

Appendix A

NEWS items

23/12/2020

Halifax councillor slams smart phone generation and says parents should feed children not the taxpayer

Calderdale independent councillor refuses to apologise over his comments

A Halifax councillor has hit out at the smart phone generation and parents over free school meals saying "if you can't feed, don't breed".

Roger Taylor, an independent councillor on [Calderdale Council](#), sent the reply to a newsletter from the public services union Unison, which contained a request to help save the school meals service and referenced the recent campaign by footballer Marcus Rashford to tackle child food poverty.

Mr Taylor, who was expelled from the Conservative party last year, said he is a supporter of school meals but he believes it is parents' responsibility to feed their children during the holidays and not that of the taxpayer.

Unison said it was "beyond belief that someone could show so little compassion".

The email from Unison, sent on December 10, contained a letter to councillors asking for their help to stop the school meals service from becoming a "casualty of the pandemic", which they said had led to cuts to the service, staff numbers, pay and hours of work.

The letter said: "It is good news that the Government finally agreed to fund free school meals holiday provision over the Christmas holiday period, and we pay tribute to Marcus Rashford for his determination.

"But this is not the only area where school meals are under pressure - provision of hot meals for pupils during term-time in schools is suffering too."

In his response on December 18, Mr Taylor said: "If you can't feed, don't breed. Simple."

Speaking to the PA Media news agency, Mr Taylor said: "I'm not going to apologise for it. What I said is what I said. That's my opinion, I'm entitled to say it."

He added: "Whilst I am a supporter of school meals and the service, the only threat will be the financial situation, with the lockdown making the economy, and level of income, much weaker.

"However, during the holidays it is the parents' responsibility and I make no bones about that."

Mr Taylor, who represents the Northowram and Shelf wards in Halifax, continued: "Many of these so-called impoverished children have smart phones and we expect the taxpayers to dip into their pockets to feed them.

"Where does it end? I don't mind free school meals when they're at school, that's fine. I just think enough's enough."

Jon Richards, Unison head of local government, said: "It's beyond belief that someone could show so little compassion. Children all over the country are going hungry because of the pandemic.

"Low-income families need support, not abuse from those who should know better.

"It's hard to fathom how a politician would think this is an appropriate way to react when asked to help children living in abject poverty."

Mr Taylor faced calls to resign in March this year after a colleague said he replied to an email about a constituent whose son had Covid-19 with the word "yawn".

Halifax Conservatives said he was expelled from the Conservative Party in December last year following an investigation.

England and Manchester United forward Rashford successfully lobbied the Government into a U-turn over its free school meals policy in England during the first coronavirus lockdown, ensuring children in need would receive meals over the summer.

08/12/2020

News

8th December

Cheshire West town councillor complaints highest since 2015

LAST year saw the most complaints made against Cheshire West's town and parish councillors since 2015.

There were 22 complaints made against representatives from town and parish councils in 2019/20, overtaking the previous high of 18 in 2016/17.

Five CWAC councillors received complaints, down from seven in 2018/19 and 18 in 2016/17.

A pre-CWAC council report said: "Between May 2019 & April 2020, the Monitoring Officer assessed 27 complaints about member conduct.

"One complaint was referred for independent investigation. The investigator reported no findings of failure and no further action was taken.

“The Monitoring Officer consulted the Independent Persons on 13 complaints. The Monitoring Officer referred one complaint about a CWAC member to their Group Leader for informal action.

“She referred six complaints about town/parish council members to their chairman for informal action e.g. training on the code of conduct.”

The information has been made available as part of CWAC’s final full council meeting of 2020, which is at 6pm on December 10.

Five of the cases dealt with by the council concerned councillors’ declaring interests — with the remainder related to general obligations, including respect for others, including on social media.

In total, ‘no action’ was taken on eight complaints, which according to the authority means that the complaint was either about a council decision, the manner in which a meeting was run, or outside the roles and responsibilities of councillors — and not about the councillor’s conduct itself.

'Disturbing' rise in complaints against South Tyneside councillors revealed

Town hall chiefs have demanded answers over the ‘disturbing’ surge in complaints against elected councillors.

Standards bosses at South Tyneside Council have been contacted more than 30 times in less than three months about the behaviour or actions of members of the local authority.

But just 16% of complaints submitted in 2020 have been found to be serious enough to prompt a formal investigation, leading to concerns some may be misusing the process for their own ends.

[The rises in complaints] is slightly concerning,” said independent opposition councillor Glenn Thompson.

“I couldn’t help thinking when going through them, wouldn’t it be great if certain complaints could be identified as vexatious, to give us a better understanding.”

Thompson was speaking at a meeting of the borough council’s Standards Committee, which was held by videolink and broadcast via YouTube.

According to a report for the panel 59 complaints have been processed since the start of the year.

Of these, 47 have been closed either because the person who submitted the original representation later decided they did not want to pursue it, or because it was rejected by the local authority’s monitoring officer, the legal official responsible for standards.

John Rumney, the council's head of legal services, said some were turned down 'on the grounds of triviality or [because they are] tit for tat'.

Of this year's complaints, 13 have progressed to a formal investigation, but none have yet gone the distance of being presented to the Standards Committee itself for consideration.

Almost two thirds of all complaints against councillors have been made by their fellow councillors.

Labour councillor Gladys Hobson said: "I've been a member of this committee for many years and I find the number of complaints coming through quite disturbing

"We've never had this many complaints coming through on an annual basis before and I think it quite disturbing that a lot of these involve members."

09/12/2020

Two Sandwell councillors cleared as complaints of wrongdoing mount

By [George Makin](#) | [Sandwell](#) | Published: Dec 9, 2020 | Last Updated: Dec 9, 2020

A local authority at the centre of a storm of claims of misconduct has cleared two unnamed councillors of wrongdoing.

Sandwell's ethical standards and member development committee was told of the results of investigations as it reviewed a list of 13 probes into claims the council's code of conduct had been broken.

