

PROCEDURES FOR DEALING WITH ALLEGED BREACHES OF THE CODE OF CONDUCT BY COUNCILLORS

Explanatory Notes

1. Introduction

This procedure applies when a complaint is received that a councillor has or may have failed to comply with the council's Code of Conduct for Councillors.

The arrangements governing standards of behaviour by local councillors are established in Section 28 of the Localism Act 2011, and specified in regulations made under the Act.

The council is required by the Act to approve a Code of Conduct for Councillors and agree procedures for dealing with any alleged breaches of that Code. Wyre Council's Code of Conduct is based on the Local Government Association's Model Councillor Code of Conduct issued May 2021 with some amendments to reflect local practices in Wyre.

Parish and Town Councils within the Wyre area are also required either to adopt the Wyre Code or to approve their own Code of Conduct. Any complaints about breaches of such Codes by Parish or Town Councillors have to be submitted to Wyre Borough Council's Monitoring Officer and, will be dealt with under the procedures set out in these notes.

2. What is the Code of Conduct?

The purpose of the code is to assist councillors in modelling the behaviour that is expected of them. It specifies that councillors must have regard to the Seven Principles of Public Life, also known as the Nolan Principles. Based on these, the following general principles and obligations should be followed when acting as a councillor:

- act with integrity and honesty;
- act lawfully;
- treat all persons fairly and with respect;
- lead by example and act in a way that secures public confidence in the role of councillor;
- impartially exercise responsibilities in the interests of the local community;
- not to improperly seek to confer an advantage, or disadvantage, on any person;
- avoid conflicts of interest;
- exercise reasonable care and diligence; and
- ensure that public resources are used prudently in accordance with the local authority's requirements and in the public interest.

The code sets out the councillor obligations, which are the minimum standards of conduct required and specifies arrangements for the registration and declaration of financial and other interests, which must be followed by councillors.

A full copy of the Wyre Code of Conduct is included in Part 5.01 of the Council's Constitution.

3. How to make a complaint

If you wish to make a complaint, please submit it to the council's Monitoring Officer, using the online form available [here](#). Please make clear, in particular, which of the requirements of the Code of Conduct you think the councillor(s) has breached.

Anonymous complaints will not be considered.

Any councillor who is the subject of a complaint (the subject member) will be informed by the Monitoring Officer of the complaint either during or at the conclusion of stage 1 of this process. The Monitoring Officer will normally tell the subject member the name of the complainant and the details of the complaint, unless he/she considers that there are special reasons for keeping that information confidential.

4. How will your complaint be dealt with?

A flowchart which shows, in diagrammatic form, how your complaint will be dealt with and by whom, is set out at Annex A.

Monitoring Officer

Your complaint will be dealt with, in the first instance, by the council's Monitoring Officer. The council is required by the Local Government and Housing Act 1989 to designate a senior officer to undertake this role, which has various responsibilities relating to complaints. He/she will consult with one of the Independent Persons, appointed by the council for this purpose, under the provisions of the Localism Act.

The council's Deputy Monitoring Officer will assist the Monitoring Officer with consideration of, and investigation of complaints. Reference to the Monitoring Officer throughout this document may also include the Deputy Monitoring Officer.

Independent Persons

Independent Persons are people who are neither councillors nor officers of the council but are appointed under Section 28 of the Localism Act 2011 to work with the council to support them with Code of Conduct complaints and standards issues. Under the Localism Act their views must be sought and taken into account on any matter under investigation. The subject member may seek their views at any stage of the process.

Stage 1 – Procedure for Initial Assessment of the Complaint

The complaint will automatically be rejected if:

- The subject member was not a councillor at the time of the alleged misconduct.
- The subject member was not acting in their capacity as a councillor at

the time of the alleged misconduct.

Where a complaint is rejected on either of the above grounds the Monitoring Officer will write to the complainant explaining why their complaint cannot be dealt with under this procedure.

The Monitoring Officer may request further information from the complainant, the subject member or any other persons as appropriate before reaching a decision.

