

Dorset Council – Complaint No. COM8830

Investigation in respect of alleged breaches of the Shaftesbury Town Council Code of Conduct

Investigation undertaken by Mary Dolley Legal Services Dorset Council

Background

Section 27 of the Localism Act 2011 requires relevant authorities to promote and maintain high standards of conduct by members of the authority and, under section 28 of the Act, to have mechanisms in place to investigate allegations that a member has not complied with the Code of Conduct.

Following an initial review by the Complaints Team and having been reviewed by the Monitoring Officer and Dorset Council's Independent Person, complaint number COM8830 was referred for investigation on 21 May 2025.

Introduction

In order to be able to carry out an investigation of the complaint raised I viewed and listened to the following:

- The Councillor Code of Conduct (the Code) adopted by Shaftesbury Town Council (the Town Council) on 14 May 2024 (Appendix B.1)
- The Standing Orders of the Town Council (the Standing Orders) adopted by it on 14 May 2024 (Appendix B.2)
- The agenda for and the minutes of the Full Council meeting of the Town Council held on 18 March 2025 (Appendix B.3) and the audio recording of that meeting.
- A relevant post on the Facebook page of This is Alfred (Appendix B.4)
- Various emails from the Town Clerk to Cllr Yeo as listed in the table in Appendix B.5

To supplement the information provided to me and available in the public domain on the Town Council's website, I also met virtually with the following people in order to seek their comments on a number of issues:

- Cllr Andy Hollingshead (the complainant) – 19 August 2025 (virtual meeting on Teams) (Appendix C)
- Cllr Alex Chase – 14 August 2025 (virtual meeting on Teams) (Appendix D)
- Cllr Peter Yeo (the subject member) – 11 September 2025 (virtual meeting on Teams) (Appendix E)

A record of our discussions is attached at Appendices C, D and E. The records of the discussions with Cllr Hollingshead and Cllr Chase have been agreed with them. Cllr

Yeo has not agreed the record of the discussion with him. He has submitted a written statement which is attached at Appendix F. I remain of the view that the interview record at Appendix E is an accurate record of the interview. I have read Cllr Yeo's statement and to the extent that it is relevant to the investigation I am reporting on I have applied paragraph numbers to its text and commented on it in the section of this report headed 'Further Findings'.

Complaint No. COM8830

A complaint was received from Cllr Andy Hollingshead a member of Shaftesbury Town Council alleging that at a Full Council meeting of the Town Council held on 18 March 2025 the conduct of Councillor Yeo another member of the Town Council was such that Chair suspended the meeting for ten minutes pursuant to SO2, and that the altercation that gave rise to the suspension was publicised in the local media by means of the This is Alfred radio station and its related Facebook page. The complainant alleges breaches of paragraphs 1 and 5 of the Code.

The complaint is set out verbatim at Appendix A.

Undisputed facts

The undisputed facts relating to the complaint are:

1. A meeting of the Full Council of the Town Council ('the meeting') took place on 18 March 2025. The meeting was chaired by Cllr Alex Chase and commenced at approximately 7.00 pm. The first part of the meeting dealt with questions from members of the public and the formal business began at approximately 7.34 pm.
2. The Town Clerk having previously tendered her resignation it was necessary for a new one to be appointed to replace her. Item no 7 on the agenda for the meeting was headed 'To consider the recruitment process for the role of Town Clerk'. The item included a report that outlined a proposed course of action including the formation of a selection committee and sought approval from the Town Council to initiate the recruitment process.
3. Discussion of agenda item no 7 commenced at approximately 8.12 pm, the meeting was suspended by Cllr Chase in accordance with SO2(c) of the Standing Orders at approximately 8.27 pm and recommenced at approximately 8.39 pm. The discussion of Agenda item no 7 concluded at approximately 8.47pm.
4. On 19 March extracts from the meeting were broadcast by the This is Alfred local radio station as part of its Alfred Daily radio programme.
5. A video clip of part of the meeting was also posted by This is Alfred on its Facebook page. The video clip ran for approximately 54 seconds and showed the vote being taken and the meeting being adjourned pursuant to SO2.

Facts/statements not agreed

Cllr Yeo denies that he has acted in breach of the Code.

