

STANDARDS AND ETHICS INDICATORS 2024

Reporting Officer: Lloyd White, Head of Democratic Services

SUMMARY

This report sets out summary information on the following range of topics, by which to gauge the corporate the health of the Authority in relation to Standards and Ethics:

- Public Interest Reports;
- Whistle Blowing Incidents;
- Challenges to Procurement Decisions;
- Employment Tribunal and Employment Appeal Tribunal Cases;
- Officer Declarations of Interest in relation to Council Contracts;
- Member Declarations of
 - Interest at Meetings
 - Gifts and Hospitality
- Local Government Ombudsman Complaints.

RECOMMENDATION: That the report be noted.

INFORMATION

The Committee has agreed to receive annual reports on a range of standards and ethics indicators and presenting this information in the public arena will demonstrate that the Council is conducting its business in a lawful, transparent manner and that any transgressions are dealt with according to due process. The figures below relate to the calendar year 2024.

1. **PUBLIC INTEREST REPORTS 2024:**

Nil. (nil in 2023)

2. **WHISTLE-BLOWING INCIDENTS REPORTED 2024:**

Nil (nil in 2023):

3. **CHALLENGES TO PROCUREMENT DECISIONS 2024:**

Nil (nil in 2023).

4. **EMPLOYMENT TRIBUNAL (ET) AND EMPLOYMENT APPEAL TRIBUNAL (EAT) CASES RECEIVED AND/OR SETTLED AND/OR ONGOING 2024:**

In 2024, 4 ET claims were settled and there are currently 2 active cases both relating to unfair dismissal claims.

5. **OFFICER DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST IN RELATION TO COUNCIL CONTRACTS 2024:**

Nil

6. MEMBER DECLARATIONS 2024:

i) **Declarations of Interest made by Members at Meetings during 2024:**

Note: A Member with a *pecuniary* interest in any matter being considered must declare that interest, not speak or vote on the item and leave the meeting. A Member with a *non-pecuniary* interest must declare that interest but may remain in the meeting, speak and vote. If, however, a member of the public, knowing all the relevant facts, would view the non-pecuniary interest as so significant that it is likely to prejudice the Member's judgment of the public interest, then that Member must declare that interest, not speak or vote on the item and must leave the room whilst that item is being considered.

In 2024 the following declarations were made by Members:

Councillor:

Bennett - 1
Burles - 1
Corthorne - 14
Garelick – 2

Judge - 1
Mand - 1
Nelson- West - 3

Broken down as follows:

14th February 2024 - Hillingdon Planning Committee

7. Hayes Park Central and South (FUL) - 12853/APP/2023/1492
 - Councillor Nelson-West – Non-Pecuniary - the application site was situated within his Ward. He left the room during the consideration of the item.
8. Hayes Park Central and South (LBC) - 12853/APP/2023/1493
 - Councillor Nelson-West - Non-Pecuniary - the application site was situated within his Ward. He left the room during the consideration of the item.
9. Rosedale College, Wood End Green Road, Hayes - 16034/APP/2023/2812
 - Councillor Garelick – Non-Pecuniary - the application site was situated within her Ward. She remained in the room during the consideration of the item.
10. Rosedale College (temporary classrooms associated with 2812) - 16034/APP/2023/2796
 - Councillor Garelick – Non-Pecuniary - the application site was situated within her Ward. She remained in the room during the consideration of the item.

14th March 2024 - Hillingdon Planning Committee

9. Dyson Drive, Uxbridge - 78464/APP/2023/3668
 - Councillor Bennett – Non-Pecuniary - he lived in an adjacent road. He left the room while this item was being considered and did not vote on the item.

18th April 2024 - Children, Families and Education Select Committee

6. Hillingdon Music Hub Annual Report
 - Councillor Judge – Non-Pecuniary - Cllr worked for Ealing Council, dealing with school finance, and there was an element of Ealing Music Service which she oversaw. Councillor Judge remained in the room for this item.

