

Joint Standards Committee Annual Report 2025/2026

Foreword from the Chair

It has been a busy year for the Joint Standards Committee as we have continued to manage the complaints process in an open, fair, and transparent way. I am pleased to report that we have undertaken a review of the complaints procedure, previously approved by Full Council. This has resulted in a simple, clear and transparent process, details of which are in this annual report.

Rose Mazza and Joe Leigh, our Independent Persons, have again offered their expert advice and observations in a voluntary capacity. I would personally like to thank Joe for his advice and to wish him well following his retirement from the committee. Thank you also to Rose for managing an increased workload while the recruitment process for new Independent Persons took place. I am pleased to report that Sheila Hollingworth and Mark Fynn are now in post, and I welcome them to the committee.

I have also been pleased to chair the member development and training working group, whose members have contributed significantly to the training programme now available. I would encourage members to make the most of the new training opportunities available to them on a wide range of topics and to provide feedback or suggestions for improvement. An evaluation pro forma is sent to attendees after each session and any comments can be sent to Jane Meller, jane.meller@york.gov.uk. Our next task is underway as we prepare the 2027 Induction Programme.

I would like to thank the Monitoring Officer, his deputies, Julie Gallagher and Chris Coss, and their teams, for their vital support and guidance. I also want to acknowledge the help and support given by Democratic Services, and in particular, Jane Meller.

Cllr C Runciman

Chair of Joint Standards Committee

Membership of the Committee

1. The Committee would like to thank all its members for supporting and attending the meetings during this year. They especially wish to acknowledge the advice and support freely given to the Committee by Mr Joe Leigh, who retired as an Independent Person in September 2025. At their first meeting of the municipal year, the Committee appointed Councillor Carol Runciman as the Chair and Parish Councillor Mark Waudby as the Vice Chair.

City of York Council:

- Councillor Tony Fisher
- Councillor Jenny Kent
- Councillor Michael Pavlovic
- Councillor Carol Runciman
- Councillor Chris Steward

Parish Councils:

- Councillor Christopher Chambers
- Councillor Diane Geogheghan-Breen
- Councillor Mark Waudby

Independent Persons

- Mr Joe Leigh (until September 2025)
- Ms Rose Mazza

2. Following a successful phase of recruitment, two Independent Persons, Mark Fynn and Sheila Hollingworth, have been recruited to the Joint Standards Committee, their appointment was confirmed at the Full Council meeting, 26 March 2026.

Complaints

3. The Council received the following Code of Conduct complaints in the Municipal year May 2025 to May 2026:

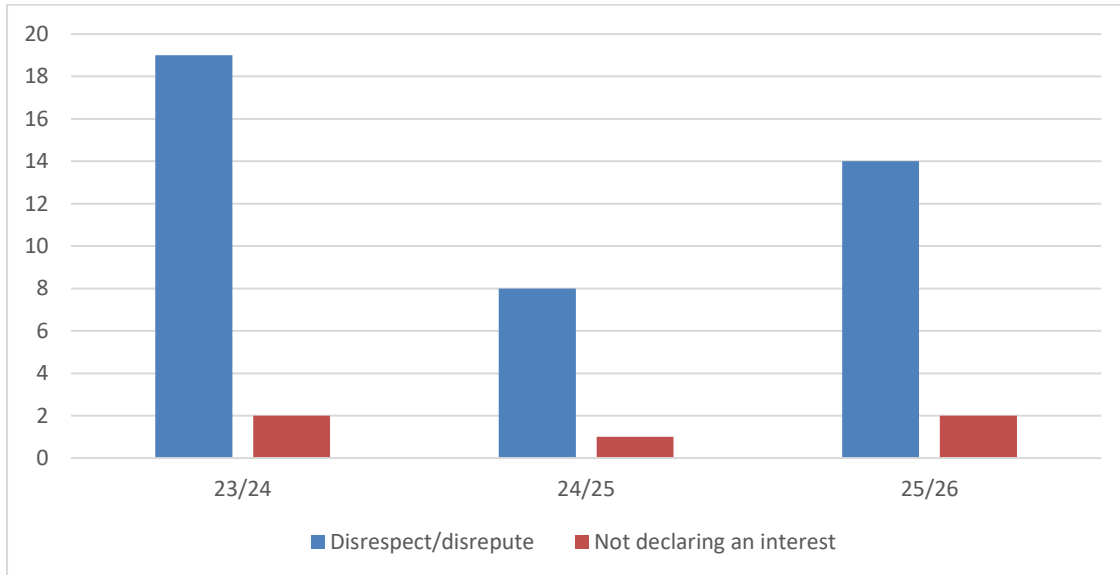
Total number of complaints made that met the initial threshold: 16