Findings

1. The Code was adopted on 14 May 2024. The paragraphs that are relevant to the complaint are:
 - 1.1. General principles of councillor conduct – to lead by example and act in a way that secures public confidence in the role of councillor.
 - 1.2. Standards of councillor conduct:-
 - 1.2.1. Respect (paragraph 1.1) – to treat other councillors and members of the public with respect.
 - 1.2.2. Disrepute (paragraph 5) – not to bring the role or local authority into disrepute.
 - 1.2.3. Complying with the Code of Conduct (paragraph 8.1) – to undertake Code of Conduct training provided by the local authority.
2. The Standing Orders contain amongst other matters, provisions about the rules of debate at meetings (SO1), disorderly conduct at meetings (SO2), the conduct of meetings generally including arrangements for members of the public to address meetings and for meetings to be recorded (SO3), and motions at a meeting that do not require written notice (SO10).
3. Councillor Hollingshead's complaint relates to the conduct of Councillor Yeo at the meeting and in order to investigate the complaint and as well as reading the minutes of the meeting and interviewing the persons mentioned above, I watched the video recording of the meeting, listened to the relevant segment from the Alfred Daily broadcast on 19 March 2025 (see paragraphs 5.1 to 5.5 below) and looked at material posted by This is Alfred on its Facebook page on 18 March 2025 (see paragraph 5.6 below).
4. The complaint concerns the discussion of item no. 7 on the agenda for the meeting and:
 - 4.1. Agenda item 7 is headed 'To consider the recruitment process for the role of Town Clerk', and it comprised a brief report recording the resignation of the Town Clerk and containing proposals for the recruitment of a replacement, including five recommendations intended to be debated and subject to any amendments, put to a vote in order for a decision to be taken in the usual way.
 - 4.2. The discussion of agenda item 7 began approximately 1 hour and 12 minutes into the meeting and in accordance with standard procedure, Cllr Chase who was in the chair introduced the item. Having obtained Cllr Chase's permission to speak the complainant made some comments, asked a few questions and (amongst other things) made some suggestions regarding the formation of the selection committee referred to in the recommendations. Cllr Yeo, having got to his feet but not having requested permission to speak, interrupted the complainant and notwithstanding Cllr Chase's request to him to be quiet, objected to the complainant's suggestion regarding the selection committee, and asserted that the proposed procedure was another instance of the process being fixed as he claimed it had been in 2022 on the previous occasion when recruitment for a new Town Clerk took place. Cllr Yeo's tone was aggressive and confrontational and his criticism of the recruitment process and his fellow councillors' approach to it quickly became personal.

- 4.3. Cllr Williams raised a point of order under the procedure described in SO1(p) (which permits interruption to make a point of order) and invoked SO2(a), which states that no person shall obstruct the transaction of business at a meeting or behave offensively or improperly. Cllr Chase accordingly requested that Cllr Yeo moderate his conduct. Cllr Yeo remained on his feet and talked over Cllr Chase, stating that he was entitled to speak and that the use of SO2(a) was improper and an attempt by Cllr Williams to prevent free speech and democracy. Cllr Yeo made a jibe directed at Cllr Williams about his political affiliation. Cllr Yeo's behaviour was disrespectful and rude and fell far short of the standard of conduct described in paragraph 1 of the Code.
- 4.4. The discussion about the formation of the selection committee proceeded and having remained on his feet Cllr Yeo interrupted again, continuing to criticise the process when the Town Clerk post was previously recruited for, and stating that in his view it should be open to any councillor who wanted to, to be on the selection committee. Cllr Chase having specified the order in which those who wanted to speak were to do so in accordance with SO3(k), Cllrs Dibben, Smith, Brown, Philpott and Yeo spoke. When it was his turn to speak Cllr Yeo reiterated his dissatisfaction with the way in which the recruitment process had been dealt with in 2022 and described it as highly improper. Amongst other things he stated that he ought to have been permitted to participate in the interview process and that good candidates had been ruled out of the process for insufficient reason. He said that the current process was a joke and that it was not the way Town Council business should be done.
- 4.5. Cllr Yeo then proceeded to criticise Cllr Dibben, who had left the meeting having apologised to Cllr Chase, for being unprofessional and again to describe the way in which the current recruitment process was being dealt with as improper. He asserted that he had a right to speak for three minutes and said that Cllr Chase should have stopped Cllr Dibben from speaking while he was doing so.
- 4.6. In accordance with SO2(a) Cllr Chase again asked Cllr Yeo to moderate his conduct and when he did not do so, moved his exclusion from the meeting in accordance with SO2 (b). The motion to exclude was seconded and passed, the only person voting against it being Cllr Yeo. When he refused to leave the council chamber and continued to complain vociferously about the use of SO2 and what he said was the unprofessional behaviour of his fellow councillors, Cllr Chase suspended the business of the meeting for ten minutes pursuant to SO2(c). Cllr Yeo reiterated his view that all the councillors had made the Town Council into more of a joke than it already was, that membership of the selection committee should be open to anyone who wanted to be on it, that the process was improper and that Cllr Chase was unfit to be the Mayor of Shaftesbury. He continued to demand that he be allowed to speak for three minutes and stated that the chair of the meeting should not be allowed to stop him and that it was undemocratic if he was not permitted to do so. Having watched the recording of the meeting I find that Cllr Yeo in fact spoke for longer than three minutes and for longer than any of the other participants in the debate; in addition to the contribution he made at the invitation of the chair, he interrupted other councillors when they were speaking and made other uninvited interjections.
- 4.7. When the meeting reconvened at approximately 8.39 pm Cllr Chase again requested Cllr Yeo to moderate his conduct in accordance with SO2(a). Discussion of agenda item 7 concluded approximately 35 minutes after it

