



# WOKINGHAM BOROUGH COUNCIL

A Meeting of the **STANDARDS COMMITTEE** will be held in David Hicks 2 - Civic Offices, Shute End, Wokingham RG40 1BN on **MONDAY 29 JANUARY 2024 AT 7.00 PM**

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Susan Parsonage', written in a cursive style.

Susan Parsonage  
Chief Executive  
Published on 21 January 2024

Note: Non-Committee Members and members of the public are welcome to attend the meeting or participate in the meeting virtually, in line with the Council's Constitution. If you wish to participate either in person or virtually via Microsoft Teams, please contact Democratic Services. The meeting can also be viewed using the following link:  
<https://youtube.com/live/yfwklkCBlrw?feature=share>

This meeting may be filmed for inclusion on the Council's website. Please note that other people may film, record, tweet or blog from this meeting. The use of these images or recordings is not under the Council's control.

<b>Our Vision</b>
<b><i>A great place to live, learn, work and grow and a great place to do business</i></b>
<b>Enriching Lives</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Champion excellent education and enable our children and young people to achieve their full potential, regardless of their background.</li> <li>• Support our residents to lead happy, healthy lives and provide access to good leisure facilities to enable healthy choices for everyone.</li> <li>• Engage and empower our communities through arts and culture and create a sense of identity for the Borough which people feel part of.</li> <li>• Support growth in our local economy and help to build business.</li> </ul>
<b>Providing Safe and Strong Communities</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Protect and safeguard our children, young and vulnerable people.</li> <li>• Offer quality care and support, at the right time, to reduce the need for long term care.</li> <li>• Nurture our communities: enabling them to thrive and families to flourish.</li> <li>• Ensure our Borough and communities remain safe for all.</li> </ul>
<b>Enjoying a Clean and Green Borough</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Play as full a role as possible to achieve a carbon neutral Borough, sustainable for the future.</li> <li>• Protect our Borough, keep it clean and enhance our green areas for people to enjoy.</li> <li>• Reduce our waste, promote re-use, increase recycling and improve biodiversity.</li> <li>• Connect our parks and open spaces with green cycleways.</li> </ul>
<b>Delivering the Right Homes in the Right Places</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Offer quality, affordable, sustainable homes fit for the future.</li> <li>• Ensure the right infrastructure is in place, early, to support and enable our Borough to grow.</li> <li>• Protect our unique places and preserve our natural environment.</li> <li>• Help with your housing needs and support people, where it is needed most, to live independently in their own homes.</li> </ul>
<b>Keeping the Borough Moving</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Maintain and improve our roads, footpaths and cycleways.</li> <li>• Tackle traffic congestion and minimise delays and disruptions.</li> <li>• Enable safe and sustainable travel around the Borough with good transport infrastructure.</li> <li>• Promote healthy alternative travel options and support our partners in offering affordable, accessible public transport with good transport links.</li> </ul>
<b>Changing the Way We Work for You</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Be relentlessly customer focussed.</li> <li>• Work with our partners to provide efficient, effective, joined up services which are focussed around our customers.</li> <li>• Communicate better with customers, owning issues, updating on progress and responding appropriately as well as promoting what is happening in our Borough.</li> <li>• Drive innovative, digital ways of working that will connect our communities, businesses and customers to our services in a way that suits their needs.</li> </ul>
<b>Be the Best We Can Be</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Be an organisation that values and invests in all our colleagues and is seen as an employer of choice.</li> <li>• Embed a culture that supports ambition, promotes empowerment and develops new ways of working.</li> <li>• Use our governance and scrutiny structures to support a learning and continuous improvement approach to the way we do business.</li> <li>• Be a commercial council that is innovative, whilst being inclusive, in its approach with a clear focus on being financially resilient.</li> <li>• Maximise opportunities to secure funding and investment for the Borough.</li> <li>• Establish a renewed vision for the Borough with clear aspirations.</li> </ul>