If the complaint has not been rejected on either ground as set out above the Monitoring Officer will then go on to further assess the complaint including consideration of the following:

- Is the complaint very minor or trivial?
- Is the complaint vexatious or malicious, politically motivated or ‘tit for tat’?
- Is the complaint about or related to historical issues?
- Is there a potential breach of the Code of Conduct?
- Is it in the public interest to investigate or take action on the complaint?

The options available to the Monitoring Officer, at this stage in the process, are:

- To reject the complaint or to decide to take no action – in which case he/she will state the reason for doing so;
- To seek further information, usually from the complainant, to clarify the particulars of the complaint;
- To seek an informal resolution (including, for example, an apology, or mediation);
- To carry out further investigation, or appoint another officer or an external person to investigate the complaint;
- To refer the complaint to the Police or other investigatory body (e.g. the Department of Work and Pensions), if a criminal offence has, potentially, taken place.

If the decision is to take no action over a complaint, then as soon as possible after making the decision notification will be sent to the complainant and subject member of the decision setting out clearly the reasons for that decision including the views of the Independent Person.

Stage 2 - Informal Resolution

The Monitoring Officer will seek the views of the Independent Person in considering whether informal resolution is the most appropriate way of dealing with a complaint.

An informal resolution is a more proportionate way of dealing with relatively minor allegations, one-off incidents or underlying disagreements between individuals.

Informal resolution may be sought following initial investigations, which is likely

to include seeking further information from the complainant and subject member.

Notification of the outcome of the informal resolution process should be sent to the complainant and the subject member stating what the allegation was and the resolution recommended.

Types of informal resolution might include:

- An apology from the subject member;
- An agreement from the subject member to attend relevant training or take part in a mentoring process;
- Engaging in a process of mediation or conciliation between the subject member and the complainant; or
- Any other action capable of resolving the complaint.

If the Monitoring Officer's attempts to reach an informal resolution are unsuccessful, he/she can reconsider the complaint and pursue other options available or refer for formal investigation as set out below.

Stage 3 - Formal Investigation and report

Any investigation, under Stage 3 of this process, will be conducted either by the Monitoring Officer or a person appointed by him/her. (If the Monitoring Officer himself/herself conducts the investigation he/she will not be able to act as the advisor to the Standards Committee at any subsequent hearing relating to that complaint).

The investigating officer will examine any available evidence of the alleged Breach and will interview the complainant, the subject member and, if appropriate, any witnesses. He/she will prepare a report setting out:

- Established/agreed facts;
- Facts which are not agreed and corresponding conflicting evidence;
- His/her conclusion on whether or not there has been a breach of the Code of Conduct.

Completion of the investigation

The Investigation Report will be considered by the Monitoring Officer with the Independent Person. The Monitoring Officer can dismiss the complaint, seek an informal resolution or take other action as appropriate including referring the matter to a Standards Hearing.

If the conclusion of the investigation is that there has been no breach of the Code of Conduct, the Monitoring Officer will inform the complainant and the subject member of that finding and tell them either that no further action is to be taken or, if applicable, that he/she intends to take some other action outside of the complaints process.

If the conclusion of the investigation is that there has been a breach of the Code of Conduct, the Monitoring Officer can seek to resolve the issue

informally without a hearing, for example, by the subject member admitting the breach and apologising. However, if the Monitoring Officer cannot reach a suitable resolution or he/she considers such an approach to be inappropriate, he/she will arrange a hearing of the Standards Committee.

Stage 4 – Standards Committee Hearing

A hearing may be called where the investigator has concluded that there has been a breach of the Code of Conduct and the Monitoring Officer has concluded that the matter cannot otherwise be resolved informally.

The hearing will be arranged at least 14 days and no later than 3 months after the investigation report has been issued. Where that is not possible, the Monitoring Officer should notify the relevant parties of the reason for the delay and provide an estimated timescale.

If a complaint has reached this stage, the hearing will normally be held in public, in order to promote public confidence and ensure fairness and transparency. However, the Committee will be able to resolve to exclude the public and press whilst any confidential or exempt information is considered and will usually do so when reaching its decision.

Once a date has been set for the hearing the Monitoring Officer will notify:

- The subject member;
- The investigator;
- The relevant Independent Person;
- The complainant (if appropriate);
- The clerk of any relevant town or parish council.

