

Name of complainant	Swaffham Town Council
Name of Subject Member	Graham Edwards [formerly Councillor Graham Edwards]
Authority	Swaffham Town Council
Summary of Complaint(s)	<p>The Complaint relates to and is summarised as follows -</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Councillor Edwards' contributions at the Assets and Open Spaces Committee on 26 March 2025, on an item regarding a tree, putting undue pressure on the Council Clerk and Councillors on a matter in which there was an alleged personal interest on the part of Councillor Edwards. b) Councillor Edwards' conduct at that meeting. c) Councillor Edwards showing disrespect and being intimidating towards the Clerk at the Council meeting on 14 April 2025, when discussing VE Day celebrations and the availability of staff to work over the Bank Holiday. d) Councillor Edwards convening private meetings with new members to persuade voting direction at forthcoming Council meetings. e) Councillor Edwards demanding entry into an unentitled meeting (Benjamin Foundation on 17 March 2025) and displaying verbal and physical aggression and bullying towards staff in the presence of others. f) Councillor Edwards being openly critical in an e mail to an officer widely copied to external third parties. g) Councillor Edwards challenging the honesty and integrity of an officer and requiring him to prove that he was telling the truth, constituting a breach of the requirement to respect employees of the Council. h) Councillor Edwards questioning the integrity and professionalism of the Clerk in clear breach of the duty of respect. i) Councillor Edwards sending an unduly aggressive and accusatory email to the Council Clerk on 9 April 2025, challenging the temporary arrangements put in place as a result of the departure of a member of staff. j) Councillor Edwards undermining the integrity of the Clerk by discussing comments made by them as a private individual on the community notice board – showing disrespect to the Clerk in a wider public audience. k) Councillor Edwards challenging the legitimacy and claiming that a Council press release needed individual approval, including the tone of the email content, which it is alleged was disrespectful and derogatory.
Decision of the Monitoring Officer	Whilst it is acknowledged that there has been a breach of the Council's Code of Conduct; as Mr Edwards is no longer a Councillor, no further action will be taken.
Reason for Decision	<p>Following Independent Investigation evidence of Breaches of the Code of Conduct were determined in respect of three matters complained of.</p> <p>(see attached Independent report for further detailed information)</p>

Monitoring Officer's comments

The Monitoring Officer summarises all of the allegations but will only comment on those that the Independent Investigator considered could be a breach of the Code of Conduct, to which the Monitoring Officer confirms and agrees that a breach of the failure to comply with the Code of Conduct has occurred on these occasions.

Where it has been deemed that there is not a breach of the Code of Conduct, this is either because it has not met the threshold or there is no supporting evidence to substantiate a breach conclusion.

- a) Councillor Edwards' contributions at the Assets and Open Spaces Committee on 26 March 2025 on an item regarding a tree, putting undue pressure on the Council Clerk and councillors on a matter in which there was an alleged personal interest on the part of Councillor Edwards.

Councillor Edwards spoke strongly in favour of removing a tree at the Assets and Open Spaces Committee on 26 March 2025.

However, evidence showed that his wife owns ■■■ Market Place, the property affected by the tree. This interest was not declared on his 2023 Register of Interests, despite having been declared in 2019.

At the meeting, Councillor Edwards denied having any interest in the property, despite acting as the agent for the tree-removal request and nearly referring to the property as "his".

Under the Council's Code of Conduct, he held a Non-Registerable Interest, as the matter affected the wellbeing of a property owned by his spouse.

He should have declared this interest, spoken only in the public participation section, and left the room for the remainder of the discussion. He did not do so.

As a result, there is evidence that Councillor Edwards breached paragraph 9.1 of the Code of Conduct by:

- participating in the discussion despite a conflict of interest,
- remaining in the room during the debate, and
- failing to register the relevant interest.

- b) Councillor Edwards' conduct at that meeting.

No breach

- c) Councillor Edwards showing disrespect and being intimidating towards the Clerk at the Council meeting on 14 April 2025, when discussing VE Day celebrations and the availability of staff to work over the Bank Holiday.

During the 14 April 2025 meeting, Cllr Edwards questioned the Town Clerk about staffing for the VE Day event.

The Town Clerk explained that she had only just heard about the date, it was a Bank Holiday weekend and discussed hers and her staff's availability.

Cllr Edwards suggested the Clerk was unwilling to work the event.

The exchange was uncomfortable and directed solely at the Town Clerk, becoming personal and critical.

Cllr Edwards also criticised the planned celebrations in a way that appeared to blame her.

The Clerk reminded him that the Council - not she alone - had agreed the plans, referencing the February 2025 meeting.

The minutes from 12 February 2025 show the Clerk reporting planned VE Day activities; no councillors objected, so the Council implicitly consented.

Cllr Edwards claimed the February agenda did not reflect what the Clerk implied, effectively questioning her honesty and integrity in public.

The Code of Conduct allows robust challenge but prohibits personal attacks on individuals.

The criticism here was personal, not directed at policy, and showed a lack of respect.

The Town Clerk confirmed that this incident reflected her broader concerns about Cllr Edwards' behaviour.

Based on this conduct, there is evidence of a breach of paragraph 1.2 of the Code of Conduct for disrespect towards a Council employee by personally attacking and impugning her integrity in public.

d) Councillor Edwards convening private meetings with new members to persuade voting direction at forthcoming Council meetings.

No breach

e) Councillor Edwards demanding entry into an unentitled meeting (Benjamin Foundation on 17 March 2025) and displaying verbal and physical aggression and bullying towards staff in the presence of others.

