



INTEGRITY IN PUBLIC LIFE

## **BUSINESS PLAN**

**2023 / 2024**

**Strategic Aim 1: 'IMPACT'****We will have a positive impact on ethical standards in public life.**

<b>Actions (Taken from Strategic Plan)</b>	<b>Activities 2023/24</b>	<b>Measurement / Target</b>
<b>1.</b> Making a proactive contribution to any initiatives to review and improve the legislative framework, processes and structures in place to support high standards of conduct in public life.	<p>Undertake review of compliance with, and any issues arising from, the renewal of the Directions issued to the Ethical Standards Commissioner under Sections 10 &amp; 11 of the Ethical Standards in Public Life etc. (Scotland) Act 2000 (the 2000 Act).</p> <p>Compile 'wish list' of recommendations to amend the governing legislation so potential breaches of the Codes of Conduct can be dealt with in the most effective and proportionate manner.</p> <p>Raise issue with Section 31 of Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973 with the appropriate Minister and spearhead legislative change.</p>	<p>Undertake review (including holding discussions with ESC to identify any issues that may have arisen) of compliance with Direction on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Progress of Investigations by end of Quarter 2</li><li>• Outcome of Investigations by end of Quarter 3</li><li>• Eligibility by end of Quarter 4</li></ul> <p>Review to be completed (including consultation with ESC and other stakeholders as appropriate) by end of Quarter 2.</p> <p>Hold discussions with Government about whether any progress has been made in respect of the review of Section 31.</p>
<b>2.</b> Taking all opportunities to be a strong and consistent voice for the importance of the ethical standards framework and compliance with the Codes of Conduct.	<p>Review social media presence to determine whether Standards Commission using most appropriate platforms.</p> <p>Work with public relations company to identify the most appropriate method, timing and audience (i.e. specific media outlets, other public bodies or politicians) for communicating messages about the ethical standards framework and Codes of Conduct.</p> <p>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</p>	<p>Undertake review of social media platforms in Quarter 1. Determine most appropriate ones to use and open new accounts / close existing as applicable.</p> <p>Hold regular meetings with public relations company to keep them advised of key issues arising and work being undertaken. Ask public relations company for advice on how to take advantage of opportunities to communicate messages about the ethical standards framework and Codes of Conduct when matters concerning public standards were the subject of media scrutiny and public debate.</p> <p>Publish and disseminate a Standards Update at the end of each quarter.</p> <p>Publish a monthly blog on the website on any topical and pertinent news stories.</p>

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	<p>or in appeal decisions in Standards Updates or via standalone communications.</p> <p>Publish and disseminate standalone news items in respect of any high-profile or potentially controversial Hearings and any appeal decisions.</p> <p>Promote Hearings to be held and Hearings decisions in media, on website and on social media platforms.</p> <p>Actively engage with local media about Hearings and issuing press releases to them at conclusion of each Hearing.</p> <p>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.</p> <p>Members to undertake more research into what work was being undertaken to encourage respect in public and political debates to determine whether the Standards Commission could undertake further activity to promote the key principles of public life, including that of respect.</p>	<p>Publish and disseminate standalone news items in respect of any high-profile or potentially controversial issues, Hearings and appeal decisions.</p> <p>Advise local and, if appropriate national, media of Hearings to be held. Liaise with any media in attendance at Hearings. Issue and publish on website media releases in advance, and press releases after, each Hearing. Publish information about Hearings to be held on website and social media platforms. Publish decision and press releases on website within five days, and full written decision within 20 working days, of conclusion of a Hearing and promote these on social media.</p> <p>Release a minimum of three posts on the ethical standards framework on social media per week.</p>
<b>3.</b> Producing and promoting guidance, advice notes and other training material to support compliance with the Codes	Review and update standard training presentations (and case illustrations) on the Codes of Conduct.	Review and update training presentations in Quarter 2.

