a system which is currently too reliant on internal political party discipline will provide a safeguard against opaque decision-making and provide reassurance to the public.

“Finally, I would like to thank all those who responded to our consultation or gave us their time and contributions to help build the evidence base for this report. It is clear to us that local government in England has the willingness and capacity to uphold the highest standards of conduct; our recommendations and best practice will enable them to do so.”

Download report [here](#).

Download evidence [here](#).

Notes to Editors

1. Interview requests and media enquiries should go to Maggie O’Boyle on 07880 740627.
2. The independent Committee on Standards in Public Life advises the Prime Minister on ethical standards across the whole of public life in the UK. It monitors and reports on issues relating to the standards of conduct of all public office holders. To find out more about the Committee’s work click [here](#).
3. The current members of the Committee are: Lord (Jonathan) Evans, Chairman, Rt Hon Dame Margaret Beckett DBE MP (Labour), Simon Hart MP (Conservative), Dr Jane Martin CBE, Dame Shirley Pearce DBE, Jane Ramsey, Monisha Shah and Rt Hon Lord (Andrew) Stunell OBE (Liberal Democrat).
4. The Committee has had a long-standing interest in local government, which was the subject of its third report, in 1997, and which it has considered on a number of occasions since then. Since it last reviewed standards arrangements in local government, the Committee has maintained a watching brief. This review was not prompted, however, by any specific allegations of misconduct or council failure, but rather to review the effectiveness of the current arrangements for standards in local government, particularly in light of the changes made by the Localism Act 2011.
5. The review covered all local authorities in England, of which there are 353 principal authorities, with 18,111 councillors in 2013, and an estimated 10,000 parish councils in England, with around 80,000 parish councillors. The Committee did not take evidence relating to Combined Authorities, metro mayors, or the Mayor of London and so do not address these areas of local government in this report.
6. The Committee’s remit does not extend to the devolved administrations of the UK, and so this review does not cover local government standards outside England, although it has considered the role, remit, and work of the standards bodies in Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland for

comparative purposes.

7. You can follow the Committee on twitter [@PublicStandards](#).

[News story: £38 million T Level Capital Fund launches](#)

The first further education providers to teach T Levels are set to benefit from a £38 million funding boost to help build new classrooms, refurbish buildings and upgrade their equipment in readiness to deliver the new qualifications from September 2020.

The [T Level Capital Fund was announced by the Chancellor in the 2018 Budget](#). It is designed to make sure young people taking the new technical courses have access to industry standard equipment and high quality facilities so they gain the skills and knowledge employers demand.

T Levels will be the technical equivalent to A Levels, combining classroom theory, practical learning and an industry placement. The first T Level courses in education, construction and digital will be taught by over 50 further education and post-16 providers from September 2020.

The T Level Capital Fund will be delivered in two parts. From today (Thursday 30 January), [eligible further education providers are being invited to bid](#) for funding to refurbish their existing buildings or to build new spaces. Funding for specialist equipment such as digital and audio visual kit, will be allocated to all providers in spring 2020.

Apprenticeships and Skills Minister, Anne Milton said:

T Levels are a once in a generation opportunity to transform technical education in this country. They will give young people the opportunity to gain the skills they need to get a great job, go on to do a higher level apprenticeship or further study.

It will be vital that they have access to the latest, high quality equipment and state-of the art facilities during their studies. The T Level Capital Fund will help those further education providers at the forefront of delivering these important reforms to be ready to teach T Levels from September 2020.

To support the further education sector to deliver the new T Level programmes, the government will provide an additional half a billion pounds every year once they are all fully rolled out.

The government is also investing £20 million to help prepare the sector for

the introduction of T Levels. This includes the [£5 million Taking Teaching Further programme](#), which aims to attract more industry experts to work in the sector, and the [£8 million T Level Professional Development offer](#) to help teachers and staff prepare for the roll-out of the new qualifications.

In December 2018, the government announced the next [7 T Levels](#) to be taught from 2021 as: Health; Healthcare Science; Science; Onsite Construction; Building Services Engineering; Digital Support and Services; and Digital Business Services.

[News story: Education Secretary urges more faith schools to consider academy conversion](#)

Faith leaders are being encouraged to convert more of their schools to academies – joining hundreds of schools across the country already benefiting from higher standards after academy conversion and building on the leading role faith groups have played in delivering the Government’s education reforms.

