

BOURNEMOUTH, CHRISTCHURCH AND POOLE COUNCIL
STANDARDS COMMITTEE

Minutes of the Meeting held on 12 February 2025 at 6.00 pm

Present:-

Cllr V Ricketts – Chair

Cllr A Chapmanlaw – Vice-Chair

Present: Cllr P Canavan (In place of Cllr E Connolly), Cllr B Nanovo and
Cllr G Wright (In place of Cllr D Farr)

Present Cllr S Armstrong, Cllr R Pattinson-West, Mr Ian Sibley
Virtually:

25. Apologies

Apologies were received from Cllr E Connolly, Cllr D Farr and Paul Cashmore.

26. Substitute Members

Notification was received that Cllr P Canavan was substituting for Cllr E Connolly and Cllr G Wright was substituting for Cllr Farr for this meeting.

27. Declarations of Interests

There were no declarations of interest.

28. Confirmation of Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 21 January 2025 were confirmed as an accurate record for the Chair to sign.

29. Public Issues

Two public questions were received from Mr Alex McKinstry in relation to Agenda Item 6 – Code of conduct Complaints Review:

Question 1

This relates to the review of code of conduct complaints (Item 6 on tonight's agenda). Complaint BCP-177 was submitted by me on 4 April 2024. Having received a reply from the subject councillor, the Committee decided to ask the councillor for further information, and that information was requested on 3 June 2024. Has the councillor now provided that information, and if so, has it been forwarded to the Committee? Can I also ask whether the subject councillor has at any point sought extra time to provide this material; and if so, what timeframe were they given? (The information was requested 254 days ago.)

Response:

Whilst the Standards Committee publishes preferred timeframes for the progression of complaints there are occasions where the process does fall outside of the same. In adjudicating complaints, the Chair of the Standards Committee in consultation with Independent Persons and members of the committee consider each case on its merits and on occasions this may result in extended timeframes.

It is unfortunate that this particular complaint is taking an exceptional period of time however it is important to respect the complainant and the subject councillors right to a fair investigation and that all evidence received is carefully reviewed. We are hopeful that this complaint will be determined in the near future.

Question 2

Again regarding BCP-177: this complaint was scheduled to be dealt with two meetings ago - on 8 October 2024 - but the Committee took the view that, as there had been correspondence between the subject councillor and officers, it would be worth allowing the Committee to see that correspondence prior to making any determination. Has that correspondence been made available to the Committee so that they can potentially make a determination this evening? I ask this because the report for Item 6, paragraph 10, states: "The Committee must determine what course of action should now be taken to conclude the matters set out above." 315 days have now elapsed since this particular complaint was made.

Response:

As per question 1 we are hopeful that this complaint will be determined in the near future.

The following public statement was received from Mr Alex McKinstry in relation to Agenda Item 6 – Code of conduct Complaints Review:

"This relates to BCP-176, and the Committee may recall how the member was going to be referred to full Council for refusing to apologise for disrespectful conduct. The Item 6 report states that prior to full Council (on 3 November, to be precise), "the subject councillor provided the apology complying with the remedy". It is a fact however that the remedy imposed by this Committee was that the councillor apologise within 14 days of its determination (in other words, by 17 June 2024). The councillor's apology was not made until 139 days after that deadline, and 149 days after they told this Committee, in writing, that they would not comply with the sanction. In my view, the member should have been named at full Council for this long-standing contumacy, which breached 8.4 of the Code of Conduct plus the member's own declaration of office."

The Deputy Monitoring Officer (MO) 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 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 October 2024. Details of allegations/complaints were set out in the table at paragraph 8. As agreed at the last meeting, where a councillor was found to have potentially breached the Code, the table included reference to the categories which were upheld.

The Chair read out a statement on behalf of Cllr T Slade who was unable to attend the meeting. Cllr Slade asked whether the Council's code of conduct should be reviewed to ensure that the councillors were subject to the same level of accountability in their personal conduct as in their role as elected members, particularly where the reputation of the Council was at risk. The Chair acknowledged the points raised. She explained that when the current national code of conduct was developed it was considered important to draw a distinction between councillors acting in their professional capacity and their right to have a personal life. Support for general principles – recent training

Members asked about the anticipated timescales for concluding those cases listed as pending. Delays were frustrating for complainants and subject councillors. The Deputy MO explained that the outcome of at least two of the investigations would be considered by Committee on 29 April 2025. A consultation meeting would be arranged to consider complaints which were at an earlier stage. The Chair advised that a review of the complaints procedure was due. This could result in a tightening of deadlines to ensure cases were concluded more quickly.

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

Voting: Unanimous

31. MHCLG Consultation: Strengthening the standards and conduct framework for local authorities in England

The Monitoring Officer (MO) 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 Committee was reminded of the context for the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) consultation, "Strengthening the standards and conduct framework for local authorities in England", as outlined at the previous meeting on 21 January 2025. The lack of consistency in local codes of conduct and the mechanisms for dealing with complaints was noted. Members had made some initial comments on the

consultation at the previous meeting which could be taken forward when considering this item further. The Chair confirmed that the consultation had been circulated to all councillors to respond individually. The deadline for responses was 28 February 2025.

The MO highlighted the current position in relation to town and parish councils. She confirmed that as the principal area, BCP Council in the form of the MO and the Standards Committee, were required to manage the complaints process for the town and parish councils. Depending on outcomes, the Committee may need to consider the impact of the community governance review as a future piece of work. It may also have a bearing on member's views on whether to have a single code of conduct.

The Committee was asked whether it wished to submit a formal response to the consultation as a committee. Members agreed unanimously that they should take the opportunity to do so. The Monitoring Officer provided an introduction to each section of the consultation and Members proceeded to consider the questions which were applicable to them as a committee. Where there wasn't a consensus on a particular question, the majority view was taken. A copy of the questions and responses with a summary of comments made is appended to these minutes.

The Chair thanked all parties for their input into this item.

The meeting ended at 8.35 pm

CHAIR