

BOURNEMOUTH, CHRISTCHURCH AND POOLE COUNCIL

STANDARDS COMMITTEE

Minutes of the Meeting held on 07 July 2026 at 6.00 pm

Present:-

Cllr V Ricketts – Chair

Cllr R Pattinson-West – Vice-Chair

Present: Cllr M Andrews, Cllr B Chick, Cllr G Farquhar and Cllr B Nanovo

Also in attendance: Ian Sibley and Paul Cashmore, Independent Persons and Cllr G Wright joined the meeting virtually

1. Apologies

There were no apologies for absence received on this occasion.

Cllr Gavin Wright joined the meeting virtually forgoing any voting rights.

2. Substitute Members

There were no Substitute Members on this occasion.

3. Election of Chair

The Vice Chair of the Committee presided over this item.

It was proposed and seconded that Cllr Vanessa Ricketts be elected as Chair of the Standards Committee for the 2026/27 Municipal Year. There were no other nominations.

RESOLVED that Cllr Vanessa Ricketts be elected as Chair of the Standards Committee for the 2026/27 Municipal Year.

The newly elected Chair presided over the remainder of the meeting.

4. Election of Vice Chair

It was proposed and seconded that Cllr Rachel Pattinson-West be elected as Vice Chair of the Standards Committee for the 2026/27 Municipal Year. There were no other nominations.

RESOLVED that Cllr Rachel Pattinson-West be elected as Vice Chair of the Standards Committee for the 2026/27 Municipal Year.

5. Declarations of Interests

There were no declarations of interest on this occasion.

6. Confirmation of Minutes

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 17 March 2026 were confirmed as an accurate record and signed by the Chair.

7. Public Issues

The following questions and statement were received from Mr Alexander McKinstry (address supplied):

In relation to Agenda Item 8 – Code of Conduct Complaints – Update:

Question:

Complaints BCP-222 and 229 date back to August / September last year; yet they are both described in tonight's report as "**Pending**", while the "outcome" column states "**Currently in progress and discussion with Independent Persons**" - which was the same status accorded to these two complaints at the 17 March 2026 meeting. When did officers last meet or correspond with the Independent Persons to discuss or progress these complaints (prior to this question being submitted on 1 July 2026)?

Answer:

An officer met with the IPs to discuss the above complaints on 2 February 2026.

In relation to Agenda Item 9 – Annual Report on Code of Conduct Complaints:

Question:

The report for Item 9 (page 34, paragraph 23) mentions an improvement in the time taken to report non-compliance to full Council. There is something left unsaid here, however. As of June 2025, where a councillor did not comply with sanctions, officers were closing the relevant complaints and asking complainants whether they wished to leave the matter there, or to submit further complaints under Part 8.4 of the Code. Is this still the procedure; if not, how has it been amended; and if so, is this something that's being looked at as part of the overall review of the Code of Conduct?

Answer:

The Committee supports an automatic referral to Full Council in the event of non-compliance by a Member. That is an aspect being considered by the current review of the Standards Process.

In relation to Agenda Item 10 – Update on the Standards Process Review:

Question 1:

This Committee voted for a review of the Code of Conduct complaints process on 8 July 2025. At the meeting of 17 March 2026, officers admitted that this review had not yet begun but did state that an informal meeting had been "**scheduled ... to consider the current arrangements, with a view to informing a thorough and comprehensive revision of the procedure.**" Did this meeting take place; if so, on what date; and how advanced is the review currently? More bluntly, does a draft report on this item now exist, or could one have been compiled for tonight's meeting (had it not been for Mr O'Gara's intervention)?

Answer:

At the meeting of 17 March 2026, the Monitoring Officer confirmed a delay in completing the review and that the Committee had agreed to expand it. Any reference to the review not having yet begun at the last meeting needs to be clarified. The review had begun and remains in process.

A meeting with the committee regarding the review progress or initial outcome has not yet taken place.

A draft report is not ready and Mr O’Gara has not ‘intervened’. The relevant report to the committee today states the background to the Chair agreeing to defer the review completion to until Mr O’Gara commences employment.

Question 2:

If Mr O’Gara’s request for the postponement of the review was made by email, what was the date of that email and what reasons were cited for the proposed deferment?

Answer:

Mr O’Gara did not unilaterally request a postponement by email. The postponement is viewed by the relevant officers and Mr O’Gara to be a prudent and practical step so as to ensure that the new Monitoring Officer has the opportunity to consider what the review recommendations are to be. This has been agreed with the Chair.

Statement:

The further postponement of the Code of Conduct review is immensely dissatisfying. Complaints are on the increase - including those upheld by this Committee; officers themselves express concern at the rising number of "disrespect" and "disrepute" allegations; six councillors are currently in breach of sanctions imposed by this Committee; three of those councillors sit on the Investigatory and Disciplinary Committee, potentially sanctioning statutory officers - with no Constitutional means of disbarring them. It is incredible, moreover, that a councillor can breach this authority’s Code of Conduct and not be named by default, unless in subsequent breach of disciplinary recommendations. This Committee voted for a review of the Code 364 days ago and the Chair asked that it be expedited in October. The recent offstage intervention is most untimely, therefore, and I suggest these repeated delays be cited as governance weaknesses in the authority’s Annual Governance Statement, currently out for public inspection.

8. Code of Conduct Complaints - Update

The Deputy Monitoring Officer presented a report, a copy of which had been circulated to each Member and a copy of which appears as Appendix 'A' to these Minutes in the Minute Book.

