

NORTH YORKSHIRE COUNCIL
STANDARDS AND GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE

13 March 2026

Complaints Update

1.0 PURPOSE OF REPORT

1.1 To update the Committee regarding standards complaint activity.

2.0 BACKGROUND

- 2.1 A standing report regarding complaints that Members and voting co-opted Members of North Yorkshire Council and parish and town councils in North Yorkshire may have breached the relevant Code of Conduct for Members is brought to scheduled ordinary meetings of the Standards and Governance Committee and other meetings as the Monitoring Officer deems appropriate.
- 2.2 North Yorkshire Council is the principal authority for parish and town councils in North Yorkshire for the purposes of the standards provisions in the Localism Act 2011. It is responsible for receiving and handling complaints that a parish/town councillor may have breached that authority's code of conduct for Members. That is the extent of North Yorkshire Council's jurisdiction in respect of parish/town council governance; parish/town councils are separate legal entities responsible for their own general governance and North Yorkshire Council has no jurisdiction to consider other complaints for example about the way in which the parish/town council has or has not done something, or about particular parish/town council decisions or employees.

3.0 CONTEXT AND SCALE

3.1 Within North Yorkshire there are currently:

- 729 individual parishes
- 412 parish and town councils, including the new town councils for Harrogate and Scarborough
- 160 parish meetings
- 90 NYC councillors

3.2 The national context:

- NYC has the largest number of parish and town councils of any local authority in the country
- The next nearest council - Somerset Council has 272 plus three groups of councils
- 51% have less than 30
- 97.5% of councils have less than 200
- There are only 6 councils with over 200 parish councils
- Only 2 councils have over 300 parish councils

3.3 The North Yorkshire context:

NYC is one of the largest local authorities in the country, in terms of geographic

area, and there is a significant number of the smallest form of parish sector organisations, parish meetings (24%). Overall, parish sector organisations are generally smaller and charge a smaller precept (if any) than other similar councils. This uniquely larger number of parish Sector organisations are spread over a significantly large rural area and generally have very limited resources.

- Within the NYC area the average precept charge is 75% less than the national average (£20,212)
- 46.6% of Parish Councils have total annual precept income less than £5k
- Only 5.6% (28) Parish Councils have total annual precept income more than £100k
- Only 4 (0.8%) Parish Councils have total annual precept income more than £300k

4.0 STANDARDS COMPLAINTS RECEIVED

Previous municipal years

- 4.1 During the period 1 April 2023 to 31 March 2024, the Council received **174** complaints that members may have breached the relevant authority's code of conduct for Members.
- 4.2 During the period 1 April 2024 to 31 March 2025, a further **133** complaints were received.
- 4.3 A more detailed breakdown of the complaints statistics for the two full municipal years is attached at **Appendix 1** to this report for Members' information.
- 4.4 The statistics for the municipal years 2023-2024 and 2024-2025 are now published on the Council's website at:

[Councillors' code of conduct | North Yorkshire Council](#)

Current municipal year

- 4.5 During the period 1 April 2025 to 27 February 2026, a further **164** complaints have been received. It is apparent that the number of complaints already received to date in the current year exceeds that of the previous year and continues to rise.
- 4.6 A more detailed breakdown of the complaints statistics for the current year is attached at **Appendix 2** to this report for Members' information.

5.0 BREAKDOWN OF COMPLAINT STATISTICS

Pre-assessments and Assessments for the current year

- 5.1 So far this municipal year, of the **164** complaints received:
- a) **70** complaints were pre-assessed by the Monitoring Officer/Deputy Monitoring Officer and did not proceed to full assessment. For example:
- **1** against an NYC Councillor where there was no evidence presented that the councillor was acting in their official capacity at the relevant times;
 - **24** against parish/town councillors which did not progress to an assessment as they were deemed to be outside the Monitoring Officer's jurisdiction as they related to matters of internal parish council governance and parish council employees;
 - **12** against councillors of one town council which did not progress to an

assessment as they were deemed to be outside the Monitoring Officer's jurisdiction as they related to matters of internal town council governance;

- **4** against parish councillors where there was no evidence presented that the councillor was acting in their official capacity at the relevant times;
- **1** which was mistakenly sent to the NYC Monitoring Officer when it related to another council;
- **1** which was a second anonymous complaint against an NYC Councillor – the first related complaint had been assessed and no further action was required;
- **1** against an NYC Councillor where there was no evidence of a breach of the Code but in any event the subject member had already apologised to the complainant;
- **2** against town councillors where there was no evidence that comments on social media were posted whilst the councillor was acting in their official capacity;
- **1** against a town councillor which fell outside the MO jurisdiction as the councillor was no longer serving;
- **3** against 3 councillors of the same council which were not progressed;
- **20** unspecified complaints concerning governance issues at a particular council.

b) **87** complaints have progressed to a full assessment by the Monitoring Officer/Deputy Monitoring Officer in consultation with the Independent Persons for Standards. Of those assessed complaints:

i. **83** complaints did not merit referral for formal investigation, for example:

