

## STANDARDS COMMITTEE

<b>Date:</b> Monday 14th July, 2025 <b>Time:</b> 10.00 am <b>Venue:</b> Mandela Room
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## AGENDA

1. Welcome and Fire Evacuation Procedure

In the event the fire alarm sounds attendees will be advised to evacuate the building via the nearest fire exit and assemble at the Bottle of Notes opposite MIMA.

2. Apologies for Absence

3. Declarations of Interest

To receive any declarations of interest.

4. Minutes- Standards Committee - 7 April 2025 3 - 6

5. Quarterly Update Report to Standards Committee 7 - 12

6. Members' Code of Conduct Arrangements

7. Any other urgent items which in the opinion of the Chair, may be considered

Charlotte Benjamin  
Director of Legal and Governance Services

## MEMBERSHIP

Councillors A Romaine (Chair), I Morrish (Vice-Chair), M Saunders, J Thompson, D Branson, P Gavigan, L Hurst, J McConnell and J Rostron

### **Assistance in accessing information**

**Should you have any queries on accessing the Agenda and associated information please contact Susan Lightwing/Joanne McNally, 01642 729712/01642 728329, [Susan\\_lightwing@middlesbrough.gov.uk](mailto:Susan_lightwing@middlesbrough.gov.uk)/[Joanne\\_McNally@middlesbrough.gov.uk](mailto:Joanne_McNally@middlesbrough.gov.uk)**

## STANDARDS COMMITTEE

A meeting of the Standards Committee was held on Monday 7 April 2025.

**PRESENT:** Councillors Anne Romaine (Chair), I Morrish (Vice-Chair), D Davison, J Ewan, J Thompson and G Wilson

**OFFICERS:** Joanne McNally, Catherine Cunningham and Ann-Marie Wilson

**APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE:** Councillor L Lewis

### 24/12 **WELCOME AND FIRE EVACUATION PROCEDURE**

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting and explained the Fire Evacuation Procedure.

### 24/13 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

### 24/14 **MINUTES- STANDARDS COMMITTEE - 14 OCTOBER 2024**

The minutes of the Standards Committee meeting held on 14 October 2024 were submitted and approved as a correct record.

### 24/15 **QUARTERLY UPDATE REPORT TO STANDARDS COMMITTEE**

A report of the Director of Legal and Governance Services was presented by the Legal Representative, to provide a quarterly update to the Standards Committee in relation to the recent and current position concerning Code of Conduct Complaints.

There were 59 complaints in 2023. Of those complaints 9 were withdrawn or discontinued, 30 were advised to be rejected based on the assessment criteria, 14 were resolved informally by way of advice and guidance, 6 complaints which had been accepted were ongoing, 5 of those complaints related to the same member and were linked with similar ongoing complaints.

There were 21 complaints in 2024. Of those complaints, 9 were rejected, 12 had been accepted. The 12 complaints that had not been rejected were currently being considered as to how they should proceed.

There had been 9 complaints so far in 2025, 2 were ongoing, 6 had been rejected and 1 complaint was accepted but had been resolved informally by advice and guidance.

Members were informed that the common prevalent theme of the complaints was inappropriate use of social media. Training was therefore identified and carried out by the Local Government Association to Members on 4 February 2025. Ten Members attended the training it was advised that the theme of complaints would be continued to be monitored to consider whether to repeat the training again.

The Standards Committee were advised that Councillors Blades and Uddin had undertaken Social Media Training on 4 February 2025 and had written a letter of apology regarding their misuse of Social Media and acknowledged that they had not met the standards of public life. The letters were received on 2 April 2025 and submitted to the Standards Committee.

Members raised issues in relation to the timelines for processing standards complaints and multiple complaints in relation to the same Members. The Legal Representative advised recruitment was underway for a full-time permanent governance solicitor who would have responsibility for standards complaints.

Members requested that they receive a monthly update as to the code of conduct position, in terms of numbers received/resolved/ongoing.

Members queried the assessment process for a complaint and the criteria used to assess a complaint. The Deputy Monitoring Officer agreed to provide a copy of the Independent

Person blank assessment form and a link to the LGA guidance.

**AGREED** as follows that the:

1. the information provided was received and noted.
2. monthly update as to the code of conduct position, in terms of numbers received/resolved/ongoing
3. a copy of the Independent Person blank assessment form to be circulated to Members of the Committee
4. link to the LGA guidance where the primary/secondary criteria is set out be provided to Members.

