

This document sets out an overview of an assessment undertaken by myself as Bedford Borough Council's newly appointed Monitoring Officer in relation to historic complaints submitted by a Town/Parish Councillor against fellow Town/Parish Councillors or Bedford Borough Councillors. I agreed to undertake this assessment further to discussions with the Complainant and the Chair and Vice-Chair of the Borough Council's Standards Committee further to allegations that the complaints had not been processed in full accordance with the Council's procedure for handling complaints against Councillors.

A total of 47 complaints were submitted between 2 November 2023 and 8 December 2024 from the same Town/Parish Councillor. The original complaints, as submitted, have been assessed using a two-stage assessment process, as follows:

Stage one – jurisdictional test

The stage one assessment includes considerations, such as:

- Whether the Subject Councillor is still in office as a Parish Councillor
- Whether the Subject Councillor was acting in an official capacity and the Councillor Code of Conduct was engaged

Stage two – assessment of complaint and evidence

The stage two assessment includes considerations, such as:

- Whether there is sufficient evidence
- Whether there are any alternative actions that could be taken to resolve matters
- Whether the allegation falls under the category of robust political debate or is protected by freedom of speech/expression
- Whether the complaints have been submitted maliciously, are politically motivated or have been submitted on the basis of 'tit-for-tat'
- Whether the allegations are serious enough to justify formal investigation
- Whether referral for formal investigation is in the public interest

Date	Against	Summary	Monitoring Officer Assessment
01/11/23	Subject Councillor A	Complaint accusing the Subject Councillor of an inappropriate response to concerns raised about use of blue lights on a security vehicle	Second stage assessment: The allegations made are not serious enough to warrant formal investigation in relation to a breach of the Councillor Code of Conduct – no further action
02/11/23	Subject Councillor B	Complaint alleging voting irregularities at a Parish Council meeting	First stage assessment: No longer a Parish Councillor – no further action
02/11/23	Subject Councillor C	Complaint alleging the Subject Councillor lied to support voting irregularities at a Parish Council meeting	First stage assessment: No longer a Parish Councillor – no further action
27/11/23	Subject Councillor B	Complaint regarding the conduct of a Parish Council meeting	First stage assessment: No longer a Parish Councillor – no further action
27/11/23	Subject Councillor A	Complaint alleging bullying in response to a complaint submitted against the Complainant by the Subject Councillor	Second stage assessment: This complaint materialised as part of a response the Complainant made in relation to a complaint against him by the Subject Councillor. On this basis, it is my view that the complaint was submitted on the basis of 'tit-for-tat' – no further action

28/11/23	Subject Councillor A	Complaint regarding alleged malicious comments on a WhatsApp messages regarding access to the parish notice board and notice provided of upcoming meetings.	Second stage assessment: The allegations made are not serious enough to warrant formal investigation in relation to a breach of the Councillor Code of Conduct – no further action
27/12/23	Subject Councillor B	Complaint alleging instances of bullying	First stage assessment: No longer a Parish Councillor – no further action
09/01/24	Subject Councillor B	Complaint regarding the Council's co-option process	First stage assessment: No longer a Parish Councillor – no further action
09/01/24	Subject Councillor A	Complaint regarding email exchange whereby the Subject Councillor is accused of providing false information regarding details of a Sub-Committee of the Council	Second stage assessment: The allegations made are not serious enough to warrant formal investigation in relation to a breach of the Councillor Code of Conduct and fall under the category of robust political debate. Any clarification as to the existence or formation of a Sub-Committee should have been directed to the Parish Clerk – no further action
12/02/24	Subject Councillor B	Complaint regarding opposition to a motion proposed at a meeting of the Council and refusal to engage with email migration project	First stage assessment: No longer a Parish Councillor – no further action