If the subject member is unable to make the specified date the panel may arrange the hearing to be held on a different date, provided that they are satisfied that the subject member has given an acceptable reason. Where the subject member does not give an acceptable reason or does not reply within a specified time, the panel will proceed with the date and may consider the report in the subject member's absence.

Arrangements for the hearing will be made in accordance with the pre-hearing procedure attached as Annex B.

The procedures to be followed at the hearing are set out in Annex C.

The decisions available to the Committee are:

- to take no further action
- to reach an informal resolution between the complainant and the subject member (if agreed by both parties)
- if it finds that there has been a breach of the Code, to impose one or more sanctions listed in paragraph 20 of the Hearing Procedure attached as Annex C.

5. Appeals

There is no right of appeal available either to a complainant or a subject

member against conclusions reached or actions taken by the Monitoring Officer or decisions made by the Standards Committee at any stage in this process.

6. Standards Committee Reports

The Monitoring Officer will submit a summary report of complaints received to each scheduled meeting of the Standards Committee where there is other business to be transacted and otherwise report all complaints annually. Information provided to the committee will include the types of allegations received since the previous meeting and a brief summary of the current position on complaints being dealt with under this process. Information about the names of individuals or specific details of complaints will not be made available at this stage in the process.

No Councillor should reveal any information to the media or in public about a complaint which is currently being dealt with or is not upheld.

7. Additional help and contact details

In line with the requirements of the Equality Act 2010, we can make reasonable adjustments to assist you, if you have a disability that prevents you from making your complaint in writing.

We can also help if English is not your first language.

If you need any support in completing this form or, if you need any further clarification of the complaints process please contact the Monitoring Officer on 01253 887605 or the Democratic Services and Scrutiny Manager on 01253 887481.

When you have completed the attached form, please send it to:

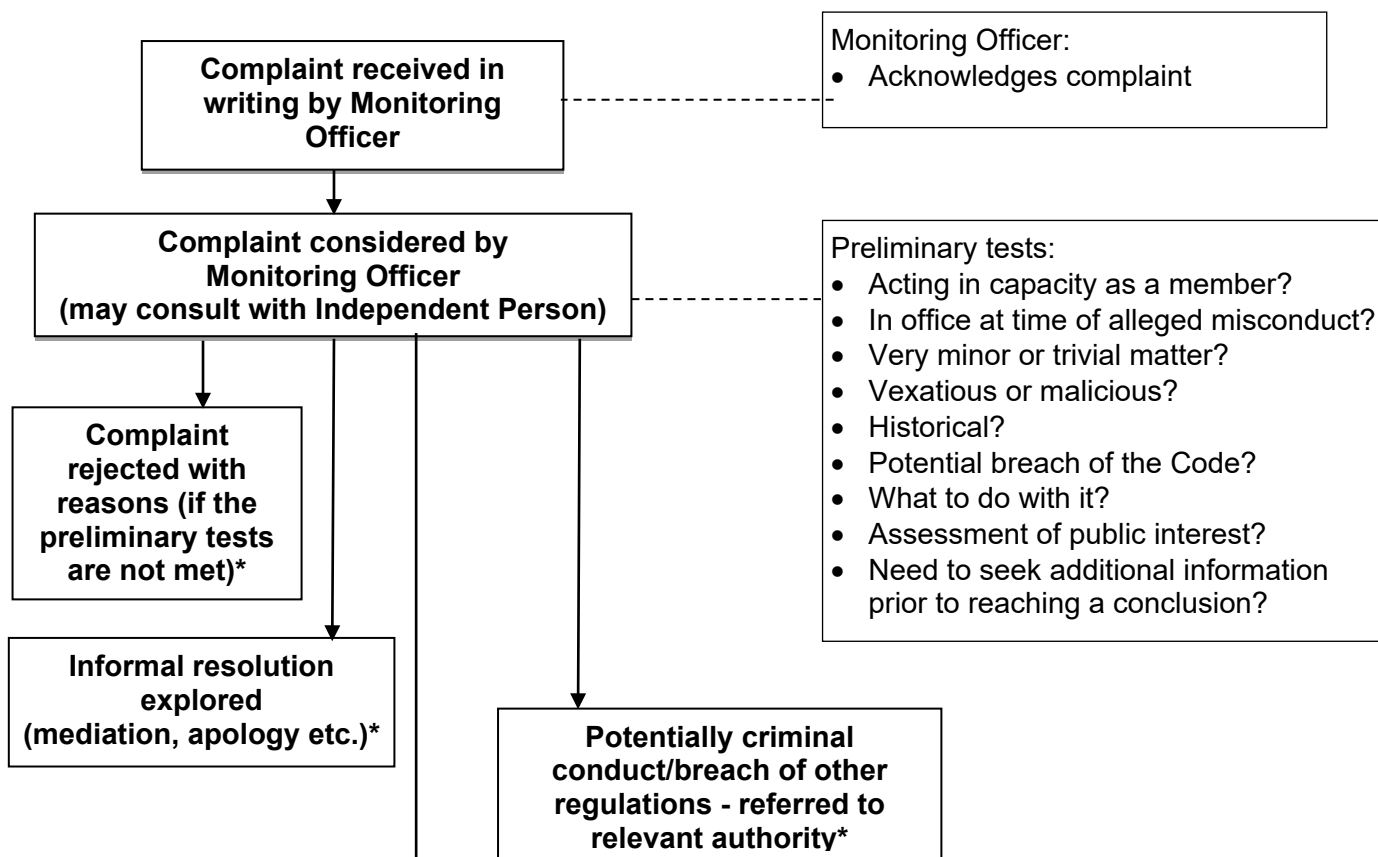
The Monitoring Officer
Wyre Borough Council
Civic Centre
Breck Road
Poulton-le-Fylde
Lancashire
FY6 7PU