- began, including the ten-minute period during which the meeting was suspended.
- 4.8. The minutes of the meeting record that the report relating to the process for the recruitment of a new Town Clerk was received and noted. The minutes also record that the recommendations were debated and broadly accepted, all councillors present with the exception of Cllr Yeo voting in favour of them; Cllr Yeo voted against the motion.
- 4.9. I find that Cllr Yeo's conduct throughout the discussion of agenda item 7 fell far below that required of him by the Code.
5. The complaint refers also to the publicity afforded locally to the part of the meeting referred to in paragraph 4 above and:
- 5.1. I have viewed the website of This is Alfred [This is Alfred – Great Stories From Shaftesbury, The Vale And Chase](#) the local radio station referred to in Cllr Hollingshead's complaint. The home page states that This is Alfred is a not-for-profit community radio station broadcasting from Shaftesbury. The website also states that the Alfred Daily is a 60-minute radio programme for Shaftesbury and the surrounding area, which is broadcast 7 days a week.
- 5.2. This is Alfred Limited is a company incorporated pursuant to the Companies Acts which was formed in 2018 and is a private company limited by guarantee. Its registration number is 11724793 and the nature of its business is specified in the register at Companies House as radio broadcasting. It holds an Ofcom community radio station licence.
- 5.3. This is Alfred also has a presence on Facebook, its page being called 'Alfred – News from Shaftesbury' which has 11,000 followers [Facebook](#)
- 5.4. The Alfred Daily reported on the meeting both on its daily broadcast on 19 March 2025 and by posting a clip of the meeting on its Facebook page.
- 5.5. Using the 'Listen Again' facility on the This is Alfred website I accessed the Alfred Daily broadcast that aired on 19 March 2025. Coverage of the discussion of agenda item 7 commenced approximately 44 minutes and 40 seconds into the broadcast and finished at approximately 51 minutes and 3 seconds. The coverage included excerpts from the recording of the part of the meeting that dealt with Agenda item no. 7, interspersed with commentary. The coverage concluded with the presenter saying that as the recruitment process moved forward it would seem that whoever was appointed to the role of Town Clerk would need skills in conflict management and dealing with strong personalities.
- 5.6. Item no 4 in Appendix B includes a screenshot of the post on This is Alfred's Facebook page. The clip lasted for approximately 54 seconds and showed the vote being taken for the suspension of the meeting for ten minutes – see paragraph 5.6 above. The clip included Cllr Yeo's statements that his fellow councillors were behaving in a highly unprofessional way, that his fellow councillors were making the Town Council into more of a joke than it already was, and that Cllr Chase was unfit to be the Mayor of Shaftesbury. The text adjacent to the clip shows that 72 comments were applied to the post, and that it has been viewed 16,000 times. I have viewed some of the comments applied to the post by members of the public; many of them were critical of Cllr Yeo's conduct at the meeting.
6. I have also read five emails sent by the Town Clerk to Cllr Yeo (see Appendix B.5) some of them dating back to Cllr Yeo's previous term of office and all of which

referred to the need to observe the provisions of the Code and offered him support and guidance to enable him to do so and:-

- 6.1. The email of 20 July 2022 (B.5.1) referenced the Full Council meeting that had taken place the previous evening. Amongst other things the email reminded Cllr Yeo of various provisions contained in the Code including those relating to treating other councillors, members of the public and Town Council employees with respect. The email quoted verbatim from parts of the Code and recommended that Cllr Yeo ought to consider how he delivered his message and presented himself.
- 6.2. The email of 28 September 2022 (B.5.2) recorded that Cllr Yeo had not responded to the email of 22 July 2022. The email was sent in the aftermath of the Town Council meeting that had taken place the previous evening. The email urged Cllr Yeo to attend the Code training (also known as Standards in Public Life training) and offered four dates on which online training was available. The email referred also to the Civility and Respect pledge promoted by the National Association of Local Councils and to which the Town Council has subscribed and to the Town Council's own Dignity at Work policy, and the Good Councillors Guide which is also promoted by the NALC. When listening to the recording of the meeting I noted that at one point when Cllr Yeo was speaking he described the Civility and Respect pledge as 'the purely voluntary behaviour thing that you don't have to sign whatsoever', indicating to me his disregard and indeed disdain for such initiatives and for the need to abide by the Code and its associated standards of conduct.
- 6.3. The email of 20 October 2022 (B.5.3) recorded that Cllr Yeo had not responded to the email of 29 September 2022 and again referenced Cllr Yeo's unsatisfactory behaviour at a recent Town Council meeting, including the making of condescending comments, disrupting the meeting and his disrespectful attitude. The email reminded Cllr Yeo of the desirability of attending Code of Conduct training.
- 6.4. The email of 29 October 2022 (B.5.4) reiterated dates on which Code training could be made available to Cllr Yeo.
- 6.5. The email of 10 May 2024 (B.5.5) referred to a presentation that had been given the previous evening and Cllr Yeo's conduct at it and reiterated to him the need to abide by the Code, the Nolan Principles and Town Council policies.

I therefore find that Cllr Yeo has been aware at all material times of the existence of the Code and the need to abide by it, and that he has continued to disregard its provisions notwithstanding that his attention has been drawn to them and to the existence of materials that would have assisted him in understanding how he ought to conduct himself in order to meet public expectations, as described in the Joint Statement at the beginning of the Code.