24/16

## **CONSTITUTION REPORT ON STANDARDS/CODE OF CONDUCT**

The Deputy Monitoring Officer presented a report on the update of the Constitution. The Constitution and Member Development Committee had been reviewing the provisions of the Constitution to remove duplication and improve its usability as far as possible. It was proposing to amend Section 8 of the Constitution (Standards) and sought the input of the Standards Committee as a result.

A Member provided the following comments:

- 8.2.2 states 3 parish councils, should be 2
- 8.6.1 should be standards not standard
- 8.9.1 should read; The role of elected member across all tiers of local government is a vital part of democracy
- 8.9.24 could this be changed to – remain neutral except in their role as political assistants.
- Page 53, 11 if this is members financial interest or wellbeing should the word Members be included?

**AGREED** as follows:

1. The comments in respect of the proposed revised Section 8 of the Constitution are submitted to the Constitution and Member Development Working Group

24/17

## **REVIEW OF GIFTS AND HOSPITALITY**

The Deputy Monitoring Officer presented the details of the Register for Gifts and Hospitality for Officers and Members.

The Monitoring Officer was required to review the Register of Gifts and Hospitality for Officers and Members on an annual basis and report details of the entries to the Standards Committee, to ensure that Members and Officers complied with the Members' Code of Conduct and the Officers' Code of Conduct, respectively.

The Council's Code of Conduct required Councillors and Co-opted Members to declare and register the receipt of either gifts or hospitality with a value of £25 or more.

Declarations were entered in the Register of Gifts and Hospitality. Details of entries received from Members for the period 2024-25 were attached at Appendix A. Details of entries received from Officers for the period 2024-25 were attached at Appendix B to the submitted report.

A Member queried the cost of item ref number 3/24, it was advised that the cost would have been approximately £150, and the register would be updated to reflect this.

**AGREED** that the information provided was received and noted.

24/18

## **ANY OTHER URGENT ITEMS WHICH IN THE OPINION OF THE CHAIR, MAY BE CONSIDERED**



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<b>MIDDLESBROUGH COUNCIL</b>	
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<b>Report of:</b>	Director of Legal and Governance Services - Charlotte Benjamin
<b>Relevant Executive Member:</b>	Mayor Chris Cooke
<b>Submitted to:</b>	Standards Committee
<b>Date:</b>	14 July 2025
<b>Title:</b>	Quarterly Update Report to Standards Committee
<b>Report for:</b>	Information
<b>Status:</b>	Public
<b>Council Plan priority:</b>	Delivering Best Value
<b>Key decision:</b>	No
<b>Why:</b>	Report is for information only
<b>Subject to call in?</b>	No
<b>Why:</b>	This report is for information to the Standards Committee

<b>Executive summary</b>
This report provides a quarterly update to the Standards Committee regarding the current position concerning Code of Conduct Complaints, and to identify any trends or patterns in regards to the type of complaints being received.

## 1. Purpose of this report and its contribution to the achievement of the Council Plan ambitions

- 1.1 To provide information by way of a quarterly update to the Standards Committee regarding the previous years and the current position concerning Code of Conduct Complaints.
- 1.2 In addition that the Committee considers the information to discuss possible areas of member development and improvements.

Our ambitions	Summary of how this report will support delivery of these ambitions and the underpinning aims
<b>A successful and ambitious town</b>	Councillors represent local residents, work to develop better services, and deliver local change.  The public have high expectations of them and entrust them to represent our local area, taking decisions fairly, openly, and transparently. There is an individual and collective responsibility to meet these expectations by maintaining high standards and demonstrating good conduct, and by challenging behaviour which falls below expectations.  This report provides the Standards Committee with the information providing the current position to create and maintain public confidence in the role of councillor and local government.  Maintaining that confidence will support the delivery of all of the ambitions and the underpinning aims.
<b>A healthy Place</b>	
<b>Safe and resilient communities</b>	
<b>Delivering best value</b>	

## 2. Recommendations

2.1 That the Standards Committee

- Notes the content of this report.

## 3. Rationale for the recommended decision(s)

3.1 Not applicable as report is for information only.



#### 4. Background and relevant information

4.1 This report is provided to committee members to give an overview of the current, and recent position with regards to the Code of Conduct complaints received.

