

STANDARDS COMMITTEE

A meeting of the Standards Committee was held on Monday 3 April 2023.

PRESENT: Councillors M Saunders (Vice-Chair), D Coupe, J Rostron and M Storey

OFFICERS: S Lightwing and A Perriman

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE: were submitted on behalf of Councillors T Mawston, S Dean, D Rooney and S Walker

22/20 **WELCOME AND EVACUATION PROCEDURE**

The Chair welcomed all present to the meeting and read out the Building Evacuation Procedure.

22/21 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no Declarations of Interest at this point in the meeting.

22/22 **MINUTES- STANDARDS COMMITTEE - 23 JANUARY 2023**

The minutes of the Standards Committee meeting held on 23 January 2023 were submitted and approved as a correct record.

22/23 **QUARTERLY UPDATE REPORT TO STANDARDS COMMITTEE**

A joint report of the Director of Legal and Governance Services and Executive Member for Legal and Governance Services was presented to provide information in regards to the recent and current position concerning Code of Conduct Complaints so that the Committee had assurance about the practice and process.

There was 1 complaint from 2020, 4 complaints from 2021, and 4 ongoing from 2022 at various stages of the process which had not yet concluded. We were unable to give any specifics about those complaints at this time so as not to prejudice any outcomes, and/or create a conflict should any of those complaints need to come to Standards Committee at a future date. The total outstanding complaints pre 2023 was 9.

Since the last quarterly update, 1 further complaint from 2022 had been rejected. This was reflected in the table at paragraph 2 of the submitted report.

There had been 29 complaints submitted to date in 2023. Of the 29 complaints, there had been 9 complaints rejected further to the assessment criteria. There were 20 outstanding complaints in 2023.

As per the table above, there had been a significant increase in complaints in the first quarter of this year, with 29 received to date, compared to a total of 12 in 2022, and 27, 31 and 33 for 2019-2021 respectively for the full year.

The internal resource to deal with the complaints was provided by the legal services team, primarily the Monitoring Officer and two Deputy Monitoring Officers. Senior officers might also be tasked to complete an investigation where required. A significant increase in complaints would of course mean that legal resource is diverted away from other areas.

Members expressed concern with the numbers of potentially frivolous complaints that were being submitted. The Deputy Monitoring Officer explained the procedures in place and stated that efforts were being made to expand the pool of Independent Members who assisted with the assessment process.

Of the 29 complaints received in 2023 to date, 23 of them involved the inappropriate use of social media in some capacity. In order to try and address this issue, some proposals were contained in the report. The timescales for the following actions were amended at the meeting and agreed.

AGREED as follows that:

1. that the information provided was received and noted.
2. within 14 days of the meeting an advice and guidance email would be sent by the Monitoring Officer/Deputy Monitoring Officer to all current members reminding them of the guidance around social media use with reference to the Code of Conduct.
3. within 21 days of this meeting a meeting would be held between Group Leaders and the Monitoring Officer/Deputy Monitoring Officer to discuss the issue and seek support around trying to address it.
4. Within 28 days post-election a training session would be carried out with newly elected Members focussing specifically on guidance around social media use.

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

None.