Further Findings

7. I have read the paragraphs numbered 31 to 46 of Cllr Yeo's statement (Appendix E). (The paragraphs numbered 1 to 30 are dealt with in the report relating to the complaints numbered COM 8299 and COM 8319.)
8. As regards paragraphs 31 to 39 of the statement, for the reasons stated in paragraph 1 of the section of this report headed 'Conclusion' below I do not accept Cllr Yeo's contention that the use of SO2 at the meeting was unlawful or

inappropriate, nor that the conduct of any of his fellow councillors in using SO2 as they did was a breach of the Code. Nor do I find that the motive of any of the councillors concerned in doing so was improper.

9. As regards paragraphs 40 to 44 of the statement, Mr Proctor was not a councillor at the time of the meeting. During my investigation I have found no evidence of the existence of a cabal of councillors, nor that any group of councillors conspired to misuse the Standing Orders, take decisions unlawfully or to prevent Cllr Yeo from speaking at meetings provided that he did so within the scope of what is acceptable under the Code and the Standing Orders.
10. As regards paragraph 45 of Cllr Yeo's statement and for the reasons set out in paragraph 6 above, I do not accept that he was unaware of the need to undertake training about the Code. Indeed the contents of paragraph 45 are contradictory – if Cllr Yeo had fully understood the requirements of the Code as he states, he would be aware that Paragraph 8.1 of it requires him to undertake Code training provided by the Town Council and he would have responded positively to the emails particularised in Appendix B.5 rather than ignoring them as he seems to have done.
11. As regards paragraph 46 of Cllr Yeo's statement I have found nothing to support his allegation that Cllr Hollingshead's complaint is vexatious or malicious, nor that his behaviour towards Cllr Yeo at the meeting on 18 March 2025 and the meetings referred to in the report relating to the complaints numbered COM 8299 and COM 8319, was abusive.

Conclusion

On concluding my investigation, I am of the view that Cllr Yeo is in breach of the Code as follows:

1. As regards the General principles of councillor conduct that require a councillor to lead by example and act in a way that secures public confidence in the role of councillor and paragraph 1 of the Standards of councillor conduct that require a councillor to treat other councillors with respect:

Conclusion: I conclude that in my opinion Councillor Yeo is in breach of these provisions of the Code.

The Joint Statement at the beginning of the Code states that the role of councillor across all tiers of local government is a vital part of democracy and that it is important that councillors can be held accountable and adopt the behaviours and responsibilities associated with the role. It reminds councillors that their individual conduct affects the reputation of all councillors and that there is an individual and collective responsibility to meet the expectations of the public by maintaining high standards and demonstrating good conduct and by challenging behaviour which falls below expectations. The Statement concludes by stating that the Code has been designed to protect the Council's role, encourage good conduct and safeguard the public's trust in local government.

The section of the Code headed 'General principles of councillor conduct' states that everyone in public office should uphold the Nolan Principles and sets out how councillors should act on all occasions. Paragraph 1 of the section of the Code headed 'Standards of councillor conduct' requires councillors to treat other

councillors with respect and the accompanying text states that respect means politeness and courtesy in behaviour and speech, and that whilst debate and having different views are all part of a healthy democracy and councillors can express, challenge, criticise and disagree with views and policies in a robust but civil manner, councillors should not subject individuals or organisations to personal attack.

The Guidance issued by the Local Government Association on its Model Councillor Code of Conduct, on which the Code is closely based, states that showing respect to others is fundamental to a civil society and that rude, offensive and disrespectful behaviour lowers the public's expectations and confidence in its elected representatives. It goes on to explain that the key roles and responsibilities of councillors (representing and serving communities and taking decisions on their behalf) require councillors to interact and communicate effectively with others and that one means by which this is achieved is by attending local authority meetings, thereby needing to be able to interact with many different people with different or conflicting needs and points of view. The Guidance suggests that although councillors will at times engage in robust debate and may express, challenge, criticise and disagree with views, ideas, opinions and policies, this ought to be done in a respectful way. Examples of respectful behaviour given in the Guidance include being polite and courteous, listening and paying attention to others, having consideration for other people's feelings and following protocols and rules. The Guidance explains that this can mean using appropriate language in meetings, allowing others time to speak without interruption during debates, focusing any criticism or challenge on ideas and policies rather than personalities or personal attributes and recognising the contribution of others to projects. Examples of disrespect include rude or angry outbursts at meetings, the use of inappropriate language in meetings, attempts to shame or humiliate others in public and fault-finding. The Guidance states that ongoing disrespectful behaviour can damage morale and ultimately create a toxic culture.

In my opinion whilst Cllr Yeo was entitled to express his views about the process to be adopted for recruiting and choosing a new Town Clerk, he ought to have done so politely rather than in the confrontational, accusatory and belligerent manner in which he did. On the first occasion when he spoke to the matter, he interrupted the complainant rather than seeking the permission of the Chair to speak, contrary to SO3 (i). His choice of language to describe his reservations about the proposed arrangements was unfortunate and at times intemperate and he conveyed his views rudely, aggressively and angrily. By continually describing his fellow councillors as unprofessional and stating that the process was improper, he was in my view demonstrating a lack of respect not only to them but also to the employees of the Town Council including the Town Clerk, who had done much work to bring the proposals for the recruitment process forward to the agenda. The way in which he behaved, which resulted in the meeting being suspended as described in paragraph 4 of the section above headed 'Findings' in my view fell a long way short of the standard of conduct required by the General principles of councillor conduct that requires a councillor on all occasions to treat all persons fairly and with respect, and paragraph 1 of the section of the Code headed 'General Conduct'.

