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22 October 2026

Exmoor National Park Authority Standards Committee

To: The Members of the Standards Committee of the Exmoor National Park Authority

A meeting of the Standards Committee will be held in the **Garden Room, Exmoor House, Dulverton, on Tuesday 3 November 2026 at 12.00pm midday**

The meeting will be open to the press and public subject to the passing of any resolution under s.100(A)(4) of the Local Government Act 1972.

There is a Public Speaking at this meeting, when the Chairperson will allow members of the public two minutes each in which to ask questions, make statements, or present a petition relating to any item on the Agenda. Anyone wishing to ask questions should notify the Democratic Support Officer by 4pm on the working day before the meeting of the agenda item on which they wish to speak, indicating a brief summary of the matter or matters to be raised (contact Committees@exmoor-nationalpark.gov.uk).

Please be aware that this is a public Authority Meeting and will be **audio and video recorded**. We will make the recordings available via our website for members of the public to listen to and/or view, within 72 hours of the meeting taking place.

Members of the public may use forms of social media to report on proceedings at this meeting. Anyone wishing to film part or all of the proceedings may do so unless the press and public are excluded for that part of the meeting or there is good reason not to do so. As a matter of courtesy, anyone wishing to film proceedings is asked to advise the Chairperson so that those present may be made aware.

(The agenda and papers for this meeting can be downloaded from the National Park Authority's website www.exmoor-nationalpark.gov.uk).

Sarah Bryan
Chief Executive

Conduct at Meetings

As set out above, the Authority welcomes public engagement with its work and believes that everyone attending a meeting of Exmoor National Park Authority or one of its Committees has the right to be treated with respect and to feel safe at all times, including before, during and after the meeting they attend.

The Authority understands that some situations can be difficult and lead to frustration; however, the Authority is committed to promoting an environment where everyone feels listened to and respected and is not subjected to unacceptable behaviour. Further guidance is provided in our Customer Notice, available on our [website](http://www.exmoor-nationalpark.gov.uk).

Agenda

1. **Election of Chairperson**
2. **Election of Deputy Chairperson**
3. **Apologies for Absence**
4. **Declarations of Interest**
5. **Minutes:** (1) To approve as a correct record the Minutes of the meeting of the Standards Committee held on 7 April 2026 ([Item 5](#)).
(2) To consider any Matters Arising from those Minutes.
6. **Business of Urgency:** To introduce any business which by reason of special circumstances the Chairperson, after consultation with the Chief Executive, is of the opinion should be considered as a matter of urgency and to resolve when such business should be ordered on the Agenda.
7. **Public Speaking:** The Chairperson will allow members of the public to ask questions, make statements, or present a petition on any matter on the Agenda for this meeting or in relation to any item relevant to the business of the Standards Committee. Any questions specific to an agenda item can be posed when that item is considered subject to the discretion of the person presiding at the meeting.
8. **Future Arrangements for the Authority's Audit Committee Functions:** To consider the joint report of the Solicitor and Monitoring Officer and Chief Finance Officer (Item 8).
9. **Overview of Complaints and Compliments:** To consider the report of the Head of Enterprise and Operations (Item 9).
10. **Revised Complaints Procedure:** To consider the joint report of the Head of Enterprise and Operations and Monitoring Officer (Item 10).
11. **Actions under the Authority's Member Code of Conduct:** To consider the verbal report of the Monitoring Officer (Item 11).

Further information on any of the reports can be obtained by contacting the National Park Authority at the address and telephone numbers shown at the top of the agenda.

Details of the decisions taken at this meeting will be set out in the formal Minutes which the Committee will be asked to approve as a correct record at its next meeting. In the meantime, details of the decisions can be obtained from the Democratic Support Officer, at Exmoor House.

Exmoor National Park Authority**Standards Committee**

3 November 2026

Agenda Item 5

Minutes of the Standards Committee Meeting held at 12 pm on Tuesday, 7 April 2026 in the Garden Room, Exmoor House, Dulverton

Present

Miss E Stacey (Chairperson)

Mr J Patrinos (Deputy Chairperson)

Mr M Ellicott

Mr S J Pugsley

Mr N Thwaites

In attendance:

Mr C Hedger (Solicitor and Monitoring Officer) – joined via Microsoft Teams

Mr B Barrett (Head of Enterprise and Operations and Chief Finance Officer)

Mr A Stanyer (Independent Person)

Mrs J Hagley-Coles (Corporate Support Officer) - notetaker

10. Apologies for absence

There were none.

11. Declarations of interest

There were none.

12. Minutes

Confirmation: The Minutes of the Standards Committee's meeting on 2 December 2025 were agreed and signed as a correct record, subject to the following amendments:-

Minute 1 – Appointment of Chairperson: In absentia, Miss E Stacey was appointed Chairperson of the Standards Committee until the first meeting of the Standards Committee convened after the Annual Meeting.