The findings of no breaches comes as the council is beset by complaints against local politicians ranging from interfering in a land sale, breaking Covid regulations and making defamatory statements.

At the same time, internal disagreements within the authority's ruling Labour group have seen claims of racism, anti-Semitism and bullying.

The number of council allegations is so high Sandwell has hired extra staff to deal with all the cases.

Surjit Tour, director of law and governance and monitoring officer, said two cases had now been resolved. They included claims a councillor shared confidential staff information and a second charge of alleged misconduct in relation to domestic arrangements.

The names of the councillors and details of the investigations were withheld but a council spokesman said: "The committee was informed of the outcome, namely that there was no breach found and the matters have been closed accordingly.

"The council does not share details of councillors facing a standards complaint unless the complaint is to be considered by the Standards Sub-Committee after an investigation has been undertaken and a significant breach found. This is to help ensure complaints can be dealt with effectively and fairly to all parties concerned."

The committee was told another four cases are expected to be completed by the end of this month after which a decision will be made on any disciplinary action.

Final reports on a further five cases are expected between January and February next year.

Separate to the council's investigations, the Labour Party has suspended the membership of four councillors while a further two are the subject of internal complaints.

Code of conduct complaints made against members of Alston Moor Parish Council

by CWH — 17 December 2020 in News, Featured



Several code of conduct complaints in relation to various members of Alston Moor Parish Council are under investigation.

Lisa Tremble, Eden Council's monitoring officer, told Monday's parish council meeting: "It's no secret to the members of this parish council and the members of the public as well that I am dealing with several complaints in relation to various members of this council.

"They are ongoing and they are all being dealt with. Not all councillors will know the extent of all of the complaints, for obvious reasons, but they are being dealt with."

Mrs Tremble made the comment after parish council chairman Andy Holt said there was "only one" current code of conduct complaint against himself and that had been made by Alix Martin.

She was one of five Alston Moor parish councillors who resigned from the council in October after Gary Wright stood down as chairman of the council at the authority's September meeting.

In a written statement read out at this week's meeting, Ray Miller, who resigned alongside Ms Martin, questioned the five councillors who had voted for Mr Holt to become chairman on how it could be the "right and proper thing to do" when he had several pending complaints against him.

These were from members of the public, which are currently being investigated by Eden District Council, and from the former councillors concerning breaches of the parish council's code of conduct.

"Can councillor Holt explain why he appeared to dial 999 during the September meeting, got a response, and then hung up without telling the operator there was no emergency," said Mr Miller.

He added that as it looks certain that an election will be held to fill vacant seats on the council, all remaining councillors should resign so that Alston Moor can have a completely new council voted for by the community.

"If the decision is not to do this voluntarily, then a petition will take place, asking the voting public what they want to see happen.

"I have been approached by dozens of members of the public believing that this should happen as many have been present at the most recent Zoom meetings and word of mouth has spread across the parish," said Mr Miller.

The meeting was told that Mr Miller also intends to make a further complaint to Eden Council's monitoring officer about the way he was "shouted down and prevented from speaking" at the November meeting of the parish council.

Mr Holt said: "I certainly didn't shout at you Ray. I have to take control of the meeting and at the last meeting it got very personal. A little bit of inexperience on my behalf, as well, as I have only been the chair of a parish council for two months.

I have undertaken a lot of training and I have gone through it and learnt a lot, which is absolutely fantastic."

He said he could not comment on any of the complaints. If they were going to be made official, they will have to go to the monitoring officer and he would then respond accordingly.

Mr Holt said he had no intention of resigning and that there was "no case to answer" following the code of conduct complaint made against him, which had already been dealt with.

There were a couple of recommendations, but they were to remain private, he said.

Mrs Tremble, who was observing the meeting, stepped in to explain that the procedure at Eden was that the authority does not routinely publish the findings of its code of conduct investigations, but does have the ability to do so.

If freedom of information requests were made, unless they fell into an exception, on confidential data grounds, the district council would probably disclose them, she said.

"Pretty much all code of conduct complaint decision notices should be publicised and made public and that is something that Eden will be looking at in the review of our constitution," said Mrs Tremble.

18/12/2020

18th December

'Particularly serious breach' says report which led to councillor resigning after Twitter spat

A COUNCIL chief who resigned his position this week after a Twitter spat was set to be sacked from his role anyway, documents have revealed.

Liam Walker, the Oxfordshire County Council cabinet member for Highways Delivery and Operation, resigned his leadership post on Wednesday.

In his letter of resignation to council leader Ian Hudspeth, Mr Walker said he was standing down because the council's monitoring officer had found his conduct on Twitter 'breached the code of conduct set by the council'.

But the council's official decision notice on his breach of the code of conduct, published the same day, had recommended he be removed from his post by his boss.

A total of 11 complaints were made against Mr Walker because of his contribution to a discussion about cycling on Twitter.

One user, called @JohnCarline3, wrote: "Cyclists constantly w**king off the dutch [sic]. F**k off over there then."

And Mr Walker replied: "Well put in a way people would complain if I said the same."

The councillor later deleted the tweet.



The twitter exchange which led to complaints against Liam Walker.

The Twitter exchange

The council's monitoring officer had recommended the council leader 'remove councillor Walker from the cabinet' as of January 1.

The officer's decision also said: "The breach was rendered particularly serious given councillor Walker's status as cabinet member for highways; and given that councillor Walker had previously been found in breach of the code for a misuse of social media."

The councillor had once used emojis to insult a Labour rival on Twitter, leading to complaints.

In his resignation letter, Mr Walker wrote: "I have already apologised to those who were genuinely offended by the tweet. "It is regrettable that the process has taken up valuable staff time and that taxpayers' money has been used to investigate; at times, aspects of the response have felt disproportionate."

