

10 February 2021

Robert Jenrick MP
Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government

Dear Robert,

Re. Government response to the review of local government ethical standards

It is just over two years since the Committee on Standards in Public Life (COSIPL) published its review of local government ethical standards and I am again urging you as a matter of some urgency to respond to this important report, to support its recommendations and to bring forward measures needed to strengthen the current standards regime.

I am sure you would agree that now more than ever, high standards of conduct in government at all levels are needed to protect the integrity of decision making, maintain public confidence and to safeguard local democracy.

As Jane Martin from COSIPL stated in a [blog post](#) just this week: “the vast majority of people who serve on town and parish councils do so for the benefit of their community and, in doing so, observe the Seven Principles of Public Life” but that “poor behaviour is creating significant disruption” in some communities.

In my recent [open letter](#), I restated our firm commitment to promoting and supporting good governance and the highest standards of conduct and behaviour in local (parish and town) councils. Most local councils are well run, with clerks and council staff working as a team with councillors to deliver their ambitions for the community. But all too often we hear about the negative impact poor and disruptive behaviour can have; by councillors, clerks and residents.

Simply put, we must tackle this issue and put a stop to the actions of the few overshadowing the many whose tireless efforts play such a vital role in our civic life and local communities. Efforts that you yourself have rightly praised as playing such an important part in the response to the current pandemic.

There has been some progress on taking forward COSIPL's recommendations through the development of a single code of conduct by the Local Government Association (LGA), which is a measure NALC called for in our submission to the review. We have put forward to the LGA our proposals on what will be needed to support the effective introduction of the code such as training, guidance and other support, especially as we are keen to ensure that the significant funding your department provides to them for local government improvement does in fact benefit our councils. We are also engaging with the Society of Local Council Clerks (SLCC) on the development of a civility project.

Our submission to the review also called for the introduction of a more robust range of sanctions such as suspension or disqualification for serious and repeated misconduct. While I am pleased that COSIPL listened to our call and included this among their recommendations, these vital measures require government support and action through legislation.

Only by taking forward the review's recommendations as a package, rather than piecemeal, with local government working closely with national government and through the provision of support and targeted investment, will we be able to continue to uphold the high standards of conduct we all expect and tackle poor behaviour where it exists.

I again extend my offer to work closely and constructively with you, the LGA and others on this important issue and I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely,



Cllr Sue Baxter
Chairman
National Association of Local Councils