



## Notice of a public meeting of

### Joint Standards Committee Hearings Sub-Committee

- To:** Councillors Fisher and Lomas (CYC Members)  
Councillor Chambers (Parish Council Member)
- Mr J Leigh and Ms R Mazza (Independent Persons)
- Date:** Thursday, 18 April 2024
- Time:** 2.45 pm
- Venue:** The Snow Room - Ground Floor, West Offices (G035)

### AGENDA

- 1. Appointment of Chair**  
To appoint a Member to chair the hearing.
- 2. Declarations of Interest** (Pages 1 - 2)  
At this point in the meeting, Members and co-opted members are asked to declare any disclosable pecuniary interest, or other registerable interest, they might have in respect of business on this agenda, if they have not already done so in advance on the Register of Interests. The disclosure must include the nature of the interest. An interest must also be disclosed in the meeting when it becomes apparent to the member during the meeting.

[Please see attached sheet for further guidance for Members].

**3. Exclusion of Press and Public**

To consider whether to exclude the Press and Public at any point in the hearing when there is a possibility that exempt information under Paragraph 1 of Schedule 12A to Section 100A of the Local Government Act 1972 (as revised by The Local Government (Access to Information) (Variation) Order 2006) may be disclosed; namely, the identity of any of the witnesses called to give evidence.

**4. Complaint against a Member of a Council (Pages 3 - 22) covered by the Joint Standards Committee**

To consider a complaint made against a Member of City of York Council, which has been referred to the Hearings Sub-Committee for determination following an investigation.

**5. Urgent Business**

Any other business which the Chair considers urgent under the Local Government Act 1972.

Democratic Services officer responsible for this meeting:

Name: Ben Jewitt

Contact details:

- Telephone – (01904) 553073
- E-mail – [benjamin.jewitt@york.gov.uk](mailto:benjamin.jewitt@york.gov.uk)

For more information about any of the following please contact the Democratic Services Officer responsible for servicing this meeting:

- Registering to speak
- Business of the meeting
- Any special arrangements
- Copies of reports and
- For receiving reports in other formats

Contact details are set out above.

**This information can be provided in your own language.**

**我們也用您們的語言提供這個信息 (Cantonese)**

এই তথ্য আপনার নিজের ভাষায় দেয়া যেতে পারে। (Bengali)

Ta informacja może być dostarczona w twoim (Polish)  
własnym języku.

Bu bilgiyi kendi dilinizde almanız mümkündür. (Turkish)

یہ معلومات آپ کی اپنی زبان (بولی) میں بھی مہیا کی جاسکتی ہیں۔ (Urdu)

**☎ (01904) 551550**

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### Declarations of Interest – guidance for Members

- (1) Members must consider their interests, and act according to the following:

Type of Interest	You must
Disclosable Pecuniary Interests	Disclose the interest, not participate in the discussion or vote, and leave the meeting <u>unless</u> you have a dispensation.
Other Registrable Interests (Directly Related) <b>OR</b> Non-Registrable Interests (Directly Related)	Disclose the interest; speak on the item <u>only if</u> the public are also allowed to speak, but otherwise not participate in the discussion or vote, and leave the meeting <u>unless</u> you have a dispensation.
Other Registrable Interests (Affects) <b>OR</b> Non-Registrable Interests (Affects)	Disclose the interest; remain in the meeting, participate and vote <u>unless</u> the matter affects the financial interest or well-being: (a) to a greater extent than it affects the financial interest or well-being of a majority of inhabitants of the affected ward; and (b) a reasonable member of the public knowing all the facts would believe that it would affect your view of the wider public interest. In which case, speak on the item <u>only if</u> the public are also allowed to speak, but otherwise do not participate in the discussion or vote, and leave the meeting <u>unless</u> you have a dispensation.

- (2) Disclosable pecuniary interests relate to the Member concerned or their spouse/partner.
- (3) Members in arrears of Council Tax by more than two months must not vote in decisions on, or which might affect, budget calculations,

and must disclose at the meeting that this restriction applies to them. A failure to comply with these requirements is a criminal offence under section 106 of the Local Government Finance Act 1992.



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**Standards Hearing Sub-Committee****18 April 2024****Public Report**

Report of the Monitoring Officer

**Complaint received in respect of a City of York Councillor: REF 2023/14****Background**

1. On 16 October 2023, the Monitoring Officer received a complaint from an officer of the Council, alleging that a Councillor had breached the Code of Conduct by copying third parties into a formal complaint that the Councillor had made against that officer's conduct. On the same day, a second officer submitted a complaint relating to the same incident and giving additional detail as to the potential breach of the Member/Officer Protocol and the Member Code of Conduct.
2. The complaint was assessed by a Deputy Monitoring Officer, in consultation with the Independent Person, and subsequently referred for investigation by a Senior Lawyer employed by City of York Council.
3. The investigating officer's report has been completed and provided to the subject member for comments and must now be considered by a Joint Standards Committee Hearings Committee in accordance with the Case Handling Procedure set out at Appendix 29 of the Constitution.
4. The investigating officer is of the opinion that the Councillor did breach the Code of Conduct.
5. The panel have received a copy of the complaint, the investigating officer's report, as well as a copy of the Council's Code of Conduct.