The report provided Members of the Standards Committee (the Committee) with an update on complaints regarding alleged breaches of the Code of Conduct against councillors received or concluded since the last report to the Committee in March 2026.

The Committee was responsible for maintaining high standards of conduct by Members of BCP Council and the Town and Parish Councils, monitoring

the operation of the Code of Conduct, and considering the outcome of commissioned independent investigations.

In response to a query about timescales for Councillors to respond to a complaint, it was confirmed it had been shortened to receiving a response within 14 days and if no response received, it would be referred to the standards committee informal meeting.

A member highlighted the backlog to get through and that the introduction of the newly formed Town Councils could increase pressure on the number of complaints received.

RESOLVED that the outcome of concluded complaints and the progress of those still outstanding be noted.

Voting: For - Unanimous

9. Update on the Standards Process Review

The Chair inadvertently missed the next item on the agenda and therefore this agenda item was discussed next.

The Interim Monitoring Officer presented a report, a copy of which had been circulated to each Member and a copy of which appears as Appendix 'B' to these Minutes in the Minute Book.

The purpose of the report was to provide the committee with an update regarding the review of the Council's Standards Process.

The Chair noted frustration that the standards review had been delayed and agreed it was important for the incoming Monitoring Officer to support and contribute to the review.

Members discussed limitations around sanctions for Code of Conduct breaches and were advised that options remained restricted by primary legislation, although measures such as publicising breaches and, in serious cases, restricting access to council buildings or committees could be used.

Members were assured that they would have opportunities to contribute ideas and provide input as part of the standards review process at the appropriate time.

The Chair confirmed an intention to progress the review as quickly as possible following the appointment of the new Monitoring Officer.

Officers highlighted that member complaints had increased by almost 80%, placing significant demands on resources and contributing to delays in progressing the review.

The Committee recognised the additional pressures on officers arising from elections, the Community Governance Review and wider responsibilities, and acknowledged their continued work in managing complaints.

An Independent Person requested that the new Monitoring Officer be encouraged to give greater priority to progressing the standards review.

RESOLVED that the Committee note the progress of the review and that the completion of the review will be postponed pending the commencement of employment of the Monitoring Officer.

Voting: Nem. Con.

10. Annual Report on Code of Conduct Complaints

The Deputy Monitoring Officer presented a report, a copy of which had been circulated to each Member and a copy of which appears as Appendix 'C' to these Minutes in the Minute Book.

The report provided a summary of complaints received and determined in relation to alleged breaches of the Code of Conduct by councillors over the four-year period 2022/23 to 2025/26, with a particular focus on the position in 2025/26.

The data showed a significant increase in complaints against BCP councillors in 2025/26 compared with the previous year. Complaints from members of the public remain the most common source, while there had also been an increase in complaints made by councillors. Social media continued to be the highest behavioural source of complaint, although complaints relating to the spoken word, typically within formal meetings, had also risen significantly.

The report highlighted that allegations relating to respect, bullying or harassment, and conduct bringing the office of councillor or the Council into disrepute remain recurring themes. It also noted that, even where complaints were not upheld, they could require significant officer time, place pressure on governance processes and had wider reputational and organisational consequences. The Standards Committee was asked to review the report and identify any areas for further work in support of its role in promoting and maintaining high standards of conduct.

The Committee discussed the report and noted the significant increase in Code of Conduct complaints and the associated workload for officers.

In response to a query, Members received clarification on complaint statistics, upheld complaints and the categorisation of alleged breaches.

The Committee discussed the complaints process and agreed that any changes to complaint forms should be considered as part of the standards review.

Members noted the importance of ensuring complainants provided sufficient information whilst maintaining an accessible complaints process.

The Committee noted a significant rise in social media-related complaints and discussed the potential benefits of additional social media training for Councillors. In response, Officers advised that training resources were available and that further social media training opportunities could be explored.

An Independent Person highlighted the importance of social media training given the number of complaints arising from online activity.

RESOLVED that the Annual Report on Code of Conduct complaints be reviewed and any areas for further work be identified for inclusion in the work programme.

Voting: Nem. Con.

11. Dispensations Granted by the Monitoring Officer

The Interim Monitoring Officer presented a report, a copy of which had been circulated to each Member and a copy of which appears as Appendix 'D' to these Minutes in the Minute Book.

The purpose of the report was to retrospectively report the dispensations granted by the Monitoring Officer for the time period 6 March 2026 to 7 July 2026.

There was no discussion on this item.

RESOLVED that Standards Committee note the dispensations granted by the Monitoring Officer for the time period 6 March 2026 to 7 July 2026.

Voting: Nem. Con.

12. Work Plan

The Committee received an update on progress against the Standards Committee Work Plan and noted that the programme would need to be reviewed following the appointment of the new Monitoring Officer.

Members were advised that work was underway with the new town and parish councils, including engagement with clerks, training provision and the development of a wider communications and engagement programme.

The Committee noted that planning had commenced for the Councillor induction programme ahead of the May 2027 elections and that draft proposals would be brought forward in due course.

Members discussed the importance of Code of Conduct training for newly elected town and parish Councillors and requested that this be raised with the incoming Monitoring Officer.

The Deputy Monitoring Officer confirmed ongoing discussions with the Dorset Association of Parish and Town Councils (DAPTC) regarding the provision of Code of Conduct training and support for town and parish councils.

The meeting ended at 7.05 pm

CHAIR