Or email to: monitoringofficer@wyre.gov.uk

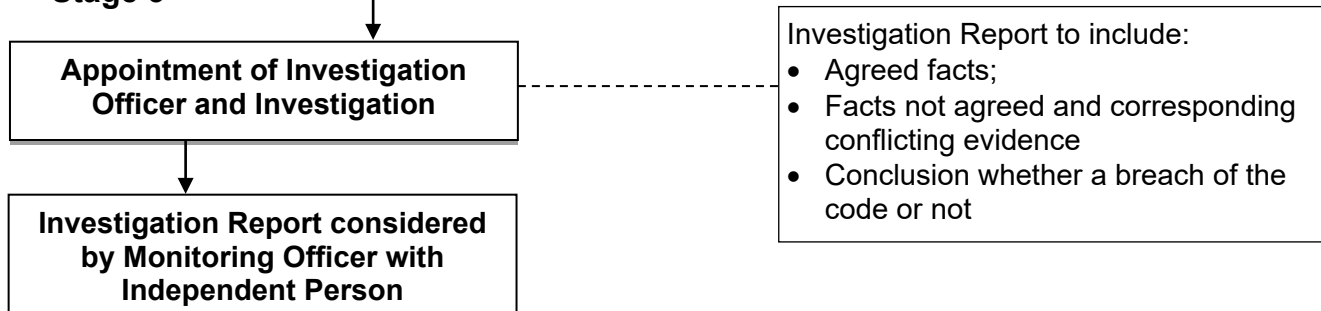
ANNEX A

Complaints Procedure Flowchart

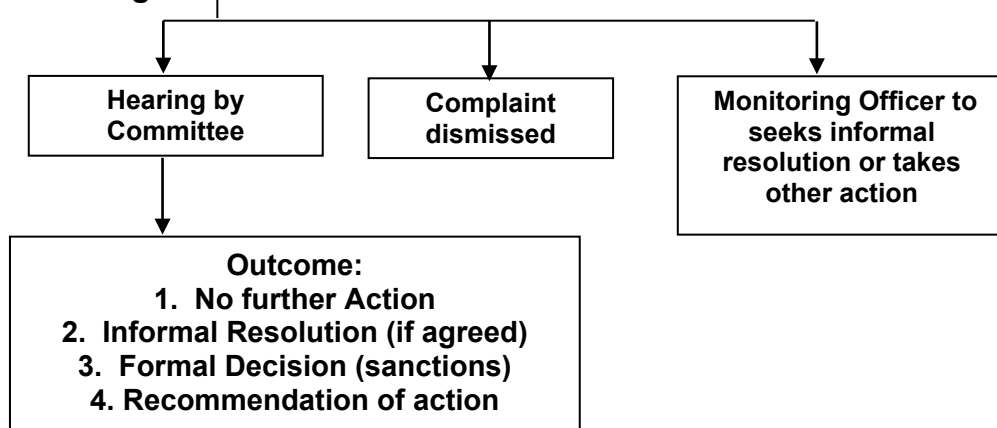
Stage 1/2



Stage 3



Stage 4



The Monitoring Officer will submit summary information on each complaint to each scheduled meeting of the standards Committee.

ANNEX B**STANDARDS COMMITTEE
PRE-HEARING PROCEDURE**

1. Where an investigation report has found that there has been a breach of the Code of Conduct, and the matter cannot otherwise be resolved by local resolution, for example by the Subject Member admitting the breach and apologising, a hearing will be arranged. The hearing will generally be a meeting of the Committee convened specifically for that purpose.
2. A copy of the investigation report will be sent to the Subject Member, the complainant, the clerk to the town/parish council if the complaint relates to the Subject Member's conduct as a parish councillor, and to the Independent Person.
3. The Subject Member will be asked for a written response within ten working days. The response should set out the Subject Member's reply to the Investigating Officer's report and state whether he/she disagrees with any of the findings of fact in the report, giving the reasons for any disagreement. The response must also state if he/she:
 - wishes to be represented or accompanied by another person;
 - wishes to give evidence to the Committee, either orally or in writing;
 - wishes to call relevant witnesses to give evidence to the Committee;
 - wishes any part of the hearing to be held in private;
 - wishes any part of the Investigating Officer's report or other relevant documents to be withheld from the public.

The Subject Member may seek the views of the Independent Person who has not been involved in the consideration of the earlier stages in the complaints process.

4. The Subject Member will be informed that if, at the hearing by the Committee, he/she seeks to dispute any matter contained in the Investigating Officer's report without having previously notified the intention to do so, the Committee may refuse to allow the disputed matters to be raised unless satisfied that there are good reasons why they have not been raised beforehand.
