

Code of Conduct Survey – 2023

Research Report

July 2023



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Summary

Background

In June 2023, the Local Government Association (LGA) conducted a survey to capture data on the LGA Model Councillor Code of Conduct (the “Model code”). The aim of the project was to gauge the impact of the Model code. This was done by measuring the number of councils which have adopted it and the effects the Model code of conduct has had on councils.

Monitoring officers in all principal councils in England were sent the survey, including district, county, unitary, metropolitan districts, and London boroughs. The final overall response rate was 35 per cent (110 councils).

Key findings

Impact and utility of the Model code

- All respondents to the survey were aware of the Model code.
- Eighty-two per cent of respondents said they had adopted the LGA model code of conduct to at least some extent, with 25 per cent adopting it in full and 40 per cent adopting the Model code with some additions or minor amendments.
- Almost all respondents had reviewed their councillor code of conduct since the Model code was launched in December 2020, with 85 per cent conducting a formal review and 10 per cent an informal review.
- Of the councils which reviewed their code of conduct, 97 per cent used the Model code to inform their review.
- Among councils which used the Model code to inform their review, 73 per cent reported it being ‘Very useful’ and 25 per cent stated it was ‘Fairly useful’.
- A light touch review of the constitutions of councils that did not respond to the survey indicated that 54 per cent of non-respondent councils had adopted the Model code in full or in part.
- In total across England, 63 per cent of councils have adopted the Model code either completely or partially and 37 per cent have not.

Impact and utility of LGA supportive resources

- Eighty-four per cent of responding councils have used the LGA Guidance on the Model Councillor Code of Conduct and a further 13 per cent said they are aware of the Guidance but have not used it. Only four per cent had not heard of the Guidance.
- Sixty-three per cent have heard of and used the LGA Guidance on the Member Model Code of Conduct Complaints Handling. Twenty-eight per cent have heard of this resource but not used it, while nine per cent had not heard of the Guidance.
- Thirty-nine per cent of responding councils were aware and have used the LGA Adaptable Model Code of Conduct Training Pack for Monitoring Officers and 20 per cent have heard of this resource but have not used it. Forty per cent had not heard of this product.
- Thirty per cent of councils reported they have heard of the LGA Councillor Code of Conduct E-learning and used it. Thirty-four per cent were aware of this resource but had not used it and 36 per cent were not aware of the e-learning product.
- Fifty-four per cent of responding councils have passed on all the guidance on the LGA Model code to their councillors, but only 22 per cent had passed on information about the LGA Model code e-learning and 25 per cent passed on some.
- Respondent councils have highlighted that other impacts of the Model code consultation including general discussion of councillor standards and awareness raising, increased demand for more and repeated training and that the consultation had been a catalyst for requests for full reviews of the councillors code.
- Twenty-five per cent said there had been some additional impacts and a couple also commented that the discussion had raised comments about sanctions for poor behaviour. One respondent believed the Model code consultation had resulted in an increase in member-on-member complaints and in another area that complaints had decreased, although it was not clear this was caused by the Model code.
- The most popular other potential forms of support or products the LGA could provide in relation to the Model code were further support/advice/resources for monitoring officers and other council officers to embed good standards of

behaviour and conduct (79 per cent), resources/training materials on healthy and respectful debate (77 per cent) and further support/advice/resources for monitoring officers (74 per cent).

- Councils provided additional detail about products they think the LGA might provide or facilitate to support high standards of councillor behaviour and conduct. This included: guidance on dealing with disputes within parish or town councils, case studies and examples of difficult situations, and advice on dealing with complaints and the resulting mediation process.

Introduction

The survey aimed to help the LGA gauge the uptake and impact of the Model code project in councils, including the act of consulting and developing the Model code, the Model code itself, the associated guidance and other training resources published by the LGA. This was achieved by measuring awareness of the Model code and associated products and to what extent councils have adopted and used them. Furthermore, councils were asked about how regularly they review their own code of conduct and the impact of LGA consultation on councils' standards approaches.