"I have always spoken freely and engaged with councillors and members of the public on social media where many others choose not to. The freedom to exchange frank views is a core part of our democracy and should be defended. My job is to speak frankly and to do my best for the residents of Oxfordshire."

Council leader Ian Hudspeth had defended his colleague when asked about the tweet during November's full council meeting.

At the time, he described Mr Walker as a 'strong supporter of active travel'.

After receiving Mr Walker's letter of resignation, Mr Hudspeth said: "It is with deep regret that I accept councillor Walker's resignation. I thank him for the hard work he has undertaken in his cabinet post during 2020."

Mr Walker will continue in his role as the councillor for Hanborough and Minster Lovell.

17/12/2020

Racism row halts meeting as councillors go Christmas crackers

Posted On 17 Dec 2020 at 11:55 pm By : Frank le Duc Comments: 7

A row about racism stopped a council meeting mid-flow this evening, with further recriminations promised.

It started with a question about a recent commitment by Brighton and Hove City Council to become an anti-racist council.

Conservative councillor Mary Mears asked why Labour councillor Nancy Platts had refused to answer questions about her former role in Jeremy Corbyn's office when he was Labour leader.

The questions followed the publication of a critical report by the Equality and Human Rights Commission after its "Investigation into the Labour Party".

The report found that Labour had broken equality law in its handling of complaints about anti-semitism.

Councillor Platts is not named in the report.

Green council leader Phélim Mac Cafferty said that it would be "inappropriate" for him to answer Councillor Mears's question.

But he said: "Members have said that they want to fight racism and I know that Councillor Platts is among those councillors."

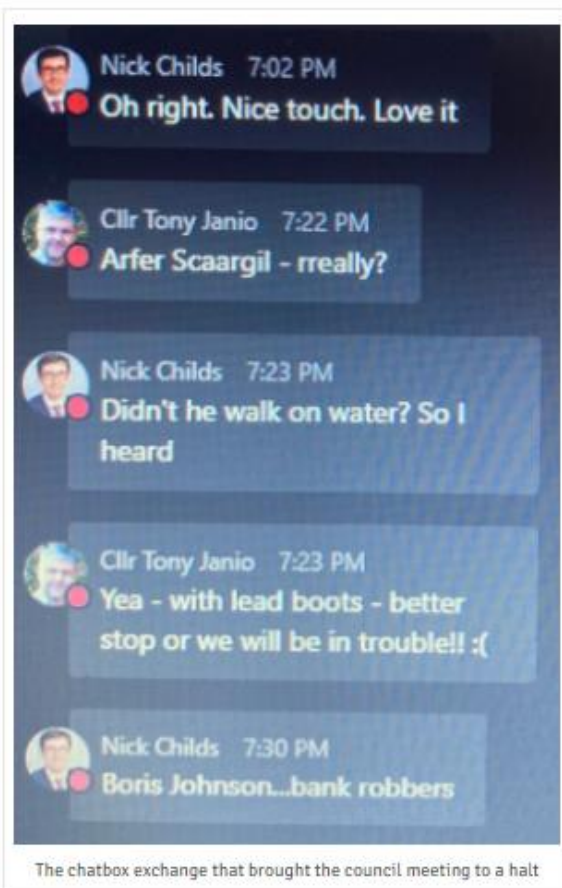
But while the public debate moved on to another topic, messages were being exchanged behind the scenes, including in the meeting's "chatbox".

The fomenting tensions were brought to the surface by former mayor Dee Simson. The Conservative councillor said: "Comments have been left in the chatbox which are just there to incite.

"We can all be civil to each other. It's completely unnecessary."

Labour councillor Nick Childs immediately held up his hand and said: "It was my comment in the chatbox about the Prime Minister."

He had referenced Boris Johnson writing in a newspaper column that women wearing a burqa resembled bank robbers.



Councillor Childs said: "I'm happy to retract it as long as Councillor Mears retracts her libellous comment about Councillor Platts."

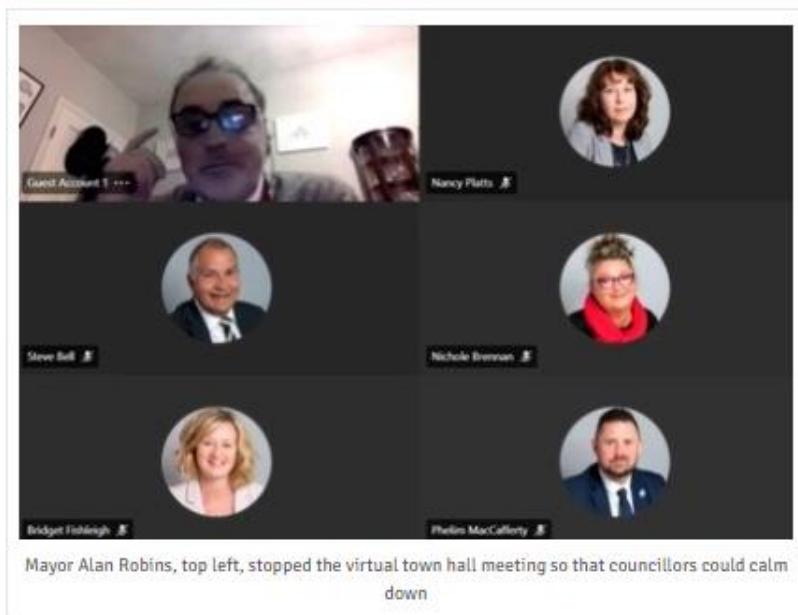
Councillor Platts said that she was happy to take the matter through the council's "standards" process, adding: "I do consider it to be a libellous comment and I'm considering legal action."

One challenge will be the legal protection, known as privilege, attached to comments made in council meetings, although unlike MPs, who have absolute privilege in Parliament, councillors have qualified privilege.

Independent councillor Kate Knight said that she and her colleagues had had meetings at which councillors' conduct had been discussed.

