



Report to: Governance, General Purposes & LGR Committee – 11 September 2025

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Report Summary	
<b>Report Title</b>	Code of Conduct Annual Report for the Period 1 May 2024 – 30 April 2025
<b>Purpose of Report</b>	To consider the Code of Conduct Annual Report for the Period 1 May 2024 – 30 April 2025
<b>Recommendations</b>	<p>That the Governance, General Purposes &amp; LGR Committee:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>a) note the annual report;</li><li>b) note that a particular focus will be given to social media at the next Code of Conduct refresher session for all Members; and</li><li>c) note and endorse the communications strategy for the Local Government Association Debate not Hate campaign.</li></ul>
<b>Reason for Recommendations</b>	To provide Members with details of Code of Conduct complaints received in 2024/25 and an update on related matters. .

## **1.0 Background**

- 1.1 The Governance, General Purposes and LGR Committee has responsibility for promoting and maintaining high standards of conduct by Members and co-opted Members of the Council. It is also responsible for maintaining an overview of the Member Code of Conduct and arrangements for dealing with complaints.

## **2.0 Code of Conduct Complaints**

- 2.1 It was reported to Audit & Governance Committee (this Committee's predecessor) in July 2024 that the Monitoring Officer recorded 41 formal complaints within the period 1 April 2023 to 30 April 2024: of these 19 related to District Councillors and 22 related to Town or Parish Councillors.

- 2.2 At Members' request, due to concerns about the significant increase in complaint numbers, an update report was presented in February 2025. It was reported that the Monitoring Officer recorded 28 formal complaints within the period 1 May 2024 to 31 January 2025: of these 15 related to District Councillors and 13 related to Town or Parish Councillors. 14 of the 28 complaints were received from members of the public and 14 from elected officials.
- 2.3 The total number of complaints received for the municipal year was 40; a comparable number to the previous reporting year, when 41 complaints were recorded.
- 2.4 The following is a summary of complaints received from 1 May 2024 to 30 April 2025:

Subject of Complaint	Number
District Councillor	22
Parish Councillor	18
Total	40

Complainant Type	Number
Member of the Public	18
Elected Official	22
Total	40

- 2.5 The following is a summary of outcomes in relation the 40 complaints received:

Complaint Outcomes	Number
Closed without investigation*	31
On hold pending the outcome of another complaint	1
Withdrawn	4
Investigation	4
Total	40

\* It was determined following appropriate consultation with the Independent Persons that either no further action was required, or that informal resolution was appropriate.

- 2.6 The nature of complaints received is similar to previous years and can be summarised as follows: -
- Disrespect
  - Bringing authority into disrepute
  - Conduct at meetings
  - Verbal abuse/outburst
  - Breach of confidentiality
  - Failure to register and declare interests
  - Conflict of interest
  - Bullying, harassment and discrimination
  - Failure to act with integrity and honesty

- 2.7 17 complaints related to social media posts. A separate report regarding the Council's Social Media Policy for Councillors is due to be presented to the November meeting of this Committee, and it is proposed that a particular focus is given to social media at the next Code of Conduct refresher session for all Members.
- 2.8 No further action was taken in relation to 8 complaints that were considered politically motivated/tit for tat, and that it would not be in the public interest, or a good use of resource, to consider them further.
- 2.9 In relation to the District Council, the highest number of complaints made against an individual Councillor was 7. The highest number of complaints made by an individual complainant (a Councillor) was 13. In relation to parish and town councils, a number relate to underlying issues at one parish council. Those complainants have been signposted to other bodies including the parish council's auditors and the Information Commissioner, where appropriate, as the formal remit of the District Council is limited to Code of Conduct matters. Mediation has also been recommended.
- 2.10 For comparison, in 2022-23 a total of 14 complaints were received. In 2021-2 a total of 9 complaints were received. The high volume of complaints inevitably has a resource implication on the Monitoring Officer, members of the Senior Leadership Team (SLT) including the Chief Executive, and other Officers. A conservative estimate is that 2 hours a week of SLT Officer time is taken up with conduct related matters.
- 2.11 The Council's two appointed Independent Persons provided independent review and oversight in relation to all formal complaints recorded, and any investigations. With the volume of complaints received this is a not insubstantial task, and the Monitoring Officer is hugely appreciative of their invaluable assistance.

### **3.0 Formal Investigation and Code of Conduct Hearings**

- 3.1 In relation to the 4 complaints referred for investigation, this has been outsourced to an independent investigator who has now concluded their investigation. The initial quote was for £4,515 plus VAT, but final confirmation of cost is awaited at the conclusion of the matter. No Code of Conduct Hearings were held during the reporting period.

