

BOURNEMOUTH, CHRISTCHURCH AND POOLE COUNCIL
STANDARDS COMMITTEE

Minutes of the Meeting held on 07 October 2025 at 6.00 pm

Present:-

Cllr V Ricketts – Chair

Cllr A Chapmanlaw – Vice-Chair

Present: Cllr S Armstrong, Cllr E Connolly, Cllr G Wright and Cllr C Weight

Also in
attendance Cllr Pattinson-West
virtually: Ian Sibley and Paul Cashmore (Independent Persons)

13. Apologies

Apologies were received from Cllr Nanovo and Cllr Pattinson-West joined the meeting virtually forgoing any voting rights.

14. Substitute Members

Cllr Claire Weight substituted for Cllr Nanovo on this occasion.

15. Declarations of Interests

There were no declarations of interest on this occasion.

16. Confirmation of Minutes

In response to a query regarding the mandatory training highlighted in the minutes, the Chair confirmed she would be having a meeting to progress this.

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting of 8 July 2025 be confirmed as an accurate record and signed by the Chair.

17. Public Issues

The following questions and statements were received from Mr Alex McKinstry.

In relation to Agenda Item 6:

Question 1.

Five complaints have been closed after the councillor who was subject to those complaints failed to apologise as directed by this Committee. The

Constitution is silent on how to proceed in such situations, but the convention until now has been for the non-compliance to be referred to this Committee, after which a report is almost always issued to full Council naming the councillor and sketching out their misconduct. This has been the practice on this Committee since 15 December 2021. Why, then, has there been a change of approach; was the Committee consulted in advance on this new approach (which entails closing the complaints, then inviting complainants to submit further complaints under 8.4 of the Code); and did the Committee support this new approach unanimously? Can you also clarify if this is how matters of non-compliance are to be dealt with henceforward?

Response from the Chair:

Thank you for your question. Since 2019, we have seen a number of complaints taking an excessive amount of time to resolve as a result of non-compliance or a lack of co-operation with the process. You are correct that we have previously resolved to refer non-compliance complaints direct to full council. It was considered by officers that this was still an exhaustive process and, in the view of the former Monitoring Officer, outside the scope of the agreed arrangements which may only determine complaints against alleged breaches. Neither I nor the Committee was made aware of this change of approach and this is not necessarily a view that I take as the LGA guidance on the Code of Conduct states that under the Model Code of Conduct failure to comply with a sanction may of itself be a breach of the Code.

We will consider the action to take against any non-compliance reported within the Code of Conduct Complaints Review Report as part of our deliberations this evening. We are also planning to review our arrangements for handling complaints and this is one aspect that needs to be reviewed as part of that process.

Question 2.

Have any responses been received from the subject councillors in complaints BCP-220, 221, 224, 226, 227 or 228 since the agenda papers were published on 29 September 2025?

Response from the Chair:

Again, thank you for question. Since the publication of the agenda, officers have received responses from the subject councillors relating to complaints referenced BCP-221 and BCP-224.

Question 3.

Noting the seriousness of the upheld allegations in complaint TPC-021 - including bullying, disclosure of confidential information, and attempting to use one's position as councillor to confer an advantage - can we be told which town or parish council was involved?

Response from the Chair:

I can advise that complaint reference TPC-021 related to a Christchurch Town councillor.

In relation to Agenda Item 8:

Question 1.

What was the sum paid to the investigator (or his LLP) for his work on complaint TPC-022, and is this inclusive or exclusive of VAT?

Response from the Chair:

The invoiced sum paid for the investigation of complaint TPC-022 to date, exclusive of VAT, is £7,118.50

Statement received from Mr Alex McKinstry in relation to Agenda Item 6:

The closing of complaints, where a councillor hasn't complied with sanctions, is catastrophic for this Committee. There is now no incentive for errant councillors to comply with the Code of Conduct - other than the possibility that a further complaint might be made against them under Part 8.4 of the Code, "I comply with any sanction imposed on me following a finding that I have breached the Code of Conduct." I have seen nothing to indicate that these subsequent complaints won't be closed either, should non-compliance continue; and of course this new approach means justice postponed - if, indeed, the complainant decides to make a further complaint anyway. I only hope that, should recalcitrance persist, such members will be named at full Council with a detailed description given of their original misconduct, to be entered into the minutes as a permanent record. Nothing in the current Constitution prevents this.

18. 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 '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 July 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.

The Committee discussed the report and there was consensus that there should be tougher sanctions for non-compliance of Committee direction and that those complaints should not be categorised as ‘closed’.

In response to a query, the Chair confirmed that there was going to be a review of the process and the procedure for changing the constitution was outlined. The Chair requested that the review be expedited by the Interim Monitoring Officer to enable the Committee to consider it at its next meeting.

The Deputy Monitoring Officer advised that he would bring a report of non-compliance to the next confidential consultation meeting which was scheduled for the end of October.

In response to a query, it was highlighted that any determinations of complaints considered at the consultation meeting, would be communicated to the complainants within a week of the meeting.

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

Voting: Nem. Con.

19. 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: Nem. Con.

20. Consideration of a Report in Respect of Code of Conduct Complaint TPC-022

The Committee moved into exempt session to consider this item.

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 the Standards Committee with the conclusion of the investigation following a complaint made about a Councillor of Christchurch Town Council under reference TPC-022. 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 and Independent Persons discussed the report and were provided with responses to any requests for further information or clarification from the Investigating Officer.

In response to a query, the Committee was advised that the threshold for freedom of expression was set high, and the Interim Monitoring Officer suggested a possible short training session for the Committee on the subject could be beneficial.

The Committee discussed Town and Parish Councils in general and the potential outcome of the Community Governance Review, with the need to ensure any new Town or Parish Councils were supported from the start with appropriate training and policies and procedures.

The Committee returned to public session to provide its resolution.

RESOLVED that in relation to complaint TPC-022, the findings of the independent investigator that the subject Christchurch Town Councillor did not breach the Council's Code of Conduct be accepted and no further action be taken.

Voting: Nem. Con.

21. Work Plan

The Deputy Monitoring Officer advised that due to the departure of the former Monitoring Officer, progression of some of the items listed had been delayed.

It was highlighted of the potential need for an additional meeting following any outcome from the Community Governance Review.

The review of the Code of Conduct procedure was acknowledged as a priority for the Committee.

The meeting ended at 6.55 pm

CHAIR