## MEMBERSHIP OF THE STANDARDS COMMITTEE

### Councillors

Morag Malvern (Chair)  
Phil Cunnington  
Caroline Smith

Rachel Burgess (Vice-Chair)  
Graham Howe

Sam Akhtar  
Imogen Shepherd-DuBey

### Parish/Town Council Representatives

Sally Gurney  
Jackie Jagger  
Sheena Matthews

Co-Optee, Wokingham Town Council  
Co-Optee Twyford Parish Council  
Co-Optee Earley Town Council

ITEM NO.	WARD	SUBJECT	PAGE NO.
19.		<b>APOLOGIES</b> To receive any apologies for absence.	
20.		<b>MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING</b> To confirm the Minutes of the Meeting held on 23 October 2023.	5 - 8
21.		<b>DECLARATION OF INTEREST</b> To receive any declarations of interest.	
22.		<b>PUBLIC QUESTION TIME</b> To answer any public questions. A period of 30 minutes will be allowed for members of the public to ask questions submitted under notice. The Council welcomes questions from members of the public about the work of this Committee.  Subject to meeting certain timescales, questions can relate to general issues concerned with the work of the Committee or an item which is on the Agenda for this meeting. For full details of the procedure for submitting questions please contact the Democratic Services Section on the numbers given below or go to <a href="http://www.wokingham.gov.uk/publicquestions">www.wokingham.gov.uk/publicquestions</a>	
23.		<b>MEMBER QUESTION TIME</b> To answer any Member questions.	
24.		<b>PARISH / TOWN COUNCIL QUESTION TIME</b> To answer any questions from Parish/Town Councillors.	
25.	None Specific	<b>UPDATE ON CODE OF CONDUCT COMPLAINTS</b> To consider the regular update report on Councillor Code of Conduct complaints.	9 - 16

26. None Specific

**LGA GUIDANCE - DEBATE NOT HATE CAMPAIGN**

17 - 20

To consider feedback from WBC Councillors following the discussion on the LGA campaign at the previous meeting.

**Any other items which the Chairman decides are urgent.**

A Supplementary Agenda will be issued by the Chief Executive if there are any other items to consider under this heading.

**CONTACT OFFICER**

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Democratic & Electoral Services Specialist

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Civic Offices, Shute End, Wokingham, RG40 1BN

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE  
STANDARDS COMMITTEE  
HELD ON 23 OCTOBER 2023 FROM 7.00 PM TO 7.30 PM**

**Committee Members Present**

Councillors: Morag Malvern (Chair), Rachel Burgess (Vice-Chair), Sam Akhtar, Imogen Shepherd-DuBey and Caroline Smith

Parish/Town Council Representatives:- Sally Gurney (Co-Optee, Wokingham Town Council) and Jackie Jagger (Co-Optee Twyford Parish Council)

**Officers Present**

Andrew Moulton, Monitoring Officer

Neil Allen, Head of Legal

Neil Carr, Democratic and Electoral Services Specialist

**11. APOLOGIES**

Apologies for absence were submitted by Councillors Keith Baker, Phil Cunnington and Sheena Matthews.

**12. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING**

The Minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 10 July 2023 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

**13. DECLARATION OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest.

**14. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME**

There were no public questions.

**15. MEMBER QUESTION TIME**

There were no Member questions.

**16. PARISH / TOWN COUNCIL QUESTION TIME**

There were no questions from Parish or Town Members.

**17. UPDATE ON COMPLAINTS**

The Committee considered a report, set out at Agenda pages 9 to 14. The report stated that, since the last update, in July 2023, nine new complaints had been received.

Only one complaint had resulted in finding a breach of the Code of Conduct. This complaint (WBC 6) had resulted in the publication of a decision notice on the WBC website and would be reported to full Council.

It was noted that all complaints are on track to be completed within the timescale that has been set out. With the three most recent complaints ongoing.