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of Conduct, to educate on best practice and to drive up standards.	<p>Update case examples and illustrations in Guidance, Advice Notes and standard presentations in light of feedback and enquiries received and decisions made.</p> <p>Continue to develop, consult on, publish and disseminate e-Learning material, videos and Advice Notes in light of any emerging trends or feedback (including those identified by Monitoring and Standards Officers at their respective workshops).</p> <p>Respond to enquiries and requests for assistance within timescales outlined in Service Charter.</p>	<p>Ongoing review of Guidance and Advice Notes. Seek feedback from Standards Officers at workshop in March 2023 and from Monitoring Officers at workshop in October 2023 and amend in light of any suggestions made.</p> <p>Ongoing review of enquiries and feedback from training sessions, workshops and discussions with stakeholders to determine whether any new e-Learning material, videos or Advice Notes should be created or any existing ones amended.</p> <p>Respond to all requests for assistance with training, on how to interpret provisions in the Codes of Conduct, and on how to make a complaint or resolve an issue concerning the ethical standards framework within timescales outlined in the Service Charter.</p> <p>Record enquiries and report on performance against timescales in Annual Report. Ongoing and Q2.</p> <p>Produce an Advice Note for Chairs of Public Bodies by end of Q4.</p>
<p><b>4.</b> Working with Scottish Government and other stakeholders to promote the revised Codes of Conduct, and improving awareness of provisions in the Codes of Conduct and that a complaint can be made if these are contravened.</p>	<p>Promote Codes of Conduct, Guidance and Advice Notes.</p> <p>Develop and publish interactive e-Learning training material on specific aspects of the Codes or ethical standards framework.</p> <p>Produce Guidance on both Codes in alternative formats.</p> <p>Assist Scottish Government with induction of new members of devolved public bodies.</p>	<p>Ongoing promotion of Codes, Guidance and Advice Notes via website, Standards Updates, social media, training and workshop events and news releases.</p> <p>Interactive content on at least two new topics to be produced and published online by end of Q4</p> <p>Consider creating digital, Braille and BSL versions of Guidance and Advice Notes, or key provisions in these, where possible.</p> <p>Liaise with Public Bodies Unit on ongoing basis to develop content on ethical standards framework for their governance hub for members of devolved public bodies.</p> <p>Executive Director to present on Model Code at the quarterly "Welcome on Board" induction workshops for Ministerial appointees.</p>
<p><b>5.</b> Obtaining and undertaking detailed analysis of qualitative and</p>	<p>Complete all agreed actions arising from surveys of Monitoring Officers, councillors, Standards Officers and Members of</p>	

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quantitative evidence on our work to promote the Codes of Conduct so that we evaluate our impact in a meaningful way.	<p>Devolved Public Bodies that were undertaken in 2021/22 and 2022/23.</p> <p>Report on progress against agreed key performance indicators in 2022/23 Annual Report.</p> <p>Undertake annual review of key performance indicators.</p> <p>Maintain a record of the nature of all enquiries and feedback received and about cases referred on an ongoing basis.</p> <p>Analyse all decisions made in 2022/23, under Section 16 of the 2000 Act, and review policy, process document, templates, publication scheme and decision-making procedures.</p>	<p>Report on performance in 2022/23 against agreed key performance indicators to be included in Annual Report due to be published and laid at end of August 2023.</p> <p>Annual Review of key performance indicators to be undertaken at September 2023 Standards Commission meeting.</p> <p>Report on all feedback received to be considered as standing agenda item at Standards Commission meetings.</p> <p>Analysis of Section 16 decisions to be completed by end of Q1. Review all policies, processes, publication scheme and templates for issuing of decisions under Section 16 in Q2.</p>

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<b>Actions</b>	<b>Activities 2023/24</b>	<b>Measurement / Target</b>
<p><b>6.</b> Making all decisions including those:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• under Sections 16;</li> <li>• in respect of interim reports; and</li> <li>• at Hearings on breaches of the Codes of Conduct</li> </ul>	<p>Provide feedback to ESC on investigation reports and seek feedback from ESC on adjudicatory decisions.</p> <p>Undertake review of Rules, procedures, template letters and publicly available</p>	<p>Agree feedback mechanism with ESC in Quarter 1 and proceed to seek / provide on ongoing basis.</p> <p>Review of each 'no action' decision and Hearing undertaken as standing agenda item at the Standards Commission meeting which follows the conclusion of each Hearing. This</p>

