

<b>Report of:</b>	Director of Legal And Governance Services – Charlotte Benjamin Executive Member for Legal And Governance Services – Councillor Barrie Cooper
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<b>Submitted to:</b>	Standards Committee Meeting of 18 <sup>th</sup> October 2021
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<b>Subject:</b>	Code of Conduct Complaints Update
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**Summary**

<b>Proposed decision(s)</b>
That Standards Committee notes the content of this report.

Report for:	Key decision:	Confidential:	Is the report urgent? <sup>1</sup>
Information	No	No	N/A

Contribution to delivery of the 2021-24 Strategic Plan		
People	Place	Business
To improve the lives of local people by ensuring that the members are acting within the Code of Conduct.	N/A	N/A

Ward(s) affected
Not Applicable

**What is the purpose of this report?**

To update the Standards Committee in regards to the recent and current position in regards to Code of Conduct Complaints.

**Why does this report require a Member decision?**

No decision required – Report for update only.

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## Report Background

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

Year (Jan-Dec)	Total complaints	Member on Member	Other on Member (ie member of public, officer)	No. withdrawn/ not progressed by complainant	No. rejected	No. resolved informally	No. to investigation	No. to standards Committee after investigation
2019	27	9	18	4	9	10	4	3
2020	31	4	27	16	12	1	1	0
2021 (to date)	29	12	17	2	0	16	0	0

There is 1 complaint from 2020, and 11 complaints from 2021 at various stages of the process which have not yet concluded. We are 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.

An ongoing theme around the complaints is around comments made on social media by members. This accounts for 12 complaints in 2019, 14 of complaints in 2020, and 14 in 2021 to date.

This obviously has an impact on resources having to deal with these complaints, some of which can take up a significant amount of time. We have considered ways to improve our response in this area and with this in mind the Code of Conduct has been updated with a greater focus on appropriate social media activity.

In addition we have organised some recent training by an external provider, Beth Evans, who talked in detail about social media activity and provided information as to when a member might be considered to be acting in an official capacity rather than in a private capacity. The training was well attended, with 25 members attending the session.

There is also an increase in member on member complaints, with this years complaints being almost as high as the last two years combined, with still a quarter of the year remaining.

We need to consider whether there is a culture that has developed within Middlesbrough to have a low tolerance to the usual cut and thrust of political debate, and whether some of the complaints have been of a retaliatory nature, with complaints being made from and against the same members in regards to the same issue.

In addition, where a member complains about the conduct of another member we will, in most circumstances, make every effort to resolve the matter informally, be liaising with the individuals concerned. Where the subject member is in a political group, we will also involve the group leader in discussions to attempt to resolve matters.

### What decision(s) are being asked for?

None – no decision is required. Report for update only.

**Why is this being recommended?**

Report is for update only.

**Other potential decisions and why these have not been recommended**

None – no decision is required. Report for update only.

**Impact(s) of recommended decision(s)**

None – no decision is required. Report for update only.

***Legal***

There is no legal impact as a decision is not required.

***Financial***

There is no financial impact as a decision is not required.

***Policy Framework***

N/A

***Equality and Diversity***

There are no issues of equality and diversity as a decision is not required.

***Risk***

N/A

**Actions to be taken to implement the decision(s)**

None – for information only.

**Appendices**

None.

**Background papers**

No background papers were used in the preparation of this report.

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