

Report of	Meeting	Date
Monitoring Officer	Governance Committee	Wednesday, 31 July 2024

## Standards Update - 2023/24

Is this report confidential?	No
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### Purpose of the Report

1. To inform members of complaints received under the Code of Conduct for the period 2023/24.

### Recommendations

2. To note and provide feedback on the contents of the report.

### Reasons for recommendations

3. It is good practice to report to committee annually on the complaints received under the code of conduct, to high light any behaviour patterns emerging or identified and to use this information to inform any improvements needed to the code of conduct or associated training for members.

### Other options considered and rejected

4. None.

### Background to the report

5. As is the practice, this report anonymises the subject of the complaint, but will confirm numbers of complaints received, those treated as not being a breach, those resolved through local resolution and those pursued through investigation.

### Complaints Received

6. In the municipal year **8 complaints** were received of which **3 were referred for investigation** after consideration of the Monitoring Officer and the Independent Person. The tests within the investigation procedure were applied
  - a. Was the subject of the complaint a councillor at the time?
  - b. Were they acting in that capacity (it should be noted that as per our code of conduct it was assumed they were)?
  - c. Assuming the alleged behaviour occurred does it constitute a breach of the code of conduct?

The public interest test was also applied.

7. Of the matters investigated, 2 have been paused pending police investigations into the issue and one was discontinued when the councillor lost their seat at the election.
8. Of the remaining complaints the conduct was not found to be a breach of the code at all, or was remedied by the subject member. On occasion members voluntarily corrected the behaviour even though it was not found to be a breach.
9. There was one ongoing investigation which was resolved by a hearing in the course of last year and the subject member acknowledged and apologised for their behaviour as well as receiving further training on the code of conduct.
10. One complaint was received against a parish councillor.

### **Patterns Emerging**

11. A number of the complaints related to the use of social media. As a result, member of this committee addressed this issue by reviewing and improving the Social Media Protocol which was recommended to and adopted by the Council this year.
12. This new protocol provides greater guidance to members on social media and encourages them to think through their use of it more carefully. This has been incorporated into the training delivered this year.
13. Of the remaining complaints there are no patterns that emerge, they relate to 2 discrete incidents, one of which was very unusual and related to a planned disturbance by third parties at a council meeting. The responses at this meeting were not atypical either of the members concerned nor the usual forum for the transaction of council business.
14. However, it is important to note that the total number of complaints received and particularly those referred for investigation remain low. This demonstrates a continued commitment to “good” behaviours by members of this council.

### **Moving Forward**

15. In addition to reviewing the Social Media Protocol, members have reviewed the Code of Conduct within the last 12 months.
16. It is not proposed to make any formal recommendations for further actions at this time. It will be important to monitor complaints particularly around social media use to assess the benefit of the new Protocol and to work with members who are the subject of complaints to understand how the issue arose to see if there is any learning we can take from it to assist other members or limit the risk of the situation arising again.

### **Equality and diversity**

17. The code of conduct reflects the model code and has been drafted in such a way as to support members and members of the public in its understanding. The Social Media protocol will be reviewed as it is used to ensure that meets the inclusivity obligations of the council.

**Comments of the Statutory Finance Officer**

18. There are no financial implications arising from this report; it is an update report for noting.

**Comments of the Monitoring Officer**

19. This is an update report for members to note only.

**Background documents**

There are no background papers to this report

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