Minute 2 – Appointment of Deputy Chairperson – Mr J Patrinos was appointed Deputy Chairperson of the Standards Committee until the first meeting of the Standards Committee convened after the Annual Meeting. In Miss Stacey's absence, Mr Patrinos chaired the meeting

Matters arising: None.

13. Business of urgency:

The meeting was reminded that Miss Stacey's term as a Secretary of State-appointed Member would end this year, meaning a vacancy on the Standards Committee would need to be filled at the Annual Meeting as part of the Member Appointments process. Standing Orders require the Standards Committee to comprise five Authority Members, including at least one Local Authority Member and at least one Secretary of State-appointed Member – which includes Parish Members who are ratified by the Secretary of State.

14. Public Speaking:

There were no public speakers.

15. Annual Governance Review 2025-26

The Committee considered the joint report of the Chief Finance Officer and the Solicitor and Monitoring Officer.

The Committee's consideration

In relation to the good practice questions set out in the governance self-assessment, it was suggested and agreed that the response to question 16, "Has the membership of the committee been assessed against the core knowledge and skills framework and found to be satisfactory?" be amended from "no" to "not applicable".

It was confirmed the role of the Independent Persons was to assess potential violations against the Code of Conduct and there was no obligation for them to submit a formal annual report. However, Mr Stanyer confirmed he would be comfortable to speak up if he felt general improvements could be made to the way Committees operated on a general basis.

Resolved to:

1. APPROVE the Annual Governance Review.
2. NOTE the results of the Governance self-assessment at Section 9 subject to amendment to the response to question 16 from "no" to "not applicable".
3. APPROVE the Annual Governance Statement as set out in the Appendix for inclusion with the Annual Accounts for 2025/26.

16. Standards Committee Annual Report 2025-2026

The Committee considered the joint report of the Chief Finance Officer and the Solicitor and Monitoring Officer.

The Committee's consideration

Section 3 of the Annual Report related to the Annual Review of Member Conduct and Code of Conduct and Members noted that the last major changes to the Code of Conduct (CoC) were made in April 2024. It was therefore suggested that a review of the CoC should be put forward as an agenda item for the next Standards Committee Meeting.

Confirmation was provided that 3 working days' notice was required to nominate a Planning Committee Substitute.

In relation to any potential training requirements, the Members welcomed the reintroduction of a Study Tour in the spring/summer. Whilst not strictly training, the Committee considered it would be valuable to reintroduce the opportunity for all Members and staff to gather during the lunch break of the Annual Meeting would be very valuable.

The meeting noted that local elections would take place in 2027 (including Somerset Council, North Devon District Council and Parish Council elections) which may result in changes to the Authority's membership, and that it would be necessary to plan accordingly for induction and other training.

Resolved to:

1. NOTE the contents of the Annual Report for 2025-2026
2. DISCUSS any Member training needs for 2026-2027

The meeting closed at 12.20pm.

(Chairperson)

Exmoor National Park Authority**Standards Committee**

3 November 2026

Agenda Item 8

Future Arrangements for the Authority's Audit Committee Functions

Joint report of the Solicitor and Monitoring Officer and Chief Finance Officer

Purpose of Report

To advise Members of new statutory requirements relating to audit committees and to recommend amendments to the Authority's committee structure and standing orders to ensure compliance.

Recommended Decision

That the Standards Committee RECOMMEND to the Authority that:

1. The Standards Committee and Final Accounts Committee be replaced by a single Audit and Governance Committee with effect from the Authority meeting in February 2027;
2. The purpose, functions and terms of reference set out at Appendix 1 be approved;
3. Responsibility for the audit committee and standards functions identified in Appendix 1 be delegated to the Audit and Governance Committee;
4. The Committee comprise 12 Authority Members, appointed on the basis set out in paragraph 4.1, with the Authority retaining the option of appointing a smaller, proportionately balanced committee of not fewer than nine Members;
5. The quorum be four Members, including at least one local authority appointed Member and one Secretary of State appointed Member;
6. Members be invited to express an interest in serving on the Committee before appointments are made in February 2027;
7. The operation of the monthly Authority and Planning Committee arrangements be reviewed to accommodate the Audit and Governance Committee's work programme; and
8. The Monitoring Officer, in consultation with the Chief Finance Officer, to make consequential and non-substantive amendments to Standing Orders, the scheme of Delegation and committee procedure rules necessary to implement these decisions.

That the Standards Committee NOTE that:

9. Further regulations and statutory guidance concerning independent membership are expected and the Authority's arrangements will be reviewed once these have been published.

1. Introduction

- 1.1 The Authority currently operates a Standards Committee and a separate Final Accounts Committee. The Standards Committee oversees Member conduct and related governance matters. The Final Accounts Committee meets annually to consider the audited Statement of Accounts, receive the External Auditor's reports, authorise the Letter of Representation and adopt the audited accounts.
- 1.2 Wider matters relating to internal audit, risk management, internal control, governance and assurance have largely been considered by the full Authority or through existing officer and committee arrangements. The Authority's annual governance review has previously recorded that the Authority itself operated as the body charged with governance rather than maintaining a dedicated audit committee.

