

REPORT OF AN INVESTIGATION INTO COMPLAINTS BY CRAIG MCBETH, KARL HOPKINS, ROSE BERRY and PETER TAPPER AGAINST COUNCILLOR TONY GREAVES

Background

1. On 8th August 2019 the Colne and District Committee met at Colne Town Hall. An item of business was to consider a planning application for extensions and alterations at the former St Bartholomew's School, Exchange Street, Colne.
2. The application had been submitted by the Madina Mosque and had been the subject of local controversy. An online petition with over 1300 signatures against the development had been submitted and there had been a demonstration in Colne town centre a few weeks previously.
3. Immediately following the meeting I received a complaint from Craig McBeth as follows:

On Thursday 8/8/19 at the Colne and District Council Meeting, Cllr Lord Tony Greaves insulted a member of the public in an unprovoked attack - calling him a "Nazi" with no justification.

These comments and insults from Lord Greaves are wholly out of keeping with the conduct of a councillor and a severe breach of the Code of Conduct for Councillors.

As a longstanding politician, Lord Greaves thinks he is beyond reproach and that he can say what he likes and treat constituents with severe contempt and disdain. The Nazis were vicious murderers who slaughtered millions of people - this gentleman at the meeting has killed no one, and was merely filming a public meeting (as allowed).

The language of Lord Greaves is disgusting and has no place in a Council chamber, but sadly no other Councillors called him out on it. However I hope this complaints procedure is robust enough to deal with abuse comments to the public. Please take note of the timeline of events too... the gentleman filming had made no comments nor disturbed the meeting until provoked by the inflammatory and highly offensive comment made by Lord Greaves.

Is this something the Council condones, can we just go around insulting people and incorrectly slurring them, or does the Council take its Code of Conduct

seriously and how it should behave. I hope so... but your conclusion and action (or lack of) will be the evidence.

Resolution requested: Personally I think Lord Greaves should be removed from the Council permanently, but that is not democracy. As with other politicians who have breached Code of Conduct or brought the Council in to disrepute, he should be suspended at the very minimum.

4. On 11th August Craig McBeth posted on Facebook a video clip lasting 4.24 minutes showing the incident. This is described in greater detail later in this report.
5. On 14th August an article appeared in the Lancashire Telegraph under the headline **Row erupts as Pendle councillor calls member of public a Nazi**. The article referred to the complaint by Craig McBeth and quoted Councillor Greaves as follows:

“Yes I did call him a Nazi, because he is one. He was exhibiting Nazi sympathies and there was aggressive and thuggish nature from the people stood behind us. They then blew up completely and had to be removed by the police.

Their general behaviour was aggressive, they were standing immediately behind us and muttering, and a person speaking on their behalf- Craig McBeth- was putting across a message of hate against the local Muslim population.

We have since voted to remove him from the committee as him and his friends have been stirring up hatred in the town for some time and causing trouble for the relatively small Muslim and Asian community.

They are fascists and Neo Nazis and I don't want to comply with these people who are nasty and trying to stir up trouble.”

6. On 15th August I received a complaint from Karl Hopkins as follows:

Whilst attending a planning meeting held at Colne Town Hall on Thursday the 8th of August, I was called a Nazi twice by a gentleman I later found to be both a Lord of the realm and a councillor!

Whilst I found this insult to be hugely offensive, my offence has dissipated into disgust that not only Lord Tony Greaves finds it acceptable to dish out damaging insults at will with no consequence, but so does Colne Council!!!

Not only did I find these insults to be personally offensive, I now find that he is

fabricating a defence in the media by implying that I was a follower of a Mr Mcbeth who he accuses of causing trouble and hatred around the town. I can assure you that previous to that meeting I did not know who Mr Mcbeth was. I would also point out that soon after Mr Mcbeth started to speak, a gentleman stood behind him was motioning his fingers across his throat as a gesture I believe was to cut his speech off.

This was supposed to be a democratic meeting with any objections delivered in a calm, professional manner! So I ask the question, why was Tony Butterworth (*in fact this appears to be Councillor Neil Butterworth*) allowed to speak in an angry intimidating manner? This was while Mr Butterworth was slating the objections brought to Mr McBeth's attention by way of petition. No matter what anger Mr Butterworth brought to the table Lord Greaves had absolutely no reason, no right to call me a Nazi.

I find Lord Greaves behaviour totally and utterly disgusting!

Resolution requested: As a result of this I want an official personal written apology from Lord Greaves!

I want an official written apology from the council for allowing this behaviour to emerge while I was observing my democratic rite to be in that meeting.

7. This was in turn followed on 15th August by a complaint from Rose Berry as follows:

I would like to make a complaint against lord greaves i attended a meeting at colne town hall and he called a member of the public a nazi cause of how he was dressed i thought it was disgusting and walked out of the meeting so did 2 of my friends

Resolution requested: Certainly needs something doing

8. This was then followed also on 15th August by a complaint by Peter Tapper as follows:-

I would formally like to lodge a complaint about his abuse on line against other people; You must always treat people with respect, including the organisations and public you engage with and those you work alongside.

