

COMPLAINT DECISION NOTICE

DECISION: BREACH OF THE MEMBERS' CODE OF CONDUCT

Power to determine Complaints

This Code of Conduct complaint against Cllr Sedgwick has been determined under the Members' Code of Conduct ('the Code'), the Council's Monitoring Officer Protocol ("Protocol"), (which sets out the arrangements for dealing with Standards Allegations under the Localism Act 2011 and which is set out in the Stockport Metropolitan Borough Council Constitution) and the procedure adopted by the Standards Committee. The decision was made by the Standards Sub Committee held on 24 March 2026.

The Complaints

Between 11 February 2025 and 10 September 2025, the Monitoring Officer received 11 formal complaints from eight members of the public concerning the conduct of Cllr Sedgwick in relation to comments made during various exchanges in a WhatsApp Group known as 'Trigger Me Timbers' ("TMT"). The complaints regarding Cllr Sedgwick, make allegations relating to the words, symbols, emojis and memojis used by him within the TMT WhatsApp Group. Some of the complaints also refer to Cllr Sedgwick not calling out alleged inappropriate behaviour of other members of the TMT WhatsApp Group. Three of the eight complainants specifically refer to comments made within the TMT WhatsApp Group by Cllr Sedgwick and other members of the Group.

The remainder of the complainants refer to Cllr Sedgwick's conduct in the TMT WhatsApp Group but did not provide any specific examples.

The following provisions of the Code are relevant to the complaints:-

- (i) Section 1.1 of the Code – 'Failing to treat other councillors and members of the public with respect'
- (ii) Section 2.1 of the Code – 'Bullying or abusive to any person'
- (iii) Section 3.1 of the Code – 'Compromising or attempting to compromise the impartiality of anyone who works for or on behalf of the local authority'
- (iv) Section 4 of the Code – 'Disclosing confidential information' and 'Disclosing Information given to them in confidence by anyone or information acquired which he or she believed is of a confidential nature'
- (v) Section 5 of the Code – 'Conduct which could reasonably be regarded as bringing the office of Councillor or the Council into disrepute'.

- (vi) Section 7 of the Code – ‘Relating to the use of the authority’s resources, or authorising their use by others’
- (vii) Section 8.1 of the Code, in three regards:-
 - ‘Intimidating or attempting to intimidate someone who is or is likely to be a complainant or witness in relation to an investigation’

‘Using or attempting to use his/her position as a member to improperly confer an advantage or disadvantage’

and

‘When taking decisions, failing to have regard to advice of the Section 151 officer or the Monitoring Officer and failing to give reasons for those decisions’

- (viii) The Nolan Principles

The Monitoring Officer’s initial assessment was undertaken in 2025, and a further/formal investigation was undertaken in 2026. The initial assessment and the further/formal investigation each considered the Code, the Protocol, the Local Government Association’s guidance on Member Model Code of Conduct Complaints Handling (“LGA Guidance”), and the relevant legislation such as the Localism Act 2011 and the European Convention on Human Rights/Human Rights Act 1998.

Before the final report was completed, Cllr Sedgwick and the complainants were invited to make comments on the draft investigation report in accordance with the Protocol.

The Monitoring Officer’s investigation report was finalised on 17 March 2026. The Monitoring Officer concluded that Cllr Sedgwick had breached seven sections of the Code that were referred to in the complaints, with insufficient evidence provided to conclude there was a breach of the Code in respect of another four sections of the Code that were referred to in the complaints. Subsequently, as per the Protocol, the Deputy Monitoring Officer decided to refer the matter to the Sub Committee for a decision.

Standards Sub Committee

The Standards Sub Committee ('the Sub Committee') was held on 24 March 2026 and comprised Independent Member Stephen Clarke (Chair), Cllr Frizzell, Cllr Bresnahan, Independent Member Julie Carter, and Independent Member Andrew Stewart. Mark Iveson (Independent Person) attended the Sub Committee to provide his views as per the Protocol but is not a member of the Sub Committee.

The Sub Committee was advised by Michelle Dodds, Solicitor and Deputy Monitoring Officer and clerked by the Head of the council's Democratic and Electoral Services team. Vicki Bates, Monitoring Officer, attended to present her report. No witnesses were called by her.

Cllr Sedgwick did not attend the hearing as he had a prior work commitment. The Monitoring Officer reported that she had offered to arrange the hearing on an alternative date to accommodate his attendance. Cllr Sedgwick gave consideration to seeking an alternative date but said that he wanted the hearing to proceed in order to draw this matter to a close.