2. New Statutory Requirements

- 2.1 On 31 July 2026 the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government issued guidance confirming that Section 94 of the English Devolution and Community Empowerment Act 2026 had been commenced with effect from 15 July 2026. The legislation now requires relevant authorities to have a separate audit committee in place.
- 2.2 The statutory audit committee functions are:
 - Reviewing and scrutinising the Authority's financial affairs;
 - Reviewing and assessing the Authority's risk management, internal control and governance arrangements;
 - Reviewing and assessing the economy, efficiency and effectiveness with which resources have been used in discharging the Authority's functions; and
 - Making reports and recommendations to the Authority in relation to those matters.
- 2.3 Whilst the Final Accounts Committee already undertakes some aspects of these responsibilities through its consideration of the audited accounts and External Auditor reports, its current remit is considerably narrower than the statutory audit committee role now required by legislation. A broader and more regular programme of work is therefore required.
- 2.4 The legislation does not currently require the appointment of an independent member. MHCLG has advised that the provisions dealing with membership, appointments and allowances will be introduced through future regulations. Authorities are nevertheless encouraged to begin considering future recruitment arrangements.

3. Proposed Combined Committee

- 3.1 Following consideration of the statutory requirements and the Monitoring Officer's advice, officers now recommend a single Audit and Governance Committee rather than retaining separate Standards and Final Accounts Committees. This would provide one focused forum for audit, financial reporting, risk, internal control, governance and Member standards, while avoiding overlapping committees and repeated consideration of closely related assurance matters.
- 3.2 The Committee would exercise delegated functions where appropriate, including approval of the audited Statement of Accounts and determination of Member conduct

matters falling within its terms of reference. Matters reserved to the Authority, including approval of the annual budget, would remain with the Authority. The Committee would provide scrutiny, assurance and recommendations without creating a routine two-stage process for all Authority business.

3.3 The Committee's proposed description and functions are set out at Appendix 1. In summary, it would:

- review financial affairs, external audit and the audited Statement of Accounts;
- oversee internal audit, risk management and internal control;
- review corporate governance, the Annual Governance Statement and value for money;
- promote and maintain high standards of Member conduct;
- advise on the Code of Conduct, consider Member complaints and determine any available sanction where necessary;
- consider dispensations, Member training and development, Standing Orders and relevant Ombudsman or complaints reports; and
- report and make recommendations to the Authority and produce an annual report on its work.

4. Membership, Chairing and Quorum

4.1 A balanced membership of 12 Members is proposed, comprising:

Appointing group	Members
Somerset Council	4
Devon County Council	1
North Devon Council	1
Secretary of State appointed (Non-Parish Members)	3
Parish Members (appointments ratified by Secretary of State)	3
Total	12

4.2 The Authority could choose a smaller Committee, but this should be no fewer than nine Members and should retain, as closely as practicable, the proportional balance between appointing groups and corresponding reduction in quorate figure to three. A 12-Member Committee provides broader representation and resilience, while a nine-Member Committee would be more compact but offers less flexibility where Members are unavailable.

4.3 The Committee would be quorate with four Members, including at least one Local Authority appointed Member and one Secretary of State appointed Member. This reflects the need for both principal appointment groups to be represented when decisions are taken.

- 4.4 Given the Committee's scrutiny role, its Chair should not also be the Chair or Deputy Chair of the Authority or the Chair of the Planning Committee. Substitutes should not be required.

5. Operation and work programme

- 5.1 The combined remit will require a planned work programme aligned with the accounts, external audit, internal audit, risk management, annual governance and standards cycles. It is anticipated that the Committee would meet more frequently than the existing Final Accounts Committee, with meetings programmed according to business need rather than duplicating the monthly work of the Authority.
- 5.2 Each item in the annual work programme should identify whether it is for decision, recommendation, assurance or noting. This will help keep decisions at the correct level and avoid unnecessary repetition between the Committee and the Authority.

Implementation timeline

Stage	Action
3 November 2026 - Standards Committee	Consider this report and recommend the proposed combined committee arrangements to the Authority.
December 2026 - Authority	Consider and approve the new Audit and Governance Committee, its terms of reference, membership framework, quorum and consequential amendments in principle.
December 2026 to January 2027	Invite all Authority Members to express an interest in serving on the new Committee. Prepare the initial work programme, training requirements and final amendments to Standing Orders and the Scheme of Delegation.
February 2027 - Authority	Confirm appointments and bring the Audit and Governance Committee into operation. The existing Standards Committee and Final Accounts Committee would cease on implementation of the new arrangements.
During 2027	Review the operation, workload and membership of the Committee, and respond to any regulations or statutory guidance on independent membership.

