



**To: Council**

**On: 11 December 2025**

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**Report by: Director of Finance & Resources**

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**Heading: Commissioner for Ethical Standards in Public Life in  
Scotland – Annual Report 2024/25**

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## **1 Summary**

- 1.1 The Commissioner for Ethical Standards in Public Life in Scotland has issued his 2024/25 Annual Report. The report is available on the Commissioner's website at <https://www.ethicalstandards.org.uk/node/2654>
  - 1.2 The report provides details of investigations of complaints about the conduct of councillors, members of devolved public bodies and MSPs and scrutiny of Scotland's Ministerial public appointments process. Where there has been contravention of the relevant Code, the Commissioner reports this, in the case of councillors and members of public bodies, to the Standards Commission for Scotland and in the case of MSPs and in relation to lobbying complaints, to the Scottish Parliament.
  - 1.3 The report advises of revised governance arrangements, reinstated transparency reporting and a new rolling biennial business covering all office functions.
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## **2 Recommendations**

- 2.1 That the 2024/25 Annual Report by the Commissioner for Ethical Standards in Public Life in Scotland be noted.
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### 3 Background

- 3.1 The 2024/25 annual report was the second published by Ian Bruce since his appointment as Commissioner for a six-year period from 1 March 2023.

### 4 Complaint Volumes In 2024/25

- 4.1 Nationally, during 2024/25 the Commissioner received a total of 2749 complaints, compared with 344 in 2023/24 and 159 in 2021/22. The statistics for 2024/25 were skewed by 2520 complaints connected to one case, which the Commissioner has referred to as a 'super complaint'. This 'super complaint' involved 'Quasi-judicial or regulatory applications' and the complaints relating to this one case have been removed from the rest of the report's statistical returns in order to improve clarity and better reflect the overall trend.
- 4.2 The following tables show the number of complaints and cases handled by the Standards Team in 2024/25. When multiple complaints relate to the same issue, they are combined into a single case. This ensures consistent handling and fair outcomes. Reporting both complaints and cases gives a clearer picture of the Commissioner's workload.

#### *Complaint volumes during 2024/25 and previous two years*

	2024/25	2023/24	2022/23
Already open at 1 April (beginning of financial year)	231	97	156
Received	2749(1)	344	159
<b>Active during year</b>	<b>2980</b>	<b>441</b>	<b>315</b>
Completed	2857	210(2)	218
Cases remaining open at 31 March, (end of financial year)	123	231	97

(1) 2520 complaints are connected to one case, which are referred to as a 'super complaint'.

(2) Following a review, some figures reported in 2022/23 and 2023/24 have been adjusted. This is due to a small number of cases either being re-opened or additional complaints being added to existing cases.

#### *Case Volumes during 2024/25 and previous years*

	2024/25	2023/24	2022/23
Already open at 1 April (beginning of financial year)	111	68	86
Received	143	185	109
<b>Active during year</b>	<b>254</b>	<b>253</b>	<b>195</b>
Completed	193	142	127
Cases remaining open at 31 March, (end of financial year)	61	111	68

## 5 Categories of Complaints Received

- 5.1 The categories of complaints received, and the number of complaints received for 2024/25 are indicated below with disrespect towards employees and the public being the most common type of complaint received. This remains unchanged from previous years. Taking together cases in relation to disrespect towards both councillors/members, employees and the public accounted for 55% of the total complaints received during 2024/25.

*Complaints Received During 2024/25 (Total 244 excluding super complaint)*

<b><u>Type of complaint</u></b>	<b><u>2024/25</u></b>
Disrespect towards employees/public	80
Outwith jurisdiction	46
Disrespect towards other councillors/members	33
Quasi-judicial or regulatory applications	26
Other	24
Breach of confidentiality	6
Failure to declare an interest	20
Financial misconduct/Misuse of council facilities	3
Failure to register an interest	6

## 6 Origin of Complaints

- 6.1 The majority of complaints, 189, were lodged by members of the public. This represented 83% of all complaints received, a slight increase on previous years. A total of 29 were lodged by Councillors and 11 by officers.

## 7 Outcome of Complaints Nationally

- 7.1 Nationally a total of 142 cases (142 complaints) progressed to full investigation and were reported on and finalised during the year, with 19 being breach reports (regarding 15 cases) which were heard by the Standards Commission, and 123 being reported on as non-breach (regarding 55 cases).

