

Report to: Meeting of the Full Council: 21 October 2025

Committee Chair: Councillor Rhona Holloway, Governance, General Purposes and LGR Committee

Director Lead: Sue Bearman, Assistant Director Legal & Democratic Services, Monitoring Officer

Officer Lead: Bryony Norman, Principal Legal Officer & Deputy Monitoring Officer and Lisa Ingram, Principal Legal Officer & Deputy Monitoring Officer.

Report Summary	
Report Title	Outcome of Standards Complaints Hearing Panel
Purpose of Report	To update Full Council of the outcome of the Code of Conduct Hearing held on 10 October 2025
Recommendations	That Members note the contents of the report
Reason for Recommendations	All councils are required to have a local Councillor Code of Conduct to promote and maintain high standards of conduct by its Councillors. The Council's Code of Conduct is designed to protect the democratic role of Councillors, encourage good conduct and safeguard the public's trust in local government. It is based on the principles of selflessness, integrity, objectivity, accountability, openness, honesty and leadership ("The Nolan Principles"). The Council's Community Plan includes our 'Purpose and Values' to make it clear what it is we are here to do and how it will go about it – as public servants we place great emphasis on adopting a public sector ethos and seek to embody this in how we interact with residents and each other. This includes a commitment to being professional and trustworthy.

1.0 Background

- 1.1 Four complaints were raised in relation to the conduct of Councillor John Lee which the Monitoring Officer, in consultation with the Council's Independent Person, decided warranted further investigation.
- 1.2 East Midlands Councils were commissioned in March 2025 to undertake the independent investigation. The investigation was paused for a period between mid-April and mid-May 2025 due to the County Council elections, in relation to which Councillor Lee and two of the witnesses were also candidates. East Midlands Councils produced their final report on 26 August 2025. The investigation found evidence of breach in relation to two complaints: -

- 1.2.1 Complaint Number 20241126: This complaint was made by Councillor Mike Pringle and relates to Councillor Lee's alleged conduct at a meeting of the Council's Policy & Performance Improvement Committee which took place on the evening of 25 November 2024.

The investigation concluded that Councillor Lee failed to treat two Councillors with respect and did not lead by example in a way that secures public confidence in the role of a councillor - and that as a result Councillor Lee's conduct brought the Council into disrepute.

- 1.2.2 Complaint Number 20250205: This complaint was made by Councillor Forde but also supported by the Chief Executive and relates to a 'Facebook' post published by Councillor Lee on 29 January 2025 detailing the alleged poor performance of the Council, the substance of which was repeated by Councillor Lee at a meeting of Balderton Parish Council on the same day. The investigation concluded that the information posted was entirely fictitious and therefore calculated to unfairly damage the reputation of the Council.

Accordingly, it was concluded that Councillor Lee brought the Council into disrepute through first publishing fictional information, then failing remove that information when advised to so by the Monitoring Officer, and further by repeating verbally it at a meeting of Balderton Parish Council.

- 1.3 The investigation found no evidence of breach in relation to two of the complaints. Considering this the Monitoring Officer decided to take no further action in relation to those complaints.

- 1.4 A draft of the investigation report was sent to Councillor Lee for comment on the 28 July 2025. It was made clear in the covering email that, consistent with the Council's procedure for Code of Conduct investigations, the draft report and the investigation itself should remain strictly confidential. Subsequently, the investigators were sent copies of an email written by Councillor Lee to four parish councils on the 29 July 2025 clearly referencing aspects of the draft investigation report and a Facebook post by Councillor Lee (made on or around the 29 July 2025 and subsequently removed) which does similar.

In their final report, the investigators concluded that this amounted to a further breach of the Code of Conduct by Councillor Lee; breach of confidentiality.

- 1.5 Following receipt of the final report, the Monitoring Officer, in line with the Council's Arrangements for dealing with Complaints, considered the report and was satisfied the investigation had been conducted properly. In relation to the findings of breach, the Monitoring Officer concluded, after consultation with the Independent Person, that there was evidence of a failure to comply with the Code of Conduct and that the matter should be referred to a Standards Complaint Hearing Panel. It was not considered appropriate to resolve by local informal resolution, although it was acknowledged that Councillor Lee had offered apologies and to attend Code of Conduct training. This was due to the belated nature of these actions.

- 1.6 In line with the Council's arrangements, the matter progressed to a hearing. A Standards Complaint Hearing Panel was convened on 10 October 2025 formed of Councillor Rainbow (Chair), Councillor Brazier and Councillor Shakeshaft.

2.0 Summary

- 2.1 The Panel considered the information in the report and presented at the hearing and retired to determine whether there has been a breach of the District Council's Code of Conduct by Councillor Lee.

- 2.2 Councillor Lee's legal advisor confirmed prior to the publication of this report that Councillor Lee would not be attending the hearing and would not be represented at the hearing. Instead, written submissions were submitted on 29 September 2025. Councillor Lee nor his legal advisor attended the hearing.

- 2.3 The outcome of the hearing was as follows:

2.3.1 Complaint Number 20241126:

The Panel found that there had not been a breach of the Code of Conduct in Councillor Lee's behaviour in reference to Councillor Hall.

The Panel found that there had been a breach of the Code of conduct in Councillor Lee's behaviour towards Councillor Pringle but that his conduct did not reach the threshold to bring his Office or the Council into disrepute.

2.3.2 Complaint Number 20250205:

The Panel found that there had been a breach of the Code of Conduct in the social media post about the performance of the Council, the information contained within the post was incorrect and this information was further supported at a meeting of Balderton Parish Council and Councillor Lee refused to remove the post on request of the Monitoring Officer. This information unfairly damaged the reputation of the Council and brought the Council into disrepute.

2.3.3 Further complaint:

The Panel found that there had been a breach of the Code of Conduct by breaching confidentiality when he shared parts of the confidential draft investigation report online and by email to four Parish Councils.

2.4 Sanctions:

2.4.1 The Panel imposed the following sanctions:

- The Panel determined that Councillor Lee should attend training in relation to the Code of Conduct which should include training on the use of social media and confidentiality.
- The Panel determined that their findings should be reported to Council.

2.5 A copy of the decision notice is attached as an **Appendix** to the report.

3.0 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.

Legal Implications - LEG2526/7289

- 3.1 Code of Conduct complaints must be dealt with in accordance with the Council's Approved Arrangements for Dealing with Complaints made under s.28 (6) Localism Act 2011. This is being reported to Members at Full Council at the request of the Panel Members.

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.

Standards Complaints Hearing Panel – 10 October 2025 Agenda and Hearing Recording
<https://democracy.newark-sherwooddc.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=316&MId=1224>