

BOLSOVER DISTRICT COUNCIL

Meeting of the Standards Committee on 11th May 2026

Members Complaints.

Report of the Strategic Director of Legal, Governance and Monitoring Officer

Classification	This report is Public Appendix 2- is not for publication under Paragraph 1 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A to the Local Government Act 1972
Contact Officer	Jim Fieldsend, Strategic Director of Legal, Governance and Monitoring Officer

PURPOSE/SUMMARY OF REPORT

- To update on the complaints made against councillors since 1st January 2025.

REPORT DETAILS

1. Background

- 1.1 All those working or serving in public life including M.P.s, councillors and employees are required to adhere to the Nolan Principles of Public Life, i.e selflessness, integrity, objectivity, accountability, openness, honesty and leadership.
- 1.2 Councillors are also required to agree to sign up to a code of conduct which is designed to regulate their behaviour in the form of a clear set of rules. Each council has its own code of conduct however many, like Bolsover District Council, will have adopted the Local Government Association's standard code. The code requires councillors to:
- Treat others with respect;
 - Not bully, harass or discriminate against people;
 - Act impartially;
 - To treat certain information as confidential;
 - Not to bring the Council or the role as councillor into disrepute;
 - Not to misuse the position as councillor;

- Not to misuse Council resources;
 - Cooperate with any Code of Conduct investigation;
 - Comply with rules regarding disclosure of interest;
 - Comply with gifts and hospitality rules;
 - Undertake all mandatory training.
- 1.3 If a councillor fails to comply with the requirements of the code a complaint can be made to the Council's Monitoring Officer, who is responsible for maintaining councillor standards at both District and Parish/Town Council level.
- 1.4 When a complaint is made the Monitoring Officer will assess whether the councillor in question was a councillor at the time of the incident and whether he/she was acting as a councillor when the incident occurred. The Monitoring Officer is not concerned about incidents occurring whilst a councillor is acting in a private capacity. The Monitoring Officer will also consider whether, if proven, does the behaviour amount to a breach of the code.
- 1.5 If a complaint meets the basic criteria the Monitoring Officer will decide whether to undertake a more detailed investigation. Many breaches are of a nature where it is not in the public interest to justify a formal investigation. These breaches can be dealt with by the councillor accepting that there has been a breach and offering an apology or agreeing to some training. However occasionally a councillor will not accept that there has been a breach and the Monitoring Officer will appoint someone to investigate.
- 1.6 Where an investigation is held, if the investigator finds that no breach has occurred no further action will be taken. However, where a breach is found to have been held, this can either result in more informal action, e.g. an apology or training or a formal hearing in front of the Standards Sub-Committee. If the Sub-Committee finds that the councillor has breached the code of conduct they have limited powers. For instance, they can censure the councillor, they can recommend that they undertake training, they can recommend to the council concerned that they be removed from a position of responsibility. Currently there is no power to suspend a councillor from office, however the Government have recently announced proposals to strengthen the standards and conduct framework which includes a proposal to suspend councillors for more serious breaches and for persistent breaches.
- 1.7 Throughout the complaints process the Monitoring Officer will consult with someone known as an Independent Person. Currently the Council has three Independent Persons who act as a sounding board for the Monitoring Officer, two of which were recently appointed by the Council in its meeting on 8th October.

