

STANDARDS COMMITTEE



Report subject	Annual Report on Code of Conduct Complaints
Meeting date	7 July 2026
Status	Public Report
Executive summary	This report provides 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 shows 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 has also been an increase in complaints made by councillors. Social media continues to be the highest behavioural source of complaint, although complaints relating to the spoken word, typically within formal meetings, have also risen significantly. The report highlights 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 notes that, even where complaints are not upheld, they can require significant officer time, place pressure on governance processes and have wider reputational and organisational consequences. The Standards Committee is 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.
Recommendations	It is RECOMMENDED 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.
Reason for recommendations	To formally receive the annual report and allow the committee to identify areas for further development to promote high standards of conduct amongst councillors.

Portfolio Holder(s):	Not applicable
Corporate Director	Aidan Dunn, Chief Executive
Report Authors	Robin Watson, Director of Law and Governance and Monitoring Officer Richard Jones, Head of Democratic Services and Deputy Monitoring Officer
Wards	Not applicable
Classification	For Decision

Background

1. The Monitoring Officer is responsible for dealing with allegations that councillors have failed to comply with the members' code of conduct in accordance with the arrangements adopted by the Council.
2. BCP Council, and all parish and town councils within the boundary of BCP Council, have a statutory duty in the Localism Act 2011 to 'promote and maintain high standards of conduct by members and co-opted members of the authority'.
3. The Standards Committee is responsible for conducting an annual review of the complaints received.

Code of Conduct

4. In accordance with the provisions the Localism Act 2011 the council has an adopted a code of conduct. The code was most recently updated by the Council in November 2021.

Independent Persons

5. The Act also requires that the council appoint "at least one independent person" whose views are sought and taken into account before it makes its decision on an allegation of a breach of the code of conduct. Their view may also be sought in dealing with allegations which have not been investigated and they may be asked to provide support to subject members who are the subject of an allegation.
6. The council currently has two independent persons, Paul Cashmore and Ian Sibley. The monitoring officer is grateful for the time and commitment the independent members have given.

Arrangements

7. A revised standards procedure was approved by the council on 23 March 2021 permitting the Monitoring Officer to enter into early preliminary and informal dialogue with the parties concerned with a view to providing early mediation and resolution.

8. A further review of the arrangements has commenced, however, in light of the appointment of the new Director of Law and Governance and Monitoring Officer, the continuation of this work is the subject of a separate report on this agenda.

Register of interests

9. The council maintains a register of interests for councillors of BCP Council and these are published on the Council's web site. Although it is the responsibility of all councillors to ensure their register entries are correct and up to date, a periodic reminder is sent to all councillors to request that entries are checked for accuracy and for updates to be registered.

Standards complaints

10. This report covers the four-year period from 1 April to 31 March for 2022/23 to 2025/26. Data for earlier periods will be available in previous annual reports. Complaints are classified to fall within each respective year using the concluded date to ensure that all complaints are captured.
11. Complaints concluded after 1 April 2026 or still pending a decision will be reported as early as possible in the 2026/27 Municipal Year.

Total number of complaints for period	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25	2025/26
Number of BCP complaints	61	9	28	50
Number of Parish and Town Council complaints	1	4	6	7

12. The number of complaints determined in 2023/24 against BCP Councillors was considerably lower than previous years. However, it was noted in previous reports that there was a large cohort of new councillors following the elections in May 2023 being the likely cause. It should be noted that there has been a sizeable increase (79%) in the number of complaints against councillors of BCP Council in 2025/26 when compared to 2024/25.
13. The complaints against parish and town councillors was marginally higher than previous years but still remained relatively low in number although any increase is not desirable. Due to the low number of parish related complaints further analysis has not been undertaken at this level but if this trend continues in future years this may be necessary. It should also be noted that with the new Town Councils for Broadstone, Poole and Bournemouth it will be necessary to monitor any impact on the complaints activity.
14. The following analysis and data tables are therefore based on the complaints made against BCP Councillors for 2022/23 to 2025/26.
15. Complaints received against BCP councillors are categorised by type of complainant (e.g., public, councillor, officer and other). The table below shows the breakdown by each of these types.