Looking at trends, the report showed that five complaints came from fellow councillors, three complaints related to social media, four complaints were connected to the meeting of the Executive in June 2023 and one complaint related to a parish councillor.

In the ensuing discussion, Members raised the following points and questions.

- Regarding WBC 6, the report states that it will be discussed at Council, however, it wasn't due to timing. Members were assured it would now go to the next full Council meeting in November.
- Sally Gurney asked if there were any patterns regarding Councillor to Councillor complaints along party lines. She stated that from the outside, the Borough looks very party political. Andrew Moulton responded by saying he was happy to take that away and have a look into those trends.
- Councillor Sam Akhtar wondered whether complaints could show if the same person is complaining multiple times. Andrew Moulton said that it is something that could be looked at, as long as anonymity is kept.
- Caroline Smith asked whether there should be a trigger point where this Committee should look at the level of Complaints. Andrew Moulton noted that this was looked at two years ago, and that it should be up to the Committee to decide.

**RESOLVED** That:

- 1) the update on Code of Conduct complaints be noted;
- 2) Andrew Moulton report statistics regarding source of complaints to the next meeting of the Committee.

## **18. LGA DEBATE NOT HATE CAMPAIGN**

Andrew Moulton gave a presentation to the Committee on the LGA Debate not Hate Campaign.

The Campaign relates to Councillors and people considering putting themselves forward in the future.

The presentation covered some key themes, these being Prevention and Support, Policies and Guidance, Training, Technology, Risk Assessment, engaging with the Police, Managing Councillor Information, Setting Expectations, Managing Public Narratives and Behaviour and Conduct.

In the ensuing discussion, Members raised the following points and questions.

- Rachel Burgess said it is worth looking if more can be put in place to see when things tick over into abuse and recommends a survey to all Councillors to see how widespread the problem is. The Chair agreed with the idea of a survey. Andrew Moulton said that doing a survey would raise awareness among Councillors. Jackie Jagger added that a survey would help identify complaints that are justified. Sally Gurney asked whether the survey could be rolled out to Town and Parish Councillors. Andrew Moulton said he will take that up with the Town and Parish Clerks.
- Caroline Smith asked if there is an existing list of people that should be avoided. Andrew Moulton confirmed that there is currently no list.
- Sam Akhtar mentioned that it might be useful for Councillors to have a training refresher relating to personal safety.

**RESOLVED** That:

- 1) the report on the LGA Debate not Hate Campaign be noted;
- 2) the Committee leads on the specific priorities for the Council to consider in response to the LGA's Campaign;
- 3) a survey to be circulated to all Borough Councillors with initial findings brought back to the next meeting of the Committee in January 2024;
- 4) Andrew Moulton discuss rolling out the survey to Town and Parish Councils with the Clerks.

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# Agenda Item 25.

**TITLE** Update on Councillor Code of Conduct Complaints

**FOR CONSIDERATION BY** Standards Committee on 29 January 2024

**WARD** (All Wards);

**LEAD OFFICER** Monitoring Officer - Andrew Moulton

## **OUTCOME / BENEFITS TO THE COMMUNITY**

To inform and feedback results of the Member Complaints process.

## **RECOMMENDATION**

The Committee is asked to note the update on complaints and consider any issues arising.

## **SUMMARY OF REPORT**

Since the last update report to the Committee in October 2023, there have been nine new complaints received.

Detailed updates on 2023/24 complaints can be found at Appendix A.

This brings the total of complaints received to date in 2023/24 to 18 (17 relating to Wokingham Borough Council and 1 to a parish council). This compares to a total of 12 received in 2022/23. A full analysis of this will be provided in the Committee's Annual Report to be considered at its next meeting on 12 March 2024.

At its last meeting, the Committee asked for more information about Councillor to Councillor complaints, and also whether individuals were submitting multiple complaints. This information is provided in the main body the report.