Cllr Sedgwick had submitted a written statement to the Sub Committee, which he said was a summary of his lengthier response to the Monitoring Officer's draft investigation report and was read out in full to the Sub Committee by the Deputy Monitoring Officer and was published as a supplement to the agenda for the Sub Committee. Cllr Sedgwick said that he takes his responsibilities under the Code seriously and approached the process with respect, reflection and contrition. Cllr Sedgwick stated that the TMT WhatsApp Group was established to coordinate legitimate political activity and provide mutual support to elected members and activists during a period of intense factionalism. He stated that the majority of messages related to campaigning, council business and informal interaction, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Cllr Sedgwick accepted the majority of the Monitoring Officer's findings that in some instances, his conduct fell below the standards accepted of an elected member, particularly in relation to failing to treat others with respect and the use of inappropriate or abusive language. Cllr Sedgwick acknowledged that he should have challenged inappropriate remarks made by others and exercised stronger judgement.

Cllr Sedgwick stated that the comments were made almost 7 years ago, during a challenging period characterised by political hostility and personal pressure but that this was not an excuse and the language and tone used does not reflect how he would communicate today. Cllr Sedgwick acknowledged the potential impact of his behaviour on others, regrets damage caused to the reputation of fellow councillors or to public confidence in the council and stated that he has genuine remorse, was committed to upholding the highest standards and to learning from the process.

Cllr Sedgwick informed the Sub Committee that he had never been referred to a Standards Committee since being elected in 2012 and that these complaints arose from individuals with a history of political hostility towards him and none were constituents of his ward, Heatons North.

The Sub Committee determined to proceed with the hearing in Cllr Sedgwick's absence, noting that he had been offered the opportunity to have the hearing on

an alternative date but had stated his preference was for the hearing to take place in his absence.

Consideration and Findings

When considering each allegation, as a preliminary matter, the Sub Committee considered whether Cllr Sedgwick was acting in an official capacity, as this is required in order for the Code to be applied. Where the Sub Committee found that Cllr Sedgwick was acting in his capacity as a councillor, they found that the Code applied. The Sub Committee then went on to decide whether Cllr Sedgwick breached the Code by reference to the Monitoring Officer's investigation report and her submissions at the hearing.

(i) **With regard to Section 1.1 of the Code – 'Failing to treat other councillors and members of the public with respect'**

The Sub Committee concluded that Cllr Sedgwick was acting in his capacity as a councillor, specifically when making comments on the TMT WhatsApp Group whilst attending the council's remote council meeting on 22 October 2020.

The Sub Committee found that Cllr Sedgwick was in breach of this section of the Code as a result of the derogatory comments and names used when he referred to other councillors and members of the public watching the council meeting.

(ii) **Section 2.1 of the Code – 'Bullying or abusive to any person'**

The Sub Committee concluded that Cllr Sedgwick was acting in his capacity as a councillor, specifically when making comments on the TMT WhatsApp Group whilst attending the council's remote council meeting on 22 October 2020.

The Sub Committee found that Cllr Sedgwick was in breach of this section of the Code as a result of the abusive names and comments used when he referred to other councillors and members of the public watching the council meeting.

(iii) **Section 4 of the Code – 'Disclosing confidential information' and 'Disclosing Information given to them in confidence by anyone or information acquired which he or she believed is of a confidential nature'**

The Sub Committee concluded that Cllr Sedgwick was acting in his capacity as a councillor when he disclosed on the TMT WhatsApp Group information relating to a previous complaint that had been made against him as a councillor.

The Sub Committee found that Cllr Sedgwick was in breach of this section of the Code, as he shared confidential information regarding a previous complaint made against him. Cllr Sedgwick would have known that details of complainants and complaints are confidential and not to be shared unless the Standards Committee or Standards Sub Committee determine they should be.

(iv) **Section 5 of the Code – ‘Conduct which could reasonably be regarded as bringing the office of Councillor or the Council into disrepute’**

The Sub Committee concluded that Cllr Sedgwick was acting in his capacity as a councillor, specifically when making comments on the TMT WhatsApp Group whilst attending council meetings and when he disclosed on the TMT WhatsApp Group, information relating to a previous complaint that had been made against him as a councillor.

The Sub Committee found that Cllr Sedgwick was in breach of this section of the Code on numerous occasions, including swapping the names of councillors with offensive words whilst commenting on their input at the council meeting to others in the TMT WhatsApp Group and referring to another councillor as “mental” whilst they were making a speech at the 22 October 2020 council meeting and sharing part of a letter from a resident on the TMT WhatsApp Group.