During the interview summarised in Appendix E and in the statement he subsequently provided (Appendix F), Cllr Yeo asserted that if allowed by the Chair

to speak, he has the right at any Town Council meeting to speak uninterrupted to a particular agenda item or debate, for three minutes. I have read SO1(t) of the Standing Orders which states that except for motions moved under SO1(r), contributions or speeches by a councillor shall relate only to the motion under discussion and shall not exceed three minutes without the consent of the chairman of the meeting. In my view SO1(t) does not permit a councillor to speak for three minutes in circumstances where their conduct and/or manner of speaking could reasonably be said to be obstructing the transaction of business or to amount to offensive or improper behaviour within the meaning of SO2(a). When called to account by reason of his interruptions and interjections, Cllr Yeo has asserted that it is his democratic right to speak, and whilst this is indeed the case his contributions must be made within the framework provided by the Code and the Standing Orders. The Town Council is a representative democracy to which all councillors are elected (or nominated if there are no more candidates than available seats). All members of the Town Council have the right to speak at meetings, in accordance with the provisions of the Standing Orders and Cllr Yeo has no greater right to do so than any of the other councillors.

Cllr Yeo has also contended in his Statement that SO2 was used improperly at the meeting and that it does not apply to councillors but rather only to members of the public. I do not agree with this interpretation. In cases where a provision in the Standing Orders applies only to councillors, the word 'councillor' is used; an example of this is found in SO1. In cases where a provision applies only to members of the public, the words 'member of the public' are used, as for instance in SO3(e). Moreover, paragraphs xii and xiii of SO10, which describes the procedure for dealing with motions at a meeting that do not require written notice, mirror SO2b in their use of language. SO10.xii uses the words 'to not hear further from a councillor or a member of the public' and SO10.xiii uses the words 'to exclude a councillor or member of the public for disorderly conduct'. It is therefore clear to me that the use of the word 'person' in SO2 means that its provisions apply both to councillors and members of the public alike. I conclude also that the use of SO2 during the meeting was lawful, justified and proportionate in the circumstances.

2. As regards paragraph 5 of the section of the Code headed 'Standards of councillor conduct' that require a councillor not to bring their role or local authority into disrepute:

Conclusion: I conclude that Cllr Yeo is in breach of this provision of the Code.

The explanatory commentary about paragraph 5 states that councillors are trusted to make decisions on behalf of their community and their actions and behaviour are thus subject to greater scrutiny than those of ordinary members of the public, and that their actions may lower public confidence in theirs or their council's ability to discharge its functions. The commentary goes on to state that councillors may hold their council and fellow councillors to account and may constructively challenge and express concern about decisions and processes undertaken by the council, whilst continuing to adhere to other aspects of the Code.

The LGA Guidance referred to in paragraph 1 above defines disrepute as a lack of good reputation or respectability. It states that a councillor's behaviour in office will bring their role into disrepute if the conduct could reasonably be regarded as either reducing the public's confidence in them being able to fulfil their role or adversely affecting the reputation of the authority's councillors in being able to fulfil their role. It goes on to state that conduct by a councillor which could reasonably be regarded as reducing public confidence in their local authority being able to fulfil its functions and duties, will bring the authority into disrepute. The Guidance states that making grossly unfair or patently untrue or unreasonable criticism of a councillor's authority in a public arena might well be regarded as bringing that authority into disrepute.

When challenging the procedural steps that his fellow councillors wanted to take in connection with the recruitment of a Town Clerk and as described in paragraph 1, Cllr Yeo repeatedly accused his fellow councillors of a lack of professionalism and of having made the Town Council into more of a joke than it already was. He also alleged that the recruitment process was improper. By making such allegations publicly and by doing so in the intemperate, provocative and exaggerated manner in which he did, and by using personal criticism, I am of the view that Cllr Yeo's conduct was intended to undermine the Town Council's reputation and was likely to lower the public's confidence in its ability to discharge its functions.

3. Although not part of the complaint, during the course of my investigation it has transpired that Cllr Yeo has not undertaken Code of Conduct training as required by the Code:

Conclusion: I conclude that Cllr Yeo is in breach of paragraph 8.1 of the Code.

When interviewing Cllr Yeo I asked him why he had not undertaken the standards (Code of Conduct) training required of all councillors and he told me that he was not aware that such training must be done (see para 4 of interview record in Appendix E). In light of the emails I have seen and to which I have referred in paragraph 6 of the section of this report headed 'Findings', I do not believe that Cllr Yeo was unaware of the requirement that he abide by the provisions of the Code, including paragraph 8.1 in the section headed 'Standards of councillor conduct' that refers to undertaking training about it.

