

## **Standards Case Updates - July 2025 Standards Committee**

### **Courtesy and Respect Vs Bullying, Harassment and Discrimination**

#### **Courtesy and Respect –**

- I treat other councillors and members of the public with courtesy and respect.
- I treat Council employees, employees and representatives of partner organisations and those volunteering for the Council with courtesy and respect and respect for the role they play.

*Respect means politeness and courtesy in behaviour, speech, and in the written word. Debate and having different views are all part of a healthy democracy. As a councillor, you can express, challenge, criticise and disagree with views, ideas, opinions and policies in a robust but civil manner. You should not, however, subject individuals, groups of people or organisations to personal attack. In your contact with the public, you should treat them politely and courteously. Rude and offensive behaviour lowers the public's expectations and confidence in councillors.*

*In return, you have a right to expect respectful behaviour from the public. If members of the public are being abusive, intimidatory or threatening you are entitled to stop any conversation or interaction in person or online and report them to the Council, the relevant social media provider or the police. This also applies to fellow councillors, where action could then be taken under the Councillor Code of Conduct, and Council employees, where concerns should be raised in line with the Council's Member / Officer Protocol.*

#### **Bullying, Harassment and Discrimination -**

- do not bully any person.
- I do not harass any person.
- I promote equalities and do not discriminate unlawfully against any person.
- I do not do anything which may cause the Council to breach a statutory duty or any of the equality enactments (as defined in section 33 of the Equality Act 2010).

*The Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service (ACAS) characterises bullying as offensive, intimidating, malicious or insulting behaviour, an abuse or misuse of power through means that undermine, humiliate, denigrate or injure the recipient. Bullying might be a regular pattern of behaviour or a one-off incident, happen face-to-face, on social media, in emails or phone calls, happen in the workplace or at work social events and may not always be obvious or noticed by others.*

*The Protection from Harassment Act 1997 defines harassment as conduct that causes alarm or distress or puts people in fear of violence and must involve such conduct on at least two occasions. It can include repeated attempts to impose unwanted communications and contact upon a person in a manner that could be expected to cause distress or fear in any reasonable person.*

*Unlawful discrimination is where someone is treated unfairly because of a protected characteristic. Protected characteristics are specific aspects of a person's identity defined by the Equality Act 2010. They are age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation.*

*The Equality Act 2010 places specific duties on local authorities. Councillors have a central role to play in ensuring that equality issues are integral to the Council's performance and strategic aims, and that there is a strong vision and public commitment to equality across public services.*

#### **Case Study 1**

#### **Summary of Allegation**

It is alleged that at the Town Council offices, the Subject Councillor made inappropriate comments to the Complainant when discussing whether a grant application made could be approved.

It is alleged that the Councillor:

- i) questioned whether money for the grant could be taken from elsewhere in the Town Council;
- ii) suggested that the Complainant spoke to the Town Clerk to try to persuade him to change his mind by wearing a low-cut top and to push her breasts out so that they sit like a balcony;
- iii) during a further conversation, made an inappropriate comment to the Complainant by saying that she made him feel calm and he wanted to give her a cuddle,
- iv) on a previous occasion when the Subject Councillor attended the Town Council offices, he made an inappropriate comment by saying to the Complainant she was his crush for the day, and he was falling in love with her,
- v) ignored the request for Councillors to make an appointment with officers before attending the Town Council Offices and when he did attend, he stood in such close proximity to the Complainant as to touch her arm.

**Summary of the evidence considered, and the representations made**

The Subject Councillor stated that in response to the Complainant resolving a system issue, he stated “You are fantastic, I’d like to give you a big cuddle but I’m sorry I can’t. You are my crush for the day/week and I could fall in love with you”.

It was also agreed by the Subject Councillor that he told the Complainant about a time when he was in St Tropez and described an experience he had whilst standing at a market stall explaining that a woman stood next to him wearing bikini bottoms and an open blouse, with a white bra with a fringe which meant that her breasts were at his eye level.

The Subject Councillor categorically denied that he suggested to the Complainant that she dress in a particular way when discussing the grant application. This was a matter of factual dispute between the Complainant and Subject Councillor.

The Sub-Committee heard evidence from the Complainant. She stated that during the discussion about the grant application the Subject Councillor had asked her to wear a low-cut top with a balcony bra when discussing the matter with the Town Clerk. She also stated that it was during that conversation on 23<sup>rd</sup> June 2022 that the Subject Councillor told the story about the time when he was in St Tropez and standing at a market stall when a woman

stood next to him wearing bikini bottoms and an open blouse with a white bra with a fringe which meant that her breasts were at his eye level.