## Background

1. One of the roles of the Committee is to monitor the operation of the Member Code of Conduct. The Committee undertakes this role through the receipt of regular updates from the Monitoring Officer that provides information on the numbers, types, and outcomes of complaints. The relevant part of the Constitution is 9.1.12 – Process for Considering Code of Conduct Complaints.
2. On receipt of a complaint, the Monitoring Officer makes an initial assessment and writes a summary of the complaint and then, subject to consultation with an Independent Person, has delegated authority to decide to:-
  - a) take no action if there is clear evidence that there has been no breach of the Code of Conduct.
  - b) resolve the matter informally by asking the Subject Member to:-
    - i) take part in mediation with the complainant in order to settle the complaint, provided both the Subject Member and the complainant are willing to do so, and/or
    - ii) make a written apology to the complainant which is acceptable to the Monitoring Officer and the Independent Person, and/or
    - iii) attend training and/or
    - iv) correct an entry in the Members' Register of Interests or correct a declaration made;

OR

  - c) Require a formal investigation and a written investigation report by an Investigating Officer. The investigation report shall conclude whether there has been a breach of the Code of Conduct. Copies of the investigation report will be provided in confidence to the Independent Person, and the Subject Member.

OR

  - d) Refer the complaint to the Standards Committee for a decision on whether options a), b) and c) above should be followed

## Analysis of Issues

### Councillor to Councillor Complaints

3. At its October 2023 meeting, the Committee asked if “there were any patterns regarding Councillor to Councillor complaints along party lines.”
4. During 2023/24 to date, there have been 17 complaints against Wokingham Borough councillors. Of these, 6 (or 35%) were submitted by Borough councillors. There is no discernible pattern with complainants being from more than one political party.
5. One of the criteria in the Constitution (section 9.1.12.4) used by the Monitoring Officer for determining an initial assessment of a complaint relates to its seriousness:-

*Seriousness of the complaint – is the complaint trivial, vexatious, malicious, politically motivated, or ‘tit for tat’? Would the resources/cost involved in investigating and determining the complaint be disproportionate to the allegation if proven?*

6. In each of the complaints received in 2023/24 from a Councillor, the complaint met the “seriousness” threshold.

### Individuals submitting multiple complaints

7. The Committee also asked whether individuals were making multiple complaints. In 2023/24, there was no evidence of this. There was, however, three examples of an incident or event (e.g. a public meeting, and social media posts) leading to multiple complaints from different complainants. This may be one reason why the number of complaints in 2023/24 is higher than in previous years.

### FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE RECOMMENDATION

***The Council faces unprecedented financial pressures as a result of; the longer-term impact of the COVID-19 crisis, Brexit, the war in Ukraine and the general economic climate of rising prices and the increasing cost of debt. It is therefore imperative that Council resources are optimised and are focused on the vulnerable and on its highest priorities.***

	How much will it Cost/ (Save)	Is there sufficient funding – if not quantify the Shortfall	Revenue or Capital?
Current Financial Year (Year 1)	£0	Yes	Revenue
Next Financial Year (Year 2)	£0	Yes	Revenue
Following Financial Year (Year 3)	£0	Yes	Revenue

#### Other financial information relevant to the Recommendation/Decision

None

#### Cross-Council Implications (how does this decision impact on other Council services, including properties and priorities?)

None specific

#### Public Sector Equality Duty

This is an information update report

#### Climate Emergency – ***This Council has declared a climate emergency and is committed to playing as full a role as possible – leading by example as well as by exhortation – in achieving a carbon neutral Wokingham Borough by 2030***

There are no direct implications arising from this report on the Council’s carbon neutral objective

<b>Reasons for considering the report in Part 2</b>
Not applicable.

<b>List of Background Papers</b>
None.