The Sub Committee considered that Cllr Sedgwick’s behaviour brought Stockport Council and the office of councillor into disrepute. There was widespread media coverage of his behaviour. Cllr Sedgwick acknowledged that there was potential damage caused to the reputation of councillors and to public confidence in the council. The Sub Committee concluded that there was damage caused and public confidence in Cllr Sedgwick and potentially other councillors was diminished.

(v) **Section 7 of the Code – ‘Relating to the use of the authority’s resources, or authorising their use by others’**

The Sub Committee concluded that Cllr Sedgwick was acting in his capacity as a councillor, specifically when making comments on the TMT WhatsApp Group whilst attending council meetings.

However, the Sub Committee was not satisfied that a breach of this section was substantiated.

(vi) **The Nolan Principles**

The Sub Committee concluded that Cllr Sedgwick was acting in his capacity as a councillor, specifically when making comments on the TMT WhatsApp Group whilst attending council meetings; when referring to other councillors and when disclosing information relating to a complaint against him as a councillor.

The Sub Committee found that whilst the specific complaint regarding an alleged breach of the Nolan Principles was not substantiated, it was evidenced by other complaints and Cllr Sedgwick's failure to treat other councillors and members of the public with respect; his abusive behaviour and failure to challenge the abusive behaviours of others within the TMT WhatsApp Group showed a lack of integrity and leadership.

The Sub-Committee agreed with the findings of the Monitoring Officer that the Code was not engaged with regard to the following elements of the complaints as there was no evidence of behaviour of Cllr Sedgwick relating to these sections and therefore the Code could not be engaged:-

(vii) **Section 3.1 of the Code – ‘Compromising or attempting to compromise the impartiality of anyone who works for or on behalf of the local authority’.**

(viii) **Section 8.1 of the Code, in three regards:-**

‘Intimidating or attempting to intimidate someone who is or is likely to be a complainant or witness in relation to an investigation’

‘Using or attempting to use his/her position as a member to improperly confer an advantage or disadvantage’

and

‘When taking decision, failing to have regard to advice of the Section 151 officer or the MO and failing to give reasons for those decisions’

Sub Committee Decision on Sanction

Cllr Sedgwick's summary which was read out at the start of the hearing offered some mitigation, which the Sub Committee considered.

Having found that Cllr Sedgwick was in breach of the Code of Conduct and the Nolan principles, the Sub Committee made the following decision on sanction, having considered carefully all the evidence they had heard at the hearing:

The Sub Committee said that as an experienced councillor, Cllr Sedgwick had an important community leadership role to undertake and this was carried out in the public eye. As such, councillors should be expected to carry out their role with respect for others, in a professional manner and upholding the office of councillor and the Council without bringing either into disrepute. The Sub Committee concluded that Cllr Sedgwick's conduct whilst participating in the TMT WhatsApp Group fell short of the high standards expected of the council's elected members. The Sub Committee noted that Cllr Sedgwick had expressed regret and contrition for his behaviour; offering an apology and also noted the self-reporting of the alleged breaches by him to the Monitoring Officer.

The Sub Committee also considered the mitigating factors including the circumstances under which the comments made on the TMT WhatsApp Group were made including an environment of political hostility and sustained harassment and the fact the comments were made six years ago and that Cllr Sedgwick had stated that on reflection, he would not make such comments or allow others to do so without challenge.

However, the Sub-Committee was of the view that this was insufficient to fully mitigate the breaches of the Code found by the Sub-Committee.

Accordingly, the Sub Committee **Resolved:**

1. That its findings be reported to the Council Meeting for information and published in an appropriately conspicuous location on the Council's website.
2. That it be further recommended that the Council Meeting censure Councillor Sedgwick.
3. That the Monitoring Officer be instructed to arrange for such Code of Conduct training, as approved by the Monitoring Officer, to be undertaken within three months, and that should Councillor Sedgwick fail to comply with this requirement, a further meeting of the Sub-Committee be convened so that Councillor Sedgwick could explain the reason for this failure.

4. That the Stockport Community Group, Group Leader be recommended to remove Councillor Sedgwick from his current post on the Corporate, Resource Management & Governance Scrutiny Committee and not nominate Councillor Sedgwick to any discretionary committees for the 2026/27 municipal year unless or until he has attended the required Code of Conduct training.

Notification of Decision

This decision notice will be sent to Cllr Sedgwick, the complainants and the council's Chief Executive and will be published on the Council's website for 12 months.

There is no right of appeal against this decision. The complainants may make a complaint to the Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman should they not be satisfied with the decision. Their details may be found at www.lgo.org.uk/contact-us

Michelle Dodds

Deputy Monitoring Officer

27 March 2026