

East Herts Council Report

Standards Committee

Date of meeting: Tuesday 28 January 2025

Report by: Head of Legal and Democratic Services

Report title: Standards Update

Ward(s) affected: (All Wards);

Summary

The report updates Members of the Committee on standards issues generally.

RECOMMENDATION that:

- a) That the Committee receive the report and provide any observations to the Head of Legal and Democratic Services and Monitoring Officer.**

1.0 Proposal(s)

- 1.1 As above

2.0 Background

- 2.1 Within its terms of reference, the Standards Committee has a function "to promote and maintain high standards of conduct of Members and Co-opted Members of the Council" and "to receive reports from the Monitoring Officer and assess the operation and effectiveness of the Members' Code of Conduct".
- 2.2 Paragraph 7.5.1 of the Constitution also states that "The Monitoring Officer will present a general report on standards matters at each Committee meeting, updating the

Committee on the workload of the Monitoring Officer and current standards issues”.

- 2.3 The Committee will therefore receive update reports from the Monitoring Officer on matters that relate to, or assist to govern, Member conduct.

East Herts complaints/ issues update

- 2.4 The complaints made to the Monitoring Officer since the last report to the Audit & Governance Committee on 16 July 2024 are as follows:

Complaint about: Parish/Town or District Councillor	Summary of complaint	Action taken
Complaint 13/2023 Complaint against District Councillor	Disrespectful behaviour toward another Councillor.	Matter progressed to Standards Sub-Committee hearing on 28 th November 2024, details of which can be found here .
Complaint 03/2024 Complaint against a District Councillor	Impartiality, not treating persons fairly.	Not a Standards matter.
Complaint 05/2024 Complaint against a District Councillor	Failure to respond to e-mails in a timely manner.	Not a Standards matter.
Complaint 06/2024 Complaint against a Town Councillor	Engaging in behaviour towards another Councillor that was considered threatening.	Dismissed under Appendix 1 paragraphs 1 and 2 of the Complaints Procedure

		<p>– no breach of the Code of Conduct (The complaint appears to be minor, trivial, or otherwise not sufficiently serious)</p> <p>And</p> <p>The complaint appears to be... retaliatory...).</p>
<p>Complaint 07/2024</p> <p>Complaint against a Town Councillor</p>	<p>Disrespectful behaviour toward another Councillor.</p>	<p>A potential breach of the Code of Conduct in failing to show mutual respect. Resolved informally through issuing a warning about their behaviour.</p>
<p>Complaint 08/2024</p> <p>Complaint against a District Councillor</p>	<p>Offensive Social Media post.</p>	<p>Dismissed under Appendix 1 paragraph 3 of the Complaints Procedure – no breach of the Code of Conduct (the Councillor was not acting in their capacity as a Councillor at the time of the alleged incident).</p>

2.5 The training ordered by the Standards Sub-Committee with regards complaint 13/2023 was delivered in person at the council officers on 15th January 2025, which the Councillor attended and completed.

3.0 Reason(s)

3.1 To ensure good governance within the Council.

4.0 Options

4.1 Not providing updates to Members on standards issues. This option is NOT RECOMMENDED, as to do so would weaken the Committee's ability to adequately promote and maintain the Ethical Standards Framework, and to maintain an oversight of the council's arrangements for dealing with complaints.

5.0 Risks

5.1 Appropriate reporting processes and policy frameworks help to ensure good governance of the Council and therefore reduce risk of poor practice or unsafe decision making.

6.0 Implications/Consultations

6.1 None

Community Safety

No

Data Protection

Yes – All information pertaining to the complainants, Councillors complained of, and the Parish and Town Council involved have been removed to maintain confidentiality, other than the matter that progressed to a Standards Sub-Committee meeting, which was held in public and there is in the public domain.

Equalities

Yes – Where complainants make it known that they require assistance in making their complaints e.g. with language issues, the Monitoring Officer took additional steps to assist them in this regard.

Environmental Sustainability

No - There are no environmental implications to this report.

Financial

No - There are no capital or revenue implications arising from the content of this report. Complaints are dealt with by the Monitoring Officer and Deputy Monitoring Officer, with some referrals externally should the Procedure indicate that this is appropriate or because of resource implication within the Directorate in dealing with this in-house.

Health and Safety

No

Human Resources

No - The work outlined within the report is within the caseload of the Monitoring Officer. Implications are otherwise touched on under financial implications above.

Human Rights

No

Legal

Yes – The Standards Committee has a function under paragraph 7.4.1(a) and (f) to promote and maintain high standards of conduct of Members and Co-opted Members of the Council and receive reports from the Monitoring Officer and assess the operation and effectiveness of the Members' Code of Conduct.

Specific Wards

No

7.0 Background papers, appendices and other relevant material

7.1 None

Contact Officer

James Ellis - Head of Legal and Democratic
Services,

Contact Tel. No. 01279 502170

james.ellis@eastherts.gov.uk

Report Author

As above.