12/02/24	Subject Councillor A	Complaint regarding opposition to a motion proposed at a meeting of the Council and objections to sharing access to emails as part of migration process	<p>Second stage assessment:</p> <p>The allegations made are not serious enough to warrant formal investigation in relation to a breach of the Councillor Code of Conduct and fall under the category of robust political debate – no further action</p>
11/04/24	Subject Councillor B	No allegations identified in the complaint which amount to a breach of the Councillor Code of Conduct	<p>First stage assessment:</p> <p>No longer a Parish Councillor – no further action</p>
11/04/24	Subject Councillor D	Complaint relating to behaviour at a Parish Council meeting	<p>Second stage assessment:</p> <p>The allegations made are not serious enough to warrant formal investigation in relation to a breach of the Councillor Code of Conduct and fall under the category of robust political debate. Existing provisions within Standing Orders could have been used to manage disturbance at the meeting, which it appears was exacerbated by the Complainant covertly filming the Subject Councillor during the meeting – no further action</p>
11/04/24	Subject Councillor A	Complaint alleging a breach of the Council's Standing Orders	<p>Second stage assessment:</p> <p>The allegations made are not serious enough to warrant formal investigation in relation to a breach of the Councillor Code of Conduct and fall under the category of robust political debate – no further action</p>

30/04/24	Subject Councillor E	Misuse of position and influencing other members of the Council to vote against the Complainant's motion	<p>Second stage assessment:</p> <p>The allegations made are not serious enough to warrant formal investigation in relation to a breach of the Councillor Code of Conduct and fall under the category of robust political debate – no further action</p>
30/04/24	Subject Councillor D	Complaint regarding accusation of a breach of Equalities Act in seeking to remove the Complainant from office and allegation of misuse of position conferring an advantage to discredit the complainant	<p>Second stage assessment:</p> <p>The allegations made are not serious enough to warrant formal investigation in relation to a breach of the Councillor Code of Conduct and fall under the category of robust political debate. There is insufficient evidence to support an allegation of a breach of the Equalities Act in relation to the complaint – no further action</p>
30/04/24	Subject Councillor A	Complaint alleging a misuse of position and conferring an advantage by interjecting in an update the Complainant was providing at the meeting	<p>Second stage assessment:</p> <p>The allegations made are not serious enough to warrant formal investigation in relation to a breach of the Councillor Code of Conduct and fall under the category of robust political debate – no further action</p>
30/04/24	Subject Councillor B	Complaint alleging a misuse of position and conferring an advantage over the Complainant to have items heard at a meeting which he knew would discredit the Complainant	<p>First stage assessment:</p> <p>No longer a Parish Councillor – no further action</p>

30/04/24	Subject Councillor F	Complaint alleging a misuse of position and conferring an advantage over the complainant by interjecting in an update the Complainant was providing at a meeting	<p>Second stage assessment:</p> <p>The allegations made are not serious enough to warrant formal investigation in relation to a breach of the Councillor Code of Conduct and fall under the category of robust political debate – no further action</p>
01/05/24	Subject Councillor E	Complaint alleging a misuse of position to attempt to remove a planning objection in his capacity as a Borough Councillor	<p>Second stage assessment:</p> <p>There is insufficient evidence to substantiate that the Subject Councillor was misusing their position. They disagreed with an objection the Parish Council had put forward and intended to challenge this in their capacity as Borough Council, which is the Councillor's prerogative – no further action</p>
01/05/24	Subject Councillor G	Complaint alleging misuse of position by calling in a planning application in his capacity as a Borough Councillor and making a false statement	<p>Second stage assessment:</p> <p>The Subject Councillor is entitled to exercise his right to call-in a planning application in his capacity as a Borough Councillor. With regard to the accusations of making false statements, I do not believe it is reasonable to expect the Subject Councillor to remember details relating to the allegations made given the significant time that has since passed – no further action</p>
01/05/24	Subject Councillor D	Complaint alleging misuse of position to attempt to overturn a decision of a delegated committee	<p>Second stage assessment:</p> <p>There is insufficient evidence as part of the complaint to identify where any breach of the Councillor Code of Conduct has occurred – no further action</p>