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in the most effective and proportionate manner.	<p>cases and Hearings information on an ongoing basis when any new issues arise.</p> <p>Actively engage with parties before Hearings to ensure:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• issues are identified and resolved in advance;</li><li>• deadlines for providing information are met; and</li><li>• queries are answered timeously and fully.</li></ul> <p>Consider varying usual Hearing procedures when appropriate to do so if possibility of reducing costs arises.</p> <p>Training for new members to be provided on Rules and on Article 10 of the ECHR and its application. Refresher training to be provided to other members, if required.</p> <p>Undertake review of all case decision made over the year to identify trends and to ensure consistency and clarity in reasoning.</p>	<p>to include analysis and discussion on what went well or otherwise, and what could have been done differently.</p> <p>Review revised version of Rules introduced in October 2022 in Q3. Seek feedback on accessibility and application of Rules from new Members and ESC before doing so.</p> <p>Actively seek to engage with parties before all Hearings. Invite parties to pre-Hearing meetings to discuss and hopefully resolve any procedural or technical issues in advance (ongoing).</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>Training to be provided after new members appointed (by end of Q1).</p> <p>Annual review of cases decisions to be undertaken at a Standards Commission meeting in Q4.</p>
<b>7.</b> Working with others to ensure there is consistency in terms of the standards expected of individuals in public life.	<p>Assist with training any new staff employed by ESC on the role of the Standards Commission, its educational material and adjudicatory processes.</p> <p>Complete induction and training on the Codes of Conduct and on the Standards Commission's standard training</p>	<p>Complete training of ESC staff as any when appropriate.</p> <p>Organise mentoring and complete induction and training in Quarter 1. Seek feedback on induction and training and update indication and training plan accordingly in Quarter 2.</p>

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	<p>presentations and other educational material for the two Standards Commission members who are due to be appointed in quarter 4 of 2022/23. Appoint an experienced Member to mentor each new Member.</p> <p>Review approach to providing thought leadership by establishing and promoting a network to raise the profile of the ethical standards framework and drive collaboration between all organisations who seek to ensure integrity in public life.</p> <p>Hold annual workshops with Monitoring and Standards Officers to discuss emerging trends and issues and how best to deal with these. Invite the ESC, Audit Scotland, Scottish Government, the Colleges Development Network and the Improvement Service to these.</p> <p>Improving engagement with devolved public bodies to help them to increase awareness amongst their members of the provisions in the Codes of Conduct and how to complain about any failure to adhere to these.</p>	<p>Identifying and holding initial discussions individually with organisations throughout Scotland and then the wider UK by end of Q2 (with a view to then considering whether a network can be established and promoted). Executive Director to participate on quarterly SOLAR Monitoring Officer Liaison group meetings.</p> <p>Executive Team to hold regular meetings with the Audit Scotland, Scottish Government, the Colleges Development Network and the Improvement Service to discuss issues of common interest.</p> <p>Workshop with Monitoring Officers to be held in Q3 (October). Workshop with Standards Officers to be held in Q4 (March).</p> <p>Contribute to review of voluntary Community Council Code and associated training materials to being undertaken by the Scottish Government.</p> <p>Identify whether any work can be done with the Improvement Service and/or COSLA to encourage equalities and diversity training and to prevent bullying and harassment; and to determine whether any work is being undertaken to investigate whether this is a barrier to individuals from under-represented groups standing as candidates. Initial discussions to be held by end of Q3.</p> <p>To advise COSLA of the concerns raised in respect of the discrepancy between councillor workloads, and issues raised in relation to work/childcare commitments hindering access to training. To be completed by end of Q3.</p>