### **4.0 Register of Members Interests**

- 4.1 Register of Interests Forms for Newark & Sherwood District Council Members are published on the Council's website: <https://democracy.newark-sherwooddc.gov.uk/mgMemberIndex.aspx?bcr=1>. Members are periodically sent reminders by Democratic Services to check their registers are up to date.
- 4.2 Town and Parish Councillors are also required to complete a Register of Interests Form. These are also published on the Council's website: <https://www.newark-sherwooddc.gov.uk/parishcouncils/register-of-interests-for-parish-councillors>. Regular communication is held with parish councils to ensure, as far as possible, that all their Register of Member Interest Forms are sent to us for publication. Where

forms are outstanding, regular reminders are sent to those parishes. Also, when we become aware of new Members who have been appointed through co-option to fill vacancies, the parishes are reminded of the requirement to submit the completed returns to us as soon as practicable.

## **5.0 Code of Conduct Training**

- 5.1 The Monitoring and Deputy Monitoring Officer delivered Code of Conduct training in November 2024 in conjunction with equalities training. This Committee is due to receive a separate report regarding Member training and development in November.

## **6.0 Government Consultation on the Code of Conduct**

- 6.1 Audit & Governance Committee (this Committee's predecessor) responded to the Government's consultation on the Code of Conduct in February 2025. The consultation sought views on introducing a mandatory minimum code of conduct for local authorities in England, and measures to strengthen the standards and conduct regime in England to ensure consistency of approach amongst councils investigating serious breaches of their member codes of conduct, including the introduction of the power of suspension. The Government is yet to publish its findings and proposals; an update will be brought to this Committee when available.

## **7.0 Conduct and Public Service**

- 7.1 Under its 'Conduct and Public Service' workstream, Audit & Governance Committee noted (May 2025) that Officers were to explore the cost and resource implications of supporting the Local Government Association's Debate not Hate Campaign. A communications strategy is attached as an **appendix** for information and endorsement.
- 7.2 Enquiries have also been made with other organisations including East Midlands Councils and East Midlands Mayoral Combined Authority about the possibility of the Council hosting a conference regarding good conduct in public office. While nothing is planned for the time being the Council's interest has been registered.

## **8.0 Implications**

In writing this report and in putting forward recommendations, officers have considered the following implications: Data Protection; Digital & Cyber Security; Equality & Diversity; Financial; Human Resources; Human Rights; Legal; Safeguarding & Sustainability and where appropriate they have made reference to these implications and added suitable expert comment where appropriate.

### Financial Implications FIN25-26/3692

- 8.1 The budget for code of conduct complaints was set to cover the additional cost of any complaints received that required further investigation by an external body. The table below shows the actual activity from 2022/23 to the current forecast in 2025/26:

Year	Budget	Actual	(Favourable)/Unfavourable Variance
2022/23 Actual	300	0	(300)
2023/24 Actual	300	1,362	1,062
2024/25 Forecast	320	27,644	(27,324)
2025/26	5,000	5,000 (based on forecast)	0

8.2 The actual for 24/25 was £27,644 needed to outsource some assessment work and investigations. This resulted in an unfavourable variance of £27,324 which was funded by the Corporate Contingency budget.

8.3 As an addition to the above table the 2025/26 cost of 2 hours per week of an SLT member would be approximately £7,000 per annum.

#### Legal Implications LEG2526/4204

8.4 The Committee is the appropriate body to consider the content of this report, in accordance with its terms of reference.

#### **Background Papers and Published Documents**

Except for previously published documents, which will be available elsewhere, the documents listed here will be available for inspection in accordance with Section 100D of the Local Government Act 1972.

The Government Consultation is published -

<https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/strengthening-the-standards-and-conduct-framework-for-local-authorities-in-england/strengthening-the-standards-and-conduct-framework-for-local-authorities-in-england>

Audit & Governance Committee report 31 July 2024 is published -

<https://democracy.newark-sherwooddc.gov.uk/documents/s20492/Item%2017%2031.07.24%20Annual%20Code%20of%20Conduct%20Complaints%20Report.pdf>

Audit & Governance Committee report 19 February 2025 is published -

<https://democracy.newark-sherwooddc.gov.uk/documents/s22057/Item%2019%2019.02.25%20Code%20of%20Conduct%20-%20Update%20and%20Government%20Consultation.pdf>

The Code of Conduct and associated complaints procedure are published on the Council's [website](#).