

REPORT OF AN INVESTIGATION INTO COMPLAINTS MADE AGAINST TOWN COUNCILLOR YVONNE TENNANT

Background

1. Between 9th and 12th June I received the following complaints:

Name: KB (a member of the public)

I wish to add to what I am sure is the high number of complaints regarding the social media activity of Nelson Town Council member, Yvonne Tennant. She has in the past week been insulting, aggressive and intimidating to the general public. She has referred to anyone who disagrees with her political or personal views in an extremely derogatory manner in several post and in one particular post used a tirade of foul and abusive language such as to bring the Town, the borough council, Nelson Town Council and the position of councillor into disrepute. So much so that I feel she should be suspended forthwith and subsequently be removed from the council. Should that not be legally possible she should be suspended from council duties for a term which covers her entire period of office. No other course of action or apology is acceptable.

I will not repeat in a letter of my sending the disgusting and insulting filth which this person has published. This from someone who is supposed to represent the town.

All in all this can only be a breach of the published councillor code of conduct. The worst I have ever seen.

Name: Neil McGowan (a Borough councillor)

I feel it is my duty as a Borough Councillor to report Marsden Town Councillor, Yvonne Tennant for her outrageous actions on social media.

The words used within her posts are totally repugnant and cast a dark shadow not just over Nelson town council but the borough council as well.

I hope that this complaint is investigated properly and thoroughly.

Please see attached evidence.



08:54

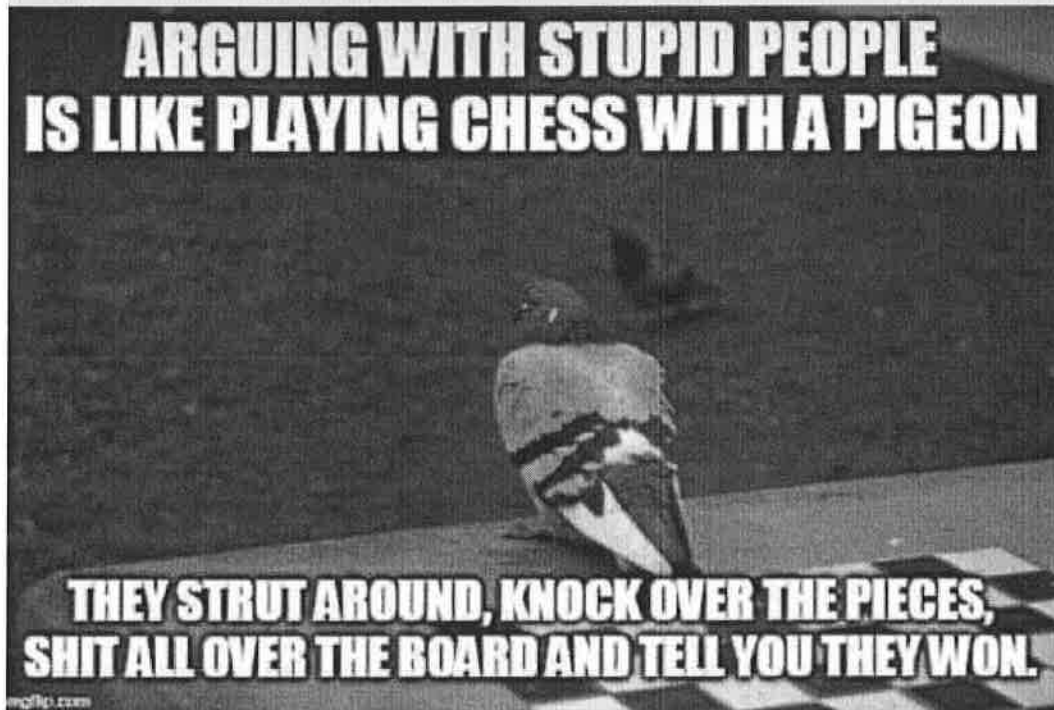


Yvonne Tennant

1 d · 👥



One for the arseholes on a certain local fb page!



Like



Comment



Send

18

Most relevant ▾



Mohammed Arshad

We have several tbh.... 😂... An some seem to chat alot of sh%t.... 😂

1 d Like Reply

1 😂



John Boardman

There are loads around Westminster. snaffling up the food of the people!

1 d Like Reply





Yvonne Tennant

1 d ·



Yvonne Tennant

Joseph Gordon Bracewell I totally gave up on Nelson Lancashire Now and Then last night I

- loads of them attacking the Town Council for having a community event in our building rather than a flag shagging orgy in the town centre. The Unity Hall event was fantastic (and none of the tossers who were complaining bothered to turn up or support - especially the "admin" and critic in chief, who lives in Spain FFS!

12 h Like Reply



Joseph Gordon Bracewell

Yvonne Tennant as mentioned previously Yvonne the arseholes dont even have the courage of their convictions. They try to hide their true agenda behind smoke and mirrors. We see them for what they really are.

12 h Like Reply

1



Yvonne Tennant

Joseph Gordon Bracewell Yeah our event was so dreadful we made the Beeb. Almost sorry I blocked the group now, I'd have liked to stick that one up 'em.