5th June 2024 - Pensions Committee

5. Administration Report
6. Draft 2023/24 External Audit Report and 2024/25 Audit Plan
7. Investment Strategy and Fund Manager Performance - Part I
8. Responsible Investment
9. Risk Register Report

10. Governance
11. Investment Part II - Strategy review and Manager Updates - Including Investment Strategy Statement
12. 2023/24 Budget Outturn and 2024/25 Business Plan and Budget
 - Councillor Corthorne – Non-Pecuniary - as a deferred member of the Local Government Pension Scheme. He remained in the room during discussion of these items.

24th September 2024 - Residents' Services Select Committee

5. Review of Homelessness and the Customer Journey
 - Councillor Burles – Non-Pecuniary - on the Management Board of the Citizen's Advice Bureau in Hillingdon. Councillor Burles remained in the room but did not participate in the discussion on this item.

2nd October 2024 - Hillingdon Planning Committee

8. 152-154 Uxbridge Road - 4482/APP/2022/213
 - Councillor Mand - Pecuniary - as the proposed development was opposite his home. Councillor Mand left the room for the duration of the item.

5th December 2024 - Hillingdon Planning Committee

6. 16 Hayes End Drive, 9105/APP/2024/1760
 - Councillor Nelson-West – Non-Pecuniary - Councillor had been in correspondence with petitioners. He left the room for this item and did not take part in the vote.

10th December 2024 - Pensions Committee

5. Administration Report
6. Investment Strategy and Fund Manager Performance - Part I
7. Responsible Investment
8. Risk Register Report
9. Governance
10. PF Annual Report and Draft Accounts
 - Councillor Corthorne – Non-Pecuniary - as a deferred member of the Local Government Pension Scheme. He remained in the room during discussion of these items.

ii) Member Declarations of Gifts and Hospitality during 2024:

In 2024, 4 declarations were received (17 in 2021, 20 in 2022 and 6 in 2023) from:

Councillor Bianco

- 25.04.24 - Dinner with MP for Uxbridge & South Ruislip at the House of Lords - approx' £40 - accepted

Councillor Edwards

- 16.04.24 - Hayes Muslim Centre - Foodstuff hamper - £40 - accepted and shared with office.
- 26.06.24 - Mrs Janet Edwards - gift of cake - approx' value £10 - given to staff.

Councillor Smallwood

- 21.09.24 - Abel Campos - boxing tickets - £225 - accepted.

7. OMBUDSMAN COMPLAINTS RECEIVED/SETTLED 2024

Complaints to the Local Government Ombudsman (LGO) continue to be dealt with within required timescales and in accordance with the Council's Corporate Complaints Policy.

The Policy was reviewed and updated by Cabinet in 2015 with the result that the process has been streamlined and made more efficient for complainants, with less time spent on complaints about 'policy' or complaints that could be labelled frivolous.

Complaints to the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman and Housing Ombudsman Service during 2024:

In 2024, the Housing Ombudsman Service and the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman concluded 57 complaints, (56 for 2019, 67 for 2020, 34 in 2021, 89 in 2022 and 36 for 2023) The figures for 2024 are as follows:

Service Area	Total complaints	Upheld	Partially Upheld	Not Upheld	Did not investigate
Finance	7	2	1	0	4
Adult Social Care	1	0	1	0	0
Children Services	0	0	0	0	0
Place	49	12	5	17	15
Total	57	14	7	17	19

The number of Ombudsman Investigations is higher than 2023 of 36 and it is envisaged that the volume of complaints to the Ombudsman will continue to rise. This is because on 1 April 2024, the Housing Ombudsman Service and Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman introduced new Complaint Handling Codes which removed informal complaints as a category and replaced it with "Service Request".

This profound change is having an impact on the handling of complaints as the council now registers more formal complaints and this means more complaints escalating to the Ombudsman. The informal step was useful as it was used to resolve complaint(s) through dialogue. Please note that of the 57 complaints concluded by the Ombudsman in 2024, 63% (36) were either not upheld or did not investigate, which is a significant number of investigations.