When asked how the conversations made her feel, the complainant stated that they made her anxious, that she would hide when the Councillor came into the offices, she found the conversations embarrassing, demeaning and insulting ,that the Councillor made her feel nervous and that she was scared to be around him or alone with him.

The Subject Councillor accepted that he did make reference to the Complainant's cleavage, which he was very conscious of, on account of the low-cut top she was wearing as he did not want her to think that he was looking at her breasts.

The Subject Councillor explained the context to his accepted comments in that he was having difficulty with some Software and asked for the number for the technical team to assist him. However, the complainant offered to help herself so he fetched his tablet device and she was able to fix the issue with ease. He asked her to show this again and she did so. The Subject Councillor explained that he was so relieved that the computer issue was finally fixed, that he uttered the words, "I could hug you, but that would not be allowed. Instead, I think I will make you my crush for the week / day." He also said words to the effect that if she was able to fix things with such ease, he could "fall in love with her".

The Subject Councillor explained that he did not think that the Complainant was dressed appropriately and he decided that he should deal with this issue himself. It was in this context that he attempted to draw an analogy with what is acceptable dress in one context may not be acceptable in another, by giving an account of the encounter he had had in St Tropez.

The Subject Councillor accepted that in hindsight the reference to the woman in St Tropez was inappropriate, that he got it wrong and that he regretted it. He stated that he did not intend to offend or insult the Complainant or make her feel uncomfortable and would not deal with the matter in that way if he found himself in the same situation. He explained that he had taken time to read literature on unconscious bias and now considered himself to be more sympathetic and empathetic and stated that he was deeply sorry that he did not empathise with the Complainant at the time of his comments.

## Case Study 2

### **Summary of Allegations**

Another Councillor put a post on Facebook containing a video clip of a bird surrounded by litter with the words:

*"Sad to see South Kesteven Greens refusing to support wildlife near the A1.*

*Despite this setback, I'm proud to have seconded a successful amendment to the Budget, securing £60,000 to clean up the A1 and protect our environment. The new reserve will be called the 'Clean the A1' reserve. Local Greens, along with Labour, Liberals, and most Independents, either abstained or voted against this. Shameful. "*

A second councillor commented on the post, saying:

*"X, Could you please explain why you voted AGAINST the overall budget which included the employment of a Tree Officer post, £700,000 for void repairs, financial support for our play parks and leisure centres and the creation of a reserve for litter-picking on the A1?"*

A member of public replied to that comment by saying:

*"... the answer is simple, he is a self-promoting Pratt and very selective with the truth. Had he ever achieved anything as a councillor."*

The Subject Councillor liked this comment which was the basis for the first complaint.

Another Councillor posted, on Facebook a link to a Lincsonline article and wrote:

*"Former portfolio holder for bins at SKDC, Cllr Y, has left the Cabinet and the Green Party. Did she jump before she was binned?"*

The Subject Councillor commented on the post. He stated:

*"What a vile disrespectful piece of garbage you really are X !! What do you know about Cllr Y and her person[al] life or me[n]tal health ?? Have you given any consideration to this ? ...I think not !! Given your obvious low intellect !! and FYI .... if you don't report my comment .....I'll be very disappointed !!! You vile disrespectful fool !!!"*

A member of public commented on the post to say:

*"You disgusting little turd. No doubt you will get away with this abuse yet again just like you have gotten away with every report made against you!!! Odd that. Time to look a little closer into who is reviewing these complaints I think!!! Vile man."*

The Subject Councillor responded to the comment to say:

*"Well said " and gave a thumbs up emoji.*

### **Summary of the evidence considered, and the representations made**

The Subject Councillors response to the complaint was:

*".....I think it speaks for itself. Is the Resident right? Has Cllr X behaved like a "Pratt" ? Was the post "Self Serving" ?. I would suggest he and it was! I did ask for the post to be removed before it could cause any Reputational damage to other councillors which it now unfortunately has!. I would consider myself a " Self serving Pratt" if I had posted something which would and could cause Reputational damage to other councillors ? Yes! I would. Also the complaint holds no ground and I do not recognise it, as it is based on the "Code of conduct" Something we have had confirmed as not being worth the paper it is written on given Cllr Z can Publicly insult a Female Councillor in the chamber and not be held to account. The code and insults are clearly subjective. I reserve the right to "like" anything and everything on facebook."*

*"I totally understand Your only doing your job, but I don't recognise the complaints as I don't recognise X as a Councillor until he takes action to correct his vile behaviour on social media. X must remove all posts from his social media which have without doubt caused reputational damage and distress. For Z to suggest X's post was a harmless question is outrageous!, he was quite obviously mocking a Person and Cllr whilst they were at a low point. The post is disrespectful and shows a complete lack of compassion for Cllr Y and until removed I remain resolute in my stance that I don't recognise X, therefore I can't recognise any complaints."*