Calling some a Nazi in print is not right

You must promote and support high standards of conduct when serving in your public post, in particular as characterised by the above requirements, by leadership and example.

Further exacerbating that abuse by going into print and adding more abuse is beyond belief.

I would like this email to be an official complaint and I shall be reporting this matter to the police.

9. Peter Tapper has subsequently clarified to me that "going into print" was a reference to the comments by Councillor Greaves in the newspaper article referred to above.
10. Subsequently on 23rd September the Standards Officer of the Liberal Democrat Party forwarded to me complaints made to it by Craig McBeth and Karl Hopkins as follows:

Case 36- complaint by Craig McBeth

On August 8, 2019, Lord Greaves was at a Council meeting in Colne. During this meeting he called a member of the public a "nazi" for no good reason. This type of behaviour is below the expected standards of a councillor and lord, and I would hope that your party would condemn such actions against innocent members of the public who have done nothing wrong.

Given the press coverage and social media sharing of this incident, I believe his behaviour will have had a negative impact on the party, bringing it in to disrepute.

However, these elderly peers think they are beyond reproach, he has refused to apologise and will no doubt continue to go on throwing baseless insults and slurs around while claiming to be Liberal and Democratic.

I trust you will take this complaint seriously.

<https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/tony-greaves-lib-dem-nazi-mosque-lord-colne-pendle-council-a9056526.html>

What result or penalty would you like applied as a result of your complaint?

I would like Lord Greaves expelled or suspended from the Party.

Case 37 – complaint by Karl Hopkins

Colne planning meeting.... Whilst attending a planning meeting in Colne Thursday 8th of August I was called a Nazi twice by a gentleman I found later to be not only a lord of the realm but also a councillor ! Whilst I found this insult hugely offensive my offence has dissipated into disgust that not only that Lord Tony Greaves finds it acceptable to dish out damaging insults at will with no consequence so does Colne council also follow this example? Not only did I find these insults to be personally offensive I now find that he is fabricating a defence in the media by implying that I was a follower of Mr Mc Beth who he accuses of causing trouble and hatred around the town. I can assure you that previous to this meeting I did not know or ever met Mr Mc Beth. I would also like to point out that soon after Mr Mc Beth started to speak the gentleman stood behind was motioning his fingers across his throat as a gesture to cut his speech off.

What result or penalty would you like applied as a result of your complaint?

I would like a written and public apology.

Investigation

11. I discussed the incident and the complaints with the Council's Independent Person, Pat Higginbottom. In short, she had read about it in the local press and shared my view that it should be the subject of a formal investigation.
12. In accordance with the Council protocol on complaints against councillors I wrote to Councillor Greaves with details of the complaints. In response he agreed to meet with me which took place on 29th October.

In summary he said that there had been a petition raised against the planning application which he considered to have been racially motivated. He believed Craig McBeth instigated the petition and also a related demonstration in the town centre. He had spoken at length earlier in the meeting about the petition and what he saw as the inaccuracies in it and the religious intolerance it showed.

Supporters of the petition were at the meeting and there was an unpleasant atmosphere in the room. One of those attending (now known to be Karl Hopkins) was wearing a T shirt supporting Tommy Robinson, the well-known far right political activist.

Councillor Greaves felt the position of Karl Hopkins and the three other people close behind where he and other councillors were sitting was deliberately intimidating.

Councillor Greaves did not dispute that he called him a Nazi nor that he repeated this when giving his comments to the reporter for the press article mentioned above.

He indicated firmly that he would not apologise for his comments, feeling it was fully justified.

He says that before and after the incident he received threatening voice mail and Facebook messages in relation to the planning application and the incident itself.

13. On 30th October I interviewed Craig McBeth. In summary he confirmed the contents of his complaints. He said he was strongly opposed to the application and had spoken at length on it earlier in the meeting.
14. He was not connected with nor had previously known Karl Hopkins or the other people who attended the meeting. He knew Councillor Greaves quite well and had had a number of social media exchanges with him about political issues.
15. Also on 30th October I interviewed Karl Hopkins. In summary, in addition to confirming the contents of his complaint he said that he had not been involved

in the petition or the lead up to consideration of the planning application. He had heard about the application and was interested in the outcome.

