

**ANNUAL REPORT ON COMPLAINTS RELATING TO COUNCILLORS CONDUCT IN
2019/20**

Report of the Monitoring Officer

1. INTRODUCTION AND PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To update the council on complaints received about the conduct of members during the 2019/20 municipal year.

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1 Under the Members' Code of Conduct, complaints received by the Monitoring Officer about the conduct of members are subject to an initial assessment by the Monitoring Officer in consultation with the Statutory Independent Person. Where necessary, complaints will be referred to the Standards Committee Hearing Panel for consideration.
- 2.2 The Council's approved policy for dealing with complaints states that the Standards Committee will be kept informed of the number of complaints received and an annual report of the Monitoring Officer be submitted to the Council Meeting. A summary of the complaints are set out below.
- 2.3 The council is asked to note that at the time of writing this initial report at the end of July 2020, there was a proposal following the report of the Committee on Standards in Public Life of January 2019, a recommendation has been made by that Committee that a new Model Code of Conduct for Councillors be introduced. The Government/Parliament have yet to respond on the recommendation and a consultation is being undertaken by the LGA during July and August 2020 which is currently being considered by the Monitoring Officer and the Standards Committee.

3. COMPLAINTS

- 3.1. In 2019/20, 5 complaints were received by the Monitoring Officer about Councillors' conduct from members of the public.
- 3.2. In 3 cases, one of the two Independent Persons were consulted at an early stage and a view provided to the Monitoring Officer. On each occasion the Independent Person was in agreement with the action proposed and then taken by the Monitoring Officer.
- 3.3. 2 cases did not proceed to the Independent Person because the complainant did not provide any further information in support of the original complaint when requested by the Monitoring Officer (see further below).

- 3.4. The details below are a brief synopsis of the resolved complaints. The purpose of this report is purely to provide an overview of the salient points raised and how they were resolved.

Complaint 1

- 3.5. A complaint was made by a member of the public regarding a Councillor's conduct in relation to an issue relating to double yellow lines and an alleged conflict of interest.
- 3.6. Following an initial assessment and discussion with the Independent Person it was agreed that there had been no breach of the code of conduct and the complaints were rejected.

Complaint 2 (did not progress)

- 3.7. A complaint was made by a member of the public regarding a Councillor's conduct in relation to correspondence relating to double yellow lines. This was a different set of circumstances than those referred to in Complaint 1.
- 3.8. The complaint did not progress because the complainant did not provide the further information requested by the Monitoring Officer.

Complaint 3 (did not progress)

- 3.9. A complaint was made by a member of the public against a Councillor regarding conduct in relation to voting at an election and a non-declaration of interest.
- 3.10. The complaint did not progress because the complainant did not provide the further information requested by the Monitoring Officer.

Complaint 4

- 3.11. A complaint was made by a member of the public regarding comments made by a Councillor.
- 3.12. Following an initial assessment and discussion with the Independent Person it was agreed that the majority of the complaints were rejected but that one (not insignificant) part was upheld in relation to the use of inappropriate language. As such the code of conduct had been breached. The Councillor was asked to attend further training on the use of social media and apologise to the complainant.

Complaint 5

- 3.13. A complaint was made by a member of the public regarding a Councillor's alleged conflict of interest in relation to double yellow lines. This was a different set of circumstances than those referred to in Complaints 1 and 2 above.

3.14. Following an initial assessment and discussion with the Independent Person it was agreed that there had been no breach of the code of conduct and the complaint was rejected

4. OUTCOMES

4.1 None of the complaints resolved during this period progressed beyond the initial assessment or investigation stage as outlined the Complaints Policy. No matters were referred to the Standards Committee or the Standards Hearing Committee.

4.2 The number of complaints received has significantly decreased when compared to the 21 complaints received in 2018/19.

5. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 That the report be noted.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

There are none.

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