At a round-table of representatives from all major faiths held on 29 January, the Education Secretary Damian Hinds set out the benefits of becoming an academy school – placing freedom into the hands of school leaders and helping schools to work together to achieve more than they can alone.

The Education Secretary also praised the role faith organisations have had in the Government’s education reforms since 2010, with more than a quarter of state-funded faith schools already having academy status and more than 100 faith free schools open or due to open soon. The figures reflect an upturn in the pace of academy conversion within faith groups, with more groups now also establishing their own multi academy trusts.

The department would also like to see more people from faith groups choosing to join the thousands of volunteers already offering their time, energy, skills and expertise as school governors and trustees.

Mr Hinds said:

The diversity of schools in this country is one our education system’s most valuable assets, and faith schools play a pivotal role in that. They have led the way in embracing our reforms, with innovative free schools and high performing academies, taking advantage of the freedom and autonomy those choices provide.

Faith schools make up one-third of the schools in England. I want to see even more faith schools enjoying the benefits of academy conversion, with even more faith groups using the exciting opportunity the free schools route provides. In doing so, the leaders of these schools will ensure they are the ones making the right decisions for their pupils and for their communities, as I firmly believe they should be.

The meeting followed the news that more than 50% of children in state-funded schools in England are now taught in an academy or free school, with standards rising faster in many sponsored academies than in similar council-run schools.

Standards in faith schools are also impressive, with last year's GCSE data showing faith schools perform better than their non-faith counterparts, while over half of the top performing 5% of schools at Key Stage 2, are faith schools.

Representatives from all major faiths attended the meeting, including individuals from the Church of England, Muslim, Catholic, Sikh, Jewish and Hindu faiths, and from the Methodist Church.

They were joined by leaders of high performing faith multi-academy trusts – Hamid Patel of Star Academy Trust, Nitesh Gor of Avanti Schools Trust and Dr Brinder Mohan Singh of Nishkam School Trust.

These trusts are just three examples of faith groups combining their own ethos and values with the freedom and autonomy that academies and free schools enjoy, to create thriving schools providing the education their pupils deserve.

Director of the Catholic Education Service, Paul Barber, said:

The Catholic Church has been a longstanding Government partner in the provision of education, and today's meeting highlights the continued strong working relationship we enjoy with the Department.

Nearly a quarter of all Catholic schools in England are academies and we welcome the continued support of the Secretary of State for Catholic dioceses and their academisation plans.

As the country's second largest provider of schools, we remain committed to providing high quality Catholic education centred around the formation of the whole child.

[Press release: Newton Fund supports 4 projects on flooding and drought in SEA](#)

Hydrometeorological hazards pose a direct threat to lives and livelihoods of people living in South East Asia, from death and injury to damaged or destroyed homes, businesses, transport links, power supplies and agricultural land. Climate change and population growth are increasing the number of people at risk, and changes in land-use and the expansion of urban areas has led to a shift in how floods and droughts impact communities.

With support from the Newton Fund, the Natural Environment Research Council (NERC), the Economic & Social Research Council (ESRC), and the Vietnam National Foundation for Science and Technology Development (NAFOSTED) are pleased to announce four joint projects looking into impacts of flooding and drought. These projects are expected to kick off in 2019 and will run for 30 to 36 months.

[Valuing the benefits of blue/green infrastructure for flood resilience, natural capital and urban development in Viet Nam](#)

Lead Investigators: Dr Tobias Borger, University of St Andrews and Dr Van Giai Phong Tran, Hue University

[Comp-Flood: Compound flooding in coastal Viet Nam](#)

Lead Investigators: Dr Ivan Haigh, University of Southampton and Dr Nguyen Nghia Hung, Southern Institute of Water Resource

[Slow Onset Hazard Interactions with Enhanced Drought and Flood Extremes in an At-Risk Mega-Delta](#)

Lead Investigators: Professor Stephen Darby, University of Southampton and Dr Nguyen Ngoc Huy, National Center for Water Resources Planning and Investigation

[An Interdisciplinary Approach to Understanding Past, Present and Future Flood Risk in Viet Nam](#)

Lead Investigators: Dr Jeffrey Neal, University of Bristol and Dr Nam Khanh Pham, University of Economics Ho Chi Minh City

This bilateral programme between Vietnam and the UK is a component in the joint programme among NERC, ESRC and five partner countries in South East Asia, including Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Thailand and Vietnam. A total of 18 projects will be supported with the hope to improve understanding of the impacts of these hazards in the region.

