

BOURNEMOUTH, CHRISTCHURCH AND POOLE COUNCIL
STANDARDS COMMITTEE

Minutes of the Meeting held on 29 April 2025 at 6.00 pm

Present:-

Cllr V Ricketts – Chair

Cllr A Chapmanlaw – Vice-Chair

Present: Cllr S Armstrong, Cllr E Connolly, Cllr D Farr, Cllr R Pattinson-West
and Cllr B Nanovo

Present virtually: Mr Ian Sibley, Independent Person

25. Apologies

There were no apologies for this meeting.

26. Substitute Members

There were no substitutes members.

27. Declarations of Interests

There were no declarations of interest

28. Confirmation of Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 12 February 2025 were confirmed as an accurate record for the Chair to sign.

29. Public Issues

Three public questions were received from Mr Alex McKinstry in relation to Agenda Item 7

Question 1

Will the Chair be providing an update tonight on the eight complaints considered at the consultation meeting of 22 April; and if *not*, can we be told here and now the outcome of those complaints - along with details of any sanctions, and confirmation of whether the subject councillor in Complaint BCP-177 has provided the "further information" which was requested of them on 3 June 2024?

Response from the Chair

I am not in a position to provide an update in respect of those complaints considered at the consultation meeting last week. An update will be

provided at the next meeting of the Standards Committee on 1 July 2025 as part of our standing complaint update item.

Question 2

The report for Item 7 is prefaced as "an update on complaints ... received or concluded since the last report to the Committee in February 2025." Gaps in the numerical sequence, however, indicate that six complaints have been excluded from this report: BCP-200, 201, 202, 204, 206, and 211. (None of these were in February's report either, although BCP-211 appears to date from March.) This is not normal procedure. The practice up to now has been for all the latest complaints to be included in the update for that particular quarter, regardless of whether a complaint has been resolved already, or dismissed at the initial assessment stage, or withdrawn for any reason. So why have these complaints been omitted, with the result that the Committee, and indeed the public, have been given an incomplete round-up?

Response from the Chair

The six complaints referred to were all registered through the online complaints submission process and assigned a reference. However, all were determined to be outside the jurisdiction of the Code of Conduct complaint process and the complainants advised accordingly. Officers register all such submissions and these will be included within the statistics for the annual report accordingly.

Question 3

If a party to a code of conduct complaint is dissatisfied with the complaint outcome - or with the way a complaint has been processed - is there any *internal* right of review or appeal? None is mentioned in Part 6 of the Constitution.

Response from the Chair

I can confirm that there is no internal right of review or appeal.

Three public questions were received from Mr Alex McKinstry in relation to Agenda Items 10, 11 and 12:

Question 1

Regarding the seven complaints being considered tonight under Items 10, 11 and 12: did the Committee have to set a budget, or present a business case to Cabinet, before referring these complaints for external investigation? I ask this because the Audit and Governance Committee was told, on 20 March, that it had to do both these things in order to stand a chance of getting FuturePlaces externally investigated. If you could comment on how investigations commissioned by the Standards Committee are funded in general, that too would be most illuminating.

Response from the Chair

The Monitoring Officer has an allocated budget in compliance with Article 11 of the Constitution and the Local Government and Housing Act 1989 and the cost of the investigations was taken from that allocated budget.

Question 2

How is it that all seven of tonight's investigations ended up being conducted by the same agent?

Response from the Chair

4 of the BCP cases and both of those relating to Parish/Town Councils have a shared or related theme and/or involve the same interested parties. In the interests of consistency and natural justice for both the complainant(s) and the subject councillor(s) involved and for the avoidance of duplication it was felt necessary to instruct the same independent investigator.

Question 3

Can you confirm how much the investigator (or their LLP) was paid for their work on each of these cases, and whether those sums include / exclude VAT? The complaint references are:

BCP-172;

BCP-184;

BCP-192;

BCP-193;

BCP-195;

.... plus the two complaints against a Christchurch Town councillor - the wording of the agenda report suggests that it's the same town councillor in both these cases - TPC-013 and TPC-014.