5. Upon receipt of the Member's response, the Investigating Officer will be invited to comment on it within ten working days, and to say whether or not he/she:
 - wishes to call relevant witnesses to give evidence or submit written or other evidence to the Committee
 - wishes any part of the hearing to be held in private
 - wishes any part of the report or other relevant documents to be withheld from the public
6. Upon receipt of the Investigating Officer's response, the person advising the Committee at the hearing (either the Monitoring Officer or if he/she has carried out the investigation, the Deputy Monitoring Officer) will consider the responses of the Subject Member and the Investigating Officer and set a date for the hearing in consultation with the chairman of the Committee.

7. The Subject Member and the Investigating Officer will be entitled to request that any witnesses they want should be called. However, the Chairman of the Committee may limit the number of witnesses to be called, if he/she believes the number requested is unreasonable and that some witnesses will simply be repeating the evidence of earlier witnesses, or else not providing evidence that will assist the Committee to reach its decision.
8. Nothing in this procedure shall limit the Chairman of the hearing from requesting the attendance of any additional witnesses whose evidence he/she considers would assist the Committee to reach its decision.
9. The Monitoring Officer, in consultation with the Chairman and the Independent Person, will:
 - confirm a date, time and place for the hearing
 - confirm the main facts of the case that are agreed
 - confirm the main facts that are not agreed
 - provide copies of any written evidence to the relevant parties
 - confirm which witnesses will be called by the parties
 - provide the parties with copies of the proposed procedure for the hearing, specifying which parts of the matter, if any, may be considered in private