Project aims

- To assess whether the LGA's Model code project has raised the profile of councillor standards and behaviour issues with officers and members.
- To gauge how many councils have recently reviewed their code of conduct arrangements to ensure their code sets out high standards of behaviour and conduct and whether they used the LGA products to support their review.
- To measure how many councils have fully or partially adopted the Model code.
- To determine the other impacts the Model code project and products have had on councils.
- To understand if these impacts have been positive or negative.
- To gauge councils' awareness of the LGA's Model code improvement offer.
- To determine what additional products would be useful in relation to the Model code and councillor standards.

Methodology

The research project was conducted by the LGA's Research and Information Team using an online survey. On the 7 June 2023, an email containing a unique link was sent to monitoring officers across all councils in England (317). In total 110 complete responses had been submitted when the survey closed on 19 June 2023.

In addition to the survey, the LGA also reviewed the codes of conduct of all councils who did not respond to the survey and by this means determined if those councils had also adopted the Model Code or not. Results of this exercise are found under the Adoption of the LGA Model code of conduct section.

Response rate

The total response rate was 110 complete responses out of 317 (35 per cent). Table 1 shows the response rate by type of council. Unitary authorities had the highest return rate (41 per cent) whilst London borough councils had the lowest (24 per cent).

Type of council	Total number	Number of responses	Response rate (Per cent)
Unitary authority	63	26	41
County	21	8	38
Shire district	164	59	36
Metropolitan district	36	9	25
London borough ¹	33	8	24

Table 2 shows response rate by region. The response rate was highest from the North East (58 per cent). The lowest rate of response was from local authorities in Greater London (24 per cent).

Region	Total number	Number of responses	Response rate (Per cent)
North East	12	7	58
Yorkshire and the Humber	15	6	47
East	50	22	44
South West	29	13	41
East Midlands	39	15	38
South East	70	20	29
North West	36	10	28
West Midlands	33	8	24
Greater London	33	8	24

Notes

In addition, the following points should be noted about the research methodology:

- Some respondents did not answer all questions in the survey, so within this report, findings are based on different numbers of responses. This number

¹ For the purposes of this report the City of London Corporation has been categorised as a London Borough

(the base) is shown below all tables. Please note that bases vary throughout the survey.

- Throughout the report, percentages in figures and tables may add to more or less than 100 per cent due to rounding. Percentages are rounded to the nearest whole per cent.
- The data presented is not weighted meaning these results should strictly be taken as a snapshot of the views of this particular group of respondents/authorities, rather than representative of all councils in England; this level of response means that the results are likely to provide a reasonable indication of the position of the sector more widely.

LGA Model Code – Survey 2023

This section contains analysis of results from the survey. It is split into four sections covering: the awareness of the Model code, the adoption of the Model code, councils reviewing their councillor code of conduct, and the impact of the LGA consultation on the model code of conduct or any associated work on the council and councillors.

Awareness of the LGA Model code

The level of awareness among the councils which responded to this survey on the LGA's Model code was very high; all responding English councils (100 per cent) stated they aware of it.

Table 3: Before today, had you heard of the LGA's model councillor code of conduct, or not?

	Number	Per cent
Yes	110	100
No	0	0

Base: All responding English councils (110)

Adoption of the LGA Model code

Of the councils which have reviewed their councillor code of conduct since December 2020, nearly all (97 per cent) have used the Model code to inform their review. Only three per cent did not use it. Six councils had not reviewed their code since 2020.

Table 4: Did your council use the LGA model councillor code of conduct to inform its own review, or not?

	Number	Per cent
Yes	101	97
No	3	3

Base: All responding English councils which have reviewed their code of conduct since December 2020 (104)

Among the three per cent of councils that did not use the Model code to inform their review, two councils reported that the reason for this was due to a lack of time to do a full-scale review. While the other council, gave a written response stating "We did not feel that it met our expectations. We preferred our own version." It is worth highlighting that the sample size for this question is very low and any conclusions taken from it can only be limited.

Table 5: Why did your council not use the LGA model councillor code to inform the review of their councillor code of conduct? Please tick all that apply.