6. Future Independent Member Requirement

- 6.1 MHCLG has advised that a requirement for audit committees to include at least one independent member will be brought into force through separate regulations and supported by statutory guidance.
- 6.2 Until those regulations are published it is not yet clear what eligibility criteria, appointment processes, voting rights, terms of office or allowance arrangements will apply.
- 6.3 Officers therefore recommend that the Authority implements the structural changes set out within this report immediately. Once the detailed legislative framework is known, officers will first consider whether the Authority's existing Independent Persons are eligible and suitable to fulfil the independent member role, which may avoid the need for a separate recruitment process.

7. Legal and Policy Considerations

- 7.1 Strategic alignment – Develop and maintain effective and efficient services. Getting best value from our resources and improving our performance – Finance and Performance - Financial Management. Maintain effective governance, accountability and stewardship of public resources.
- 7.2 Legal implications – Section 94 of the English Devolution and Community Empowerment Act 2026 has been commenced for relevant authorities with effect from 15 July 2026. The legislation now requires relevant authorities under the Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014 to maintain an audit committee responsible for specified audit, governance, risk management and financial oversight functions. The legislation also contains provisions for the future introduction of independent members to audit committees. MHCLG has confirmed that these provisions are not yet in force and will be implemented through future regulations and statutory guidance.
- 7.3 Equality implications – The equality and human rights implications of this report have been assessed as having no impact on any particular individual or body.
- 7.4 Financial implications – The proposed structural changes can be implemented with minimal impact on existing resources. An increase in the special responsibility allowance for the Chair of the Audit and Governance Committee will be required to 1x basic allowance (Standards Committee currently 0.25x basic allowance). There may be additional administrative and Member time requirements if the Audit and Governance Committee meets more frequently, although these should be mitigated through the proposed review of the monthly Tuesday meeting arrangements. Future costs may also arise from the appointment, training and remuneration of an independent member when the relevant regulations come into force; these costs are not yet known.
- 7.5 Risk management implications – Failure to establish arrangements which comply with the statutory requirements would create governance, legal and reputational risks for the Authority. The proposed approach provides a proportionate mechanism to comply with the legislation while building on existing arrangements. Clear terms of reference, reporting lines and meeting arrangements will be important to avoid duplication and ensure effective scrutiny.
- 7.6 Climate implications – This report does not have an adverse impact on our ability to respond to Climate Change.

8. Conclusion

- 8.1 The commencement of Section 94 of the English Devolution and Community Empowerment Act 2026 requires the Authority to maintain a separate audit committee responsible for a broader range of governance, assurance and oversight functions than are currently undertaken by the Final Accounts Committee.
- 8.2 The proposed replacement of the Standards Committee and Final Accounts Committee by a single Audit and Governance Committee, supported by revised terms of reference, provides a pragmatic and cost-effective means of ensuring compliance while strengthening the Authority's governance framework. The Committee's broader remit will require a planned work programme and a review of the monthly Tuesday meeting arrangements so that the Committee can operate effectively alongside the full Authority and Planning Committee.
- 8.3 Detailed matters such as membership, quorum, substitutes and meeting frequency will be finalised through the consequential amendments to standing orders, and where necessary, a further report.

Report Author

Ben Barrett
Chief Finance Officer
bbarrett@exmoornationalpark.gov.uk
20 October 2026

Andrew Yendole
Solicitor and Monitoring Officer

Appendices

Appendix 1 - Proposed Terms of Reference: Audit and Governance Committee

Background papers

MHCLG letter dated 31 July 2026: Audit Committee Requirement

English Devolution and Community Empowerment Act 2026 (Commencement No2)
Regulations 2026

Exmoor National Park Authority Standing Orders and Scheme of Delegation, revised 1 July 2014

Appendix 1

Proposed Terms of Reference - Audit and Governance Committee

Purpose

The Audit and Governance Committee is the Authority's focused committee for independent-minded review, scrutiny and assurance in relation to financial affairs, audit, risk management, internal control, corporate governance, value for money and Member standards. It supports the Authority in maintaining high standards of public accountability, conduct and stewardship, determines matters delegated to it and makes reports and recommendations to the Authority on matters within its remit.

Functions

The Committee shall:

Financial Reporting and External Audit

1. Review and scrutinise the Authority's financial affairs.
2. Consider and approve the audited Statement of Accounts.
3. Receive and consider the External Auditor's Audit Findings Report, Auditor's Annual Report and other audit reports.
4. Authorise the issue of Letters of Representation.
5. Monitor implementation of recommendations arising from external audit reviews.

Internal Audit

6. Consider and approve the Internal Audit Strategy and Annual Audit Plan.
7. Receive progress reports on delivery of the Internal Audit Plan.
8. Receive the Head of Internal Audit's Annual Opinion.
9. Monitor management responses to internal audit recommendations and seek assurance that agreed actions have been implemented.