ANNEX C**STANDARDS COMMITTEE
HEARING PROCEDURE**

1. The Hearing Committee will decide, on a balance of probabilities, on the evidence presented to it, whether the complaint is upheld.
2. All matters will be decided by a simple majority of votes cast. If there are equal numbers, the Chairman shall have a second and casting vote.
3. The Independent Person will attend the hearing in an advisory, non-voting capacity.
4. The meeting will be open to the press and public unless confidential or exempt information is likely to be disclosed and a resolution is passed to exclude them.
5. The Procedure for the hearing shall be as follows, but the Chairman may agree to vary this procedure in any particular instance where he/she is of the opinion that such variation is necessary in the interests of fairness.
6. The Subject Member may be represented or accompanied during the meeting with the permission of the Committee. It is the responsibility of the Subject Member to arrange any representation.
7. The Committee may take advice from the Monitoring Officer/Deputy Monitoring Officer (provided that they have not conducted the investigation) at any time during the hearing or during its deliberations. The substance of any advice given to the Committee will be shared with the Subject Member and Investigating Officer if they are present at the hearing.
8. At the start of the hearing, the Chairman will introduce each of the members of the Committee, the Independent Person, the Subject Member (if present), the Investigating Officer (if present) and any other officers present, and shall then explain the procedure which the Committee will follow in the conduct of the hearing.
9. The Committee shall then confirm that it is quorate, and deal with any disclosures of interests.
10. If the Subject Member is not present at the start of the hearing:
 - The Chairman will ask the Monitoring Officer/Deputy Monitoring Officer whether the Subject Member has indicated his/her intention not to attend the hearing.
 - The Committee will then consider any reasons which the Subject Member has provided for not attending the hearing and will decide whether it is satisfied that there is sufficient reason for such failure to attend.
 - If the Committee is satisfied with such reasons, it will adjourn the hearing to another date.
 - If the Committee is not satisfied with such reasons, or if the Subject Member has not given any such reasons, the Committee will decide whether to consider the matter and make a determination in the absence of the Subject Member, or to adjourn the hearing to another date.

11. After the preliminary procedures, the Committee will consider whether or not there are any significant disagreements about the facts contained in the Investigating Officer's report.
12. If there is disagreement, the Investigating Officer will present the evidence which is relevant to the facts in dispute. With the permission of the Committee, witnesses can be called to give relevant evidence. The Subject Member, the Committee members and the Independent Person may ask questions of the Investigating Officer or any witness.
13. The Subject Member or his/her representative will then present the evidence that is relevant to the facts in dispute. With the permission of the Committee, witnesses can be called to give relevant evidence. The Investigating Officer, the Committee members, the Independent Person and the Monitoring Officer/Deputy Monitoring Officer, may ask questions of the Subject Member or any witnesses.
14. If the Subject Member disagrees with any relevant fact in the report without having given prior notice, he or she must give good reasons for not mentioning it before the hearing. After considering the Subject Member's explanation, the Committee may continue with the hearing, relying on the information in the report, may allow the Subject member to make representations about the issue and invite the Investigating Officer to respond and call any witnesses as necessary, or may postpone the hearing to arrange for appropriate witnesses to be present.
15. Having usually considered the evidence submitted in public the Committee will consider in private, with the Independent Person and the Monitoring Officer (or the Deputy Monitoring Officer), its findings of fact, and its conclusion on whether there has been a failure to comply with the Code of Conduct. Depending on the complexity of the case, this may be done in two stages, with the Committee first hearing evidence and making findings of fact, and then hearing representations as to whether, on those facts, there has been a failure to comply with the Code of Conduct and making a finding on that issue.
16. At any stage in the consideration of the matter, the Committee may return to ask further questions of the Investigating Officer or the Subject Member or seek further information. The other party will be given an opportunity to comment upon the questions asked or the responses made.
17. At the conclusion of the Committee's deliberations, the Chairman will advise the Subject Member and the Investigating Officer of their findings.
18. If the Committee concludes that the Subject Member has failed to comply with the Code of Conduct, the Chairman will invite representations from the Investigating Officer and the Subject Member as to what action, if any, it should take, and will take advice also from the Independent Person. The Committee may ask questions of the Subject Member and the Investigating Officer. The Subject Member will be invited to make any final relevant points.
19. The Committee shall then consider in private, with the Independent Person and the Monitoring Officer or Deputy Monitoring Officer) whether to impose a sanction, and, if so, what sanction to impose and when that sanction should take effect.