Councillor Knight said: "It was agreed that these meetings were acrimonious and unpleasant."

She spoke about a tendency towards personal abuse and added: "Not only are there serious personal allegations being made but flippant and offensive and personal remarks that have no place in this sort of meeting."



As others interrupted, the mayor, Councillor Alan Robins, who chairs meetings of the full council, called a five-minute break so that members could calm down.

The remote meeting restarted about 20 minutes later and came to an early end because of technical problems.

The final council meeting before Christmas is more often marked by councillors exchanging cards and pleasantries – including across party where friendships exist despite the political rivalries.

Although it is the season of goodwill, this was a meeting with fewer signs of the festive spirit on show than usual.

One councillor said privately: "This was a disgraceful, petulant and childish display from all sides and they should be ashamed of themselves."

09/12/2020

Furious residents accuse councillors of yawning and appearing distracted during important meeting in Milton Keynes

Video footage of a crucial meeting is causing chaos on social media

Blakelands Residents Association has publicly accused Labour councillors of damaging the council's reputation during last week's special audit committee meeting.

But council leader Pete Marland has disputed their complaint and defended his members, saying: "The meeting was four hours long, I think yawning is allowed."

The meeting, held virtually via Zoom, was to discuss residents' objections to the council's approval of a giant warehouse they say is "blighting" their estate and overshadowing their homes.

Sitting on the committee were Labour councillors Mick Legg, Martin Petchley and Elaine Wales - and all three have been accused by the residents of "unacceptable" behavior. Councillor Legg and Councillor Wales have responded to the complaints and assured

residents they were focused on the discussions. Councillor Petchley has not yet responded

The association has now put in a complaint to MK Council. It states: "We are emailing you because we are thoroughly shocked and appalled by the behaviour of certain members of the audit committee during the meeting. This was an important meeting for residents of Blakelands. There were a large number of people watching the meeting live on YouTube.

It adds: "Over the last 48 hours, we have received a large number of messages, comments and emails from the residents of Blakelands and the wider community in Milton Keynes. All of those individuals have condemned the unacceptable behaviour of certain members of the audit committee."

The complaint then goes on to make direct accusations. It states: "Councillor Legg: You were repeatedly yawning and using your mobile phone in a very visible manner."

The complaint also accused Councillor Petchley of yawning and criticised what they said were "deeply insulting" comments about campaigners.

The campaigners added: "Councillor Wales: You were seen watching television in the background and we could hear it when you spoke."

The complaint continues: "It was also highly visible during the meeting that some members appeared to be receiving group messages on their mobile phones. When the mobile phones of the four Labour members are heard going off at the same time and they are then seen reading those messages, the public are only able to draw one conclusion. The visible actions and behaviour of certain members have further damaged the reputation of the council at a time when you be seeking to rebuild public trust and confidence."

The video of the meeting shows another Labour councillor, Norman Miles, cooking his dinner and doing a crossword puzzle during the session.

But he is not a member of the committee and leader Pete said: "I'm not sure why he was on the team's call, he could have watched on YouTube but he should have switched his camera off."

Councillor Mick Legg has admitted he was yawning throughout the meeting. He told the Citizen: "I certainly was yawning but I'd had a really long day and I was tired. My work day started at 7.30am and that meeting went on until 11pm."

Councillor Legg works at a plumbers merchants.

Cllr Elaine Wales has defended having her TV on. She told the Citizen: "As a single working mum I had spent the day at work and then took part in a four-hour council meeting in the

evening. I don't live in a big house and my daughter may have had the TV on. Covid-19 has impacted on all our lives and I don't think it's reasonable that my family should be impacted by my taking part in a long council meeting in our home."

She added: "I listened to the meeting throughout and considered all the points raised during the meeting carefully. I have the utmost sympathy (which I did express during the meeting) for the residents and their situation."

Cllr Martin Petchey has so far not replied to the Citizen's messages inviting him to comment.

Meanwhile, Conservative councillor John Bint, who was at the meeting to defend the residents' views about the warehouse, has given his view.

He said: "For councillors taking part in online committee meetings, I think

the odd lapse in concentration or the occasional domestic distraction is completely understandable. But what I think we saw at Tuesday's meeting was several councillors apparently not listening to the subject being discussed by a committee that they were part of."

He added: "I think that was deeply disrespectful to the members of the public who are affected by the situation."

Leader of Welsh council suspended for seven months for code of conduct breaches, vows to appeal

January 6, 2021



[Tweet](#)



[Print](#)



[Email](#)

The Adjudication Panel of Wales has suspended the Leader of Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council, Cllr Kevin O'Neill, for seven months for breaching the local authority's code of conduct.

According to the Local Democracy Reporting Service, Cllr O'Neill has vowed to appeal the panel's ruling.

The panel had received a referral in July 2020 from the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales in relation to allegations against him.

The panel's [decision notice](#) said there were six allegations:

-
- The first allegation was that Cllr O'Neill had failed to declare orally the existence and nature of a personal interest in the business of the authority relating to a property at Luther Lane at an inter-agency meeting on 15th August 2018.
 - The second allegation was that he had a prejudicial interest in relation to the business of the authority regarding the property at Luther Lane and was in breach of the Code in not withdrawing from the room when the property was being considered at the inter-agency meeting on 15th August 2018.
 - The third allegation was that the respondent, Cllr O'Neill, had a prejudicial interest in relation to the business of the authority regarding the property at Luther Lane and was in breach of the Code in that he was seeking to influence a decision about that business and made oral representations at the inter-agency meeting on the 15th August 2018.

