

London Borough of Hammersmith and Fulham Arrangements for dealing with complaints alleging a breach of the Members' Code of Conduct

1. Context

- 1.1 Under Section 28 of the Localism Act 2011, the Council must have in place “arrangements”, under which allegations that a Member or co-opted Member of the Council, or of a Committee or Committee of the Council, has failed to comply with the Members' Code of Conduct can be investigated and decisions made on such allegations.
- 1.2 These “arrangements” set out how you may make a complaint that an elected or co-opted Member of the London Borough of Hammersmith and Fulham (“the Council”) has failed to comply with the Members' Code of Conduct (“the Code”) and sets out how the Council will deal with allegations of a failure to comply with the Code.
- 1.3 Such arrangements must provide for the Council to appoint at least one Independent Person, whose views must be sought by the Council before it takes a decision on an allegation which it has decided shall be investigated, and whose views can be sought by the Council at any other stage, or by a Member or co-opted Member against whom an allegation has been made.

2. The Code

- 2.1 The Code adopted by the Council is on the Council's website:
<https://www.lbhf.gov.uk/councillors-and-democracy/complaints-and-compliments/complaints-about-councillors>

3. Making a complaint

- 3.1 If you wish to make a complaint, please complete the online complaint form on the Council's website: <https://www.lbhf.gov.uk/councillors-and-democracy/complaints-and-compliments/complaints-about-councillors>
- 3.2 The Monitoring Officer is a senior officer of the Council who has statutory responsibility for maintaining the Register of Members' Interests and who is responsible for administering these arrangements.
- 3.3 Please provide all the details requested on the complaint form. If you want to keep your name and address confidential, please indicate this in the confidentiality section of the form. The Monitoring Officer will consider your request but in the interests of fairness the presumption is that the Member concerned is entitled to know who has made the complaint. If, in exceptional circumstances, your request is granted we will not disclose your name and address to the Member against whom you make the complaint without your prior consent.

- 3.4 The Council will not investigate anonymous complaints unless the Monitoring Officer considers that there is a strong and clear public interest in doing so.
- 3.5 The Monitoring Officer will acknowledge receipt of your complaint within 5 working days of receiving it and will keep you informed of the progress of your complaint.

4. Will your complaint be investigated?

- 4.1 The Monitoring Officer will consider each complaint received and will decide, on the basis of the information set out in the complaint form or submitted with the complaint, whether it merits formal investigation. Whilst complainants must be confident that complaints are taken seriously and dealt with appropriately, investigating a complaint involves spending public money as well as the cost of officer and Member time. The Council, therefore, takes a proportionate approach to the issue of whether or not a complaint merits investigation bearing in mind the sanctions which can be imposed if a Member is found to be in breach of the Code, and the costs to the Council and, therefore, to the public of undertaking an investigation. The performance of Members in terms of how they represent those in their wards is ultimately a matter for the electorate if a Member seeks re-election.
- 4.2 A complaint will only be considered to merit formal investigation if it complies with all the criteria in paragraph 4.3 or one or more of the criteria in paragraph 4.4 below. The Monitoring Officer will consult the Independent Person before coming to a final decision as to whether or not a complaint which meets the relevant criteria should be investigated.
- 4.3 The relevant criteria are:
- a) The complaint raises matters which would be a breach of the Code;
 - b) The complaint is sufficiently serious to warrant investigation;
 - c) The complaint is not “tit-for-tat”;
 - d) The complaint appears not to be politically motivated;
 - e) It is about someone who is still a Member or co-opted Member of the Council;
 - f) The complaint has been received within 3 months of the alleged failure to comply with the Code unless there are exceptional circumstances for the delay and the delay does not mean that it would be difficult for a fair investigation to be carried out;
 - g) The same, or similar, complaint has not already been investigated;
 - h) It is not an anonymous complaint, unless it includes sufficient documentary evidence to show a significant breach of the Code;
 - i) The Member complained about has not already apologised and/or admitted making an error; and
 - j) If the complaint reveals a criminal offence and a complaint has been made to the Police, that the Police investigation and any proceedings

have concluded or the Police have confirmed no proceedings will be issued.

4.4 Additional criteria:

- a) The complaint reveals a continuing pattern of behaviour that is significantly and unreasonably disrupting the business of the Council and there is no other avenue left to deal with it other than by way of an investigation; or
- b) The complaint is made by the Chief Executive or the Monitoring Officer

4.5 This decision will normally be taken within 28 working days of receipt of your complaint. The Monitoring Officer will inform you of their decision and the reasons for that decision.

4.6 In appropriate cases, where the Monitoring Officer has decided in accordance with the criteria set out above that a complaint would merit investigation, the Monitoring Officer may seek to resolve the complaint informally, without the need for a formal investigation. Such informal resolution may involve the Member accepting that their conduct was in breach of the Code and offering an apology, or other remedial action such as correcting the Register of Interests. Where the Member makes a reasonable offer of informal resolution, but you are not willing to accept the offer, the Monitoring Officer will take account of this in deciding whether the complaint should be investigated.

4.7 In consultation with the Independent Persons and Chair of the Standards Committee, the Monitoring Officer will refer to the Police for investigation a complaint which falls under Section 34 of the Act which makes it a criminal offence if a Member or co-opted Member fails, without reasonable excuse, to comply with requirements to register or declare disclosable pecuniary interests (but not other such interests as the Council may include in its Code), or takes part in Council business at meetings or when acting alone when prevented from doing so.