20. The sanctions open to the Committee are:
- to censure the subject member;
 - to report its findings to full Council (or relevant parish council);
 - to recommend the subject member's Group Leader (or in the case of an ungrouped member to recommend to the Council) the removal of the Subject Member from any or all Committees;
 - if the subject member is a member of the Cabinet, to recommend the Leader of the Council to remove them from the Cabinet or to relieve them of particular Portfolio Holder responsibilities (in some circumstances this might be for a limited period of time);
 - to recommend to the subject members Group Leader that he/she be removed from some or all outside appointments to which he/she has been appointed by the Council;
 - to instruct the Monitoring Officer to request the subject member to attend training;
 - to withdraw any equipment or privileges provided to the subject member by the Council for a specified period of time as deemed appropriate by the Committee;
 - to exclude the subject member from the Council's offices with the exception of meeting rooms as necessary for attending Council, Committee or Task Group meetings, for a specified period of time;
 - if relevant recommend to council that the subject member be removed from their role as leader of the authority;
 - if relevant recommend to the secretary or appropriate official of a political group that the councillor be removed as group leader or other position of responsibility.
21. If the finding relates to the Subject Member's conduct in his/her capacity as a town/parish councillor, the Committee will report its findings to the town/parish council, and may make recommendations to the town/parish council on the imposition of sanctions.
22. In deciding to impose a sanction, the Committee will consider all the relevant circumstances.
23. The Chairman will announce the decision of the Committee. Written notice of the findings of the Committee will be given as soon as is reasonably practicable to the Subject Member. If the complaint was against the Subject Member as a town/parish councillor, written notice of the findings of the Committee will also be sent to the Town/Parish Clerk.
24. The Committee may consider making any recommendations to the authority concerned with a view to promoting higher standards of conduct among its members.
25. The decision of the Committee, whether or not there has been a finding of breach of the Code of Conduct, will be made public.

COMPLAINT FORM: ALLEGED BREACHES OF THE COUNCILLORS CODE OF CONDUCT

Your Details

1. Please provide us with your name and contact details:

Title (Mr/Mrs/Ms/Other):

First Name:

Last Name:

Address:

Daytime Telephone:

Evening Telephone:

Mobile Telephone:

Email Address:

(Please see attached notes explaining who this information will be given to).

2. Please tell us whether you are:

- A member of the public
- An elected or co-opted Councillor
- A Member of Parliament
- A Monitoring officer for another Council
- A Council employee
- Other (please specify)

3. Please state the name of the Councillor(s) you believe have breached the Code of Conduct and which Council they are a Member of:

<u>First Name</u>	<u>Last Name</u>	<u>Council Name</u>

(Please note that if your complaint relates to a Wyre Borough Councillor who is also a Lancashire County Councillor or a Member of a Parish or Town Council within the Wyre area, then the information on this form may be shared with that other Council).

4. Please explain in this section what the Councillor has done that you believe breaches the Code of Conduct. If you are complaining about more than one Councillor you should clearly explain what each individual person has done that you believe breaches the Code of Conduct.

It is important that you provide all the information you wish to have taken into account by the Monitoring Officer when he/she decides whether to take any action on your complaint. For example:

- You should state which specific provision(s) in the Code of Conduct which you think the Councillor has failed to comply with.
- You should be specific, wherever possible, about exactly what you are alleging the member said or did. For instance, instead of writing that the member insulted you, you should state what it was they said.
- You should provide the dates of the alleged incidents wherever possible. If you cannot provide exact dates it is important to give a general timeframe.
- You should confirm whether there are any witnesses to the alleged conduct and provide their names and contact details if possible.
- You should provide any relevant background information.

Please provide us with the details of your complaint. Continue on a separate sheet if there is not enough space on this form.

- 5. If you do not want your name to be revealed to the Councillor you are complaining about, please say why here.

(Please see attached notes explaining how such requests will be considered).

Date:

Please send your completed form to:

The Monitoring Officer
Wyre Borough Council
Civic Centre
Breck Road
Poulton-le-Fylde
Lancashire
FY6 7PU

Or email to: monitoringofficer@wyre.gov.uk