Response from the Chair

The cost of each investigation (exclusive of VAT) is as follows:

BCP-172 £3,027.00

BCP-184 Nil

BCP-192 £2,147.50

BCP-193 £1,544.00

BCP-195 £3,719.00

TPC-013 £2,066.50

TPC-014 £5,068.00

30. Dispensations granted by the Monitoring Officer

The 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 purpose of this item was to retrospectively report the dispensations granted by the Monitoring Officer for the time period 11 January 2025 to 17 April 2025.

There was no discussion on this item.

RESOLVED that the Standards Committee note the dispensations granted by the Monitoring Officer for the time period 11 January 2025 to 17 April 2025.

Voting: For - Unanimous

31. Code of Conduct Complaints - Review

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 'B' 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 February 2025.

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.

A Member expressed concern regarding the number of code of conduct complaints. It was advised that it was not possible to stop the number of complaints received however, there may be some updated guidance from central government to reduce the number in the future. The linked issues and complexities were also highlighted.

There was some discussion about additional training for Councillors around the use of social media and a refresher code of conduct training considering the number of complaints received. A Member referred to the corporate training which was available for staff and the possibility for members to use this resource.

It was noted that with the possible increase of town and parish councils, this could increase the potential of more complaints and the Chair highlighted discussions with the Monitoring Officer regarding delivering training to parish councils.

The Chair concluded the item by advising that some of the complaints which were still outstanding were very complex which was resulting in outcomes taking time.

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

Voting: For - Unanimous

32. Forward Plan

The Committee considered its Forward Plan.

The Monitoring Officer expressed concern about the amount of work involved in potentially supporting any new town and parish Councils for the Committee and welcomed its addition to the work plan.

The Monitoring Officer also agreed it was timely for a refresher Code of Conduct training for all Councillors

The Chair requested the review of the Code of Conduct Complaints Procedure be added to the July meeting

The Chair highlighted the need for the Standards Committee Annual Report to Council and felt this needed to be considered as soon after the end of the municipal year as possible and suggested the inclusion of the following recommendations:

- Immediate Refresher Code of Conduct training for all Councillors
- That the Constitution Review Working Group update the Constitution to include the Officer Code of Conduct.

A Committee Member felt it appropriate to review the register of interests and ensure Councillors were aware of what the requirements were regarding it.

An Independent Person enquired whether it would be possible to include them in the training sessions. Clarification was given that the invitation should include the Independent Persons who sat on the Audit and Governance Committee as some elements of the Code of Conduct were considered in that forum.

A Committee Member expressed frustrations felt by the Committee when sanctions were not followed and in response, the Chair advised that it was hoped this could be strengthened as part of the Code of Conduct review.

The Monitoring Officer highlighted that Council was going to be considering the Community Governance Review in October and that there may be the need for an extraordinary meeting of the Standards Committee to deal with that single item issue.

RESOLVED that the updates to the Work Plan be agreed.

Voting: For – Unanimous

33. Exclusion of Press and Public

RESOLVED that under Section 100 (A)(4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the public be excluded from the meeting for the following items of business on the grounds that they involve the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in Paragraphs 1 and 2 in Part I of Schedule 12A of the Act and that the public interest in withholding the information outweighs such interest in disclosing the information.

Voting: For - Unanimous

34. Consideration of a Report in Respect of Code of Conduct complaints BCP 172, BCP 186, BCP 192 and BCP 195

The 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 the Standards Committee with the conclusions of the investigations following complaints made about a Councillor of BCP Council under references BCP 172, BCP 186, BCP 192 and BCP 195. The Investigator's Reports were attached at Exempt Appendices 1, 2, 3 and 4.

The Investigator concluded that in respect of both complaints, there had not been a failure to comply with the Code of Conduct.

The Committee was asked to consider the report of the Monitoring Officer and the Investigator's reports.

In response to a query about the risk of not accepting a recommendation, the Committee was advised of the potential consequences, and it was highlighted that any decision made would require evidence and reasoning.

The Committee then moved in to exempt session to consider the confidential appendices.

The Investigator presented the Committee with his findings regarding BCP 172, BCP 186, BCP 192 and BCP 195.

The Committee considered the reports and received responses to questions asked.

