

## **Code of Conduct Complaints – Quarterly Update – Q4**

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### **1. Summary**

- 1.1.** Following the creation and provision to the Committee of the monthly Code of Conduct complaint summaries (see Appendix 1) this report provides an update to the Committee regarding the number of complaints received, any themes emerging and the performance in respect of acknowledgment and substantive responses against our published timescales. A full year 1 review of the complaint numbers and themes will be presented to the Committee in Q1 2024/2025.

### **2. Recommendations**

- 2.1.** That Committee note the update report at the end of quarter four in respect of Code of Conduct complaints and provide any associated comments, observations and direction.

### **3. Background**

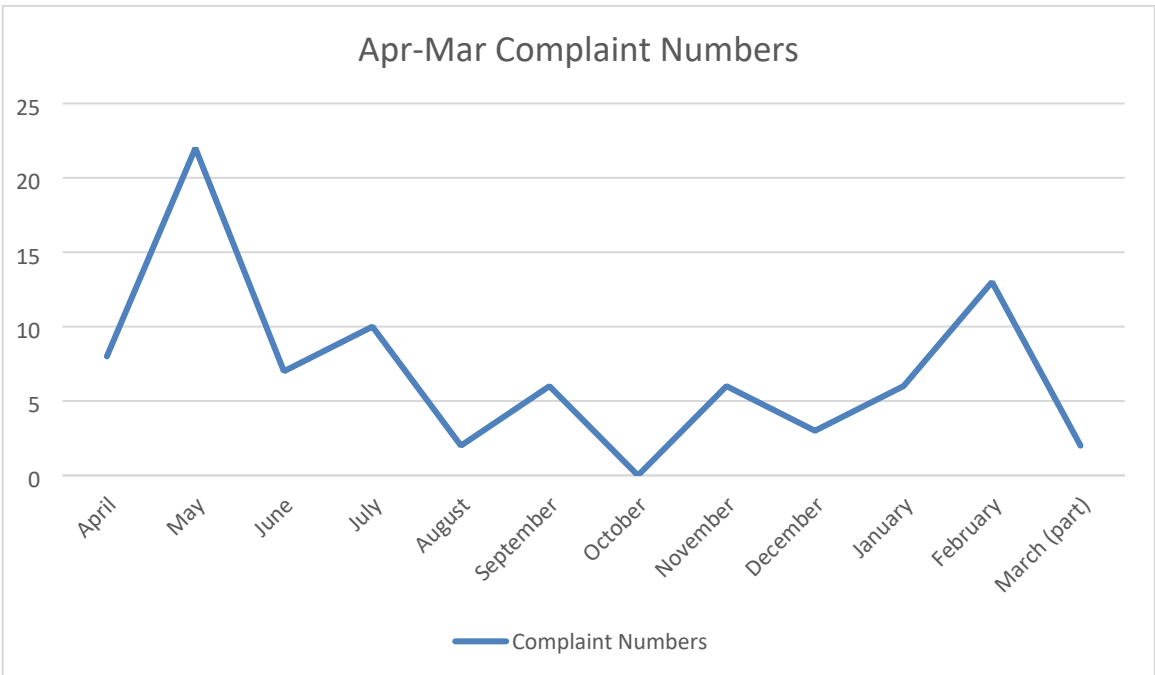
- 3.1.** Somerset Council adopted the LGA Model Code of Conduct following a decision of Full Council in February 2022 ahead of the elections in May 2022. That Code has transitioned to the new Somerset Council from April 2023.
- 3.2.** All Code of conduct complaints have been administered centrally from that point and virtually a full four quarters have been completed. This report, therefore, provides an update to Members in respect of volumes, performance and any identifiable trends. The purposes of the report is not to review any individual or groups of complaints but to consider the overall numbers, trends and performance.

### **4. Analysis**

#### **4.1. Number of Complaints**

Of the 86 complaints received some related to the same incident i.e. multiple complaints regarding the same subject members and the same alleged breach of the code of conduct. Taking this into account there were 58 separate 'incidents' complained about. The monthly totals of complaints received are set out in the following table. The number of complaints received in May has been identified as an exception, otherwise the numbers remain much lower and closer to the volumes predicted prior to vesting day based on historical trends from the legacy councils.