- a parish councillor's failure to declare an interest, which had been addressed by them;
- allegations of a parish councillor bullying and harassing the clerk where insufficient evidence was provided of a potential breach of the relevant code of conduct;
- two concerned different NYC Councillors, one relating to levels of engagement with a parish council, and the other regarding alleged disrespect, whereby in both cases there was insufficient evidence presented of a potential breach of the Code of Conduct;
- two concerned the same NYC Councillor from the same member of the public - in both cases there was insufficient evidence presented of a potential breach of the Code of Conduct;
- an anonymous complaint regarding an NYC Councillor alleging illegal activity which was not evidenced;
- self-referrals by two councillors of two different councils which did not merit further action;
- nine complaints concerning four councillors belonging to the same Town Council – where mediation is being advocated by the Monitoring Officer to address the apparent ongoing dysfunctional working relationships between councillors and with members of the public.

ii. **1** complaint was recommended for informal resolution: the parish councillor concerned was urged to consider apologising to the complainant.

iii. **3** complaints have been referred for investigation (**Investigations 11, 12 and 13** listed in section 5.2 below).

c) It is anticipated that at least **3** further complaints will have been assessed by the time of this meeting.

The remaining are in preparatory stages or awaiting pre-assessment or assessment. A further update will be given to the Committee by the Monitoring Officer at the next scheduled meeting.

Investigations/Determinations since Vesting Day

5.2 Since Vesting Day (1 April 2023), 35 complaints have been referred for investigation, through 13 investigations:

2023 - 2024

- **Investigation 1** – 1 complaint against 1 North Yorkshire Councillor. Referred to Hearings Panel. **Breach of Code found**. Sanction – apologies. Recommendations made to authority.
- **Investigation 2** – 1 complaint against 11 Town Councillors. Referred to Hearings Panel. **No breach**. Recommendations made to authority.
- **Investigation 3** – 1 complaint against 2 individual Parish Councillors. Referred to Hearings Panel. **Breach of Code found**. Recommended sanction – apologies, training, review of one PC Code.
- **Investigation 4** – 1 complaint against 1 individual Parish Councillor. Referred to Hearings Panel. **Breach of Code found**. Sanction – recommended that PC issue private letter of censure to the subject Member.
- **Investigation 5** – 2 complaints from different individuals about the same matter against 1 Town Councillor. The Investigating Officer found **no evidence of breach** of code. Accepted by Monitoring Officer and Independent Person as sufficient. No further action required.
- **Investigation 6** - 1 complaint against 1 individual Parish Councilor. Referred to Hearings Panel. **Breach of Code found**. Sanction – recommended that the subject Member undertake inclusion and diversity training.
- **Investigation 7** – 2 complaints from different individuals about the same matter against 1 North Yorkshire Councillor. Complaint is live. The Monitoring Officer will update the Committee when in a position to do so.

2024 - 2025

- **Investigation 8** – 2 complaints about the same matter against 4 Town Councillors. The Investigating Officer found **no evidence of breach** of code. Accepted by Monitoring Officer and Independent Person as sufficient. No further action required.
- **Investigation 9** – 3 complaints about the same matter against 1 Town Councillor. The Investigating Officer concluded that there was **evidence of a breach** of the code by the subject member who had since resigned. In accordance with section 9 of the North Yorkshire Council standards complaints procedure, the Deputy Monitoring Officer consulted the Independent Person for Standards and the parties and was satisfied the matter could reasonably be **resolved informally** without the need for a Hearing.

- **Investigation 10** – 1 complaint against 1 individual Town Councillor.
The Investigating Officer found **no evidence of breach** of code. Accepted by Monitoring Officer and Independent Person as sufficient. No further action required.

2025 – 2026

- **Investigation 11** – 1 complaint against 1 North Yorkshire Councillor.
Referred to Hearings Panel. **Breach of Code found**. Sanction – repayment to Council for use of pool cars at weekends, reimbursement to Council for mileage claim payments claimed in error, return of Council mobile telephone, publication of Decision Notice. Recommendations also made.
- **Investigation 12** – 1 complaint against 1 North Yorkshire Councillor.
The Investigating Officer found **no evidence of breach** of code. Accepted by Monitoring Officer and Independent Person as sufficient. No further action required.
- **Investigation 13** – 1 complaint against 1 Town Councillor.
This complaint is live. The Monitoring Officer will update the Committee when in a position to do so.

5.3 The volume of complaints and associated correspondence and information governance requests has meant a sustained heavy workload for officers and the Independent Persons during the three years since Vesting Day. Whilst the flow of new complaints had slowed during 2024/2025, Members will see that the rate has increased once again as can be seen from section 4 of the report which shows the comparative figures for years one, two, and three. Despite this upturn, the average time taken to process complaints remains significantly reduced, following the erosion of the previous backlog which accrued after Vesting Day and the introduction of the pre-assessment stage of complaint handling and other streamlining of processes.

5.4 The Monitoring Officer and Deputy Monitoring Officer would again wish to take this opportunity to thank all the Independent Persons for their valued views, time, patience and input into what can be time-consuming and complex matters.

6.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

6.1 There are no significant financial implications arising from this report.

7.0 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

7.1 There are no significant legal implications arising from this report.

8.0 ENVIRONMENTAL/CLIMATE CHANGE IMPLICATIONS

8.1 There are no significant environmental/climate change implications arising from this report.

9.0 EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

9.1 There are no significant equalities implications arising from this report

10.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

10.1 That the Committee notes the current position on standards complaints received.

BARRY KHAN

Assistant Chief Executive, Legal and Democratic Services and Monitoring Officer

Background Documents: None

County Hall

NORTHALLERTON

2 March 2026