There were lengthy discussions regarding complaint BCP 172 and the Committee, having fully considered it and agreed with the Recommendation of the Investigator, felt a further response was required. It was therefore agreed that the following observation be recorded and highlighted to relevant Member:

Whilst the Standards Committee agreed with the findings that there had been no breach, it asks the subject Councillor to be mindful of their use of language, that could be considered offensive and the effect that this can have on members of public as it may cause upset and impact on how the Council is perceived.

The Committee resumed in public session to provide any recommendations and resolutions.

RESOLVED that the Monitoring Officer include a section in the Standards Annual Report for Councillors to be mindful of what they say in public because whilst it may not be a breach of the Code of Conduct, some people may take offence.

RESOLVED that in relation to:

- a) BCP 172 the findings of the independent investigator that the subject councillor did not breach the Council's Code of Conduct is accepted and no further action be taken;**
- b) BCP 186 the findings of the independent investigator that the subject councillor did not breach the Council's Code of Conduct is accepted and no further action be taken;**
- c) BCP 192 the findings of the independent investigator that the subject councillor did not breach the Council's Code of Conduct is accepted and no further action be taken;**
- d) BCP 195 the findings of the independent investigator that the subject councillor did not breach the Council's Code of Conduct is accepted and no further action be taken.**

Voting: For - Unanimous

35. Consideration of a Report in Respect of Code of Conduct complaint BCP 193

The 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 report provided the Standards Committee with the Conclusion of the investigation following a complaint made about a Councillor of BCP Council under reference BCP 193. The investigator's report was attached at Exempt Appendix 1. The investigator concluded that there had not been a breach of the Code of Conduct.

The Committee was asked to consider the report of the Monitoring Officer and the Investigator's report.

The Committee moved in to exempt session to consider the confidential appendices.

The Committee received the Investigators report and received responses to questions asked.

The Committee resumed in public session to provide its resolution.

RESOLVED that in relation to BCP 193 the findings of the independent investigator that the subject BCP Councillor did not breach the Council's Code of Conduct is accepted and no further action be taken.

Voting: For - Unanimous

36. Consideration of a Report in Respect of Code of Conduct complaints TPC-013 and TPC-014

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 'E' to these Minutes in the Minute Book.

The report provided the Standards Committee with the conclusions of the investigations following complaints made about a Councillor of Christchurch Town Council under references TPC-013 and TPC-014. The Investigator's reports were attached at exempt appendices 1 and 2. The Investigator concluded that in respect of both complaints, there had been a failure to comply with the Code of Conduct.

The Committee was asked to consider the report of the Deputy Monitoring Officer and the Investigator's reports and, if supported, determine appropriate remedies.

The Committee moved in to exempt session to consider the confidential appendices.

The Committee received the Investigators report and received responses to questions asked.

The Committee considered TPC-013 and agreed with the findings of the Investigator. The Committee considered the possible sanctions and decided an appropriate sanction would be that the Subject Councillor receive individual training and make a personal apology to the Complainant.

The Committee also felt it would be beneficial for the Town Council to consider any concerns regarding working together and to introduce measures to mitigate any further complaints including the possibility of Code of conduct training for the entire Council.

The Committee considered TPC-014 and agreed with the findings of the Investigator. The Committee then considered what remedies or sanctions should be applied and agreed that a public apology should be made by the Subject Councillor to the Complainant at a full Council meeting of Christchurch Town Council and also on the relevant Facebook page.

The Committee resumed in public session to provide any recommendations and resolutions.

RESOLVED that it is recommended that all Councillors of Christchurch Town Council receive additional Code of Conduct training.

RESOLVED that:

- (a) in relation to complaint TPC-013, the findings of the independent investigator, that the subject councillor did breach, in part, the Christchurch Town Council Code of Conduct be accepted and the committee determined that the Subject Councillor should receive individual training and make a personal apology to the complainant.**
- (b) in relation to complaint TPC-014, the findings of the independent investigator, that the subject councillor did breach the Christchurch Town Council Code of Conduct be accepted and the committee determined that a public apology should be made by the Subject Councillor to the complainant at a full Council meeting of Christchurch Town Council and on the relevant Facebook page.**

Voting: For - Unanimous

The meeting ended at 8:15pm.

CHAIR