16. He had not met Craig McBeth or any of the protestors before the meeting. He had never had any dealings with Councillor Greaves before. He had never attended a Council meeting before.
17. He attended in part because he wished to develop his filming skills. He was aware that filming of Council meetings was permitted. The room was full and he chose to stand at the side by the doorway so that he would have a good view of the room and be able to film all those who spoke.
18. As regards the wearing of the Tommy Robinson T shirt he said he was interested in his views but was not and never had been a member of any political party or movement he was involved in.
19. He spoke with Craig McBeth after the meeting and sent him the video clip which he subsequently posted on Facebook.
20. I have viewed the video clip closely. Two points of clarification are required at this point.
21. Firstly members of the public are permitted to film Council committee meetings. The Council has a protocol on this which is attached as an appendix.
22. Secondly Craig McBeth was not amongst the group of people standing with Karl Hopkins. As a co-opted member of the committee he was sat further along the bench from where Councillors Greaves and Dorothy Lord were sitting next to each other.
23. The clip starts some way into the meeting with Councillor Lord speaking. Karl Hopkins is not seen on the clip. As the filming proceeded it became clear that a small group of three people were standing alongside Karl Hopkins
24. Shortly after Councillor Lord started to speak on the planning application the camera shifted position slightly to focus in on her. She turned and said "please do not film me" to which Karl Hopkins responded "Why not? I am allowed to".
25. At this point Councillor Greaves interjected and said "He's a Nazi". Karl Hopkins responded "I am not a Nazi".
26. Another member of the group standing by Karl Hopkins said "Let's discuss why he is a Nazi" and this led to a general altercation with raised voices and shouting. It continued for a minute or so.
27. The chairman, Councillor Waugh, then stood and came over to the side of the room and asked the group to leave. A minute or so after that police officers arrived and escorted them out of the building. The filming continued until they had left the building.

28. Finally as part of the investigation I spoke with three members of Council staff who were at the meeting. They all broadly confirmed what had happened as described by the complainants and Councillor Greaves.

The Member Code of Conduct

29. The Code contains the following principle relating to the conduct of councillors which is relevant here:

You must always treat people with respect, including the organisations and public you engage with and those you work alongside.

Conclusions and Findings

30. There are two complaints here. The first is the calling of Karl Hopkins a Nazi at the meeting itself. The second is the repetition of that word and the further related comments which then appeared in the press article.

31. The backdrop was the planning application and the controversy it generated. The antagonism between Councillor Greaves and Craig McBeth was also a feature. However this is not really the issue. Karl Hopkins was not involved in any of this.

32. There is no doubt he was entitled to film the meeting. He did not speak or otherwise get involved in the meeting until the incident when he defended his right to do so.

33. No doubt Councillor Greaves considered his wearing of the Tommy Robinson T shirt to be indicative of his political views and that the position where he was standing was inflammatory.

34. In my view the word Nazi has an unequivocal meaning. It is likening someone to a member of the German political party led by Adolf Hitler which committed great atrocities. It is not a catch all to criticise opposing even extremist political views. It is unacceptable and disrespectful for a councillor to use it towards a member of the public in a meeting.

35. The repeated use of the word in the comments to the reporter for the press article comes across as deliberate and unrepentant. In my view this also was unacceptable and disrespectful.

36. **My finding is that there is sufficient evidence of a failure to comply with the Code of Conduct.**

PHILIP MOUSDALE
MONITORING OFFICER
DECEMBER 2019

APPENDIX

PROTOCOL FOR RECORDING OF COUNCIL MEETINGS

General

1. The Council supports the principle of transparency and encourages the filming, recording, photographing of meetings open to the public. In order to balance the wishes of those who want to record the meeting and those attending, the following principles will apply:
 - (a) Any filming/recording/photography must take place from positions in the meeting room agreed by the Chairman to ensure the view of councillors, officers, public and media representatives is not obstructed. Those intending to bring large equipment, or wishing to discuss any special requirements, are advised to contact Committee Services (01282 661648/661654) in advance of the meeting to seek advice and guidance.
 - (b) If the Chairman feels the filming/recording/photography is disrupting the conduct of the meeting in any way (for example through the use of flash photography or intrusive camera equipment) the operator of the equipment will be required to stop. Anyone undertaking filming/recording/photography must comply with any requests made by the Chairman of the meeting.
 - (c) The person recording proceedings are requested to ensure the film/record/photographs will not be edited in a way that could lead to misinterpretation of the proceedings.
 - (d) The responsibility for how any film/recording/photography is used rests with the person doing it, not the Council. Those filming proceedings should make themselves aware of their responsibilities under current legislation, particularly in the area of publication and seeking consent.
 - (e) All the provisions within this protocol also refer to the use of mobile phones in meetings and any other equipment that could be used for the purposes of filming, recording or taking photographs.
2. The Committee Administrator will ensure signs are put in place before the meeting starts to remind attendees that filming/recording/photography may take place. Meeting agendas will also carry this message and this will also be added to the Council's Agenda Meetings web page.

During the meeting

3. The Chairman shall announce, at the commencement of the meeting, that filming, recording or the taking of photographs shall be taking place. Anyone seated in the public area or anyone attending the meeting to speak will have

the opportunity to express his or her wish not to be filmed/recorded/photographed and to be guided to seating areas away from the area being filmed/recorded/photographed. If a member of the public is intending to speak at the meeting and prefers not to be filmed/recorded/photographed their wish will take precedence.

4. If someone refuses to stop recording when requested to do so, the Chairman will ask the person to leave the meeting. If the person recording refuses to leave then the Chairman may adjourn the meeting or make other appropriate arrangements for the meeting to continue without disruption. These will be in line with disorderly conduct procedures set out in the Constitution.
5. If a meeting passes a motion to exclude the press and public, then all rights to record the meeting are removed.