Year (Jan-Dec)	Total	Member on Member	Other non Member (ie member of public / officer)	ONGOING	CONCLUDED				
					No. withdrawn/ discontinued due to not re-elected	No. rejected	No. resolved informally	No. to investigation	No. to standards Committee after investigation
2019	27	9	18	0	4	9	10	4	3
2020	31	4	27	0	16	12	1	2	1
2021	33	13	20	0	7	5	19	2	1
2022	12	3	9	0	4	4	2	2	2
2023	59	10	49	0	9	30	14	6	0
2024	21	7	14	5	0	8	8	0	0
2025	24	10	14	9	2	10	3	0	0

4.2 The shaded columns show the breakdown of the ongoing and complaints outcomes and will add up to the total number for the year.

4.3 The outstanding complaints as at 1<sup>st</sup> July 2025 are as follows:

Year	Total Number Received	Total Number Ongoing	Number of Cllrs
2024	21	5	1
2025 (to date)	24	9	6
TOTALS	45	14	7

4.4 Of the 14 outstanding complaints:

- 8, including 5 from 2024, are awaiting the outcome of an investigation or other external processes before they can continue.
- 6 are with the Independent Person/Monitoring Officer for consideration of the preliminary assessment and/or next stages. All 6 are no more than 4 weeks old.

4.5 There is a difference between the April 2025 update report and this report in regards to the number of rejected complaints for 2024. By way of explanation in error, the header column had been included in the total number, incorrectly having the number rejected as 9, when it is 8.

- 4.6 The column for the complaints resolved informally was also incorrectly populated as zero in the April 2025 report – this has now been rectified.
- 4.7 The introduction of the shaded columns as above should make it easier to identify where the information is not consistent, and provide an easier breakdown of the complaints received.
- 4.8 For clarification, the information shows each separate complaint. In some cases, we may get a number of complaints in regard to the same incident which can inflate the total number. We may also have the same complaint against a number of Councillors, which can again inflate the total number.
- 4.9 You will note that the outstanding complaint from 2023 has now been concluded by way of informal resolution, namely advice and guidance.
- 4.10 The common prevalent theme of the complaints continues to be the inappropriate use of social media. Training was therefore identified and carried out by the Local Government Association to Members on the 4 February 2025 and was attended by ten members as updated at the last meeting.
- 4.11 We are currently in the process of agreeing an additional training session with an external provider for September which will consider standards, and in particular social media use. All members will be encouraged to attend.
- 4.12 The theme of complaints will be continued to be monitored to consider what additional support is required.
- 4.13 As was updated at the last meeting the Monitoring Officer we are in the process of advertising for a full-time, permanent governance solicitor to assist and support in standards matters following a successful growth bid.
- 4.14 Relevant discussion points:
- **Review of monthly updates**
    - o Is this useful/should it continue
  - **Information provided**
    - o Is there anything not provided you would like to see on a regular basis
    - o Can we reduce the number of comparative years – reduce to three years including the current year
  - **Engagement with training**
    - o Are there any suggestions as to how we can engage more members in the training provided around standards

## 5. Ward Member Engagement if relevant and appropriate

5.1 Not applicable.

## 6. Other potential alternative(s) and why these have not been recommended

6.1 Not applicable as report is for information only.

## 7. Impact(s) of the recommended decision(s)

Topic	Impact
Financial (including procurement and Social Value)	There is no financial impact as the report is for information and discussion only.
Legal	There is no legal impact as the report is for information and discussion only.
Risk	The report contributes to the Council demonstrating its approach to monitoring and maintaining standards of behaviour and ethical governance
Human Rights, Public Sector Equality Duty and Community Cohesion	There are no issues affecting human rights, the public sector equality duty or community cohesion.
Reducing Poverty	There is no impact on reducing poverty as the report is for information and discussion only.
Climate Change / Environmental	There is no impact on the Council's climate change or environmental aspirations as the report is for information and discussion only.
Children and Young People Cared for by the Authority and Care Leavers	There is no impact on children and young people cared for by the Authority and care leavers as the report is for information and discussion only.
Data Protection	There are no issues of data protection as the report is for information and discussion only.

## Actions to be taken to implement the recommended decision(s)

Action	Responsible Officer	Deadline
None		

## Appendices

1	None
2	
3	

## Background papers

Body	Report title	Date
None		

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