<b>Contact</b> Andrew Moulton	<b>Service</b> Governance
<b>Telephone No</b> Tel: 07747 777298	<b>Email</b> andrew.moulton@wokingham.gov.uk

**Appendix A**  
**Member Code of Conduct Complaints 2023/24 (on 19 January 2024)**

Ref	Date Received	Acknowledged	Within 3 days?	Complainant	Subject Member	Summary of Complaint	Progress/Conclusion	Date Concluded/ Next steps	Within Performance Timescales
WBC17	18/1/24	18/1/24	Y	Wokingham Borough Councillor	Wokingham Borough Councillor	Allegation that a failure to declare an interest brought the Council into disrepute.	Initial assessment of complaint being undertaken prior to consultation with independent person.	Ongoing	Y
WBC16	16/1/24	16/1/24	Y	Member of Public	Wokingham Borough Councillor	Allegation that social media post breached the Social Media guidance in the Constitution.  NB: WBC15 and WBC14 relate to the same post but received from different complainants.	Initial assessment of complaint being undertaken prior to consultation with independent person.	Ongoing	Y
WBC15	16/1/24	16/1/24	Y	Member of Public	Wokingham Borough Councillor	Allegation that social media post breached the Social Media guidance in the Constitution.	Initial assessment of complaint being undertaken prior to consultation with independent person.	Ongoing	Y
WBC14	16/1/24	16/1/24	Y	Member of Public	Wokingham Borough Councillor	Allegation that social media post breached the Social Media guidance in the Constitution.	Initial assessment of complaint being undertaken prior to consultation with independent person.	Ongoing	Y
WBC13	12/1/24	15/1/25	Y	Member of Public	Wokingham Borough Councillor	Allegation that a social media post breached the requirements of "respect."	Initial assessment of complaint being undertaken prior to consultation with independent person.	Ongoing	Y

WBC12	15/11/23	16/11/23	Y	Member of Public	Wokingham Borough Councillor	Allegation that a social media post concerning the Israel Gaza conflict breached the Code.  NB: WBC 11 and WBC 10 relate to the same social media post.	Initial assessment of complaint undertaken by MO. Consultation meeting held on 15 November with Independent Person where it was concluded that there had been no breach of the Code.	21/12/23	Y
WBC11	8/11/23	9/11/23	Y	Member of Public	Wokingham Borough Councillor	Allegation that a social media post concerning the Israel Gaza conflict breached the Code.	Initial assessment of complaint undertaken by MO. Consultation meeting held on 15 November with Independent Person where it was concluded that there had been no breach of the Code.	21/12/23	Y
WBC10	8/11/23	8/11/23	Y	Member of Public	Wokingham Borough Council Parish Councillor	Allegation that a social media post concerning the Israel Gaza conflict breached the Code.	Initial assessment of complaint undertaken by MO. Consultation meeting held on 15 November with Independent Person where it was concluded that there had been no breach of the Code.	21/12/23	Y
WBC9	23/10/23	23/10/23	Y	Member of Public	Wokingham Borough Councillor	Allegation of breaches of disrepute and misuse of position relating to social media post.	Initial assessment of complaint undertaken by MO. Consultation meeting held with Independent Person where it was concluded that there had been no breach of the Code.	7/12/23	Y
T&P1	28/9/23	28/9/23	Y	Member of Public	Parish Councillor	Complainant currently clarifying which part(s) of Code they believe have been breached.	Following further discussions with the complainant, it was concluded that this was not a Councillor Code of Conduct Complaint and has been forwarded to the parish council to deal with under their complaints policy.	7/11/23 Complaint withdrawn – not a Code of Conduct matter.	Y