2. Details of Proposal or Information

- 2.1 Appendix 1 of the report sets out details of the complaints received in the current since the start of 2025. So far at the time of writing, we have processed 24 complaints. Some of the complaints are about more than one councillor and other complaints have been made by more than one complainants. Two complaints are currently under investigation or due to be investigated. Two new complaints are being assessed as to whether an investigation is necessary. Four complaints have resulted in councillors accepting they have breached the code and apologised to the complainant. Two councillors resigned as a councillor soon after a complaint being made and no further action taken. The remainder of the complaints were not considered to be matters that fell under the jurisdiction of the member complaints regime.
- 2.2 One complaint that has been investigated has resulted in Bolsover District Councillor John Ritchie being found to have breached the code of conduct. The investigating officer's report is set out in full in Appendix 2 which is an exempt document. Councillor Ritchie has been found to have breached the code through interfering in the day to day management of staff which is a breach of Protocol on Member/Officer Relations. The Investigating Officer considered this amounted to a breach of the Code of Conduct requirement to treat local employees with respect. In addition Councillor Ritchie has failed to comply with the requirement not to disclose confidential information.
- 2.3 Members will note the proposed recommendations from the Investigating Officer, that Councillor Ritchie apologise to the complainant and undertake relevant training. The complainant was consulted on the proposed actions however they felt that the matter should be referred to a Standards Committee hearing. Despite the complainant's views the Monitoring Officer, following consultation with one of the Independent Persons, considered that the proposed actions were proportionate and suitable in the circumstances. Councillor Ritchie agreed to both proposals and has now submitted an apology to the complainant through the Monitoring Officer.

3. Reasons for Recommendation

- 3.1 To keep members of Standards Committee updated on code of conduct complaints.

4 Alternative Options and Reasons for Rejection

- 4.1 There are no alternative options.

RECOMMENDATION(S)

1. That the Committee note the report.
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IMPLICATIONS:

<u>Finance and Risk</u> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Details: <p style="text-align: right;">On behalf of the Section 151 Officer</p>
<u>Legal (including Data Protection)</u> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>
Details: <p>Section 28(6) and (7) of the Localism Act 2011 requires the Council to have arrangements in place under which allegations that a district town or parish councillor within its area has failed to comply with that authority's code of conduct can be investigated and decisions made on such allegations.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">On behalf of the Solicitor to the Council</p>
<u>Staffing</u> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Details: <p style="text-align: right;">On behalf of the Head of Paid Service</p>
<u>Equality and Diversity, and Consultation</u> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Details:
<u>Environment</u> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Details: Please identify (if applicable) how this proposal/report will help the Authority meet its carbon neutral target or enhance the environment

DECISION INFORMATION:

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Please indicate which threshold applies:	
Is the decision a Key Decision? A Key Decision is an Executive decision which has a significant impact on two or more wards in the District or which results in income or expenditure to the Council above the following thresholds:	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Revenue (a) Results in the Council making Revenue Savings of £75,000 or more or (b) Results in the Council incurring Revenue Expenditure of £75,000 or more.	(a) <input type="checkbox"/> (b) <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

<p>Capital (a) Results in the Council making Capital Income of £150,000 or more or (b) Results in the Council incurring Capital Expenditure of £150,000 or more.</p> <p>District Wards Significantly Affected: <i>(to be significant in terms of its effects on communities living or working in an area comprising two or more wards in the District)</i> Please state below which wards are affected or tick All if all wards are affected:</p>	<p>(a) <input type="checkbox"/> (b) <input checked="" type="checkbox"/></p> <p>All <input type="checkbox"/></p>
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<p>If Yes, is the call-in period to be waived in respect of the decision(s) proposed within this report? <i>(decisions may only be classified as exempt from call-in with the agreement of the Monitoring Officer)</i></p> <p>Consultation carried out: <i>(this is any consultation carried out prior to the report being presented for approval)</i></p> <p> Leader <input type="checkbox"/> Deputy Leader <input type="checkbox"/> Executive <input type="checkbox"/> SLT <input type="checkbox"/> Relevant Service Manager <input type="checkbox"/> Members <input type="checkbox"/> Public <input type="checkbox"/> Other <input type="checkbox"/> </p>	<p>Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/></p>
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Links to Council Ambition: Customers, Economy, Environment, Housing

DOCUMENT INFORMATION:

Appendix No	Title
1	Councillor Complaints Received 2025/2026
2	Investigating Officer's report.

Background Papers
<i>(These are unpublished works which have been relied on to a material extent when preparing the report. They must be listed in the section below. If the report is going to Executive, you must provide copies of the background papers).</i>