NERC Associate Director of Research Ned Garnett said: "To increase resilience

in countries prone to hydrometeorological hazards, we need to gain a better understanding of the likely environmental and social impacts. This programme of research will deliver this understanding enabling the development and implementation of effective adaptation and mitigation measures. For example, helping local communities to design effective flood defences or restore natural defences, such as mangroves.”

For more information, please visit [NERC](#) and [NAFOSTED](#) websites.

Note to Editors

Natural Environment Research Council (NERC) is the UK’s main agency for funding and managing research, training and knowledge exchange in the environmental sciences. Our work covers the full range of atmospheric, Earth, biological, terrestrial and aquatic science, from the deep oceans to the upper atmosphere and from the poles to the equator. We coordinate some of the world’s most exciting research projects, tackling major environmental issues such as climate change, environmental influences on human health, the genetic make-up of life on Earth, and much more. NERC is part of UK Research & Innovation, a non-departmental public body funded by a grant-in-aid from the UK government.

Economic & Social Research Council (ESRC) funds research into the big social and economic questions facing us today. They also develop and train the UK’s future social scientists. Their research informs public policies and helps make businesses, voluntary bodies and other organisations more effective. Most importantly, it makes a real difference to all our lives. The ESRC is a member of UK Research & Innovation.

The National Foundation for Science and Technology Development (NAFOSTED) was established in February 2008 under the Government’s Decree. NAFOSTED’s establishment and operation is evaluated as one of the important imprints in the renovation process of science and technology management mechanism. NAFOSTED plays an active role in promoting scientific research activities nationwide as well as bilateral cooperation with foreign countries.

The Newton Fund builds research and innovation partnerships with 17 partner countries to support their economic development and social welfare, and to develop their research and innovation capacity for long-term sustainable growth. It has a total UK Government investment of £735 million up until 2021, with matched resources from the partner countries. The Newton Fund is managed by the UK Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS), and delivered through 7 UK delivery partners.

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[Speech: Maintaining commitment to Kuwait's security since 1899: speech by Michael Davenport](#)

Your Excellency Deputy Prime Minister & Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Sabah Al-Khalid Al-Hamad Al-Sabah; Your Excellency Deputy Head of the Amiri Diwan Sheikh Mohammed Abdullah Al-Mubarak Al-Sabah; Your Excellency Minister of Information, Minister of State for Youth Affairs Mohammed Nasser Abdullah Al-Jabri; Your Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

On behalf of Her Majesty's government I should like to express our heartfelt thanks to the government of the State of Kuwait, and to their Excellencies the Deputy PM and the Minister for Information personally, for hosting today's event to mark the anniversary of the first treaty between our two countries, signed on this very day 120 years ago.

This treaty, kept secret at the time, was enormously significant for both our countries. It was in fact, according to contemporary records, the first formal engagement ever executed between a ruler of Kuwait and the government of any country.

Only days after the signing of the treaty, on 4th February 1899, the British government issued instructions to deploy naval force to prevent an attack on Kuwait. And in the 120 years since 1899 Britain has maintained a lasting commitment to Kuwait's security.

Britain's intervention in defence of Kuwait in 1920 also marked the first ever overseas deployment of the newly formed Royal Air Force.

The British commitment to Kuwait continued beyond Kuwait's independence in 1961. In that very year Britain responded to His Highness the then Amir's request for military support, fulfilling its enduring commitment to Kuwait by deploying armed forces amounting to half of a brigade under Operation Vantage.

When your country was invaded, overrun and occupied by Iraq in August 1990 Britain under PM Margaret Thatcher played a leading role in securing a UN mandate for an international coalition to be formed for the liberation of Kuwait.

Britain was proud to be a member of that international coalition. And we are proud to this day of our armed forces who served bravely alongside coalition and Kuwaiti friends and succeeded in restoring Kuwait's sovereignty and

independence. I am especially pleased that Lt Gen Sir John Lorimer, Defence Senior Adviser to the ME, is with us today in recognition of our continuing commitment to Kuwait.