	Number	Per cent
Lack of time to do a full-scale review	2	67
Lack of awareness of the code	0	0
Lack of resource to review other examples of codes of conduct	0	0
Other, please specify	1	33
Don't know	0	0

Base: All responding English councils which have reviewed their code of conduct since December 2020 but did not use the LGA model councillor code of conduct to inform its own review (3)
 Respondents were able to select multiple options for this question

Among councils that did use the Model code to inform their review, almost all found it very or fairly useful (98 per cent). Seventy-three per cent reported it being 'Very useful' and 25 per cent reported it was 'Fairly useful'. One per cent of councils found it 'Not at all useful' and a further one per cent said they didn't know.

Table 6: How useful, or not, was the LGA councillor code of conduct in your council's review of its own councillor code of conduct?

	Number	Per cent
Very useful	74	73
Fairly useful	25	25
Not very useful	0	0
Not at all useful	1	1
Don't know	1	1

Base: All responding English councils which have reviewed their code of conduct since December 2020 and used the LGA model councillor code of conduct to inform its own review (101)

The one council which stated that Model code was not useful in the review process was asked to state how the Model code could be more useful to the review process. Their response was as follows: "The revised code was weaker than existing requirements and follows a pattern of watering down ethical standards in local government".

Of all the councils responding to this survey, 82 per cent have adopted the Model code to some extent. Of these councils 25 per cent have adopted it in full and a further 40 per cent to a great extent. Eleven per cent have adopted it to a moderate extent and six per cent to a small extent. Eighteen per cent had not adopted the Model code to any extent.

Table 7a: To what extent has your council adopted the LGA model code of conduct?

	Number	Per cent
Completely – the model code was adopted in full	27	25
To a great extent – the model code was adopted with some additions and minor amendments	44	40
To a moderate extent – more than half, but not all, of the model code was adopted	12	11
To a small extent – less than half of the model code was adopted	7	6
Not at all	20	18

Base: All responding English councils (110)

To provide a more substantial overview of whether the Model code was adopted, desk research of councils' code of conduct, available on their websites, was undertaken of councils which did not respond to the survey. Amongst these councils a binary analysis was completed as to whether the council appeared to have adopted any part of the Model code or adopted none of it. This analysis showed that non-respondent councils were less likely to have adopted the Model code compared to councils that did respond to the survey. Of this non-respondent groups, 111 councils had adopted the Model code in full or with some small tweaks and additions; 96 councils had not adopted the Model code at all.

Table 7b: To what extent has your council adopted the LGA model code of conduct?

	Number	Per cent
Completely or partially	111	53
Not at all	96	47

Base: All non-responding English councils (207)

When the data from table 7a and 7b is combined, the results indicate that 63 per cent of councils in England have adopted the Model code either completely or partially and 37 per cent have not.

Table 7c: To what extent has your council adopted the LGA model code of conduct?

	Number	Per cent
Completely or partially	201	63
Not at all	116	37

Base: All English councils (317)

Analysis of the full council data indicates that adoption of the Model code varies depending on the region and authority type. The majority of regions achieved approximately two-thirds of councils in their area using the Model code, with only the South East (53 per cent) and Greater London (39 per cent) having lower proportions of uptake. Full results are in table 8. Similarly, most authority types achieved two-thirds or more except counties (57 per cent) and again London boroughs (39 per cent), the full result are set out in table 9.

Table 8: Adoption of Model code by region

	Number	Per cent
West Midlands	26	79
Yorkshire and Humber	11	73
East Midlands	28	72
East of England	36	72
North East	8	67
South West	19	66
North West	23	64
South East	37	53
Greater London	13	39

Base: All English councils (317)

Table 9: Adoption of Model code by council type

	Number	Per cent
Unitary authorities	46	73
Metropolitan districts	25	69
Shire districts	105	64
Counties	12	57
London boroughs	13	39

Base: All English councils (317)

Councils reviewing their councillor code of conduct

Since December 2020, when the LGA launched the Model code, 95 per cent of responding councils have reviewed their code of conduct. Eighty-five per cent have conducted a formal review and 10 per cent have informally reviewed their code. Only five per cent of the councils which took part in this survey have not reviewed their councillor code of conduct since December 2020.

Table 10: Since the LGA model code of conduct was launched in December 2020, has your council reviewed its councillor code of conduct?

