

ASSESSMENT CRITERIA

Stage 1 Criteria

Before the assessment of a complaint begins, the Monitoring Officer or Referrals Panel must be satisfied that the complaint meets the following requirements:

- (i) It is a complaint against one or more named Members of the Council or a Parish or Town Council within the area;
- (ii) The named Member or Members were in Office at the time of the alleged conduct and acting in their official capacity; and
- (iii) The complaint, if proven, would be a breach of the Council's Code of Conduct in force at the relevant time.

If the complaint fails any one of these tests, it cannot be investigated as a breach of the Council's Code of Conduct and the complainant must be informed that no further action can be taken in relation to the complaint. If it passes all three tests then it can be assessed according to the criteria set out below.

Stage 2 Criteria

The Monitoring Officer or Referrals Panel is/are unlikely to refer a complaint for investigation where it falls into any of the following categories:-

- The complaint appears to be vexatious, malicious, politically motivated, relatively minor, insufficiently serious, tit-for-tat, or there are other reasons why an investigation may not be proportionate or in the public interest.
- The same, or substantially similar, complaint has already been the subject of an investigation and there is nothing more to be gained by further action being taken.
- It appears that the complaint concerns or is really about dissatisfaction with a Council decision or policy rather than a breach of the Code of Conduct.
- There is not enough information currently available to justify a decision to refer the matter for investigation.
- The complaint is about someone who has died, resigned, is seriously ill or is no longer a Member of the Council concerned and therefore it is not in the public interest to pursue.
- Where the allegation is anonymous, unless it includes documentary or photographic evidence indicating an exceptionally serious or significant matter and it is considered in the public interest that it be investigated.
- Where the event/s or incident/s took place more than 6 months prior to the date of complaint being received or where those involved are unlikely to remember the event/s or incident/s clearly enough to provide credible evidence.

- The complaint is such that it is unlikely that an investigation will be able to come to a firm conclusion on the matter and where independent evidence is likely to be difficult or impossible to obtain.
- If it is considered that the subject Member has provided a satisfactory remedy to the complainant (for example by apologising) or the complaint is capable of other informal resolution and the Member complained of is amenable to such approach.
- If it is considered that having regard to the nature of the complaint and the level of its potential seriousness, the public interest in conducting an investigation does not justify the cost of such an investigation.
- Where the allegation discloses a potential breach of the Code of Conduct but it is considered that the complaint is not serious enough to warrant any further action and:
 - the Member and Officer resource needed to investigate and determine the complaint is wholly disproportionate to the matter complained about; or
 - in all the circumstances there is no overriding public benefit or interest in carrying out an investigation.

RE-CONSIDERATION CRITERIA

The Investigating Officer may, following consultation with the Independent Person, refer an investigation to the Referrals Panel for re-consideration as to whether the investigation should proceed where:

- As a result of new evidence or information, the Investigating Officer is of the opinion that the matter is materially less serious than may have seemed apparent to the Monitoring Officer or the Referrals Panel when the decision was made to refer the complaint for investigation, and a different decision may have been made had either the Monitoring Officer or the Referrals Panel been aware of the new evidence or information;
- The Member who is the subject of the allegation has died, is seriously ill or has resigned from the Council concerned and in the circumstances the Investigating Officer is of the opinion that it is no longer appropriate to proceed with the investigation; or
- Other circumstances arise, which in the reasonable opinion of the Investigating Officer, render it appropriate for the investigation to be referred to the Referrals for re-consideration.