Complainant Type	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25	2025/26
Public	57	6	23	35
Councillor	3	2	5	13
Officer	0	1	0	2
Other	1	0	0	0

16. Officers have further analysed complaints to identify the behavioural source of the complaints, the alleged breach criteria and the final outcome. The tables below provide a breakdown of these categories. Complaints may cite more than one source and as a consequence the sum of these tables may not match the total number of complaints determined.

Behavioural source for complaint	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25	2025/26
Spoken word	10	3	2	17
Email	31	5	5	5
Social media	4	1	22	20
Lack of response	1	0	0	5
Other	15	0	0	2

17. For clarity, the 'other' criteria referred to in the table includes typically non-behavioural actions, for example, decisions of the council as a whole, allegation of interest conflicts, matters arising from media articles and historic matters.
18. When making a complaint, complainants are requested to indicate which obligations of the Council's Code of Conduct they consider the subject councillor has breached. Complainants are permitted to identify more than one criteria. The following table provides a summary of the respective allegations made by complainants.
19. A new online submission and logging system was introduced in 2024/25 to provide improved management of complaints and more granular statistics. Consequently, certain lines on the table below will only have data for single years as this was aggregated in previous years, however, they have been grouped together to show the collective trend and new lines indented.

Alleged Code Breached	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25	2025/26
Failing to treat others with respect	25	6	-	-
Failing to treat other councillors and members of the public with respect			25	35
Failing to treat local authority employees, employees and representatives of partner organisations and those volunteering for the local authority with respect and respect the role they play			6	7
Bullying any person	6	3	11	23
Harassing any person			10	22
Failure to promote equalities and do not discriminate unlawfully against any person	4	0	9	15
Compromising or attempting to compromise the impartiality of those who work for or on behalf of the Council	4	2	3	13

Alleged Code Breached	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25	2025/26
Unlawfully disclosing confidential information or information believed to be of a confidential nature	0	2	2	3
Improper use of knowledge gained solely as a result of being a councillor for the advancement of myself, my friends, my family members, my employer or my business interests			2	4
Preventing a person from getting information that the person is entitled to by law	1	2	2	2
Bringing the office of Councillor or the Council into disrepute while acting in an official capacity	31	3	18	37
Using or attempting to use the position as a Councillor improperly to confer on or secure an advantage or disadvantage for him or herself or anyone else	6	5	9	20
Misuse of Council resources	1	1	2	4
Using or authorising the use of the Councils resources improperly for political purposes	1	1	2	5
Failure to undertake Code of Conduct training			3	5
Failure to cooperate with any Code of Conduct investigation and/or determination			3	3
Intimidating or attempting to intimidate any person who is likely to be involved with the administration of any investigation or proceedings	7	3	2	6
Failure to comply with any sanction imposed on me following a finding that I have breached the Code of Conduct			2	6
Failing to have regard to the Councils Code of Publicity	9	0	-	-
Failing to have regard to the advice of the Monitoring Officer or Chief Finance Officer	1	0	-	-
Failing to declare the existence and nature of a personal interest	5	0	-	-
Failing, within 28 days, to register and disclose my interests	0	0	1	4

Alleged Code Breached	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25	2025/26
In respect of a prejudicial interest, failing to withdraw from the room or chamber; exercising executive functions; or seeking to improperly influence a decision	3	0	-	-
Failure to register gifts and hospitality offered or received as a councillor			0	1

20. Finally, the following table provides details of the outcome of the complaints.

Complaint Outcome	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25	2025/26
Outside Jurisdiction	3	0	5	7
Dismissed - No Breach of Code	43	6	6	16
Monitoring Officer – Informal Resolution	2	0	0	1
Potential Breach - Informal Resolution	9	0	6	9
Independent Investigation - No Breach	0	0	3	5
Independent Investigation - Breach	2	0	0	0
Non-compliance – Report to Council	2	3	1	4
Withdrawn			1	1
Incomplete			5	7