Risk Management and Internal Control

10. Review and assess the effectiveness of the Authority's risk management framework.
11. Monitor the Strategic Risk Register and the effectiveness of mitigating actions.
12. Review the adequacy and effectiveness of internal control arrangements.
13. Consider reports concerning fraud, corruption, whistleblowing and other significant control issues.

Corporate Governance and Value for Money

14. Review and assess the Authority's governance arrangements.
15. Consider the Authority's Code of Corporate Governance and recommend amendments where appropriate.
16. Review the Annual Governance Statement and recommend its approval to the Authority.
17. Monitor progress in implementing governance improvement actions.
18. Review and assess the economy, efficiency and effectiveness with which resources have been deployed.
19. Consider value for money and other assurance reviews and monitor implementation of recommendations arising from such reviews.

Member Standards

20. Promote and maintain high standards of conduct by Authority Members.
21. Advise the Authority on the adoption or revision of the Members' Code of Conduct.
22. Consider and determine complaints against Members in accordance with the Authority's adopted arrangements, including any sanction available to the Committee where necessary.
23. Consider requests for dispensations where delegated to the Committee.
24. Receive reports on complaints, Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman matters and other conduct or governance issues relevant to its remit.
25. Oversee Member training and development in relation to conduct, governance, audit and assurance.
26. Review Standing Orders and related governance procedures and recommend amendments to the Authority where appropriate.

Reporting

27. Make reports and recommendations to the Authority on matters within its remit. Matters delegated to the Committee shall be determined by the Committee; matters reserved to the Authority, including approval of the annual budget, shall remain for decision by the Authority.
28. Approve an annual work programme identifying whether each item is for decision, recommendation, assurance or noting.
29. Produce an annual report on its activities and on the effectiveness of the Authority's audit, governance and assurance arrangements.

Membership

30. Membership shall comprise 12 Authority Members: four appointed by Somerset Council; one appointed by Devon County Council; one appointed by North Devon Council; three Secretary of State appointed Members (non-Parish); and three Parish Members (appointments ratified by the Secretary of State).
31. The Authority may appoint a smaller Committee of not fewer than nine Members, provided that proportional balance between appointing groups is retained as closely as practicable.
32. The quorum shall be four Members and must include at least one local authority appointed Member and one Secretary of State appointed Member.
33. The Chair shall not also be the Chair or Deputy Chair of the Authority or the Chair or Deputy Chair of the Planning Committee.
34. The Committee shall operate in accordance with the Authority's Standing Orders and committee procedure rules.
35. The Authority shall appoint an independent member when required by legislation or when otherwise determined by the Authority.

Implementation

The Committee will take effect from the Authority meeting in February 2027, following approval of the arrangements in December 2026 and an invitation for Members to express an interest. On implementation, the existing Standards Committee and Final Accounts Committee will cease, and their relevant functions will transfer to the Audit and Governance Committee.

Exmoor National Park Authority

Standards Committee

3 November 2026

Agenda Item 9

Overview of Complaints and Compliments

Report of the Head of Enterprise and Operations

Purpose of Report

To provide details of complaints and compliments received during the period 1 April 2026 to 30 September 2026.

Recommended Decision

That the Standards Committee:

1. CONSIDER and NOTE the overview report of general complaints and compliments received by the Authority.
-

1. Introduction

- 1.1 This report provides an overview of complaints and compliments received during the first six months of the 2026/27 reporting year.
- 1.2 The complaints covered by this report were handled under the Authority's existing Complaints Procedure. A separate report to this meeting sets out proposals for a revised Complaints Procedure; if approved, this will apply to complaints received following its implementation.

2. Complaints received

- 2.1 Under the existing complaints procedure, the Authority received 14 informal complaints during the first six months of the 26/27 reporting year, the majority of which were successfully resolved.
- 2.2 During the same period one complaint progressed through both Stage 1 and Stage 2 of the complaints procedure:

Stage	Date	Outcome
Stage 1 - Planning – Concerns about the handling of a planning application, pre-application advice and fees incurred.	May 2026	Complaint not upheld. The complainant raised concerns about the handling of a planning application, including pre-application advice obtained through the Planning Portal, the application fee and the consideration of comments received after the consultation period.

		Officers advised that the Planning Portal is independent of the Authority, the application fee was not refundable, and no fault was found in the handling or determination of the application.
Stage 2 - Planning – Request for a Stage 2 review of the response to the above Stage 1 complaint.	May 2026	Complaint not upheld. The Complaints Officer agreed with the Stage 1 findings but recommended that the Authority’s website be updated to distinguish more clearly between advice provided by the Planning Portal and the Authority’s own pre-application advice service.