WBC8	18/9/23	18/9/23	Y	Member of Public	Wokingham Borough Councillor	Allegation of breaches of respect, impartiality of officers and disrepute relating to social media post.	Initial assessment of complaint undertaken by MO. Consultation meeting held on 2 November with Independent Person where it was agreed to undertake a short investigation.	Ongoing	N
WBC7	25/8/23	25/8/23	Y	Wokingham Borough Councillor	Wokingham Borough Councillor	Allegation of breaches of respect, impartiality of officers and disrepute relating to social media post.	Initial assessment of complaint undertaken by MO. Consultation held with Independent Person on 2 October where it was agreed to undertake a short investigation.	Ongoing	N
WBC6	27/7/23	28/7/23	Y	Wokingham Borough Councillor	Wokingham Borough Councillor	Allegation of inappropriate language used in an informal meeting which may have breached respect, unlawful discrimination, and disrepute clauses.	Initial assessment of complaint undertaken by MO. Consultation held with Independent Person on 15 August where it was agreed to undertake a short investigation. Investigation concluded one breach of respect clause and finding of no breach of two other clauses.	Finding of breach - Decision Notice published  Reported to Council on 16/11/23	Y
WBC5	12/7/23	13/7/23	Y	Wokingham Borough Councillor	Wokingham Borough Councillor	Allegation of disrepute relating to a post made on social media.	Initial assessment of complaint undertaken by MO. Consultation held with Independent Person on 28 July where it was concluded that there had been no breach of the Code.	28/7/23	Y
WBC4	10/7/23	10/7/23	Y	Member of Public	Wokingham Borough Councillor	Allegation of disrespect shown to complainant at a public meeting of the Council's Executive.	Initial assessment of complaint undertaken by MO. Consultation held with Independent Person on 21 July where it was concluded that there had been no breach of the Code.	21/7/23	Y

WBC3	8/7/23	10/7/23	Y	Wokingham Borough Councillor	Wokingham Borough Councillor x 2	Allegation of disrespect shown to complainant at a public meeting of the Council's Executive.	Initial assessment of complaint undertaken by MO. Consultation held with Independent Person on 21 July where it was concluded that there had been no breach of the Code.	21/7/23	Y
WBC2	7/7/23	8/7/23	Y	Wokingham Borough Councillor	Wokingham Borough Councillor	Allegation of disrespect shown to complainant at a public meeting of the Council's Executive.	Initial assessment of complaint undertaken by MO. Consultation held with Independent Person on 21 July where it was concluded that there had been no breach of the Code.	21/7/23	Y
WBC1	3/7/23	3/7/23	Y	Member of Public	Wokingham Borough Councillor x 2	Allegation of disrespect shown to complainant at a public meeting of the Council's Executive.	Initial assessment of complaint undertaken by MO. Consultation held with Independent Person on 21 July where it was concluded that there had been no breach of the Code.	21/7/23	Y

**Performance Timescales (introduced October 2021)**

Acknowledgement within 3 days of receipt

Initial consultation meeting held within 15 working days of acknowledgement.

Conclusion within 3 months (if investigation required)



<b>TITLE</b>	<b>LGA Guidance on "Debate Not Hate" Campaign</b>
<b>FOR CONSIDERATION BY</b>	Standards Committee on 29 January 2024
<b>WARD</b>	(All Wards);
<b>LEAD OFFICER</b>	Chief Executive - Susan Parsonage

## **OUTCOME / BENEFITS TO THE COMMUNITY**

Raises the public awareness of the role of councillors and improves the responses and support for local councillors facing abuse or intimidation

## **RECOMMENDATION**

That the Committee:-

1. Notes the results of the survey of Wokingham borough councillors;
2. Identifies the specific priorities for the Council to consider in response to the LGA's campaign; and
3. Considers further whether it wishes to roll-out the survey more widely amongst town and parish councils.

## **SUMMARY OF REPORT**

At its last meeting the Committee received a presentation on the Local Government Association's (LGA) "Debate Not Hate" campaign.

The campaign relates to councillors and individuals considering putting themselves forward in the future to stand for election with a view to enhancing key themes such as prevention, policies and guidance, training, technology, risk assessment, engaging with the police, managing councillor information, setting expectations, and managing public narratives and behaviour/conduct.

The Committee noted the report and was keen to identify the extent of the issue locally. Therefore, a survey of all 54 borough councillors was conducted between 30 November and 20 December 2023.