17/06/24	Subject Councillor B	Complaint regarding conduct at meetings and an allegation of bullying	First stage assessment: No longer a Parish Councillor – no further action
17/06/24	Subject Councillor A	Complaint regarding a challenge in relation to the legalities of an extraordinary meeting and an allegation of bullying	Second stage assessment: The allegations made are not serious enough to warrant formal investigation in relation to a breach of the Councillor Code of Conduct and fall under the category of robust political debate – no further action
17/06/24	Subject Councillor D	Complaint regarding a challenge in relation to the legalities of an extraordinary meeting and an allegation of bullying.	Second stage assessment: The allegations made are not serious enough to warrant formal investigation in relation to a breach of the Councillor Code of Conduct and fall under the category of robust political debate – no further action
17/06/24	Subject Councillor E	Complaint regarding consideration and final vote associated with planning application and actions taken to attempt to reverse the decision	Second stage assessment: The allegations made are not serious enough to warrant formal investigation in relation to a breach of the Councillor Code of Conduct and fall under the category of robust political debate – no further action

24/08/24	Subject Councillor E	Complaint alleging false and vexatious allegations of racism against the Complainant and questioning his integrity	<p>Second stage assessment:</p> <p>The allegations relate to the personal views of the Complainant regarding the Subject Councillor's integrity in respect of declaring a conflict of interest and leaving the meeting room. Having reviewed an audio recording of this matter I believe this would fall under the category of robust political debate and would also be protected under Article 10 of the European Convention of Human Rights under freedom of expression/speech.</p> <p>The Subject Councillor can also be heard expressing a view that "he too felt there were racist overtones in there", presumably referring to a document under consideration at the meeting. I do not believe this was a direct allegation of racism against the Complainant and that the Subject Councillor was expressing his personal opinion on the tone and content of a document. It is my view that this would also be protected under Article 10 of the European Convention of Human Rights under freedom of expression/speech - no further action</p>
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25/08/24	Subject Councillor D	Complaint regarding homophobic comments in a WhatsApp message	<p>Second stage assessment:</p> <p>Having reviewed the complaint and a supporting screenshot of the message exchange, whilst both messages use language which an ordinary member of the public would not expect their Parish Councillors to use, there is no evidence that these messages related to Council business or that either party was acting in an official capacity. I do not believe the Subject Councillor's message constitutes homophobia as is alleged and it is my view that this complaint has been submitted on the basis of 'tit-for-tat' given the content and tone of the Complainant's opening message – no further action</p>
25/08/24	Subject Councillor D	Complaint alleging that the Subject Councillor lied at a meeting regarding a planning application	<p>Second stage assessment:</p> <p>There is insufficient evidence to establish whether the allegations are true. It is almost a year since this complaint was received and I do not believe it is reasonable to expect the Subject Councillor to remember details relating to the allegations made given the significant time that has since passed – no further action</p>
29/08/24	Subject Councillor D	Complaint alleging that an email to all Councillors regarding concerns reported to her from a resident constitute a breach of the Code of Conduct	<p>Second stage assessment:</p> <p>Insufficient evidence of specific breach of the Councillor Code of Conduct – no further action</p>
09/09/24	Subject Councillor B	Complaint alleging instances of bullying	<p>First stage assessment:</p> <p>No longer a Parish Councillor – no further action</p>

12/09/24	Subject Councillor B	Complaint alleging instances of bullying	First stage assessment: No longer a Parish Councillor – no further action
13/09/24	Subject Councillor B	Complaint alleging instances of discrimination	First stage assessment: No longer a Parish Councillor – no further action
11/11/24	Subject Councillor B	Complaint alleging instances of bullying and harassment	First stage assessment: No longer a Parish Councillor – no further action
11/11/24	Subject Councillor B	Complaint alleging instances of bullying and harassment	First stage assessment: No longer a Parish Councillor – no further action
26/11/24	Subject Councillor H	Complaint alleging the airing of false and misleading assertions and apportioning blame to the Complainant as to the resignation of the former Parish Clerk	Second stage assessment: In reviewing the email from the Subject Councillor to which the complaint relates, the Subject Councillor appears to be passing on information he received directly from the outgoing Clerk. This does not constitute a breach of the Councillor Code of Conduct and the Councillor is entitled to share their opinion, which would be protected under Article 10 of the European Convention of Human Rights under freedom of expression/speech - no further action

