

**Summary of the Findings and Determinations of the Standards Committee –
Councillor John Robertson**

Standards Hearing held 10th March 2026 at Hebburn Central – Complaint C240

The Committee was satisfied by a majority of 3 to 1 that the date on which the complaint was received for the purposes of the timelines set out in the Protocol for Dealing with Allegations of Breaches of the Members' Code of Conduct (the Protocol) was 18th December 2024.

The Committee was satisfied by a majority of 3 to 1 that the departure from the requirement in Paragraph 3.9.1 of Annex C of the Protocol that a hearing be held within 3 months of the receipt of the investigation report was fair due to exceptional circumstances.

The Committee agreed unanimously that the facts of the case are as set out in the investigation report.

On the basis of the facts as found by it, the Committee is satisfied that Councillor Robertson was acting as a councillor in respect of the emails sent using his councillor email account and emails sent using his personal email account to officers, councillors and others about Council business, his conduct at Council and Committee meetings, and his posts and comments on social media about the Council, its business and its officers.

The Committee finds by a majority of 3 to 1 that Councillor Robertson failed to treat officers with respect and decency by subjecting officers to personal attack and public criticism, in breach of paragraph 12.1 of the Code of Conduct (the Code).

The Committee finds by a majority 3 to 1 that Councillor Robertson bullied and harassed senior Council officers by his conduct in Council meetings and in his criticisms of those officers in breach of paragraph 12.2 of the Code.

The Committee was not satisfied that Councillor Robertson sought to, or did, compromise the impartiality of officers in breach of paragraph 12.3 of the Code. Although there were examples of Councillor Robertson seeking to apply pressure to officers, the Committee were not of the view that this pressure was undue pressure, or pressure which would compromise the impartiality of officers.

The Committee finds by a majority of 3 to 1 that Councillor Robertson misused his position in pursuing personal and historic disagreements with officers in breach of paragraph 12.6 of the Code.

The Committee was not satisfied that Councillor Robertson misused Council resources in breach of paragraph 12.7 of the Code. The Committee was of the view that the volume of the communications sent by Councillor Robertson did not demonstrate a misuse of resources due to insufficient evidence that a majority of his communications were unrelated to Council business.

The Committee finds by a majority of 3 to 1 that by the conduct set out above, Councillor Robertson failed to comply with the Member/Officer Protocol and the Council's Protocol on the Use of Social Media in breach of paragraph 12.8 of the Code. The Committee was not satisfied that Councillor Robertson failed to comply with the Council's Protocol on the Use of Resources.

The Committee finds by a majority of 3 to 1 that Councillor Robertson refused to engage in Code of Conduct training offered by the Council in breach of paragraph 12.8 of the Code. The

Committee notes that Councillor Robertson has, since the publication of the report, undertaken training in relation to his position on the Standards Committee in August 2025.

The Committee does not consider the matter of whether Councillor Robertson sought to intimidate the Investigating Officer as within the scope of the complaint and therefore, declines to make a finding as to whether there has been a breach of the Code of Conduct on that point.

The Committee finds by a majority of 3 to 1 that Councillor Robertson brought his role and local authority into disrepute by the conduct set out above in breach of paragraph 12.5 of the Code.

In reaching these findings, the Committee has had regard to the application of the right to freedom of expression conferred by Article 10 of the European Convention on Human Rights and the extent to which such rights may lawfully be subject to interference by the application of the Code of Conduct.

By way of sanction, the Committee:-

1. By a majority of 3 to 1, issues a formal censure of Councillor Robertson;
2. By a majority of 3 to 1, recommends to Council that a formal censure be issued;
3. By a majority of 3 to 1, recommends to the Council that Councillor Robertson be removed from membership of the Standards Committee and that he not be reappointed to that position at the May 2026 Annual Meeting of the Council. The Committee notes that this would require approval from the Leader of the REAL Independents Group;
4. Refers its findings to Council for information;
5. Publishes a full decision notice of its findings;
6. Instructs the Monitoring Officer to commission training for Councillor Robertson on effective and constructive communications with officers, in use of social media, and conduct in Council meetings, to take place within 3 months of 7th May 2026. The Committee requests that the trainer produces a report to the Committee as to the success of that training;
7. Recommends to Council that Councillor Robertson's access to Council officers be restricted by means of an email diversion to a dedicated officer to be designated by the Monitoring Officer until satisfactory completion of the above training.