### *Outcome from complaints completed in 2024/25 and previous two years*

<b>Outcomes</b>	<b>2024/25</b>		<b>2023/24</b>		<b>2022/23</b>	
<i>Initial assessment</i>	2712	95%	127	60%	121	56%
<i>Full investigation</i>	142	5%	77	37%	79	36%
<i>Breach</i>	19	13%	21 <sup>1</sup>	27%	17	22%
<i>No breach</i>	123	87%	56	73%	62	78%
<i>Withdrawn</i>	3	0.1%	6	3%	18	8%

**Outcome from complaints completed in 2024/25 and previous two years**

Outcomes	2024/25	2023/24	2022/23
<b>Total completed</b>	<b>2857</b>	<b>210</b>	<b>218</b>

<sup>1</sup>Following a review, some figures reported in 2023/24 have been adjusted to reflect changes made in the first two tables of this report.

**Outcome from cases completed in 2024/25 and previous two years**

Outcomes	2024/25		2023/24		2022/23	
Initial assessment	120	62%	84	59%	69	54%
Full investigation	70	36%	53	37%	45	36%
Breach	15	21%	15 <sup>1</sup>	28%	9	20%
No breach	55	79%	38	72%	36	80%
Withdrawn	3	2%	5	4%	13	10%
<b>Total completed</b>	<b>193</b>		<b>142</b>		<b>127</b>	

<sup>1</sup>Following a review, some figures reported in 2023/24 have been adjusted to reflect changes made in the first two tables of this report.

## 8 Outcome of Complaints relating to Renfrewshire Council

- 8.1 Information has been received separately from the Commissioner that, during the period covered by the report, five complaints were considered about councillors in Renfrewshire Council which totalled to 4 cases. One case combined two complaints as they were relating to the same matter.
- 8.2 Out of the four cases, one was about disrespect towards employees/public, one was a combination of disrespect towards the public and misuse of council facilities, and two were relating to service complaints which are outwith our jurisdiction. All four cases were dismissed at the admissibility stage (stage 1).

## 9 Hearings

- 9.1 Under current Directions, the Commissioner reports the outcome of all investigations to the Standards Commission for Scotland (SCS). They may hold a hearing, direct the Commissioner to conduct further investigation or do neither. If the SCS concludes at a hearing that a breach of the Code has occurred, they must impose a sanction.
- 9.2 Nationally, 55 reports where the Commissioner found there was no breach were submitted to the SCS. There were a further 15 reports which were referred to the SCS where the Commissioner found that a breach had occurred.

## 10 Code of Conduct

- 10.1 On 8 October 2025, as part of the programme of events and development opportunities for Councillors, the Head of Corporate Governance provided an annual update to Members on the Code of Conduct/Standards Commission.
- 10.2 The Council's Head of Corporate Governance is available for members should they wish to seek advice on the Code of Conduct generally and specifically in relation to the registration and declaration of interests.

## 11 Public Appointments

- 11.1 The Commission regulates how Scottish Ministers make appointments to the boards of public bodies that are within their remit.
- 11.2 The ESC report highlighted that it had a statutory duty to use their powers with a view to ensuring that appointments are made fairly and openly and that as far as possible everyone has an opportunity to be considered. As part of our work in this area, the Commissioner agreed targets with the Scottish Ministers in the strategy document "Diversity Delivers" (published September 2008), intended to encourage applications from as wide a range of people as possible. The strategy also included a range of recommendations, agreed with the Scottish Government at the time, intended to improve on the diversity of Scotland's boards. Progress against the recommendations is available on our website. During the year, contractors, Leading Kind, successfully tendered to undertake a review of the Diversity Strategy and began consulting with interest groups and conducting initial research. A "State of the Nation" report is due to be published in the Autumn of 2025.
- 11.3 Tables and graphs included in the Annual Report detailed the extent to which Scotland's board members at the end of 2024 reflected the population of the country as a whole and how it had changed over time.

## Implications of the Report

1 **Financial** - None

2 **HR & Organisational Development** – None

3 **Community Planning** – None

4 **Legal** - None

5 **Property/Assets** – None

6 **Information Technology** - None

7 **Equality & Human Rights** – The Recommendations contained within this report have been assessed in relation to their impact on equalities and human rights. No negative impacts on equality groups or potential for infringement of individuals' human rights have been identified arising from the recommendations contained in the report. If required following implementation, the actual impact of the recommendations and the mitigating actions will be reviewed and monitored, and the results of the assessment will be published on the Council's website.

8 **Health & Safety** – None

- 9 **Procurement** - None
- 10 **Risk** – None.
- 11 **Privacy Impact** – None
- 12 **COSLA Policy Position** – None
- 13 **Climate Risk** – None
- 14 **Children’s Rights** – none

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