Further conclusions

As to the coverage of the meeting by This is Alfred including the radio broadcast on 19 March and the video clip posted on its Facebook page, whilst councillors and members of the public are entitled to their own views about the media and how it reports on matters relating to the Town Council and its meetings, it is a reasonable expectation that councillors should be aware that their actions and words are likely to be scrutinised by the media and so brought to the attention of the public. The fourth of the Nolan principles of public life is that of accountability and states that holders of public office are accountable to the public for their decisions and actions and must submit themselves to the scrutiny necessary to ensure this. Whilst the possibility of adverse media coverage cannot and should not prevent councillors from expressing their own opinions and the views of those they are elected to

represent, and on occasion participating in the taking of decisions that might not be universally popular, councillors ought to be mindful that their words and actions are likely to be publicised in the media and thereby subjected to a measure of comment that might not always be positive. It is therefore all the more necessary that they consider how their behaviour and the manner in which they express themselves are likely to be perceived, and that they moderate their words and conduct accordingly.

The complaint with which this report is concerned relates to events that occurred at a meeting where the process for the recruitment of a Town Clerk was discussed. The role of Town Clerk is an important one, encompassing a wide range of responsibilities that are crucial for the effective functioning of the Town Council – the Town Clerk serves as chief administrative officer of the Town Council having day-to-day oversight of a number of members of staff and handling a wide range of tasks such as managing meetings, record-keeping and ensuring compliance with local government regulations. The Town Clerk interacts with various stakeholders and provides advice and support to councillors. From an examination of the information on its website, the Town Council is responsible for the running of several facilities that are important to the residents of Shaftesbury. The importance of attracting and retaining a suitable person to serve as Town Clerk is therefore in my view critical. The Joint Statement at the beginning of the Code states that the conduct of individual councillors affects the reputation of all councillors and that the role of councillor ought to be one that people aspire to. The same principle applies in relation to those who work for the Town Council, and the quality of leadership required by the Code to be displayed by councillors ought to mean that the Town Council is, and is perceived as, an employer of choice.

Mary Dolley
Legal Services
Dorset Council
28 January 2026

Appendix A

COMPLAINT No. COM8830

At Full Council on Tuesday 18 March 2025 Cllr Yeo's conduct was such that SO 2 (b) (c) was breached and the chairman was forced to suspend the meeting for 10 minutes. The altercation was put on a local media outlet (This is Alfred) and at time of writing had in excess of 10,000 views and 63 comments.

The complainant alleges that Cllr Yeo thereby failed to comply with Respect, Disrepute and Code of Conduct clauses and requirements.

Appendix B

1. The Town Council's Code of Conduct [Model Councillor Code of Conduct 2020](#)
2. The Town Council's Standing Orders [Standing-Orders-2025-05-20.pdf](#)
3. The Agenda and Minutes of the Town Council meeting held on 18 March 2025 [2025-03-18-Full-Council-Agenda-UPDATED.pdf](#) and [2025-03-18-Full-Council-Minutes-Approved.pdf](#)
4. Post on the Facebook page of This is Alfred [Video](#) | [Facebook](#)



5.

B.5.1	20 July 2022 - email from the Town Clerk to Cllr Yeo
B.5.2	28 September 2022 - email from the Town Clerk to Cllr Yeo
B.5.3	20 October 2022 - email from the Town Clerk to Cllr Yeo
B.5.4	29 October 2022 - email from the Town Clerk to Cllr Yeo
B.5.5	10 May 2024 - email from the Town Clerk to Cllr Yeo

Appendix C

Interview with Cllr Andy Hollingshead (Complainant)

1. I explained to Cllr Hollingshead that the purpose of the interview was to gather information to enable me fully to understand the background to the complaint I had been asked to investigate, so that I could formulate my report and any conclusions for consideration by the Monitoring Officer and the Independent Person and if necessary, by the Audit and Governance (Hearing) Sub-Committee. I explained that the investigation is being undertaken in accordance with Dorset Council's Arrangements for dealing with Councillor Code of Conduct complaints and I advised him that the Arrangements could be accessed on Dorset Council's website. I advised Cllr Hollingshead that our interview was to remain confidential.
2. I asked Cllr Hollingshead to explain his understanding of the comments made by Cllr Yeo about the process adopted the last time a Town Clerk was being recruited

namely in 2022, Cllr Yeo having alleged that the process had been fixed. Cllr Hollingshead said that the background to Cllr Yeo's allegation is that as most councillors agreed that it was not feasible to have all of them involved in the detail of the selection and interview process, there was a consensus that a panel (informal committee) ought to be formed to consider the applications, interview the candidates and make a recommendation for appointment to a Full Council meeting. Cllr Hollingshead was one of the councillors who considered that only councillors who had subscribed to the civility and respect pledge promoted by the Society of Local Council Clerks and the National Association of Local Councils should be appointed to such panels, although this approach was not ultimately adopted by the Town Council. Cllr Hollingshead believes that Cllr Yeo's allegation that the minutes of the relevant meeting in 2022 at which this was discussed had been fabricated is born of his (Cllr Yeo's) belief that the minutes of Town Council meetings should be a word-for-word account of everything that is said by those who speak rather than a record of the decisions taken.