- The fourth allegation was that Cllr O'Neill's email to the Director of Social Services on 16th August 2018 failed to include details of the respondent's personal interest in the business of the authority in relation to the property at Luther Lane, and that the email sought to influence a decision about that business and made written representations about that business in which he had a prejudicial interest, in breach of the Code.
- The fifth allegation related to whether the respondent's actions in speaking at the meeting of the 15th August 2018 and sending written correspondence to an officer in the form of an email to the Director of Social Services on 16th August 2018 were seeking to influence a decision about the business of the property at Luther Lane in breach of the Code, and whether such conduct, if proved, could reasonably be regarded as bringing his office or authority into disrepute, in breach of the Code.
- The sixth allegation related to the meeting with the former chief executive of the council on the 5th March 2019 and whether the respondent's conduct towards the former chief executive was inappropriate and failed to show respect and consideration to him in breach of the Code.

The case tribunal determined its adjudication by way of written representations, in accordance with Cllr O'Neill's wishes, at meetings last month by Cloud Video Platform.

"The Case Tribunal found by unanimous decision that the Respondent had failed to comply with the Code with regard to all of the allegations," the decision notice said.

The Case Tribunal decided, also unanimously, that Cllr O'Neill should be suspended from acting as a member of the council for a period of seven months or, if shorter, the remainder of his term of office. The relevant period starts on 23 December 2020.

Cllr O'Neill has the right to seek the leave of the High Court to appeal this decision.

The Case Tribunal also recommended that the council's monitoring officer (or their delegate) provide further training to Cllr O'Neill on the Code of Conduct, the meaning of 'prejudicial interests' and the approach to be taken to, and the status of, the advice of the Monitoring Officer. "Such training to be undertaken within one month of the Respondent returning to his post following the service of his suspension."

Responding to the ruling, Merthyr Tydfil said: "During this period, Kevin O'Neill will be treated as a member of the public, not as a councillor.

"In the meantime, Deputy Leader, Councillor Lisa Mytton will represent the Leader's office."

In a statement given to the [Local Democracy Reporting Service](#) and [reported on the BBC](#), Cllr O'Neill said he would give a "full explanation" on the matters concerned "if and when the time is right".

"I was shocked by the tribunal's decision and surprised it has been picked up by the press before I have been given the reasons for it."

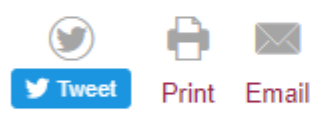
He added: "My motivations during my time in office have been (and will always be) doing right by the people of Merthyr Tydfil.

"I don't believe that commitment has ever been questioned during this process.

"I will be scrutinising the reasons closely with my legal team as soon as they're received. My firm wish is to appeal so I can return to public service as soon as possible."

Standards committee for Welsh Parliament consults on new code of conduct including new principle of 'Respect'

January 6, 2021



The Senedd Cymru's standards committee last month launched a consultation on a proposed new Code of Conduct for Members of the Senedd.

If the new Code is agreed, the Senedd's Members would be subject to the standards of behaviour set out in the Code - including a new principle of 'Respect' - after the election in May 2021.

The committee said it believed that the addition of a 'Respect' principle would now be appropriate, reflecting:

1. The independent inquiry report on the Bullying and Harassment of the House of Commons staff which led to the adoption of the Senedd's Dignity and Respect Policy.
2. Wider movements in society such as #MeToo and Black Lives Matter.

The committee said the code outlines how Members should engage with each other as well with staff, stakeholders and the public.

The proposed Code also makes it clear that those standards of behaviour should apply to Members at all times, "including in their personal and private lives".

If anyone believes that a Member has not met the standards of behaviour set out in the Code, they can make a complaint to the independent Commissioner for Standards.

In its consultation, the committee asks whether the current complaints procedure works or whether it should be changed in any way. The current Code was agreed in May 2016.

The proposed new Code does not refer specifically to the use of social media but says that members *"must not subject anyone to personal attack in any communication (whether verbal, in writing or any form or electronic or other medium) - in a manner that would be considered excessive or abusive by a reasonable and impartial person, having regard to the context in which the remarks were made"*.

By including a new principle of 'Respect', the committee hopes the new code can address some of these concerns by setting a respectful standard of debate and encouraging people of all backgrounds to get involved in politics.

Following the consultation the committee will present the new Code to the Senedd who will decide, as a whole, whether or not to agree to it.

It is intended that this review will be completed by the end of the current Senedd in preparation for the next Senedd.

Jayne Bryant MS, Chair of the Senedd's Standards Committee, said: "The Code of Conduct sets the standard and tone of political debate, and now more than ever it is important to get this right.

"With a serious problem of online abuse and powerful campaigns such as the #MeToo movement and Black Lives Matter, we've got to do all we can to improve the tone of debate and set a standard that encourages trust in elected representatives and inspires people from all backgrounds to stand for election.

"We're keen to hear the view of people from across Wales on the refreshed Code of Conduct for Members of the Senedd."

Cabinet member resigns over breach of code of conduct in dealing with grant application by motorcycle display team

December 17, 2020



[Tweet](#)



[Print](#)



[Email](#)

A Hampshire cabinet member has resigned after a standards investigation found he breached the code of conduct over a council grant to a children's motorcycle display team.

Sean Woodward, a Conservative, was cabinet member for recreation and heritage. He is also leader of Fareham Borough Council, a post he retains.

Hampshire's **conduct panel decided** that no further action need be taken against him.

Two local residents Russell Collier and Jason Morris complained that Cllr Woodward broke the councillors' code of conduct.

In January 2020 Hampshire appointed as investigator Simon Goacher, a partner with law firm Weightmans.

He concluded that Cllr Woodward failed to comply with the code over the award of a £15,000 grant to the Rockets display team.

Mr Goacher said: "Cllr Woodward was heavily involved in supporting Ms A [an official of the team] in making the application.

"He has shown an extensive interest in the application from before it was even made."

A dispute developed within the Rockets' management led Ms A to set up the separate Solent Stars team to which she asked that the Rockets grant be made instead.

The report said: "The applications of both the Rockets and the Solent Stars related to the provision of a lorry for the team. Cllr Woodward told officers that he was taking his HGV licence when the application was being made and later showed a video to officers of him driving the Solent Stars' lorry (which was not funded by the council).

