



**Department for  
Communities and  
Local Government**

Cllr John Woodman  
Standards Committee Chair  
Sedgemoor District Council  
Bridgwater House  
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**Marcus Jones MP**  
*Minister for Local Government*

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*Dear Councillor Woodman,*

Thank you for your letter of 2 May, to the Rt Hon Sajid Javid MP on behalf of a number of council standards committees across the South West of England, raising concerns about the local authority standards regime. I am replying as this matter falls within my ministerial responsibilities.

I note your concerns. As you will know, in 2012 the Conservative-led coalition government abolished the Standards Board regime, which had become a vehicle for petty, malicious and politically motivated complaints and put in place new, localist standards arrangements. Local authorities are required to put in place a code of conduct and also put in place arrangements to investigate and decide on allegations of failure to comply with that code. The public rightly expect high standards of conduct from those they elect.

Elected members who fail to comply with their authority's code of conduct can face censure. There is no power of sanction or suspension, as this was abolished with the Standards Board regime. Whilst the government believes the current arrangements are appropriate, we have publicly committed to reviewing the local authority standards arrangements, which should take place within the next year or so. I would like to take this opportunity to assure you that the points you have made will be taken into account as part of that review.

You stated that criminal acts in a Member's personal life cannot be taken into account. In fact, section 80 of the Local Government Act 1972 sets out a range of criteria under which a person is disqualified from standing as a candidate or being a member of a local authority. This includes a provision that if a person, within 5 years before being elected, or at any time since being elected, has been convicted in the UK, Channel Islands or Isle of Man of any offence and has received a sentence of imprisonment (suspended or not) for a period of not less than three months without the option of a fine.

The government has publicly committed to reviewing the disqualification criteria for councillors to bring the criteria into line with modern sentencing guidelines. I am giving that matter serious consideration and your points will be taken into account as part of that review. I have asked my officials to keep you informed of any public policy developments in that space.

Finally, in response to your point on co-opted members, these individuals are specifically chosen by the appropriate body to represent a specific area of interest or issue of consideration. They are appointed because of their level of knowledge and experience, e.g. headteachers. Whilst I recognise they make a useful contribution to discussions, government has no plans to change the current arrangements. I am not sure that making the Independent Person a member of the Standards Committee would be compatible with their independence, which is vital to ensure and maintain public confidence on how allegations of councillor misconduct are investigated.

*Your Sincerely,*

*Marcus Jones*

**MARCUS JONES MP**