

STANDARDS COMMITTEE

WEDNESDAY, 2 JULY 2025

Present:

Councillors Henderson, Nutley, Clarence, Palethorpe and Nuttall (Chair)

Sandra Geneder, Independent Person

Apologies:

Councillors Bullivant

Officers in Attendance:

Paul Woodhead, Head of Legal and Democratic Services and Monitoring Officer
Charlie Fisher, Democratic Services Team Leader and Deputy Monitoring Officer
Abbie Cook, Legal Assistant and Deputy Monitoring Officer

8. CHAIR AND VICE CHAIR

The Committee noted the Council's decision on Tuesday 20th May 2025 to appoint Councillor Charles Nuttall and Councillor Phil Bullivant as Chair and Vice Chair of the Standards Committee for the 2025/26 Municipal Year.

9. MINUTES

It was **proposed** by Councillor John Nutley and **seconded** by Councillor David Palethorpe and

Resolved

that the minutes of the previous meeting (Thursday 27th July 2023) be agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

10. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None.

11. COUNCILLOR COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE AND APPEAL SYSTEM REVIEW

The Monitoring Officer gave a verbal update to the Committee on the Councillor complaints procedure and Appeal System review.

The Monitoring Officer appraised Members on the current complaints process and appeals system, the steps within the process and the development of the process in 2023. The Monitoring Officer highlighted his concerns with the current process that it is open to abuse and there are mechanisms within the process to prolong it without any meaningful justification. He commented that in his view, complainants use the appeals mechanism to try to overturn decisions rather than to raise issues with the process.

The Independent Person present commented that the process needed to be clear, straightforward and the need to simplify the current process.

The Monitoring Officer highlighted some of the proposed changes with the appeals process and the creation of a supplementary document to outline the criteria for complaints. The Deputy Monitoring Officers (the Democratic Services Team Leader and the Legal Assistant) would bring a revised process to the Committee for further discussion.

The Committee agreed that a revised version of the Councillor complaints process would be brought to a future meeting of the Standards Committee for discussion.

12. COUNCILLOR COMPLAINTS UPDATE

The Monitoring Officer gave a verbal update to the Committee on the number and type of Councillor Complaints.

The Monitoring Officer appraised Members of the current figures:

- 61 complaints had been received from June 2024 – June 2025;
- In terms of the types of complainants: 30 were from Elected or co-opted Members, 23 from members of the public, 5 from Officers/staff and 3 were others;
- 14 of the 61 complaints were ruled as invalid;
- 17 complaints found no breach of the Code of Conduct was found;
- 8 complaints were informally resolved; and
- 22 complaints were ongoing at various stages in the process.

Of the complaints ongoing, 6 are currently being investigated and further 3 are awaiting instruction of an investigation following consultation with an independent person.

The Monitoring Officer highlighted his intention to publish these figures to improve the transparency around the process and amount of resources assigned that related to councillor complaints. He estimated that the Council had spent c. £500,000 on councillor complaints in recent years.

The Committee and Officers discussed the requirement to engage in the Code of Conduct and the powers of the Council relating to sanctions within the Code and legislation.

The Chair proposed an informal working group of the Committee to discuss the issues raised in the meeting. The Deputy Monitoring Officers agreed to support this work to help the Committee and report back at the next meeting.

Councillor Charles Nuttall **proposed** and Councillor David Palethorpe **seconded** and it was

Resolved

That an informal working group is set up to review options of publishing complaints data in order to inform a decision by the Committee at a future meeting.

13. CLOSE OF MEETING

On the conclusion of the agenda items, the Committee discussed training for the Committee, further items for the agreed working group to consider (the Appeals Process and Livestreaming of meetings) and the proposed changes to the Committee Structure including the Audit Scrutiny, Procedures and Standards Committees

The Chair closed the meeting following this discussion.

Chairman