**Strategic Aim 2: 'IMPROVEMENT'**

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Actions	Activities 2023/24	Measurement / Target
	Continue to promote the highest standards of ethical standards within Community Councils with the Scottish Government.	
<b>8.</b> Helping to improve understanding of the ethical standards framework and resolving or mitigating any issues or tensions that might arise.	<p>Respond fully to all enquiries about the Codes and how provisions should be interpreted within the timescales outlined in the Service Charter.</p> <p>Hold at least two training events for councillors on the Councillors' Code of Conduct or specific topics, such as social media.</p> <p>Provide training to boards of public bodies on request.</p> <p>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.</p> <p>Ongoing review of all sources of intelligence including complaints, enquiries, information gathering at workshops and training events, information gathering from the media, parliamentary committee reports and Audit Scotland reports to identify any topics that would benefit from new educational material.</p>	<p>Ongoing. General nature of enquiries and timescales for responses recorded. Report on these to be produced and considered in Q4.</p> <p>Training events for councillors to be held in Qs 2 and 3.</p> <p>Training to be provided to public body boards, on request (subject to availability).</p> <p>Invite ESC to three formal joint meetings to be held with ESC in June and December 2023 and February 2024. Fortnightly informal meetings to be held between Executive Team and ESC.</p> <p>Undertake annual reviews (end of Q4) of both enquiries and comments received on the Standards Commission's social media accounts, with reports then provided to Members outlining the numbers of comments or enquiries received by the:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• category of individual it is from;</li><li>• category of individual or organisation it concerns; and</li><li>• its general nature</li></ul> <p>in order to identify common issues or themes.</p>



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Actions	Activities 2023/24	Measurement / Target
	Record any trends or issues arising from enquiries, and requests for advice, to determine whether any further general guidance or advice should be issued.	Acknowledge any requests for dispensations within three working days and respond substantively within one 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.

**Strategic Aim 3: 'STAKEHOLDERS'**

We will pursue and develop strong relationships with our stakeholders.

Actions	Activities 2023/24	Measurement / Target
<p>9. Identifying and seeking ways of working with all individuals and organisations who are potentially affected by the ethical standards framework.</p>	<p>Work with Standards Officers to identify the best way the Standards Commission can support them in providing induction / training on the Model Code of Conduct and awareness, amongst board members and officers, of the right to make a complaint.</p> <p>Work with Monitoring Officers to identify the best way the Standards Commission can support Councils in providing advice and training on the Councillors' Code of Conduct.</p> <p>Circulate feedback forms at every Hearing and request feedback in decision letters and via Standards Updates and social media.</p> <p>Proactively seek feedback from relevant Monitoring or Standards Officer after each Hearing.</p>	<p>Regular liaison with Standards Officers and Monitoring Officers via the issuing of quarterly Standards Updates, the holding of workshops and meetings with relevant stakeholder groups (such as the MO Liaison Group and the College Development Network).</p> <p>Use responses from feedback, liaison meetings and enquiries to identify the best way the Standards Commission can provide support in terms of induction / training on the Codes (ongoing).</p> <p>Feedback to be sought on Standards Commission's Hearing Rules, Hearings related Guidance, communications / correspondence, how it conducts Hearings and the clarity of its public information and decisions. Overall feedback to be collated and circulated to Members for consideration in Q4.</p> <p>Following up with Monitoring / Standards Officers three months after Hearings to see whether there has been any discernible impact in terms of behaviour as a result of the decision.</p> <p>Consult ESC on any proposed substantive changes to the Hearing Rules and associated procedural documents.</p>

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We will pursue and develop strong relationships with our stakeholders.