3. Cllr Hollingshead confirmed that Cllr Brown had seconded the motion introduced by Cllr Chase for the exclusion of Cllr Yeo from the 18 March meeting, pursuant to SO2(b).
4. Cllr Hollingshead had noted from This is Alfred's Facebook page that there had been in excess of 16,000 viewings of the clip posted on it relating to Cllr Yeo's behaviour at the 18 March meeting, and that the majority of the 72 people who had added comments to the post had been critical of Cllr Yeo's conduct.
5. Cllr Hollingshead has established that approximately 900 people had listened to the Alfred Daily broadcast on 19 March 2025, that included a six-minute segment reporting on the discussion of agenda item no 7 at the 18 March meeting.

Appendix D

Interview with Cllr Alex Chase

1. I explained to Cllr Chase that the purpose of the interview was to gather information to enable me fully to understand the background to the complaint I had been asked to investigate, so that I could formulate my report and any conclusions for consideration by the Monitoring Officer and the Independent Person and if necessary, by the Audit and Governance (Hearing) Sub-Committee. I explained that the investigation is being undertaken in accordance with Dorset Council's Arrangements for dealing with Councillor Code of Conduct complaints and I advised him that the Arrangements could be accessed on Dorset Council's website. I advised Cllr Chase that our interview was to remain confidential.
2. I confirmed to Cllr Chase that the complaint relates to the events that occurred during the discussion of Agenda item no 7 at the 18 March 2025 Full Council meeting, and I explained that I had read the agenda and the minutes and viewed the video recording of the meeting.
3. Cllr Chase explained that Cllr Yeo has a history of interrupting speakers at meetings of the Town Council, and being rude to other councillors, officers and even members of the public who are present at meetings.
4. At the 18 March meeting, after Cllr Chase introduced item no 7 and went through the recommendations for which a vote was to be sought, Cllr Hollingshead made

various comments including in relation to the composition of the panel or committee that would be formed to interview candidates for the Town Clerk vacancy. Cllr Yeo interrupted and after he ignored Cllr Chase's attempt to ask him to wait, Cllr Williams stood up and invoked SO2(a).

5. Other councillors wished to speak as well, and Cllr Chase directed the order of speaking in accordance with SO3(k). When it was Cllr Yeo's turn to speak, he stated that the process was improper and spoke about his dissatisfaction with the recruitment process used when recruitment of a Town Clerk was previously undertaken in 2022. I asked Cllr Chase about the background to Cllr Yeo's allegation that the process had been fixed, and he stated that Cllr Yeo had not been on the panel of three councillors that had been constituted for the purpose of considering the applications for the post and interviewing the candidates. Cllr Chase said that after the recruitment process had been completed and a Town Clerk appointed it transpired that the panel had not been unanimous in its recommendation and that the panel member who had dissented was one with whose views Cllr Yeo frequently associated himself.
6. Cllr Chase told me that Cllr Yeo regularly expresses the view that smaller groups or panels of councillors should not be formed to take forward work on discrete aspects of particular projects in advance of discussion of them and decision taking at Full Council meetings, and that all councillors should have the right to participate in all discussions about them.
7. I asked Cllr Chase about the circumstances in which Cllr Dibben left the 18 March meeting before it ended. Cllr Chase explained that Cllr Dibben had been upset by Cllr Yeo's tone during the discussion of agenda item no 7 and his implicit accusation of malpractice and wrongdoing in relation to the appointment of the Town Clerk in 2022. Cllr Dibben apologised to Cllr Chase as he left the meeting.
8. I asked Cllr Chase to comment on the statement made by Cllr Yeo, that he (Cllr Chase) should never have been the Mayor of Shaftesbury. Cllr Chase explained that the role of Mayor is held by the councillor who is the Chair of the Town Council, and he thinks that Cllr Yeo's objection may be based on a belief on his part that his (Cllr Chase's) ability to chair Town Council meetings is poor. Cllr Chase told me that Cllr Yeo has expressed similar views about the chairing skills of previous Mayors.

Appendix E

Interview with Cllr Peter Yeo (Subject Member)

1. I introduced myself to Cllr Yeo and explained to him that the purpose of the interview was to gather information to enable me fully to understand the background to the complaints I had been asked to investigate, so that I could formulate my reports and any conclusions for consideration by the Monitoring Officer and the Independent Person and if necessary, by the Audit and Governance (Hearing) Sub-Committee. I reminded him that the investigation is being undertaken in accordance with Dorset Council's Arrangements for dealing with Councillor Code of Conduct complaints details of which had been notified to him previously. I advised Cllr Yeo that our interview was to remain confidential.
2. I explained to Cllr Yeo that my request that he permit me to record the interview had been made in order to assist in the preparation of a written summary of it and

that the recording would be destroyed as soon as the summary had been agreed by both of us as an accurate record of what was said, in accordance with guidance issued by the Local Government Association. I confirmed that the recording would not be shared with any third party. Cllr Yeo remained unwilling for a recording to be made, and I confirmed that I would not make one. I also confirmed that he did not have my permission to make a recording either.