26/11/24	Subject Councillor E	Complaint alleging verbal abuse in an email related to the above complaint involving another Councillor	Second stage assessment: Insufficient evidence of a specific breach of the Councillor Code of Conduct and would fall under the category of robust political debate – no further action
08/12/24	Subject Councillor D	Complaint alleging behaviour contrary to the Nolan principles 'integrity' and 'honesty'	Second stage assessment: Insufficient evidence of specific breach of the Councillor Code of Conduct and linked with additional complaint below submitted as part of the same email on the same date – no further action
08/12/24	Subject Councillor A	Complaint alleging behaviour contrary to the Nolan principles 'integrity' and 'honesty'	Second stage assessment: Insufficient evidence of specific breach of the Councillor Code of Conduct and linked with additional complaint below submitted as part of the same email on the same date – no further action
08/12/24	Subject Councillor E	Complaint alleging behaviour contrary to the Nolan principles 'integrity' and 'honesty'	Second stage assessment: Insufficient evidence of specific breach of the Councillor Code of Conduct and linked with additional complaint below submitted as part of the same email on the same date – no further action
08/12/24	Subject Councillor B	Complaint alleging instances of violent and threatening behaviour	First stage assessment: No longer a Parish Councillor – no further action

08/12/24	Subject Councillor C	Complaint alleging instances of violent and threatening behaviour	<p>First stage assessment:</p> <p>No longer a Parish Councillor – no further action</p>
08/12/24	Subject Councillor D	Complaint alleging intimidation of any person who is likely to be a complainant	<p>Second stage assessment:</p> <p>The allegations made relate to the Subject Councillor's request to include an item on an agenda at an extraordinary meeting to effectively seek a vote of no confidence against the Complainant in relation to his position as Councillor. Challenges in relation to the legalities of such proceedings should be addressed to the Parish Clerk. I do not believe the Subject Councillor intended to intimidate the Councillor in their capacity as a Complainant by undertaking this course of action as she did not know a complaint would be submitted in relation to this matter at the time. Her actions would fall under the category of robust political debate – no further action.</p>
08/12/24	Subject Councillor A	Complaint alleging intimidation of any person who is likely to be a complainant	<p>Second stage assessment:</p> <p>The allegations made relate to the involvement of the Subject Councillor in a meeting which effectively sought a vote of no confidence against the Complainant in relation to his position as a Councillor. Challenges in relation to the legalities of such proceedings should be addressed to the Parish Clerk. I do not believe the Subject Councillor intended to intimidate the Councillor in their capacity as a Complainant by taking part in this meeting as she did not know a complaint would be submitted in relation to this</p>

			matter at the time. Her actions would fall under the category of robust political debate – no further action
08/12/24	Subject Councillor E	Complaint alleging intimidation of any person who is likely to be a complainant	<p>Second stage assessment:</p> <p>The allegations made relate to the involvement of the Subject Councillor in a meeting which effectively sought a vote of no confidence against the Complainant in relation to his position as a Councillor. Challenges in relation to the legalities of such proceedings should be addressed to the Parish Clerk. I do not believe the Subject Councillor intended to intimidate the Subject Councillor in their capacity as a Complainant by taking part in this meeting as he did not know a complaint would be submitted in relation to this matter at the time. His actions would fall under the category of robust political debate – no further action</p>
08/12/24	Subject Councillor B	Complaint alleging intimidation of any person who is likely to be a complainant	<p>First stage assessment:</p> <p>No longer a Parish Councillor – no further action</p>
08/12/24	Subject Councillor C	Complaint alleging intimidation of any person who is likely to be a complainant	<p>First stage assessment:</p> <p>No longer a Parish Councillor – no further action</p>