- 2.3 Authority staff also receive many compliments, some of which are given verbally or are recorded in the visitor book at our National Park Centres. During the first six months of the 2026/27 reporting year, 39 written compliments were forwarded to the Compliments Inbox. These related to all areas of the Authority’s work, with Planning, Access & Recreation and Field Services featuring most frequently.
- 2.4 The Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO) issued its Annual Review Letter in May 2026 which is attached at Appendix 1. As reported at the Standards Committee meeting in April of this year, the one complaint referred to the LGSCO was closed after initial investigations due to Sch 5.1 court proceedings.

3. Legal and policy considerations

- 3.1 Strategic alignment – To meet the requirements of legislation where applicable to National Parks and conduct Authority business in line with good practice and the 7 principles of public life.
- 3.2 Legal implications – Section 65(4) Environment Act 1995 – provides powers to the National Park Authority to “do anything which in the opinion of the Authority, is calculated to facilitate, or is conducive or incidental to-
- (a) the accomplishment of the purposes mentioned in s. 65 (1) [National Park purposes]
- (b) the carrying out of any functions conferred on it by virtue of any other enactment.”
- The Localism Act 2011 requires the Authority to promote and maintain high standards of conduct.
- 3.3 Equality implications – There are no foreseen adverse impacts on any protected group(s).
- 3.4 Financial implications – Reputational and other risks including criminal liability could arise should the Authority fail to act on complaints received.
- 3.5 Risk management implications – Reputational and other risks including criminal liability could arise should the Authority fail to act on complaints received.
- 3.6 Climate implications – None identified.

4. Conclusion

- 4.1 The Standards Committee are recommended to consider and note the overview report of general complaints and compliments received by the Authority.

Report Author

Ben Barrett

Head of Enterprise and Operations

20 October 2026

Appendices

- Appendix 1 – LGSCO Annual Review Letter 2025-26

Background papers

- None

Item 9

Appendix 1

Local Government & Social Care OMBUDSMAN

20 May 2026

By email

Ms Bryan
Chief Executive
Exmoor National Park Authority

Dear Ms Bryan

Annual Review letter 2025-26

I write to you with your annual summary of complaint statistics from the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman for the year ending 31 March 2026.

We recognise that authorities continue to face significant pressures in delivering services to their communities. We hope the data and insight we share with you each year remains a useful tool for reflection and continuous improvement. Please consider it as part of your corporate governance processes.

We will write to organisations in July where there is exceptional practice or where we have concerns about complaint handling. Not all organisations will get a letter. If you do receive a letter it will be sent in advance of its publication on our website on 15 July 2026.

Complaint statistics

[Our statistics](#) focus on three key areas that help to assess your organisation's commitment to putting things right when they go wrong. We provide the total number of decisions we made about your authority during the year, the number of complaints that were not for us or not ready for us, the number of complaints we assessed and closed and the number of complaints we investigated.

Complaints upheld - We uphold complaints when we find fault in an organisation's actions, including where the organisation accepted fault before we investigated.

Satisfactory remedy provided by the organisation - In these cases, the organisation upheld the complaint and we agreed with how it offered to put things right.

Compliance with recommendations - We recommend ways for organisations to put things right when faults have caused injustice and monitor their compliance with our recommendations. Failure to comply is rare and a compliance rate below 100% is concerning. In addition, we now provide a timely compliance statistic alongside the overall compliance rate. This statistic shows the proportion of cases where agreed recommendations were recorded as completed on time.

Supporting complaint and service improvement

We remain committed to supporting the sector to embed effective systems of redress. Where authorities are navigating reorganisation and devolution, we are ready to help ensure that robust complaint handling is built into new arrangements from the outset. Please do get in touch if your organisation would benefit from our advice and guidance.

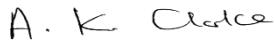
Our [Complaint Handling Code](#), in force since April 2025, is now applied in our casework about councils and offers structure and support to your local complaint system. The Code is good practice for all organisations we

investigate (except where there are statutory complaint handling processes in place), and we may decide to issue it as guidance to other organisations, such as yours, in future.

Our training programme provides a flexible, expert-led route to building complaints capability across your teams, with courses open for individual delegates to book. Contact training@lgo.org.uk for more information.

Our Annual Review of Local Government Complaints will be published in July 2026, setting out the national picture of complaints, trends across service areas, and emerging systemic issues. We encourage you to read it alongside your own organisation's data.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "A. K. Clarke". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Amerdeep Clarke
Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman
Chair, Commission for Local Administration in England

Complaint overview
Between 1 April 2025 and 31 March 2026, we dealt with 1 complaint. Of these 0 were not for us or not ready for us to investigate. We assessed and closed 1 complaint. We investigated 0 complaints.
Complaints upheld
The Ombudsman carried out no investigations in this period
Satisfactory remedies provided by the organisation
The Ombudsman did not uphold any complaints in this period
Compliance with Ombudsman recommendations
No recommendations were due for compliance in this period

Exmoor National Park Authority**Standards Committee**

3 November 2026

Agenda Item 10

Revised Complaints Procedure

Joint Report of the Head of Enterprise and Operations and Monitoring Officer

Purpose of Report

To seek approval of the Authority's revised Complaints Procedure.