3. Cllr Yeo expressed concern that the required procedure for dealing with Code of Conduct complaints had not been followed. He said that he understood that the procedure had been altered earlier in the year and I confirmed that it had, and that he had been given details of the updated procedure. He said that he had not been provided with details of the Independent Person. I reminded him that he had received correspondence from me and others, most recently my email to him of 28 August 2025, advising him of the identity of the Independent Person and telling him that he was at liberty to contact them. I said that I would arrange for him to be sent Mr Powell's contact details, which I subsequently did by email dated 11 September 2025.
4. I advised Cllr Yeo that I had looked at his training record posted on Shaftesbury Town Council's website and noted that it indicated that he had not undertaken the Code of Conduct (Standards) training, and that I had obtained confirmation from the Town Clerk that according to her records this information is correct. I asked Cllr Yeo why he had not undertaken the training, and he said that he was not aware that he was required to do so. I reminded him that by signing the declaration of acceptance of office in the aftermath of having been elected to Shaftesbury Town Council, he became bound by Shaftesbury Town Council's Code of Conduct, and I directed him to the opening sentence in the section of it headed 'Application of the Code of Conduct'. Cllr Yeo asked me whether training about the Code of Conduct is compulsory, and I stated that it is; I directed him to paragraphs 8.1 and 8.2 of the section of the Code headed 'Complying with the Code of Conduct' and I advised him that I had seen emails sent to him by the Town Clerk reminding him of his obligations under the Code. Cllr Yeo said that he is [REDACTED] and works full time, that he was unaware that he is obliged to undertake training about the Code and that he considers that his conduct has been entirely proper.
5. I referred Cllr Yeo to paragraphs 1 (Respect), 5 (Disrepute) and 6 (Use of position) in the section of the Code of Conduct headed 'Standards of councillor conduct' these being the provisions cited in the complaint. I also referred him to the provisions of Standing Order 2 of the Town Council's Standing Orders that allow the Chairman of a council meeting to request moderation of conduct and to restore order, and Standing Order 3.k that allow the Chairman to dictate the order of speaking.
6. I asked Cllr Yeo to explain how he considered that his conduct during the discussion of agenda item no 7 at the Town Council meeting on 18 March 2025, complied with the obligations in the Code of Conduct, particularly those relating to treating others with respect and not bringing the role of councillor or the Town Council into disrepute.
7. Cllr Yeo stated that he was not surprised that the complainant has made a vexatious complaint. He (Cllr Yeo) said that he has the right to speak uninterrupted

for three minutes to agenda items at Town Council meetings and that the complainant did not want the councillors who had been newly elected in 2024 and members of the public to know how improper the candidate selection process had been when the position of Town Clerk had previously been recruited for in 2022. The complainant had shown him (Cllr Yeo) disrespect. The complainant is friendly with Cllr Chase who chaired the meeting and Cllr Chase showed bias in his conduct of the meeting. I reminded him that Cllr Chase had permitted six councillors including himself and the complainant, to speak to the matter of the recruitment process. Cllr Yeo said that Cllr Dibben had been allowed to interrupt and talk over him. Cllr Yeo reiterated that the recruitment process in 2022 had been illegal and that the complainant and the other councillors who had been involved in the process, did not want the public to know about it.

8. I asked Cllr Yeo whether he considered that it was acceptable for him to interrupt and speak over other councillors, and if so, why he felt that such behaviour is acceptable. Cllr Yeo stated that the complainant and other councillors had ganged up on him and that he should be making complaints about their conduct. He reiterated that the councillors who had been involved in the 2022 recruitment process did not want his views about how the current process ought to be undertaken to be heard because they did not like him speaking the truth.
9. I told Cllr Yeo that my attention had been drawn to the publicity about the 18 March meeting afforded by the Alfred Daily radio programme on the This is Alfred local radio station the following day and on its website and related Facebook page, and I asked him whether he considered that the report of the meeting that appeared on those facilities reflected well on the Town Council and its members. Cllr Yeo said that the journalist/reporter who is behind This is Alfred is a friend of the outgoing Town Clerk and some of the councillors including a gang of legacy councillors (those who had been members of the Town Council before the election in May 2024), who use social media as a weapon and who try and bully some of the other members off the Town Council. Cllr Yeo does not believe that This is Alfred offers an independent and unbiased view of matters on which it reports and understands that a number of complaints have been made about it to its regulator Ofcom.
10. I asked Cllr Yeo whether there was anything he wanted to add before the interview was concluded. He reiterated that he believed that the complainant's motive in making the complaints was malicious and that he had an axe to grind, going back to events at a committee meeting in 2020 that he (Cllr Yeo) considered was being held unlawfully.
11. I explained that the next step is for me to prepare a note of the interview, which I will aim to forward to him by the end of the coming week (19 September). I stated that I will aim to complete work on my draft report within the next four weeks after which it will go initially to the Monitoring Officer and the Independent Person, then to Cllr Yeo and the complainant before being finalised and submitted to the Monitoring Officer for a decision to be made, in accordance with paragraphs 6.H and 6.I of the Arrangements for dealing with Code of Conduct complaints against Councillors.

Appendix F

Written statement submitted by Cllr Peter Yeo

Cllr Yeo's statement dated 25 September 2025 is attached.

Appendix G

**Comments on draft report submitted on behalf of Cllr Peter Yeo with
comments on them made by Investigating Officer in red ink**

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