

Agenda Item 15.

TITLE	Update on Complaints and Feedback
FOR CONSIDERATION BY	Standards Committee on 12 October 2020
WARD	Non Specific
DIRECTOR	Director of Corporate Services - Graham Ebers

OUTCOME / BENEFITS TO THE COMMUNITY

To inform and feedback results of the Member Complaints process.

RECOMMENDATION

To note the report and consider any issues arising.

SUMMARY OF REPORT

Since the last report on Complaints to the Committee on 1 July 2020 there have been three new complaints received.

Appendix A provides a summary of the complaints and the latest position on each.

A verbal update will be given at the meeting on any specific patterns/trends or other matters that the Committee may need to consider.

Also, the Committee is asked to consider any broader training issues that arise from these complaints.

Background

Under Section 9.1.13.5 of the Council's Constitution, the Monitoring Officer provides a report to the Standards Committee, on a quarterly basis, which contains the following: the number and nature of complaints received; progress on any investigations and associated costs; and identify areas where training or other action might avoid further complaints. However, the name(s) of the Member(s) will not be disclosed.

Since the last report to the Committee on 1 July 2020, there have been three new Code of Conduct complaints received.

Under the Council's adopted policy for the consideration of Code of Conduct Complaints, the Monitoring has delegated authority to decide whether the complaint:

- can be resolved informally i.e. by mediation with the two parties before making a decision on whether the complaint merits formal investigation;
- requires investigation;
- should be referred to the Standards Committee;
- no further action should be taken.

Analysis of Issues

The latest position on existing complaints is shown at Appendix A.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE RECOMMENDATION

The Council faces severe financial challenges over the coming years as a result of the austerity measures implemented by the Government and subsequent reductions to public sector funding. It is estimated that Wokingham Borough Council will be required to make budget reductions in excess of £20m over the next three years and all Executive decisions should be made in this context.

	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?)

The work and conduct of Councillors can impact all aspects of the Council's services.

Reasons for considering the report in Part 2
Not applicable

List of Background Papers
None

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

Appendix A Code of Conduct Complaints

Date Received	Subject Member	Summary of Complaint	Progress/Conclusion	Date Concluded
4/3/2020	WBC Member	Complaint received from member of the public about the manner in which the Councillor concerned dealt with a service request in July 2019.	Following an initial evaluation of the complaint and in consultation with the Chairman and Independent Person it was concluded that there was no evidence of a breach and therefore no further action was necessary.	1/7/2020
5/3/2020	Town & Parish Member	Complaint received from a Town & Parish clerk about bullying and disrespect to other Members and officers, and a potential breach of that Councils' equality duties.	Following an initial evaluation of the complaint in consultation with the Chairman and Independent Person, an independent investigation was commissioned, the results from which are due shortly.	Ongoing
4/6/2020	Two WBC Members	Complaint received from a member of the public that alleges two councillors were not adhering to social distancing rules. However, the complainant is unclear as to which part(s) of the Code of Conduct may have been breached.	The Monitoring Officer has made initial evaluation of the complaint prior to consulting with the Chairman and Independent Person – a verbal update will be provided to the Committee.	Ongoing
22/6/2020 (initial) 7/7/2020 (clarification)	WBC Member	Complaint received from a member of the public (and subsequently supported by letter with group signatories). Allegation that Councillor had breached disrespect, bullying and equality provisions in the Code as a consequence of statements made on social media and at a Council meeting.	Following consultation with the Vice Chairman and Independent Person, it was concluded that a breach of the Code had taken place. The Councillor concerned has written a letter of apology to the complainant and received training on the Council's Equality Policy.	7/8/2020

23/7/2020	WBC Member	Complaint received from a member of the public. Allegation that Councillor had breached disrespect and bullying provisions in the Code as a consequence of statements made on social media.	Following an initial evaluation of the complaint in consultation with the Vice-Chairman and Independent Person, an independent investigation has been commissioned.	Ongoing
28/7/2020	2 WBC Members	Complaint received from a member of the public. Allegation that Councillor had breached disrespect in failing to adhere to social distancing guidance.	A verbal update on this complaint will be provided to the Committee at the meeting.	Ongoing

Appendix A (Continued)
Code of Conduct Complaints

Date Received	Subject Member	Summary of Complaint	Progress/Conclusion	Date Concluded
5/3/2020	Town & Parish Member	Complaint received from a Town & Parish clerk about bullying and disrespect to other Members and officers, and a potential breach of that Councils' equality duties.	The Monitoring Officer has made an initial evaluation of the complaint prior to consulting with the Chairman and Independent Person. Further information has been requested from the Councillor concerned.	Ongoing
4/6/2020	Two WBC Members	Complaint received from a member of the public that alleges two councillors were not adhering to social distancing rules. However, the complainant is unclear as to which part(s) of the Code of Conduct may have been breached.	The Monitoring Officer has made initial evaluation of the complaint prior to consulting with the Chairman and Independent Person – a verbal update will be provided to the Committee.	Ongoing