Our two countries have changed radically since 1899. That was the year in which the first motor bus hit the streets of London. Britain moved closer to the Continent when the first radio signal was transmitted across the English Channel. Kuwait's economy was of course dependent on trade, especially with India, and pearl diving. Some things do not change, however. Especially generous Kuwaiti hospitality. Stuart Knox was the first Political Agent to be appointed to Kuwait after the 1899 treaty. What he reported back sounds very familiar – "My private reception", he wrote, "has been most kind and cordial. The Sheikh has set aside large rooms for me and my servants. He insists on feeding me – and my servants – while I am staying with him.... The feeding is distinctly good !"

Kuwaiti-British relations stretch back, of course, way beyond 1899, well into the 18th century. When the British East India Company ran into difficulty with the Ottomans in Basra it should come as no surprise that Kuwait, with its openness to trade and its excellent natural harbour, should have offered an attractive refuge.

But the 1899 treaty ushered in a period of extraordinary expansion in the relations between our two countries and peoples. Throughout the 20th century and right up to this day.

Our leaders sealed these relations through historic visits: notably Viceroy of India Lord Curzon in 1903, shortly before the political agency was established; HH Sheikh Ahmed Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, who visited London just after the First World War; and in more recent times the state visits by HM Queen Elizabeth II and His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmed Al-Jaber Al-Sabah.

In recent decades Britain has become a home from home for many Kuwaitis. Many Kuwaitis I meet seem to know London much better than I do! Kuwaitis invest in properties all over the United Kingdom not just in London, and there are now more Kuwaitis studying at British universities than ever before. Indeed more Kuwaitis are now travelling to Britain than ever before.

In 1952, Britain was poised for an extended period of economic growth. But with rationing and shortages still in place after the Second World War, that seemed far from obvious. So Kuwait's decision in that year to establish the Kuwait Investment Office in smog-bound London, was a resounding vote of confidence in the United Kingdom as a sound place to invest.

The KIO was the first such office of any Sovereign Wealth Fund, later managing Kuwait's investments right across Europe. And Kuwait's investments in the UK, from both the KIO and the private sector, have continued to grow exponentially since then. We warmly welcome and encourage further such investment because it is both responsible and for the long term.

A key outcome of the State Visit to Britain by HH the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al

Ahmed Al Jaber Al Sabah in 2012 was the establishment of a new framework for our bilateral relations in the form of the Joint Steering Group, as part of my Government's new Gulf Strategy.

This Joint Steering Group – or JSG – is helping us to deepen our co-operation in those areas where we are already working together – and to broaden our co-operation in pastures new.

The JSG has helped us to deepen our defence and security co-operation. In the year ahead our armed forces will be exercising and training together more than ever before. We are close allies in the international Counter-Daesh Coalition.

At a government to government level we are working together in highly sensitive areas, for example to safeguard passengers flying out of our airports and to protect the integrity of our data and communications against cyber attacks.

Last week's visit by the Lord Mayor of the City of London highlighted new opportunities in trade and investment – in both directions – including in support of His Highness the Amir's exciting new plans for Hareer Territory, in pursuit of Kuwait's Vision 2035.

We are sorry not to have HE the Minister for Education & Higher Education with us today, but I am happy that this is because he is attending the Education World Forum in London, where he is also holding consultations on co-operation in the area of curriculum reform.

And in the cultural sphere the 120th anniversary has helped to stimulate fresh co-operation in music and the arts between the British Council and the National Council for Arts and Literature. The Royal Philharmonic Orchestra will be making its first ever visit to Kuwait in April to perform at the remarkable Jaber Al-Ahmed Cultural Centre. Britain and Kuwait enjoy distinguished and exceptionally special relations. Many of us are witness to this every day. Our duty and our challenge will be to ensure that our relations endure to keep pace with regional and global developments, and that they are fit for purpose in the twenty-first century.

We are well placed together to fulfil this duty and to meet such a challenge side by side. Not only do we have a strong bond of friendship. This is matched by a close and rare identity of interests and values, which helps to strengthen our co-operation in many fields. Whether in the UN Security Council, where we are delighted to be working with our Kuwaiti colleagues. Or tackling global environmental challenges, such as the menace of marine pollution. Or working together to bring security and stability to this precious but troubled region.

So I feel confident in wishing our two countries not only a happy anniversary, but also a further 120 years of partnership and friendship, well into the next century!