	Number	Per cent
Yes, formally	93	85
Yes, informally	11	10
No	6	5

Base: All responding English councils (110)

LGA resources and support relating to councillor codes of conduct

The following four tables measure the awareness and use of four LGA resources designed to support councils adopting the LGA model code of conduct, including:

- The LGA Guidance on the Model Councillor Code of Conduct (the “Guidance on the Model code”)
- The LGA Guidance on the Member Model Code of Conduct Complaints Handling (the “Guidance on complaints handling”)
- The LGA Adaptable Model Code of Conduct Training Pack for Monitoring officers (the “Adaptable training pack”)
- The LGA Councillor Code of Conduct e-learning for elected members (the “Model code e-learning”)

Eighty-four per cent of respondents were aware of and had used the Guidance on the Model Code, with only four per cent unaware of the Guidance. Sixty-three per cent were also aware of and had used the Guidance on complaints handling; only nine per cent had not heard of this Guidance.

Results were less strong with the other Model code products. Only 39 per cent of respondents had used the Adaptable training pack, although 60 per cent were aware of it; 40 per cent had never heard of this resource. Similarly, only 30 per cent said they had heard of and used the Model code e-learning, but a larger proportion were aware and had not used it (34 per cent) and more still had not heard of it at all (36

per cent).

Table 11: Which, if any, of the following resources that support the LGA model code of conduct are you aware of? (Per cent)

	Per cent			
	Guidance on the Model Code	Guidance on complaints handling	Adaptable training pack	Model code e-learning
I have heard of this and used it	84	63	39	30
I have heard of this but not used it	13	28	21	34
I haven't heard of this	4	9	40	36

Base: All responding English councils (110)

The following table shows the results as to whether monitoring officers had passed on information to councillors about two LGA Model code products that are aimed at councillors.

Fifty-four per cent of responding councils have passed on the Guidance on the Model code to councillors. Twenty-eight per cent had passed on some of this information while 18 per cent had not passed on any information about the Guidance.

Twenty-two per cent of respondents passed on all information about the Model code e-learning for elected members and 25 per cent passed on some. Fifty-three per cent, had not passed on any information about the Model code e-learning to councillors. This could be explained by the lower level of awareness of this resource as shown in Table 11.

Table 12: Do you or have you pass information about these LGA products, which are relevant to councillors, to your elected members?

	Guidance on the Model Code		Model code e-learning	
	Number	Per cent	Number	Per cent
All	59	54	24	22
Some	31	28	28	25
None	20	18	58	53

Base: All responding English councils (110)

Responding councils were given a list of potential other forms of support or products

the LGA could provide in relation to the Model code. Further support/advice/resources for monitoring officers and other council officers to embed good standards of behaviour and conduct was the most popular potential product with 79 per cent of responding councils having selected this option. Seventy-seven per cent selected resources/training materials on healthy and respectful debate. Seventy-four per cent chose further support/advice/resources for monitoring officers on addressing minor conduct issues. Sixty-five per cent, selected support/advice/resources on implementing local resolution protocols. Twenty-one per cent gave a written (Other, please specify) response. These responses have been summarised below table 13.

Table 13: What other support or products, if any, would you like the LGA to provide or facilitate to help embed good standards of councillor behaviour and conduct? Please tick all that apply.

	Number	Per cent
Further support/advice/resources for monitoring officers and other council officers to embed good standards of behaviour and conduct	87	79
Resources/training materials on healthy and respectful debate	85	77
Further support/advice/resources for monitoring officers on addressing minor conduct issues	81	74
Support/advice/resources on implementing local resolution protocols	72	65
Other, please specify	23	21
Don't know	6	5

Base: All responding English councils (110)
Respondents could select more than one option

Summary of “Other, please specify” responses:

- Social media guidance for elected members
- Support for monitoring officers dealing with parish councils
- Disclosable pecuniary interests for councillors
- Improve the level of sanctions for breaches
- Networking between monitoring officers and some form of advice line
- Guidance on minimising conflict between councillors

Following on from the previous question, councils were asked if they could provide any additional detail about products, they think the LGA might provide or facilitate to support high standards of councillor behaviour and conduct. The responses given to this question were quite varied. The paragraph below will summarise some of the

themes which emerged from their responses.