Former councillor at London borough jailed for electoral offences

January 20, 2021



[Tweet](#)



[Print](#)



[Email](#)

A former councillor at the London Borough of Redbridge has been jailed for electoral offences and banned from holding elected office for five years.

Chaudhary Mohammed Iqbal, 51 of Cecil Avenue, Barking was sentenced on 4 January for three counts of making false statements in candidate nomination papers, contrary to Sec 65A(1A) of the Representation of the People Act 1983, and one count of perverting the course of justice.

The Metropolitan Police said the charges related to false declarations by Iqbal regarding his address, in relation to the 2018 local government elections in the London Borough of Redbridge.

He had previously pleaded guilty to three counts of causing or permitting a false statement to appear on a nomination form and one count of conspiracy to pervert the course of justice.

Iqbal appeared at Southwark Crown Court and was sentenced to nine months' imprisonment for each of the three electoral malpractice offences, to run concurrently.

He was also sentenced to eight months' imprisonment for perverting the course of justice, to run consecutively.

Iqbal was also ordered to pay prosecution costs of £10,422.54, compensation to Redbridge Council of £10,000 for the by-election costs and compensation to Redbridge Council of £18,368 for the allowances paid to him.

He was reminded of section 173 of the Representation of the People Act 1983 setting out the requirements of a person convicted of a corrupt practice in relation to his current elected post and also the five year ban on holding elected office.

Detective Chief Inspector Sarah McConnell, of the Metropolitan Police's Central Specialist Crime Command, said: "This is a significant sentence for this type of offence. It reflects the seriousness with which the court viewed the wrongdoing in an electoral setting."

Parish council that went viral over committee meeting is subject of "multiplicity of complaints"

February 8, 2021



[Tweet](#)



[Print](#)



[Email](#)

Cheshire East Council has received a "multiplicity of complaints" regarding the conduct and behaviour of Handforth Parish Council, which was in the spotlight last week when a recording of a chaotic Planning and Environment Committee [went viral](#).

Problems at the parish council appear to have been ongoing for some time, however. In an official, but undated, notice to the parish councillors published on [Handforth Parish Council's website](#), the Director of Governance at Cheshire East, David Brown, said that as monitoring officer he had received complaints ranging from multiple complaints about councillors' behaviour; to fundamental issues of governance and member/officer engagement.

"The most recent referrals relate to suggestions that some members of Handforth Parish Council have purported to take decisions that are plainly unlawful, and these decisions have resulted in expenditure of public funds," he wrote.

Mr Brown said that if the Code of Conduct matters raised were taken at face value they were sufficiently serious to warrant detailed consideration. "The detailed consideration may result in a hearing before the Cheshire East Council Committee for Standards."

He went on to warn the councillors "that any member who knowingly acts unlawfully places themselves at risk of personal liability for damages to third parties, and the recovery of any public money purported to be expended by them on behalf of the parish council".

"It may be timely, given the nature of the referrals made, for Councillors to reassure themselves that no element of misfeasance in public office could arise. The elements of the offence are summarised in *Attorney General's Reference No 3 of 2003* [2004] EWCA Crim 868 and expanded upon in the Crown Prosecution Service website."

Referring to the attempts that some councillors had made to reinstate a councillor after they had been disqualified following absence from meetings, Mr Brown said: "Councillors are all aware that there has been no valid challenge, upheld by a court to the declaration of vacancy as notified to the Returning Officer. It is therefore probable that any Councillor acting on the purported belief there is no vacancy may be engaging in misconduct and acting willfully or being recklessly indifferent to that fact."

Brown finished the notice by saying: "Handforth Parish Council, or any individual councillor, may seek advice and assistance from the local association of Town and Parish Councils for help with any potential issue and to seek advice to resolve the difficulties that have been reported. Given the high volume of complaints received, significant scrutiny of the parish council's actions is likely."

In a recent council meeting, Cllr John Smith of Handforth Parish Council said that relationships between the parish clerk, Ashley Comiskey Dawson, and the chair had broken down when a disagreement on reinstating the disqualified councillor arose.

He said: "A councillor missed meetings from December 2019. On taking advice from Cheshire East, they advised Ashley that a vacancy now existed in the West Ward due to self-disqualification rules. Councillors Birkhill, Tolver and Brewerton wanted Ashley to reinstate that councillor. However, Cheshire East Democratic Services instructed Ashley that it would be unlawful if he tried to do that.

"We had a meeting on Monday evening where it listed the Employment Committee meetings and Councillor Birkhill stated in there [...] that, due to the seriousness of the concerns about the actions of the clerk and the fact that relationships had broken down, they suspended him and that was in November."

According to Cllr Smith, the parish clerk, Mr Comiskey Dawson, later received an email in error "saying 'how can we get rid of Ashley. Can we get a solicitor who specialises in employment law to get rid of Ashley' so that they could bring this councillor back".

Two later meetings that took place on 10 December 2020 led to an argument between the members which was viewed more than 5 million times on YouTube and led to nationwide attention from the media.

The 10 December meeting was called by two councillors using Schedule 12 of the Local Government Act 1972 which allows for an 'extraordinary meeting' to take place if the Chairman refuses to call a meeting after a requisition for that purpose, signed by two members of the parish council, has been presented to him.

Brian Tolver, Chairman of the council, joined the meeting and attempted to move a proposal to the council to deem the meeting unlawful.

He said: "There are some very specific conditions for calling an extraordinary meeting and these have not been met. These are specified both in our standing orders (standing order 17d) and in law. An extraordinary meeting has to be either called by the Chairman, or it has to be requisitioned formally by two councillors applying to the Chairman for it. I have received no such requisition".

But he was subsequently removed from the meeting by Jackie Weaver, a member of the Cheshire Association of Local Councils (ChALC), who was acting as clerk to the meeting in the absence of the regular clerk, after questioning her authority.