Of those, number closed: 15

Number of current year complaints ongoing: 1

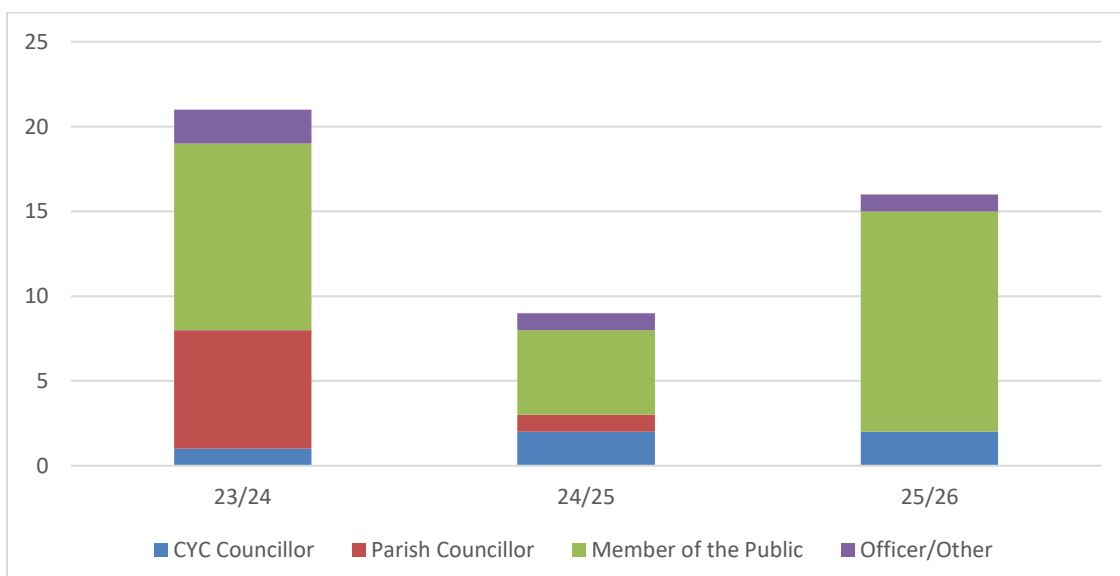
4. The following charts illustrate the nature of the complaints, who they came from, whether they related to Parish or CYC councillors and how they were dealt with (if closed) in the municipal years 23/24, 24/25 and 25/26 to allow for comparison.

Nature of complaints



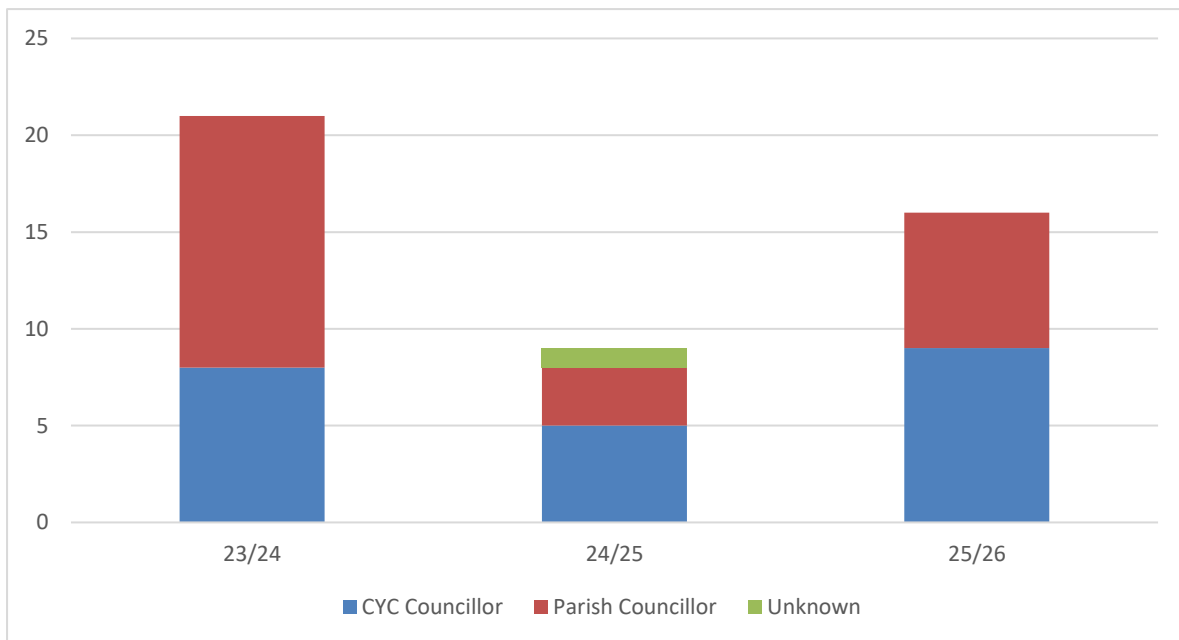
Nature of Complaints	23/24	24/25	25/26
Disrespect/disrepute	19	8	14
Not declaring an interest	2	1	2
Total	21	9	16