Cllr Edwards "forced" his way into the staff room where members of the Benjamin Foundation were waiting with Council officers to have a meeting and he entered the staff room despite being told repeatedly the meeting had not yet started and was in another room. Councillor Edwards was rude, raised his voice, and showed no respect toward staff or external guests.

He stated that "nobody had a meeting without him," indicating a belief he was entitled to attend regardless of circumstances.

His behaviour in front of both Council staff and the Benjamin Foundation representatives created discomfort and unease.

Some witnesses reported him barging past a staff member, though evidence was inconclusive.

Testimony from Benjamin Foundation representatives was considered strong, reliable, and impartial.

The following breaches have been identified –

- Breach of respect (Code paragraph 1.2) – His actions failed to treat employees and guests with respect, constituting a breach

of the Code of Conduct.

- Behaviour amounted to bullying (Code paragraph 2.1) – Actions were intimidating, undermining, and an abuse of power, meeting ACAS indicators of bullying.
- Breach of bullying prohibition – His conduct towards staff and the receptionist amounted to bullying under the Code.
- Failure to uphold Civility & Respect Pledge – His behaviour did not meet the standards of civility and respect required under the Council's pledge.

f) Councillor Edwards being openly critical in an e mail to an officer widely copied to external third parties.

No breach

g) Councillor Edwards challenging the honesty and integrity of an officer and requiring him to prove that he was telling the truth, constituting a breach of the requirement to respect employees of the Council.

No breach

h) Councillor Edwards questioning the integrity and professionalism of the Clerk in clear breach of the duty of respect.

No breach

i) Councillor Edwards sending an unduly aggressive and accusatory email to the Council Clerk on 9 April 2025, challenging the temporary arrangements put in place as a result of the departure of a member of staff.

No breach

j) Councillor Edwards undermining the integrity of the Clerk by discussing comments made by them as a private individual on the community notice board – showing disrespect to the Clerk in a wider public audience.

No breach

k) Councillor Edwards challenging the legitimacy and claiming that a Council press release needed individual approval, including the tone of the email content, which it is alleged was disrespectful and derogatory.

No breach

Where the Monitoring Officer has either found no evidence of a breach, or where that evidence does not (in the opinion of the Monitoring Officer) reach the threshold for such a breach, the Monitoring Officer does not in any way diminish the impact of former Councillor Edwards' actions and behaviour on employees and others.

The Monitoring Officer does not underestimate the cumulative effect on the officers who dealt with him regularly. It also does not exonerate him from responsibility for some poor behaviour.

The Monitoring and the Independent Investigators opinion is that his

	<p>relationship with Council officers was one of self-entitlement, to be involved in whatever he deemed appropriate. The evidence demonstrated either a lack of understanding of his role as an elected member compared to an officer, or a refusal on his part to accept the differences in their roles and responsibilities.</p> <p>Recommendation: It is recommended that the Town Council ensures that new members receive standards and code of conduct training.</p>
<p>Independent Person's comments (IP)</p>	<p>The Independent Person has read the details of the complaint against former Councillor Edwards, along with the independent report commissioned by Breckland District Council and other supporting pieces of evidence. The Independent Person agrees with the findings of the independent review and the decision of the Monitoring Officer. In addition, the Independent Person would like to make the following comments on those aspects of the complaint which have been upheld.</p> <p>There was a probable conflict of interest over the request to remove a tree close to ■■■ Market Place. At the very least, there was a perception of a conflict, and to think otherwise would be disingenuous at best. Former Councillor Edwards had been given a number of opportunities to explain his interest in the matter and had at no point been helpful in his answers. This leads to the inevitable conclusion that former Councillor Edwards was being deliberately evasive when asked by the independent reviewer.</p> <p>It seems that relations between former Councillor Edwards and the Town Clerk had deteriorated to the point where antagonism and discourteous behaviour was inevitable. It is disappointing that Councillor Edwards was unable to maintain a level of professionalism in his dealings with the Clerk.</p> <p>Of greatest concern is the incident involving a Council officer who was described as being barged out of the way by former Councillor Edwards as he entered a room where he mistakenly believed a meeting was being held without him. It is not exactly clear what the term 'barged' meant and whether the member of staff was deliberately or indirectly pushed by former Councillor Edwards, or if any contact was made at all. However, the evidence of a number of witnesses makes it clear that the Council officer was poorly treated, leaving her feeling shaken and unsafe. It is particularly disappointing that in the face of all the evidence, former Councillor Edwards continued to deny that his actions made a member of staff feel unsafe. No one ever deserves being on the receiving end of this kind of behaviour and council officers have every right to expect to feel safe in their place of work. The Independent Person believes that there should have been enough confidence by others present to challenge what had happened. This point should be considered by Swaffham Town Council. They may wish to consider sending out a message to all officers and councillors that bullying and oppressive behaviour will not be tolerated in the workplace and any such behaviour should always be challenged and reported.</p> <p>In summary, the evidence shows that former Councillor Edwards' behaviour has led to an irretrievable breakdown of trust and confidence between himself and others in Swaffham Town Council. The Independent Person hopes that the Town Council will now be able to move forward and deliver the service that the people of Swaffham expect and deserve, without any further distractions being brought about by the breakdown of personal and professional relationships</p>

within the Council.

In accordance with Breckland Council's arrangements for dealing with complaints; having considered the complaint, the Independent report and consulted with the Independent Person, I have concluded that whilst there has been a breach of the Council's Code of Conduct; as Mr Edwards is no longer a Councillor, no further action will be taken and therefore the matter is now closed.

The decision of the Monitoring Officer is final and there is no right of appeal against my decision.

The matter will be included in the statistics that will be reported to the Governance and Audit Committee as part of the Annual Standards report.



Monitoring Officer, Breckland Council

Date of Decision: 20 March 2026