**The Member/Officer Protocol**

6. The Protocol for Officer / Member Relations forms Appendix 16 to the City of York Council Constitution. The relevant provisions include:

- *A member must treat others with respect, must not bully or harass people;*
- *Officers can expect members:*
  - *to treat them fairly and with respect, dignity and courtesy*
  - *to act with integrity, to give support and to respect appropriate confidentiality*
  - *to comply at all times with the Member Code of Conduct, the law, the Constitution and such other policies, procedures, protocols and conventions agreed by the Council.*
- *A member who is unhappy about the actions taken by, or conduct of, an officer should:*
  - *avoid personal attacks on, or abuse of, the officer at all times*
  - *ensure that any criticism is well founded and constructive*
  - *ensure that any criticism is made in private*
  - *take up the concern with the Chief Operating Officer or appropriate Chief Officer*

## **The Code of Conduct**

7. As required by the Localism Act 2011, the City of York Council has adopted a Code of Conduct which sets out the conduct expected of Councillors when acting as such. Particularly relevant to this complaint are the following requirements of members:

- *I treat all persons fairly and with respect; and*
- *I lead by example and act in a way that secures public confidence in the role of Councillor.*
- *I treat other Councillors and members of the public with respect.*
- *I treat local authority employees, employees and representatives of partner organisations and those*

*volunteering for the local authority with respect and respect the role they play.*

- *Respect means politeness and courtesy in behaviour, speech, and in the written word. Debate and having different views are all part of a healthy democracy. As a Councillor, you can express, challenge, criticise and disagree with views, ideas, opinions and policies in a robust but civil manner. You should not, however, subject individuals, groups of people or organisations to personal attack.*
- *I do not bully any person.*
- *I do not harass any person.*

8. The Local Government Association publishes guidance on complaints handling which is referred to as a background document. Key aspects of that guidance regarding the general obligations under the code of conduct are:

- i. Respect. You will engage in robust debate at times and are expected to express, challenge, criticise and disagree with views, ideas, opinions, and policies. Doing these things in a respectful way will help you to build and maintain healthy working relationships with fellow councillors, officers, and members of the public, it encourages others to treat you with respect and helps to avoid conflict and stress. Respectful and healthy working relationships and a culture of mutual respect can encourage positive debate and meaningful communication which in turn can increase the exchange of ideas, understanding and knowledge. Examples of ways in which you can show respect are by being polite and courteous, listening and paying attention to others, having consideration for other people's feelings, following protocols and rules, showing appreciation and thanks and being kind.
- ii. Bullying. Bullying may be characterised as offensive, intimidating, malicious, insulting, or humiliating behaviour, an abuse or misuse of power that can make a person feel vulnerable, upset, undermined, humiliated, denigrated or threatened. Bullying behaviour may be in person, by telephone or in writing, including emails, texts, or online communications such as social media.

Examples of bullying include inappropriate comments about someone's performance, abuse of authority or power such as placing unreasonable expectations on someone in relation to their job, responsibilities or hours of work.

- iii. Disrespectful behaviour. Failure to treat others with respect will occur when unreasonable or demeaning behaviour is directed by one person against or about another. It is important to remember that any behaviour that a reasonable person would think would influence the willingness of fellow councillors, officers or members of the public to speak up or interact with you because they expect the encounter will be unpleasant or highly uncomfortable fits the definition of disrespectful behaviour.
- iv. Recent case law has confirmed that local authority officers should be protected from unwarranted comments that may have an adverse effect on good administration and states that it is in the public interest that officers are not subject to offensive, abusive attacks and unwarranted comments that prevents them from carrying out their duties or undermine public confidence in the administration. That said, officers who are in more senior positions, for example chief executives or heads of services, will also be expected to have a greater degree of robustness.

## **The Hearing Process**

9. The Joint Standards Committee has approved a procedure for hearings. In line with that procedure the complainant and subject member have been asked to indicate whether they intend to attend the hearing, to identify facts which they say are in dispute, and provide their views as to whether any part of the hearing should be in public. These responses have been shared with the Panel.

## **Issues to be determined**

10. Has the Councillor breached the Code of Conduct?
11. In the event that the Sub committee finds that the Code has been breached, it will need to determine whether a sanction should be imposed and if so, what sanction.

## **Implications**

### **Financial**

Not applicable to this report.

### **Human Resources (HR)**

The Council has a duty of care to its employees and failure to protect employees from harmful behaviour could lead to grievance/ tribunal proceedings.

### **Equalities**

The Equality Act 2010 places specific duties on Local Authorities, including the presence of a clear and concise Code of Conduct which prohibits unlawful discrimination and gives the public confidence in Councillors. Ensuring that the Code of Conduct is maintained meets the Nolan principles and also supports the prohibition.

### **Legal**

As detailed within this report.

### **Crime and Disorder, Information Technology (IT) and Property**

Not applicable to this report.

### **Other**

Not applicable to this report.

**Contact Details**

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**Chief Officer Responsible for the report:**

**Bryn Roberts  
Director of Governance & Monitoring  
Officer**

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**Report**  **Date** 10 April 2024  
**Approved**

**Wards Affected:**

**All**

**For further information please contact the author of the report**

**Background Papers:**

- City of York Council Code of Conduct and Procedure for Handling of Complaints
- City of York Council Constitution

By virtue of paragraph(s) 1, 2 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A  
of the Local Government Act 1972.

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