Origin of complaint



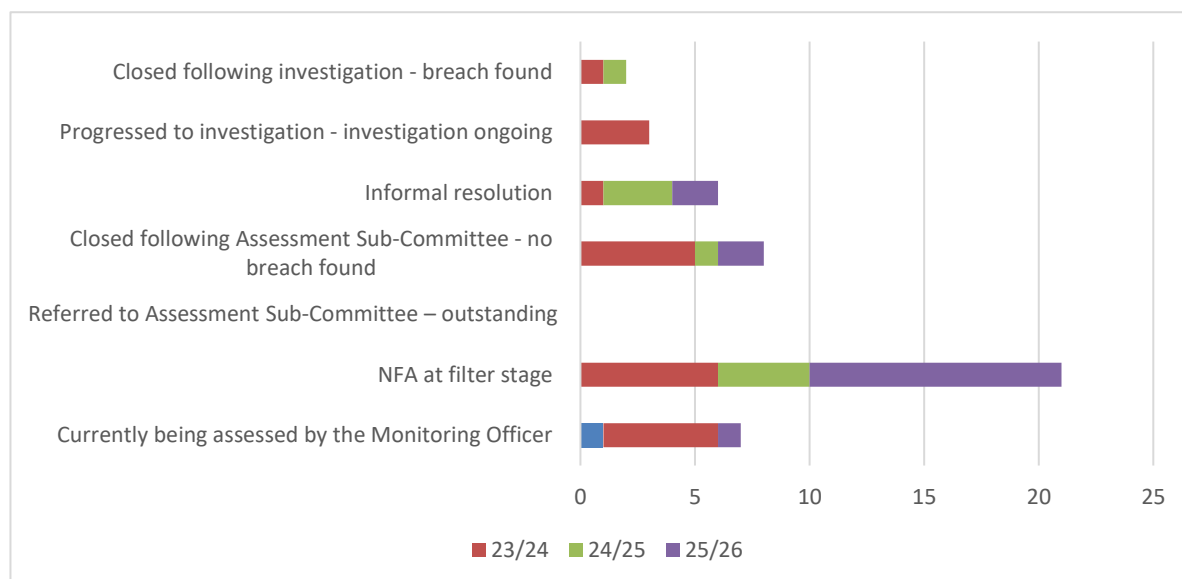
Origin of Complaint	23/24	24/25	25/26
CYC Councillor	1	2	2
Parish Councillor	7	1	0
Member of the Public	11	5	13
Officer/Other	2	1	1
Total	21	9	16

Subject of complaint



Subject of Complaint	23/24	24/25	25/26
CYC Councillor	8	5	9
Parish Councillor	13	3	7
Unknown		1	
Total	21	9	16

Outcome of complaints received



Outcome of complaints	23/24	24/25	25/26
Currently being assessed by the Monitoring Officer	5	0	1
NFA at filter stage	6	4	11
Referred to Assessment Sub-Committee – outstanding	0	0	0
Closed following Assessment Sub-Committee - no breach found	5	1	2
Informal resolution	1	3	2
Progressed to investigation - investigation ongoing	3	0	0
Closed following investigation - breach found	1	1	0
Total	21	9	16

5. All of the complaints received have been reported to meetings of the Joint Standards Committee throughout the year.

Other Work of the Committee

Results of Government consultation on strengthening the standards and conduct framework for local authorities in England.

6. As was noted in last year's annual report, the Committee provided their cross-party response to the Government consultation paper on strengthening the standards and conduct framework for local authorities in England, the outcome of which was published in November 2025.
7. The government proposes to legislate to prescribe a mandatory code, this will include:
 - a behavioural code,
 - the requirement for elected members and co-opted members to co-operate with code of conduct investigations,
 - and that submitting multiple vexatious complaints would be a code of conduct breach.

Local authorities will be able to develop their own guidance and protocols which must align with the mandatory code but will not be part of the code or arrangements for enforcement.