21. Despite the proportion of complaints being dismissed, any complaint received is the result of a perceived dissatisfaction by the complainant and has the potential to damage the reputation of the Council. Administering the complaints process is a high resource activity and consequently every effort should be made to reduce complaints arising in the first instance. Complaints can also have a wider organisational impact, including on staff confidence and morale across the Council, particularly where officers are directly involved in supporting members or responding to the issues raised. All councillors should be encouraged to play an active role and take responsibility for promoting and maintaining high standards of conduct.
22. On analysis of all complaints received, social media activity remains the highest source of complaints, although it should be noted that complaints about the spoken word (typically within formal meetings) have also risen significantly when compared to previous years. Allegations relating to a lack of respect remain common and are matched by complaints alleging conduct that brings the office of councillor, or the Council, into disrepute. This is a concerning trend.
23. Non-compliance with a Code of Conduct determination continues to be an issue which adds significantly to the demands on resources, however, this has been addressed partly by a faster non-compliance reporting process to full Council.
24. In 2025/26, officers introduced into the regular update report, details of which specific code provision had been breached when a complaint was upheld in whole or in part. Although comparator data is not available for previous years, the table below provides a breakdown of the number of occasions that the respective code provision was upheld. To clarify, each upheld complaint may have cited more than one code provision, and the total will not therefore match the number of complaints upheld as detailed in the table at paragraph 20.

Upheld Code Breaches	2025/26
Failing to treat other councillors and members of the public with respect	8
Failing to treat local authority employees, employees and representatives of partner organisations and those volunteering for the local authority with respect and respect the role they play	1
Bullying any person	4
Compromising or attempting to compromise the impartiality of those who work for or on behalf of the Council	1
Bringing the office of Councillor or the Council into disrepute while acting in an official capacity	7
Intimidating or attempting to intimidate any person who is likely to be involved with the administration of any investigation or proceedings	1
Failure to comply with any sanction imposed on me following a finding that I have breached the Code of Conduct	5

Conclusion

25. This report provides information about the council's performance in relation to the code of conduct and the administration of complaints. The data in this report provides a useful four-year benchmark for future annual reports.
26. The Committee may wish to consider referring or recommending this report to Council to ensure all members are fully appraised. This would provide an opportunity to reinforce awareness of the practical, reputational and organisational impact that complaints can have, and to encourage continued reflection on the standards expected of all members.

Summary of financial implications

27. There are no financial implications arising directly from this report, however, the volume of complaints is considered high and resistance to comply, places additional burden on already stretched resources, impacting on the ability to support other core services and to satisfactorily deal with all complaints in a timely manner.

Summary of legal implications

28. The annual review report evidences that the council complies with the duties required under the Localism Act 2011.

Summary of human resources implications

29. Whilst there are no direct human resources implications arising from this report, the volume and nature of complaints can have a wider impact on staff confidence and morale across the Council, particularly where officers are directly involved in supporting members, administering complaints or responding to the issues raised.

Summary of sustainability impact

30. There are no sustainability impact implications arising from this report.

Summary of public health implications

31. There are no public health implications arising from this report.

Summary of equality implications

32. This report provides statistics for complaints processed in accordance with agreed policy and procedures. Consequently, there are no equality implications arising from this report.

Summary of risk assessment

33. As noted above, any complaint arises from a perceived dissatisfaction with the actions or behaviour of councillors and can carry reputational, organisational and resource implications for the Council. In addition, the volume and nature of complaints can affect staff confidence and morale, particularly where officers are directly involved in supporting members, administering complaints or responding to the issues raised. Whilst some complaints may be unavoidable, all councillors have a responsibility and duty to promote high standards of conduct, and every effort should be made by the Committee to raise awareness of these matters amongst all members.

Appendices

There are no appendices to this report.

Background papers

Records of complaints received by the Council between 1 April 2022 and 31 March 2026. These records contain exempt information (Categories 1 (Information relating to any individual) and 2 (Information which is likely to reveal the identity of an individual)).