

# Standards Committee



12 February 2025

<b>Title</b>	Update on Member Complaints
<b>Purpose of the report</b>	To update and invite the Members to consider possible measures to improve standards of conduct.
<b>Report Author</b>	Linda Heron, Interim Monitoring Officer
<b>Ward(s) Affected</b>	All Wards
<b>Exempt</b>	No
<b>Exemption Reason</b>	Not applicable
<b>Corporate Priority</b>	This item is not in the current list of Corporate Priorities.
<b>Recommendations</b>	<p><b>Committee is asked to:</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>1. Acknowledge the update on the numbers and outcomes of Member complaints dealt with since April 2024; and</b></li> <li><b>2. Consider possible measures to address complaints about the same few Members, in order to improve standards.</b></li> </ol>
<b>Reason for Recommendation</b>	This Committee is responsible for the promotion of high standards of conduct by councillors and co-opted members and assisting the Members to observe the Code of Conduct.

## 1. Summary of the report

What is the situation	Why we want to do something
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There have been 13 complaints under the Code of Conduct since 1 April 2024</li> <li>• All but 1 of those complaints were raised by, or about, the same four Members.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A small handful of Members are repeatedly engaging in behaviour which falls short of the high standards of conduct expected, or complaining about other Members.</li> <li>• Informal resolutions such as apologies or training have not been effective at preventing repeat complaints.</li> <li>• Even where these complaints are dismissed, they create additional workload for officers in ensuring the matters are properly considered in accordance with the Council's adopted Arrangements.</li> </ul>
This is what we want to do about it	These are the next steps

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Seek the views of the Standards Committee on how to address the issue of 'repeat offenders/complainers'</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>This will depend on any suggestions received from the Committee.</li> </ul>
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1.1 This report seeks to update the Standards Committee on the numbers and outcomes of complaints about Members, received and considered under the Council's arrangements for dealing with allegations of a breach of the Code of Conduct.

1.2 It also seeks the Committee's views on possible measures to address the issue of the same few councillors being the subject of, and making, those complaints.

## 2. Key issues

2.1 The Council's '[Arrangements](#)' for dealing with complaints under the Member Code of Conduct requires that the Monitoring Officer report to the Standards Committee on those complaints which:

- a. The Monitoring Officer has rejected
- b. Have been referred to the Assessment or Hearing Sub-Committee

2.2 An anonymised summary of complaints received since 1 April 2024 is attached at **Appendix A**.

2.3 Members were provided with an update summary for complaints received between August 2023 and July 2024 in the September edition of the Members' Briefing Pack. Some of those are repeated in the summary attached to this report for the purposes of illustrating the number of complaints about the same few councillors in the past 9 months.

2.4 Over the period shown, the Monitoring Officer received 13 complaints.

- 11 complaints were about the same four Members.
- Five complaints were made by one of those four Members.
- Two of the four Members have received further training on social media as a result of the complaints against them.

## 3. Complaints rejected by the Monitoring Officer

3.1 In addition to the 13 complaints appearing in the summary, a further four complaints were received which were rejected for the following reasons:

- (a) No jurisdiction as the complaint related to the councillor's private life
- (b) No jurisdiction as the complaint was about dissatisfaction with a Council decision
- (c) The matter complained about did not fall within the scope of the Member Code of Conduct (x2)

#### **4. Complaints dealt with informally by the Monitoring Officer**

- 4.1 The '[Arrangements](#)' include provision for the Monitoring Officer to consider informal resolution at any stage in the process for dealing with a complaint, subject to meeting the criteria in Annex C to Appendix 2 of the Arrangements.
- 4.2 Seven of the complaints received since 1 April 2024 were closed following agreement to an informal resolution – four by means of an apology and three by advice/training on the use of social media.

#### **5. Complaints referred to Hearing Sub-Committee**

- 5.1 Since 1 April 2024, four complaints have been referred for independent investigation. One was heard by a Hearing Sub-Committee with a finding of breach of the Code of Conduct on respect. The other three are currently under investigation. These may be dealt with informally or considered by a Hearing Sub-Committee in due course.
- 5.2 The Monitoring Officer will report on the outcome of any future Hearing Sub-Committees in a report to this Committee at the appropriate time.

#### **6. Options analysis and proposal**

- 6.1 There are no options being proposed. The matter is open for discussion by the Committee.

#### **7. Financial management comments**

- 7.1 There are no direct financial impacts arising from this report. There is a cost for engaging an Investigator for complaints which proceed to a Hearing, but these are met from within existing budgets.

#### **8. Risk management comments**

- 8.1 Poor standards of conduct have the potential to bring the Council into disrepute. This can lower the public's expectations and confidence in the local authority, and councillors and politicians more generally.

#### **9. Procurement comments**

- 9.1 Not applicable to this report.

#### **10. Legal comments**

- 10.1 Section 27 of the Localism Act 2011 requires the Council to promote and maintain high standards of conduct by members and co-opted members of the Council.
- 10.2 Under the Constitution, the following are some of the roles and functions of the Standards Committee:
- promoting and maintaining high standards of conduct by councillors and any co-opted members; and
  - assisting the Members to observe the Members' Code of Conduct.

#### **11. Other considerations**

- 11.1 There are no other considerations to be taken into account.

#### **12. Equality and Diversity**

- 12.1 There is no impact on equality and diversity arising from this report. The Council has adopted arrangements for dealing with allegations of a breach of

the Code of Conduct which ensure all complainants and subject members are treated fairly and equally.

**13. Sustainability/Climate Change Implications**

13.1 Not applicable to this report.

**14. Contact**

14.1 Linda Heron, Interim Monitoring Officer [l.heron@spelthorne.gov.uk](mailto:l.heron@spelthorne.gov.uk)

**Please submit any material questions to the Committee Chair and Officer  
Contact by two days in advance of the meeting.**

**Background papers:** There are none.

**Appendices:**

Appendix A – details of complaints received from 1 April 2024 to 1 January 2025