ChALC is a member-based organisation that exists to promote the rights and interests of town and parish councils in the Cheshire area. The organisation also provides professional support for members councils in all aspects of their work, including providing legal advice on council related issues.

Ms Weaver also removed to the waiting room two other councillors who opposed the calling of the meeting: Vice-chair Aled Brewerton, along with Cllr Barry Burkhill. Mr Brewerton had told Ms Weaver that he was in charge and told her to "read the standing orders! Read them and understand them!"

Ms Weaver then proposed the election of a new chair, and Cllr John Smith was elected chair.

A Cheshire East Council spokesperson said: "All matters relating to complaints to the monitoring officer about a parish council or elected member, remain confidential until all processes have been followed. The outcome of any formal investigation is published on the council's website."

Ms Weaver told *Local Government Lawyer* that it should be borne in mind that the 10 December meeting was properly called by two councillors, one of which was not the chairman nor was it the vice chairman.

"Before the meeting started their behaviour was clearly disruptive with the sole purpose of preventing the meeting that had been called," she said. "They were removed from the meeting even before it began (as the chairman stated). The vice chairman was also removed from the zoom session for his disruptive and unreasonable behaviour.

"The meeting then went on to properly elect a chairman for the meeting and the meeting began."

Appendix B

CSPL news

Local government ethical standards – follow up to best practice recommendations

Posted by: Jane Martin, Posted on: 8 January 2021

In January 2019, the Committee published a report and recommendations on local government ethical standards, an area of long-standing interest for CSPL. We approached the work as a health check of the standards framework in place at the time for local authorities across England, established by the Localism Act 2011. The report provided assurance that the arrangements in place are promoting and maintaining the standards expected by the public, and reinforced our view that the majority of local councillors maintain the highest ethical standards. However, we did recommend that some improvements were required, in particular, the need for maximum independence in local complaints processes and the need for greater sanctions where appropriate in the rare cases of significant or repeated breaches of the code of conduct. Having carried out a review of actions since the 2019 report, we can give further assurance that the majority of local councils are demonstrating their strong commitment to high standards in public life.

A key recommendation was that the LGA should develop a non-mandatory, model code of conduct. Following consultation, the LGA has now published this model code, which CSPL views as a welcome step, helping to set clear standards and avoid confusion for both councillors and members of the public alike.

We await the government's formal response to this report.

As well as making recommendations to government, CSPL identified 15 best practice recommendations to drive high ethical standards in local government.

In the report, the Committee said it expected all local authorities could and should implement these best practice recommendations. We therefore followed up on progress in 2020, writing to all local authorities in England inviting them to update the Committee. CSPL is of course aware that the COVID-19 pandemic has involved significant additional work for those in local government and we will continue to accept responses. We have received 213 replies to date.

It was clear from the evidence we received during our review that the vast majority of councillors and officers want to maintain the highest standards of conduct in their own authority. This is also reflected in the positive responses received from local authorities which have replied to date, saying that they have already implemented or are taking steps to implement our best practice recommendations.

Many of the councils, if they didn't use the precise terms of CSPL's best practice recommendation in their codes of conduct, nonetheless had elements in place and were reviewing their practices to comply fully.

For example, with respect to the best practice recommendation: *Codes should have prohibitions on bullying and harassment*, many councils said that their codes contained provisions that members should treat others with respect. And with respect to our best practice recommendation: *Councillors should comply with formal standards provisions*, many councils said that whilst not explicitly articulated in their code, such provisions were contained within their protocols and procedures for handling standards complaints.

Of the 213 local authorities who had responded by 17 December 2020:

75.6 % said they have prohibitions on bullying and harassment in their code of conduct, or were putting them into place. Other councils we heard from were waiting for finalisation of the LGA model code of conduct to review how best to include prohibitions on bullying and harassment.

51.2 % said they have provisions in their code of conduct requiring councillors to comply with formal standards investigation. Most of the other councils we heard from said that they were waiting to see what the LGA model code of conduct looked like before they adapted their own codes of conduct to incorporate our best practice.

98.6 % said their code is readily accessible or were making changes to make the code accessible - published and available on council premises.

86.4 % said they update their gifts and hospitality register regularly and have made it readily accessible to the public.

98.6 % said they consulted an Independent Person as to whether to undertake a formal investigation on an allegation.

98.6 % said they had clear guidance on their websites informing members of the public how to make a complaint under the code of conduct.

93.9 % said that their senior offices had arrangements for meeting with political group leaders/whips to discuss standards issues.

CSPL: Intimidation in Public Life

SUMMARY OF PROGRESS MADE AGAINST THE REPORT'S RECOMMENDATIONS

Government

The government has made progress in a number of areas. In 2019, they published their Online Harms White Paper, which established a new regulatory framework for online safety, including a statutory duty of care to make companies take more responsibility for the safety of their users. This will be backed up by an independent online harms regulator. The government has not committed to bringing forward legislation to shift the liability of illegal content online towards social media companies.

As per our recommendation, the government consulted on the introduction of a new electoral offence of intimidation of candidates and campaigners during elections. They have committed to legislating for this offence when parliamentary time allows. Similarly, the government published legislation in 2018 to remove the requirement for candidates standing as local councillors to have their home addresses published on the ballot paper. These provisions came into force for the polls on 2 May 2019.

Political parties

In 2017, we found that political parties needed to do more to protect their candidates from intimidation – to show leadership in setting an appropriate tone for candidates and supporters; to tackle intimidatory behaviour undertaken by their members; and to provide support to their candidates who face intimidation during elections.

Political parties have made progress in a number of key areas, but there is still work to be done in others.