Actions	Activities 2023/24	Measurement / Target
	<p>Seek feedback from Panel Members on management of all activity relating to each Hearing, including administrative arrangements, communications and the preparation of written decisions.</p> <p>Update Hearing Rules, procedures and processes as appropriate in light of any feedback and reviews.</p> <p>Provide updates on feedback and any improvements and changes made in Standards Updates, via social media and in Annual Report.</p>	<p>Publish Standards Updates each quarter. Publish at least three social media posts per week. Publish and lay Annual Report in Quarter 2.</p>
<p><b>10.</b> Actively seeking feedback on our educational material, policies and procedures and collaborating with other regulators and partner bodies across the UK to share experiences and inform best practice.</p>	<p>Consult with stakeholders on any substantive changes to be made to the Standards Commission's Guidance, Advice Notes and other educational material.</p> <p>Actively engage and collaborate with the ESC, Committee on Standards in Public Life, Northern Ireland Ombudsman and Standards Commissioner for Wales on emerging trends arising from complaints and Hearings and on best practice.</p> <p>Continue contact with other key stakeholders including ESC, SOLACE, Audit Scotland, COSLA, the College Development Network and the Improvement Service, and consult with all on any substantive changes</p>	<p>Consult with other key stakeholders on any substantive changes to Guidance and on any new Advice Notes within one month of these being agreed by the Standards Commission.</p> <p>Executive Team to have regular contact, and if possible one meeting per year, with each of the Committee on Standards in Public Life, Northern Ireland Ombudsman and Standards Commissioner for Wales.</p> <p>Executive Director to attend SOLAR liaison group meetings in Q2 and Q4. Standards Commission to hold one meeting per annum with SOLACE officeholders, Audit Scotland and COSLA.</p>

### Strategic Aim 3: 'STAKEHOLDERS'

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Actions	Activities 2023/24	Measurement / Target
	to Guidance and any new Advice Notes as appropriate.	
11. Seeking to share services where possible, to ensure best value.	<p>Undertake a best value review of legal expenditure.</p> <p>Migrate all files to the SharePoint platform provided by the Scottish Parliament's Business and Information Technology Team.</p> <p>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.</p> <p>Discuss shared training opportunities with other Officeholders (particularly on data protection and cybersecurity).</p> <p>Implement recommendations and action points arising from external and internal audits.</p> <p>Review service level agreement with Scottish Parliament's Business and Information Technology Team (BIT).</p> <p>Ensure Standards Commission is named in any relevant SPCB and Officeholders' procurement contracts.</p>	<p>Review to be undertaken by end of Q2.</p> <p>Further discussions on timescales to be held with Business and Information Technology Team. Compile plan for migration and training of all staff and Members on SharePoint once dates agreed.</p> <p>Participation in Commissioners and Ombudsman's Group, FOISA Network Group and Data Protection Officer meetings. Ongoing research and <i>ad hoc</i> contact with other public bodies.</p> <p>Hold regular discussions with other Officeholders and include as appropriate when seeking quotes for provision of training. Provide refresher training to all staff and members on data protection, information retention and disposal policies and cybersecurity by end of Q3.</p> <p>Programme of audits and associated improvement actions to be completed Q4.</p> <p>Ongoing contact with Officeholder Services about any significant procurement.</p> <p>Review of service agreement with BIT in Q2.</p>

**Strategic Aim 3: 'STAKEHOLDERS'**

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Actions	Activities 2023/24	Measurement / Target
	Review all relevant policies and procedures in light of any applicable changes to human rights or data protection legislation.	

**Strategic Aim 4: 'CLARITY'**

We will ensure that all stakeholders, including members of the public, have easy access to high quality information about the organisation, its work and any initiatives it is undertaking.