5. How is the investigation conducted?

5.1 If the Monitoring Officer decides that a complaint merits investigation, they may conduct the investigation but will normally appoint an investigating officer, who may be another senior officer of the Council, an officer of another Council or an external investigator ("the Investigating Officer"). The Investigating Officer will decide whether they need to meet or speak to you to understand the detail of your complaint and so that you can explain your understanding of events and suggest what documents need to be seen and who needs to be interviewed.

5.2 The Investigating Officer will normally write to the Member against whom you have complained and provide them with a copy of your complaint, and ask the Member to provide their explanation of events, and to identify what documents they need to see and who they need to interview. In exceptional cases, where the Monitoring Officer has decided to keep your identity

confidential your name and address will be deleted from the papers given to the Member.

- 5.3 At the end of their investigation, the Investigating Officer will produce a draft report ("the Investigation Report") and will send copies of that draft report, in confidence, to you and to the Member concerned, to give you both an opportunity to correct any factual inaccuracies.
- 5.4 Having received and taken account of any comments which you may make on the draft Investigation Report, the Investigating Officer will send their final report to the Monitoring Officer.

6. What happens if the Investigating Officer or Monitoring Officer concludes that there is no evidence of a failure to comply with the Code of Conduct?

- 6.1 The Monitoring Officer will review the Investigating Officer's report and, if they are satisfied that the Investigating Officer's report is sufficient, the Monitoring Officer will write to you and to the Member concerned notifying you that they are satisfied that no further action is required, and give you both a copy of the final Investigation Report. There is no right of appeal for you as complainant or for the Member against a decision of the Monitoring Officer.

7. What happens if the Investigating Officer or Monitoring Officer concludes that there is evidence of a failure to comply with the Code of Conduct?

- 7.1 If an Investigating Officer has been appointed the Monitoring Officer will review the Investigating Officer's report, seek the views of the Independent Person and will then arrange for the Standards (Complaints) Sub-Committee to consider the complaint. The Sub-Committee will consider the Investigator's Report, the written opinion of the Independent Person and any written representations from the Member concerned before deciding whether the Member has failed to comply with the Code and, if so, whether to take any action in respect of the Member.
- 7.3 The meeting will be held in public so you may attend the meeting as can other members of the public. The Committee will usually consider the matters on the papers but, in exceptional cases, the Member may be permitted by the Committee to make representations on their own behalf, although they will not be entitled to be represented by a solicitor or other legal representative.
- 7.4 The Committee, with the benefit of any advice from the Independent Person, may conclude that the Member did not fail to comply with the Code, and dismiss the complaint. If the Committee concludes that the Member did fail to comply with the Code, the Chair will inform those present at the meeting of this finding and the Committee will then consider what action, if any, the Committee should take as a result of the Member's failure to comply with the Code. In doing this, the Committee may give the Member an opportunity to make representations but will consider any written representations from the

Member and take into account the views of the Independent Person, before deciding what action, if any, to take in respect of the matter.

8. What action can the Standards Committee take where a Member has failed to comply with the Code of Conduct?

8.1 The Committee may:

- a) Censure the Member;
- b) Report its findings to a meeting of the Council for information;
- c) Recommend to the Council that the Member be issued with a formal censure;
- d) Recommend to the Member's Group Leader that they be removed from any or all Committees or Sub-Committees of the Council; or
- e) Recommend to the Leader of the Council that the Member be removed from the Cabinet, or removed from particular Portfolio responsibilities.

9. What happens at the end of the hearing?

9.1 At the end of the hearing, the Chair will announce the decision of the Committee as to whether the Member failed to comply with the Code and as to any sanctions imposed.

9.2 As soon as reasonably practicable thereafter, the Monitoring Officer will write to you and the Member concerned confirming the decisions taken.

10. Appeals

10.1 Where a Member is dissatisfied with the decision of the Standards (Complaints) Sub-Committee in respect of a complaint against them, they may appeal to a Standards (Appeals) Sub-Committee comprising a different membership to the original Sub-Committee, to reconsider the decision. The Member will be required to set out in detail, within 14 days of the Committee meeting, the grounds upon which an appeal is sought.

10.2 Upon receipt of notification of appeal, the Monitoring Officer will consult an Independent Person for their views. The Monitoring Officer will forward a report detailing the allegations, views of the Independent Person and the findings of the investigation to the Standards (Appeals) Sub-Committee who will determine the appeal. The Appeals Sub-Committee can either endorse the previous decision or conclude that there is no breach and dismiss the complaint.

11. What are the responsibilities of the Standards Committee?

11.1 The Standards Committee is charged with considering those written complaints that a Member or co-opted Member has failed to comply with the Code referred to it following an investigation of the complaint. The Committee may decide to impose a sanction if it finds that the Member has failed to

comply with the Code. The duty to consider complaints has been delegated to its Complaints Sub-Committee.

12. Who is the Independent Person?

- 12.1 The Independent Person is a person who has applied for the post following advertisement of a vacancy for the post, and has been appointed by the Council. There are a number of statutory restrictions on who may be appointed. For example, a person cannot be appointed as an independent person if they are, or have been within the past 5 years, a Member, co-opted Member or officer of the Council.
- 12.2 The Independent Person may be invited to attend meetings of the Committee and their views are sought and taken into consideration before the Committee takes any decision on whether the Member's conduct constitutes a failure to comply with the Code and as to any action to be taken following a finding of failure to comply with the Code.

13. Revision of these arrangements

- 13.1 The Council may by resolution agree to amend these arrangements.