All code of conduct investigations undertaken by standards committees will be required to publish their findings and decisions, included those investigations that are found to be 'no case to answer'.

Complainants and respondents will have a legal 'right for review' of standards committee investigations.

Authorities will have the power to suspend elected members for serious code of conduct breaches for a maximum of 6 months, with the option to withhold allowances and a premises / facilities ban where appropriate.

An elected member may be placed on suspension in response to serious code of conduct allegations subject to external investigation.

An elected member or co-opted member may be disqualified if they receive a sanction of suspension for the maximum period of 6 months twice over a 5-year period.

While there is no timeline to date for these measures to be implemented, members can read the full details of the consultation [here](#):

Member Development and Training

8. At the Joint Standards meeting in May 2025, the committee agreed to establish a Member Development Working Group. The group has since met on four occasions and has established the priorities for training, a protocol for evaluating the training provided for members, a protocol for managing member training records, and has discussed the development of the 2027 Member Induction and Training programme.
9. Membership of the working group is as follows:
Cllr Runciman (Chair)
Cllr Steward (Vice-Chair)
Cllr Fisher
Cllrs Kent / Pavlovic
Parish Cllr Geoghegan-Breen
Ms R Mazza (Independent Person)

Member Training 2026

10. An outline training programme has been collated and is contained at Annex 1 of this report. Members should note this is a live document and subject to change.

Standards Training

11. Members participated in a code of conduct refresher which was held in person at West Offices on 3 February 2026 and delivered by the Director of Governance. The supporting presentation and recording will be available for members to refer to on the Members' Portal.

Evaluating Training

12. Members will be sent an evaluation form immediately following a member training session. The returns will be anonymised and fed back to the trainer and organiser. The data will form part of the training section of this section annual report of Joint Standards.

Member Training Records – essential training

13. Democratic Services will keep member records for all core/essential training. The training considered essential by the working group includes Planning, Licensing, Audit and Governance, and Standards/Code of Conduct training. Members will be contacted annually to confirm their record. Records will subsequently be anonymised and included in this section of the annual report of Joint Standards.

Members' Portal

14. The working group are also overseeing the revamp of the Members' Portal, which will host all the information members may need for meetings, training, scrutiny etc, in a format that is user friendly and easy to access.

Member Induction and Training – 2027

15. The outline proposal for the 2027 Member Induction was shared with the working group at their meeting in April, this will involve a half day in person, followed by a full programme of Member training. In considering the plans, it was agreed to provide personal safety guidance and key induction dates to potential new members following close of registrations. The programme will be supported through the Members' Portal, a Members' handbook and a monthly newsletter. A more detailed plan will be brought back to the working group later in the year.

Review of allegation handling arrangements

16. During the autumn, the committee also reviewed the allegation handling arrangements, which are set out in Appendix 29 of the Constitution. These have been revised to make the process clearer and aims to address the expectations of both Complainants and Subject Members in a fair and open way. The key changes are as follows:
 - The use of sub-committees is removed entirely.
 - LGA guidance is clear that hearings ought to be a last resort. In keeping with the “light touch” approach, hearings are reserved for the most serious or complex matters, or where the public interest demands that a Subject Member be given the chance to

clear their name or a complainant be given the satisfaction that their allegation was formally upheld.

- The approach to Anonymity, Confidentiality and Publicity are now clearly explained
- Parallel criminal or regulatory investigations no longer automatically freeze Standards procedures
- A chair/vice chair *veto* is now suggested, in place of using an inquisitorial sub-committee, in all cases concerning the Leader, opposition Leader, Executive or shadow executive, and all chairs and vice chairs.
- Hearings may now be “on paper” as well as oral.
- Adjournments are now expressly provided for.
- Hearing procedures are now set out more clearly to control the use and presentation of evidence and witnesses, the order of business and the removal of the requirement for separate hearings for findings and for sanctions
- Provision of reasons for decisions are now restricted to the complainant and Subject Member, to comply with duties for an appeal by way of Judicial Review or to the Ombudsman, but also to free the Authority to better control press releases.
- Sanctions are now clearly explained so that all parties’ expectations are managed.
- A new ‘written warning’ is added, to provide a documentary train that makes the management of patterned behaviour easier.

17. The revised Joint Standards Procedures, Appendix 29 of the Constitution, were unanimously approved by Full Council on 26 March 2026.

Future work

18. The committee will be working with officers to implement the strengthened standards and conduct framework once the timeline has been confirmed by the Government.

19. The main focus of the Member Development working group will be the development of the Member Induction and Training package for 2027 and the Members' Portal.

Annex 1 Member Training Programme 2026