

BOROUGH COUNCIL OF KING'S LYNN & WEST NORFOLK

STANDARDS COMMITTEE

Minutes from the Meeting of the Standards Committee held on Tuesday, 25th March, 2025 at 11.30 am in the Council Chamber, Town Hall, Saturday Market Place, King's Lynn PE30 5DQ

PRESENT: Councillor A Ware (Chair), Councillors B Ayres, S Bearshaw, S Ring and S Sandell (Vice-Chair)

OFFICER PRESENT: James Arrandale- Deputy Monitoring Officer

8 APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Squire

9 MINUTES

RESOLVED: The minutes of the previous meeting were agreed as a correct record.

10 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Under Standing Order 34, Councillor Nash declared an interest in Item 7, Summary of 2023-2024 Code of Conduct Complaints.

11 URGENT BUSINESS

There was none.

12 MEMBERS PRESENT UNDER STANDING ORDER 34

Councillor Nash was present under Standing Order 34.

13 CHAIR'S CORRESPONDENCE (IF ANY)

There was none.

14 SUMMARY OF 23-24 CODE OF CONDUCT COMPLAINTS

[Click here to view the recording of this item on YouTube.](#)

The Deputy Monitoring Officer presented the report.

The Chair invited questions and comments from the Committee, a summary of which is set out below.

Councillor Ring thanked the Deputy Monitoring Officer and asked how the previous year's number of complaints compared to 2023-2024.

The Deputy Monitoring Officer advised the number of complaints for 2022-2023 was around 40 and agreed the previous years should be included in the report to provide a further comparison.

Councillor Ring asked if the report could focus on number of incidents rather than complaints. He commented further this information would be useful to determine the position of the Council and Members with LGR and Devolution upcoming. Councillor Ring sought further clarification on how malicious complaints were measured.

The Deputy Monitoring Officer stated that there was no fixed definition for malicious complaints, as it was inherently difficult to determine a complainant's motive. The Council takes a cautious approach to determining whether a complaint is malicious. An indicator would be where a complainant makes repeated complaints without proper evidence or supporting material.

Councillor Ring sought clarification on how social media posts were considered as complaints.

The Deputy Monitoring Officer understood this information was a request from prior reports to Standards Committee. He clarified that this referred to social media-related conduct included in the complaint, such as comments made on social media.

In response to Councillor Ayres, the Deputy Monitoring Officer confirmed if the complaint was about social media conduct, it was likely evidence of the conduct on social media would be provided along with the complaint.

Councillor Bearshaw referred to table 3 of the report and asked if an additional column could be included for complaints upheld.

Under Standing Order 34, Councillor Nash referred to point of order 20.1: if appendix B was endorsed, 3 members of the Committee had an interest in Appendix B as members who attended the Standards hearing.

Councillor Ring commented the recommendation was to note the reports not to approve.

The Deputy Monitoring Officer advised as per the Terms of Reference for the Committee, the function was to monitor the report and receive the specific briefing, and no further action was required. Standards Committee were not acting in a decision-making capacity when noting the Report, so an interest did not arise.

RESOLVED: The Standards Committee noted the contents of this report together with Appendices A and B

Councillor Nash left the meeting at 11:49am

UPDATED CODE OF MEMBER CONDUCT AND GUIDANCE ON COMPLAINT HANDLING

[Click here to view the recording of this item on YouTube.](#)

The Deputy Monitoring Officer presented the report.

The Chair invited questions and comments from the Committee, a summary of which is set out below.

Councillor Ring commented the report was clear and helpful with the tracked changes. He highlighted the declarations of interest forms for Members were correct and already included spouses and the Code of Conduct now reflected this too. He commented the importance of this being clear and correct and members were encouraged if in doubt to include in their declarations of interest.

The Deputy Monitoring Officer clarified, “partner” was used to include spouses and civil partners etc.

The Chair, Councillor Ware thanked the Deputy Monitoring Officer for the clear definitions in the report.

Councillor Bearshaw asked for the declarations of interest flow chart to be amended to reflect the inclusion of partner. Councillor Bearshaw referred to allowances and suggested on the item all members have dispensation to speak as it was needed.

Councillor Ring asked if the recent judicial hearing fed into the amendments made to the investigation section of the code of conduct. He commented there were clear points of clarification on the hearing process.

The Vice-Chair, Councillor Sandell sought clarification on the timescales in reference to the second step criteria, and whether there was a cut-off when a complaint arose too far in the past to be considered.

The Deputy Monitoring Officer confirmed there was no definite timescale as it depended on the nature of the allegation. Complaints in any event tend to be made quite promptly after the event in dispute but were usually within the last couple of months.

Councillor Bearshaw sought clarification on the independent person and if there were separate terms of reference.

The Deputy Monitoring Officer advised the independent person was formally instructed and best practice guidance was given. He added there was no issue raised in any legal cases in relation to Appendix B of the independent person.

The Chair, Councillor Ware commented in relation to timescales, it was finding a balance and the public interest needed to be considered. She referred to Councillor Bearshaw’s previous question and commented further the independent person was a vital part of the investigation up to

the 25 January 2024 Hearing and acted fairly. Councillor Ware commented following the hearing there were newspaper articles and sought clarification if they could be subject to a complaint.

The Deputy Monitoring Officer without seeing a complaint formally, he said he was unable to comment and would need to know the full details. He added it would be considered if this was in the bounds of the Members free speech.

Councillor Ring added he felt this was not in the public interest to form a complaint over the comments made and the independent person acted within their remit and the procedures for the hearing were followed.

Councillor Bearshaw commented complaints by the nature are emotive and as a committee their role was to remove the emotive side of the complaint and follow procedures

RESOLVED: The Standards Committee were requested

1. To approve the attached revised Member Code of Conduct, with tracked changes accepted).
2. To adopt the attached revised Guidance on Complaint Handling, with tracked changes accepted.

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DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The Deputy Monitoring Officer advised the annual report was deferred pending the judicial review and the report for 2024-2025 was to be brought to the Committee within a couple of months.

Councillor Ayres referred to previous years when the Chair would receive regular updates on complaints which were submitted and then an informed decision could be made when a meeting was necessary.

The Chair, Councillor Ware agreed with the Deputy Monitoring Officer to receive regular updates on the Complaints submitted.

The date of the next meeting was to be scheduled when required.

The meeting closed at 12.16 pm