Recommended Decision

That the Standards Committee:

1. APPROVE a revised Complaints Procedure, developed with reference to the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code.
 2. NOTE that the Complaints Procedure will be kept under review in light of experience, learning from complaints and any further guidance issued by the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman.
-

1. Introduction

- 1.1 The Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO) has introduced a revised Complaint Handling Code sets out expectations for effective, accessible and transparent complaint handling. The Authority has reviewed its existing Complaints Procedure against the Code and identified a number of changes to improve clarity, consistency and accountability.
- 1.2 The revised procedure provides a clearer distinction between service requests and complaints, encourages the early resolution of concerns where appropriate, and introduces a streamlined two-stage complaints process. It also clarifies responsibilities, response times, escalation arrangements, record keeping and how learning from complaints will be used to support service improvement.
- 1.3 The LGSCO's Complaint Handling Code also expects an annual complaints performance and service improvement report, including a self-assessment against the Code. This will be incorporated into the Authority's Corporate Plan reporting and governance arrangements.

2. Implementation

- 2.1 Subject to approval, the revised Complaints Procedure will be published on the Authority's website, supported by updated guidance for the public and officers.

- 2.2 Relevant officers have accessed complaint-handling training through the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman's website, and further internal guidance will be provided to support consistent implementation.
- 2.3 Complaints received before 1 December 2026 will continue to be handled under the existing procedure. The revised procedure will apply to complaints received on or after 1 December 2026. The next six-monthly report will reflect the transition to the revised procedure, with future reports presented in the new format.

3. Legal and policy considerations

- 3.1 Strategic alignment – To seek to continually improve services provided by the Authority where complaints received are upheld.
- 3.2 Legal implications – Potential for complaints to be relevant to current legislation and/or equalities legislation.
- 3.3 Equality implications – There are no foreseen adverse impacts on any protected group(s).
- 3.4 Financial implications – Reputational and other risks including criminal liability could arise should the Authority fail to act on complaints received.
- 3.5 Risk management implications – Reputational and other risks including criminal liability could arise should the Authority fail to act on complaints received.
- 3.6 Climate implications – None identified.

4. Conclusion

- 4.1 The revised procedure provides a clearer and more consistent framework for handling complaints, whilst ensuring that lessons from complaints are used to improve the Authority's services.
- 4.2 The Standards Committee are recommended to approve the new Complaints Procedure and note that it will be kept under review in light of experience, learning from complaints and any further guidance issued by the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman.

Report Author

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Appendices

- Appendix 1 – Revised Complaints Procedure

Background papers

- None

Appendix 1

Exmoor National Park Authority Complaints Procedure

1. Purpose

- 1.1 Exmoor National Park Authority is committed to providing high-quality services and treating people fairly, courteously and with respect.
- 1.2 We welcome feedback about our services and recognise that complaints provide a valuable opportunity to identify where services can be improved.
- 1.3 This policy explains:
 - what a complaint is
 - how complaints can be made
 - how complaints will be investigated
 - how complaints will be resolved
 - how learning from complaints will be used to improve services
- 1.4 The Authority aims to deal with complaints openly, fairly, proportionately and consistently.

2. Scope

- 2.1 This policy applies to complaints about:
 - services provided directly by the Authority
 - actions or decisions taken by the Authority
 - actions of Authority employees
 - actions of contractors, consultants or others acting on behalf of the Authority where the Authority remains responsible for the service provided
- 2.2 This policy does not apply where separate statutory appeal, review or complaints procedures exist.
- 2.3 Examples include:
 - planning appeals
 - Freedom of Information and Environmental Information Regulations requests
 - employment matters
 - Members' Code of Conduct complaints
 - matters which are subject to legal proceedings

3. Definition of a Complaint

3.1 The Authority defines a complaint as:

"An expression of dissatisfaction, however made, about the standard of service, actions or lack of action by the Authority, its own staff, or those acting on its behalf, affecting an individual or group of individuals."

3.2 A person does not need to use the word "complaint" for a matter to be treated as a complaint.

3.3 Complaints may be received by:

- email
- letter
- telephone
- the Authority website
- social media
- in person
- through a representative acting on behalf of a complainant

4. Service Requests

4.1 A service request is:

"A request that the Authority provides or improves a service, fixes a problem or reconsiders a decision."

4.2 Examples include:

- reporting a damaged gate
- reporting an obstruction on a public right of way
- notifying the Authority of a maintenance issue
- requesting action on a service issue

4.3 Service requests are not complaints

4.4 The Authority will seek to resolve service requests through normal service delivery arrangements.

4.5 Where an individual remains dissatisfied with the response received, the matter may be considered as a complaint.

4.6 The Authority will continue to address any underlying service request while investigating a complaint.

5. Accessibility and Support

5.1 The Authority is committed to ensuring that the complaints process is accessible to all.

5.2 Complaints may be made through a range of communication methods.

5.3 Reasonable adjustments will be made where required to ensure that individuals are not disadvantaged when accessing the complaints process.