<b>Month</b>	<b>Number of Complaints</b>
April	8
May	22
June	7
July	10
August	2
September	6
October	0
November	6
December	3
January	6
February	13 (7 incidents)
March (up to 15.3.24)	2



## **4.2. Acknowledgment**

The Council's target to provide an acknowledgement of received complaints is 5 working days. After quarter four the Council achieved this target 85% of the time i.e. on 73 out of 86 occasions. The principal reason for failing to acknowledge within 5 working days remains annual leave and sickness earlier in the year. The Q4 performance is 100%.

## **4.3. Substantive Response**

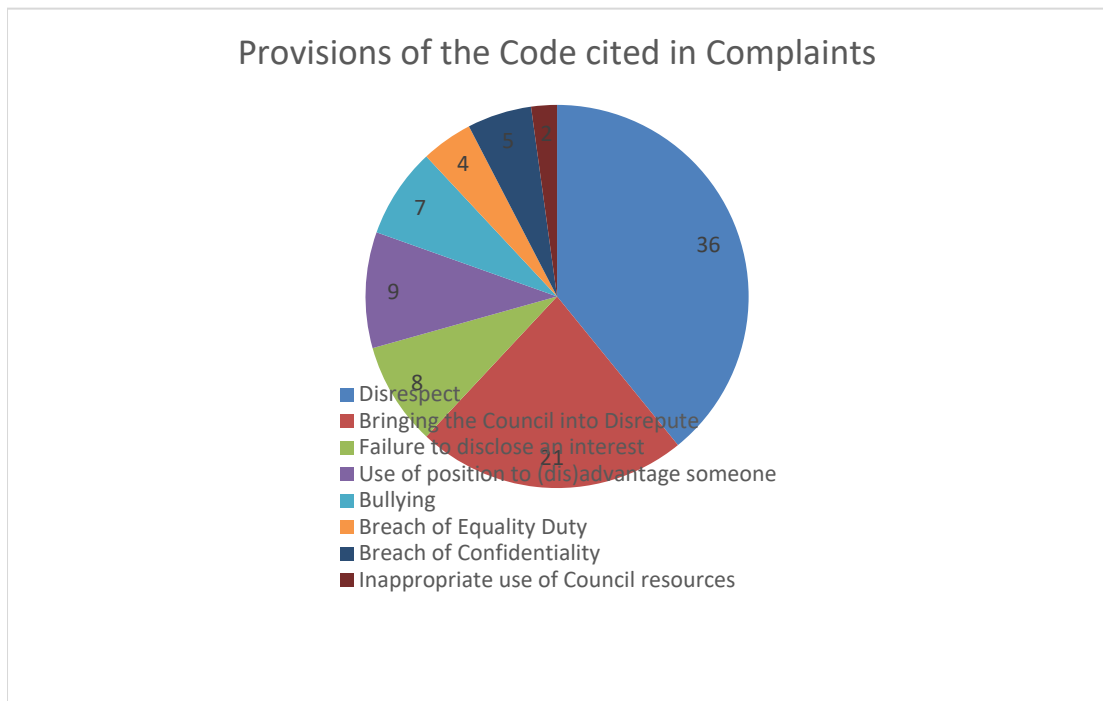
The Council's target to provide a substantive response to a Code of Conduct complaint is 20 working days from the receipt of the complaint. After quarter 4 the Council achieved this target 44% of the time i.e. on 33 out of 75 occasions (11 complaints remain under consideration and within time at the time of report production). The reasons for regularly failing to meet this target are more complex as the timings are not wholly within the Council's control. The initial assessment period could require further information to be submitted by the complainant or a detailed response to be provided by the subject member and every proposed response has to be shared with the Independent Person. Looking a quarter 4 in isolation this target was met 100% of the time in respect of the assessments that have been concluded at the time of writing.

Moving forward the monthly summaries distributed to Committee Members will provide the reason for any delay which results in a failure to meet response time targets.

#### 4.4. Trends and Themes

Of the 86 complaints assessed 69 (76%) concluded No Further Action was required, 6 (7%) resulted in Further Action with 11 (13%) still in the assessment phase. No complaints have been deemed worthy of a formal investigation and/or a hearing.

The following table lists the areas of the code that were alleged to have been breached in the complaints, in many cases more than one potential breach was cited.



#### 5. Implications

- 5.1. This is the third code of conduct complaints report that has been brought before the Committee since vesting day. The committee may wish to indicate what additional or alternative data they would consider valuable.

#### 6. Background papers

- 6.1. Somerset Council Code of Conduct.  
Somerset Council Code of Conduct Complaints form and guidance

**Note** For sight of individual background papers please contact the report author.

**Appendix 1**

April to March (Part) Code of Conduct Complaints Summary