Actions	Activities 2023/24	Measurement / Target
<b>12.</b> Ensuring all case related decisions are clearly explained and well-reasoned.	<p>Induct and train new Members appointed in Quarter 4 of 2022/23 on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• the Codes of Conduct, Guidance and Advice Notes;</li> <li>• all case related policies, processes and decision-making procedures; and</li> <li>• the management of Hearings (including Chairing).</li> </ul> <p>Refresher training for existing Members on the revised Codes and Guidance (or specific topics within them).</p> <p>Ensure Members are briefed on all relevant issues before making Section 16 decisions on reports referred by the Ethical Standards Commissioner (ESC).</p> <p>Ensure Hearing Panel Chairs and Members are briefed fully before Hearings on facts / matters that are in dispute and any relevant legislation or case law.</p> <p>Update Rules, procedures and decision-making templates in light of relevant case</p>	<p>Induction and training completed by end of Q1 (including any external training if required).</p> <p>Training to be completed by end of Q3.</p> <p>Briefing template email to be circulated to Members within one working day of report from ESC (as per KPIs).</p> <p>Reasoning for all decision to 'take no action' under Section 16 circulated to nominated member for approval before decision issued.</p> <p>Hearing briefing note to be issued / provided to Panel Chair and Members, or briefing meeting arranged, at least five working days before Hearings (as per KPIs).</p> <p>Ongoing research to be undertaken in respect of relevant case law, appeal decisions and cases / or work in analogous organisations / jurisdictions. Updates and training to be provided accordingly.</p>

**Strategic Aim 4: 'CLARITY'**

We will ensure that all stakeholders, including members of the public, have easy access to high quality information about the organisation, its work and any initiatives it is undertaking.

Actions	Activities 2023/24	Measurement / Target
	<p>law, appeal decisions and cases / or work in analogous organisations / jurisdictions. Ensure Panel Members receive training accordingly.</p> <p>Send draft decisions to Panel Members for review within two working days of conclusion of Hearing / decision to impose an interim suspension.</p>	<p>Send draft written decision to Panel within two working days of conclusion of a Hearing (as per KPIs)</p> <p>Panel Members to provide feedback on quality of draft written decisions as part of case review at Standards Commission meeting following a decision to take no action under Section 16, or the conclusion of the Hearing, or a decision on the imposition or otherwise of an interim suspension.</p>
<b>13.</b> Using digital technology to ensure all educational material and information about good practice and Hearings are published and disseminated as widely as possible.	<p>Undertaking a full review of the Standards Commission's website to ensure it complies with legislative requirements and best practice on accessibility.</p> <p>Undertake a full review of layout and content of 'Cases' Page on website.</p> <p>Include information about how to find information about Hearings and educational materials in Standards Updates, via standalone communications, on website and via email and social media.</p> <p>Publish and disseminate standalone news items in respect of any high-profile or potentially controversial Hearings or appeal decisions.</p> <p>Encourage stakeholders to follow Standards Commission on its social media platforms.</p>	<p>Review to be completed by end of Quarter 3.</p> <p>Review to be undertaken by end of Quarter 1, with any identified changes made by end of Quarter 2.</p> <p>Issue quarterly Standards Updates. Regularly update website and issue at least three social media posts per week.</p> <p>Publish and disseminate standalone news items in respect of any high-profile or potentially controversial issues, Hearings and appeal decisions (ongoing).</p> <p>Include information about Standards Commission's social media platforms in correspondence and Standards Updates (ongoing).</p>

**Strategic Aim 4: 'CLARITY'**  
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<b>Actions</b>	<b>Activities 2023/24</b>	<b>Measurement / Target</b>
	Create and upload to website and social media platforms new animated videos on key principles and other aspects of ethical standards framework.	At least two new videos to be produced and uploaded by end of Quarter 4.
<b>14.</b> Providing training to ensure Members and staff of the Standards Commission are clear about its governance and decision-making arrangements.	<p>Providing a half day refresher training session for all Members and staff on key governance matters, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• retention and disposal policies;</li> <li>• data protection;</li> <li>• the Standing Orders, Scheme of Delegation and Finance Policy;</li> <li>• the approach to risk management;</li> <li>• Equality Impact Assessments;</li> <li>• registering interests;</li> <li>• the service charter</li> <li>• statutory reporting; and</li> <li>• whistleblowing.</li> </ul> <p>Using a mock referral case, to be discussed at an online meeting, to provide Members with refresher training on Section 7 of the Councillors' Code (regulatory and quasi-judicial decision-making) and on Section 16 decision-making on case referrals.</p>	<p>Training Session to be held by end of Quarter 1.</p>          <p>Training Session to be held by end of Quarter 2.</p>