All of the political parties represented in Westminster now have in place their own Code of Conduct, which sets out the minimum standards of behaviour expected of their members. The party codes all prohibit bullying, harassment and unlawful discrimination – conduct that clearly falls within the scope of intimidation. Some of the codes list further categories of behaviour that will not be tolerated by parties, including victimisation, abuse and hateful language. Many of the codes explicitly refer to the positive behaviours expected by party members, including fairness, respect, tolerance and dignity, as well the expectation that members will challenge unacceptable behaviour where it occurs. This is a significant step forward.

Similarly, each party has in place its own internal disciplinary process for dealing with alleged breaches of the party's code. A range of sanctions are included in those frameworks, including formal warning, suspension from party membership, prohibition from holding office or standing for election, and revocation of party membership. It is not clear to what extent parties enforce the full range of sanctions available to them to discipline intimidatory behaviour by their members. We would like to see all parties collecting data on the number

of complaints against members for engaging in intimidation and the outcome of any disciplinary process resulting from these complaints.

We have been working with the Jo Cox Foundation since 2019 on the recommendation that political parties work together to develop a joint code of conduct on intimidatory behaviour. That work has resulted in a high-level statement of principle outlining the minimum standards of behaviour that all party members should aspire to. We welcome support for the statement from the Labour Party, the Scottish National Party, the Liberal Democrats, Plaid Cymru, and the Green Party.

Policing

In 2017, we found that the approach taken on intimidation offences by local police forces was inconsistent. To that end, we recommended better training and guidance.

In line with our recommendation, the National Police Chief's Council published joint guidance with the Crown Prosecution Service, the College of Policing, and the Electoral Commission in 2019, about behaviour which candidates in elections may experience during a campaign which is likely to constitute a criminal offence. We were pleased to see that the guidance includes practical advice on how to protect yourself, as well as legal definitions and what might constitute a breach of criminal law.

We were also pleased to see that the College of Policing has updated their Authorised Professional Practice for elections to include information on the Committee's report, intimidation and the police's responsibility to mitigate and investigate allegations related to intimidation.

Social media

In 2017, we found that social media had been the most significant factor enabling intimidation in recent years. We were concerned that not enough was being done by social media companies to proactively address intimidation online.

All three social media companies now have measures in place to protect their users from intimidation and harassment. These include policies and guidelines that are regularly reviewed and updated, mechanisms to identify and remove abusive content, and reporting channels for users to report content that violates their policies. They also all give users options to control the content they see and who they can interact with online. These include block, mute and safe search functions.

In line with our recommendation, all three companies now publish transparency data on reported content and takedowns. This is a significant step forward. Neither Twitter, Facebook or Google appear to publish data on the time it takes to remove reported content, however. This would help satisfy the Committee that social media companies are able to make decisions quickly and consistently on the takedown of intimidatory content.

All three companies established temporary election teams during the 2019 General Election to protect the integrity of election-related content and identify and respond more quickly to potential threats and challenges, including removing intimidatory content. We were pleased to see that Facebook has since established a permanent reporting channel for MPs to flag abusive or threatening content, which runs year round for sitting MPs and is extended for Parliamentary candidates during elections.

We were also pleased to see that all three companies shared bespoke election and safety resources with MPs, political parties and the government, ahead of the General Election.

We were disappointed to see that social media companies have not adequately revised their tools for users to escalate potential illegal online activity to the police. We said in 2017 that general statements, such as “remember that you should contact local law enforcement if you ever feel threatened by something you see on Facebook”, do not help users to constructively engage with the police. It remains our view that social media companies have a responsibility to advise their users about how to escalate any credible threats they receive.

Press regulators

Press regulators IPSO and Impress both wrote this year to update the Committee.

It is clear that the Editors’ Code of Practice Committee, who oversee IPSO’s Code of Practice, acknowledge that intimidation is a problem for all those in public life, and that their Code is robust and protects individuals in a range of circumstances, including discrimination and harassment. They have satisfied the Committee that editors exercise discretion for their own editorial content and language and that they are open to criticism and called to account by the public and those in public life. Editors must comply with the Code and the law. We were glad to hear that publishers are responsible for their freelancers’ work, which must also comply with the Code.

We were pleased to see that Impress is currently undertaking a comprehensive review of their Standards Code, considering issues around discrimination, harassment, online threats and intimidation. They intend to publish a new version of the Code in July 2022.

Press release

Committee on Standards in Public Life announces landscape review of public standards

The independent Committee on Standards in Public Life has today launched Standards Matter 2, a landscape review of the institutions, processes and structures in place to support high standards of conduct.

The independent Committee on Standards in Public Life has today announced that it will be carrying out a review of the institutions, processes and structures in place to support high standards of conduct.

The review will look at best practice and identify any themes and gaps in the way the Seven Principles of Public Life are promoted and maintained.

Announcing the review, Committee Chair, Jonathan Evans said:

“There are now a wide range of different bodies involved in investigating, promoting, and maintaining standards, based on the Nolan principles – some as a result of the Committee’s recommendations over the last 25 years.

“As well as sharing any lessons learned and best practice, we will consider whether there are gaps or issues that require further work. We want to check whether the Nolan principles are well understood, properly embedded and that they continue to reflect the standards expected by the public of those that serve them.

“High standards are a public good. They improve predictability and promote better outcomes for society, increasing public confidence and the functioning of the economy. The Committee last undertook a strategic review of standards structures in 2013. Back then, our predecessors concluded that the institutions, processes and codes of conduct were in place but that organisations needed to work harder to fully embed a culture of high standards.

“Standards issues change and evolve over time. Organisations and institutions need to have the right culture and processes in place to maintain high standards of conduct, with the ability to properly and fairly investigate standards issues where necessary.

“The Committee is launching an open consultation today and will be talking to regulators, academics and parliamentarians, as well as carrying out research with the public as part of this review. We intend to report to the Prime Minister in Summer 2021 with our findings and recommendations.

“We published research mapping the standards regulators last year. The Committee is aware that public perceptions of standards remain low, as they have for many

years in fact. We want to look at what is working well and what more needs to be done to support high standards of conduct across public life.”