One suggestion that was made by multiple councils was to improve the level of “support and guidance” when dealing with disputes at parish or town council level. Others suggested some assistance with “mediation” between parish councillors, respondents also suggested mediation support for councillor “disputes” would be helpful at all levels of local government.

Furthermore, a council highlighted the financial difficulties associated with investigating, at times, “trivial” complaints and said that access to “a cadre of reasonably priced investigators would be good.” Councils also asked for a better range of case studies and examples the LGA could provide to help deal with a variety of situations. For example, one respondent asked for “some guidance on minor breaches would be beneficial perhaps some examples or areas of best practice”. Moreover, there was some demand to “ensure that case studies are not clear cut/obvious scenarios, but more things that deal in the grey areas”.

Other impacts of the LGA Model code consultation and products

The survey asked councils to give a written response to the following question. “Did the LGA consultation on the model code of conduct and/or any associated work by the LGA have any other impacts on your council, such as councillors requesting additional training or advice on their code of conduct?” The section below highlights some key themes taken from the responses given.

Most councils did not report additional impacts of the model code. However, some respondents highlighted other impacts of the Model code consultation. This included general discussion of councillor standards and awareness raising, increased demand for more and repeated training and that the consultation had been a catalyst for requests for full reviews of the councillors code. Twenty-five per cent said there had been some additional impacts and a couple also commented that the discussion had raised comments about sanctions for poor behaviour. One respondent believed the Model code consultation had resulted in an increase in member-on-member complaints and in another area that complaints had decreased, although it was not clear this was caused by the Model code.

Annex A: Questionnaire

Virtual council meetings survey 2023

Before today, had you heard of the LGA's model councillor code of conduct, or not?

- Yes
- No
- Don't know

Since the LGA model code of conduct was launched in December 2020, has your council reviewed its councillor code of conduct?

- Yes, formally
- Yes, informally
- No
- Don't know

Did your council use the LGA model councillor code of conduct to inform its own review, or not?

- Yes
- No
- Don't know

Why did your council not use the LGA model councillor code to inform the review of their councillor code of conduct? Please tick all that apply.

- Lack of awareness of the code
- Lack of time to do a full-scale review
- Lack of resource to review other examples of codes of conduct
- Other, please specify
- Don't know

How useful, or not, was the LGA councillor code of conduct in your council's review of its own councillor code of conduct?

- Very useful
- Fairly useful
- Not very useful
- Not at all useful
- Don't know

How could the LGA councillor code of conduct be more useful to the review process? Please use the space below to write your answer.

To what extent has your council adopted the LGA model code of conduct?

- Completely – the model code was adopted in full
- To a great extent – the model code was adopted with some additions and minor amendments
- To a moderate extent – more than half, but not all, of the model code was adopted
- To a small extent – less than half of the model code was adopted
- Not at all
- Don't know

When do you expect your council to next review the councillor code of conduct?

- Within the next 12 months
- After 12 months but within two years
- After two years but within five years
- In five years or more
- Don't know

Using both of the boxes below, please state how regularly does your council review its code of conduct?

If for example the answer was once every 6 months please write 0 in the years box and 6 in the months box.

If you don't know please leave both boxes empty.

Year(s) _____

Month(s) _____

Which, if any, of the following resources that support the LGA model code of conduct are you aware of?

1. Guidance on the Local Government Association Model Councillor Code of Conduct
2. Guidance on the Member Model Code of Conduct Complaints Handling
3. LGA Adaptable Model Code of Conduct Training Pack for Monitoring Officer
4. LGA Councillor Code of Conduct e-learning for elected members
 - I have heard of this and used it
 - I have heard of this but not used it
 - I haven't heard of this

Which, if any, of the following resources that support the LGA model code of conduct are you aware of?

1. Guidance on the Local Government Association Model Councillor Code of Conduct
2. LGA Councillor Code of Conduct e-learning for elected members LGA Adaptable Model Code of Conduct Training Pack for Monitoring Officer
 - All
 - Some
 - None

Did the LGA consultation on the model code of conduct and/or any associated work by the LGA have any other impacts on your council, such as councillors requesting

additional training or advice on their code of conduct? Please use the space below to write your answer.

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