5.4 The Authority will:

- provide information in alternative formats where reasonably practicable
- accept complaints through representatives acting on behalf of complainants
- support individuals who require assistance to access the complaints process
- consider any requirements arising from disability, language or communication difficulties

5.5 Complainants may appoint a representative to act on their behalf.

6. Complaints We May Not Consider

6.1 The Authority will normally consider complaints received within twelve months of:

- the event complained about, or
- the complainant becoming aware of the issue

6.2 The Authority may exercise discretion to consider complaints submitted after this period where there is good reason for the delay.

6.3 The Authority may decline to investigate a complaint where:

- there is an alternative statutory appeal or review mechanism available
- the matter is currently being considered by the courts
- the issue has already completed all stages of this procedure and no significant new information is presented
- the matter falls outside the Authority's responsibilities

6.4 Each complaint will be considered individually.

6.5 Where a complaint is not accepted, an explanation will be provided together with information about the complainant's right to contact the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman.

7. Stage 1 Complaint Investigation

7.1 Within five working days of receipt all complaints will be:

- logged
- acknowledged, and
- assigned for investigation

7.2 A Stage 1 investigation will normally be undertaken by the Senior Manager responsible for the service area concerned.

7.3 The investigating officer will:

- clarify the complaint where necessary
- gather evidence
- consider relevant policies, procedures and legislation
- take account of the complainant's concerns
- determine whether any fault, service failure or injustice has occurred

- consider whether any remedy is required

7.4 A full written response will normally be provided within ten working days of acknowledgement.

7.5 The response will include:

- a summary of the complaint
- details of the investigation
- the findings
- the reasons for the decision
- any remedy or action proposed
- information on how to escalate the complaint

8. Stage 2 Complaint Review

8.1 Where a complainant remains dissatisfied with the Stage 1 response, they may request a Stage 2 review.

8.2 A Stage 2 review will normally be undertaken by the Complaints Officer.

8.3 Where the complaint concerns a member of Leadership Team or where a conflict of interest exists, the review will be undertaken by the Chief Executive.

8.4 The reviewer will consider:

- the original complaint
- the Stage 1 investigation
- the response provided
- any additional information submitted

8.5 A final written response will normally be issued within twenty working days.

8.6 The Stage 2 review is the Authority's final stage.

9. Delays and Extensions

9.1 Where a complaint is complex or additional enquiries are required, it may not be possible to meet the timescales set out in this policy.

9.2 Where this occurs, the complainant will be informed:

- why a delay has occurred
- when a response is expected
- who to contact for further information

9.3 The Authority will keep complainants informed of progress throughout the investigation.

10. Remedies

10.1 Where the Authority identifies fault, service failure or injustice, it will seek to put matters right.

10.2 Remedies may include:

- an apology
- an explanation
- corrective action
- reconsideration of a decision
- amendment of records
- service improvements
- financial redress where appropriate

10.3 Any remedy offered will be proportionate to the impact identified.

10.4 The Authority will monitor agreed actions to ensure they are completed.

11. Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman

11.1 If a complainant remains dissatisfied after Stage 2, they may refer their complaint to the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman.

11.2 The Ombudsman is independent of the Authority and may investigate complaints about administrative fault or service failure.

12. Complaints About Staff

12.1 Complaints may relate to the conduct, behaviour or actions of a member of staff.

12.2 Where this occurs:

- the member of staff will normally be informed of the complaint
- the member of staff will be given the opportunity to respond
- managers will ensure appropriate support is available
- confidentiality will be maintained where appropriate

13. Unacceptable Behaviour

13.1 The Authority recognises that a small number of complainants may behave unreasonably or abusively.

13.2 The Authority will not tolerate threatening, offensive, abusive or harassing behaviour towards staff.

13.3 Where necessary, the Authority may:

- restrict methods of contact
- require communication through a nominated officer
- limit the frequency of contact
- take other proportionate measures

13.4 Any restrictions will:

- be evidence-based
- be proportionate

- take account of individual circumstances
- be reviewed periodically

14. Recording, Learning and Reporting

14.1 All complaints will be recorded and monitored.

14.2 The Authority will maintain records of:

- complaints received
- responses issued
- outcomes
- remedies
- service improvements identified

14.3 Complaint information will be used to identify trends, risks and opportunities for improvement.

14.4 An annual complaints report will be presented through the Authority's governance arrangements and will include:

- complaint volumes
- outcomes
- learning identified
- service improvements implemented
- Ombudsman decisions concerning the Authority

14.5 The Standards Committee will retain oversight of complaint handling and organisational learning arising from complaints.

15. Review of this Policy

15.1 This policy will be reviewed every three years, or sooner where legislative, regulatory or organisational changes require amendment.