Seven responses were received, the details of which are provided in the main body of the report. Whilst a low response may be indicative that there are no significant issues locally, there were examples reported where councillors have suffered abuse on the doorstep when campaigning and also on social media, particularly for those councillors who use social media extensively.

The main finding was that councillors requested further written guidance.

## **Background**

- 1.1 The LGA's Debate Not Hate campaign aims to raise public awareness of the role of councillors in their communities, encourage healthy debate and improve the responses and support for local politicians facing abuse and intimidation.
- 1.2 The LGA has recently (July 2023) published its report outlining how councils can better support councillors to prevent and handle abuse and includes principles for councils to consider, top tips and good practice case studies.
- 1.3 For ease of reference, this report attaches the LGA report and findings – see Appendix A.

## **Analysis of Issues**

- 2.1 The survey of all borough councillors took place between 30 November and 20 December. Seven responses were received.
- 2.2 The substantive questions asked were:-
  - In your role as a Councillor have you been subjected to abuse, harassment and intimidation?
  - What form did the abuse, harassment and intimidation you experience take?
  - How many incidents of abuse, harassment or intimidation have you experienced in the last 2 years?
  - Did you report the abuse?
  - Who did you report the incident to?
  - If you experienced abuse, harassment or intimidation do you know the process to report it?
  - Is there anything you feel would be helpful in supporting you in relation to abuse, harassment or intimidation connected to your role as a Councillor?
- 2.3 The main findings were as follows:-
  - a) A low response rate may indicate that councillors feel this is not a significant area of concern. However, for those councillors who did respond, the following conclusions may be drawn.
  - b) 3 out of 7 reported that they had been subject to a form of abuse, harassment or intimidation.
  - c) Types of abuse reported were verbal abuse, distribution of misinformation, character assassination, inappropriate emails, letters, phone calls and communications on social media.

- d) 1 out of 3 who were subject to abuse reported this to the Monitoring Officer. Others reported to their political party.
- e) 2 out of 3 knew the process for reporting abuse.
- f) 4 out of 7 suggested that written guidance would be helpful – there was also 1 proposal for a training session and 1 for establishing a forum to share experiences.
- g) 1 out of 7 indicated that there should be greater scrutiny of how the Monitoring Officer conducts the initial investigation process to determine whether a complaint is valid.

## FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE RECOMMENDATION

***The Council faces unprecedented financial pressures as a result of; the longer term impact of the COVID-19 crisis, Brexit, the war in Ukraine and the general economic climate of rising prices and the increasing cost of debt. It is therefore imperative that Council resources are optimised and are focused on the vulnerable and on its highest priorities.***

	How much will it Cost/ (Save)	Is there sufficient funding – if not quantify the Shortfall	Revenue or Capital?
Current Financial Year (Year 1)	£0	Yes	Revenue
Next Financial Year (Year 2)	£0	Yes	Revenue
Following Financial Year (Year 3)	£0	Yes	Revenue

<b>Other financial information relevant to the Recommendation/Decision</b>
None

<b>Cross-Council Implications</b> (how does this decision impact on other Council services, including properties and priorities?)
This report does not of itself contribute to the Council's Priorities, however, the safety of members will support the democratic process and enable members to work to achieve those priorities.

<b>Public Sector Equality Duty</b>
This is an information report but any specific proposals will be informed by an equalities assessment as appropriate.

<b>Climate Emergency – This Council has declared a climate emergency and is committed to playing as full a role as possible – leading by example as well as by exhortation – in achieving a carbon neutral Wokingham Borough by 2030</b>
There are no specific Climate Emergency implications of this report.

<b>Reasons for considering the report in Part 2</b>

Not applicable
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<b>List of Background Papers</b>
LGA report

<b>Contact</b> Andrew Moulton	<b>Service</b> Governance
<b>Telephone No</b> Tel: 07747 777298	<b>Email</b> andrew.moulton@wokingham.gov.uk