12 h Like Reply

1



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1



Yvonne Tennant

1 d ·



but give credit to those who are trying to do something in their neighbourhoods to bring folk together and celebrate platinum lizs long reign. There are always sadly those who will keep sniping from afar... Even tho Brexit is done an dusted.... Not... Lol....

9 h Like Reply



Yvonne Tennant

Mohammed Arshad No. I'm not a monarchist either. I like community and think community is the way forward. I was happy to be involved with the NTC event because it was about community and belief that our country should be a welcoming place rather than some nationalistic wasteland.

8 h Like Reply



Write a reply...



Chris Garton

I find this frustratingly true when trying to explain the danger of this govt wanting to tear up the human rights act, and remove our right to protest. They simply swallow all the far right bullshit about human rights protecting criminals and about protesters being a nuisance. Very worrying that the Turkeys are supporting Christmas just as with Brexit.

2 h Like Reply

From: MM (Nelson Lancashire Now and Then Group)

I suspect that it will already have been brought to your attention about the extremely unprofessional, rude and disrespectful way in which Nelson Councillor Yvonne Tennant has been calling the people of Nelson in my group, one of the lesser of the names she called. us all was "Moaning Minnies"., the rest I simply can't bring myself to write.

I had decided, even though she had caused a great deal of anger, and to be honest, amazement that a Nelson Town Councillor could lower herself to the level of insults that she did, that this time I would let it go. It was in fact starting to interfere with my home life, having to spend 12 hours a day at my computer, monitoring the literally thousands of angry comments coming in about Yvonne, and also the fact that Nelson Council had put no town centre or park events to Celebrate the Queen's Platinum Jubilee has not gone down well, especially as comments by Yvonne in conversation with other councillors came to light.

In the statement in their minutes of the council meeting, they said that they felt it was "not appropriate to fit a Jubilee event in between the Spring one in May and the Peace Walk in June, they later said they didn't have the time. As you can imagine the people of Nelson were quite disgusted at this calling the Town Council pathetic and disgusting.

As extra evidence of her vile and very crude comments including unacceptable language about us, coming from her elsewhere on the web came to light, I found myself duty bound to report the matter, as it's not what one expects from a Councillor who is in the position, allegedly to serve the people of Nelson.

I can assure you there is much anger amongst my group members and elsewhere, due to the total disrespect shown by Yvonne in her position representing the Council. Also there is anger that Councillors have said that they are not Monarchists or patriotic, in their opinion a celebration for the event would be a waste of money. Just because they don't respect the

lifetime of dedicated service by our Queen, to town, country and commonwealth, it's no good reason to deny the townspeople the pleasure of showing their respect in an OFFICIAL CELEBRATION in the town centre. We have repeatedly asked for an explanation and for a public apology for the lack of an event, the Jacobs Join that was not advertised, that nobody knew about or had even heard or knew of the whereabouts of Unity hall doesn't count, even I, born and lived in Nelson 57 years had no idea where it is!

From: JG (a member of the public)

I am writing to you concerning incidents that have taken place over the last few days in my hometown of Nelson involving a Labour town councillor called Yvonne Tennant.

Nelson is located within the borough of Pendle, East Lancashire with roughly 29,000 residents. It has a vast cultural diversity which immensely affects the community cohesion of the town. After the race riots in 2003 in neighbouring Burnley a lot of funding was provided to build new super schools with an aim to bring communities together. For many years the town was served by a Labour MP, Gordon Prentice. However, since 2010 we have been served by Andrew Stephenson who represents the Conservative party. The town council however has a Labour majority.

Over the Platinum Jubilee weekend other towns and villages within the borough of Pendle hosted Jubilee celebrations bringing communities together and thanking the Queen for her service. Unfortunately, there were no central celebrations or commemorations that most of the residents of Nelson were aware of. Some local residents planned their own street parties, but what many residents felt disappointed by was there was no town event.

On Saturday Yvonne Tennant posted on a local Facebook group, Nelson Lancashire now and then, about a Jubilee event that had taken place in a building called the Unity Centre. Many residents asked where the event had been advertised and why nobody was aware of it. Residents were dismayed that an event had been planned in a building that people have suggested holds between 40 and 80 for a town with a population of around 29,000. Residents questions went unanswered but then Yvonne Tennant started slandering people who had asked questions politely. It was with dismay that

another counsellor went on radio Lancashire on Monday morning to exclaim what a successful event Nelson town Council had hosted.

It is the unacceptable, completely unforgivable, tirade of obscene language that Yvonne Tennant has written since the event that needs bringing to your attention. She started by calling people 'moaning Minnie's' on the Facebook group, went on to call residents for 'not bothering to attend' and then took to her Labour pages to spew bad language that is eye opening from anyone but from a counsellor almost unbelievable.

I understand that town councillors give their time voluntary for the benefit of the townspeople. On this occasion there was an error of judgement about how residents felt about the Queen's Platinum Jubilee. People are human, mistakes are often made but then to slander townspeople is unacceptable. Complaints have been made to the local town council by the lady who is admin for the Facebook group.

It is soul destroying to see what could have a cohesive town celebration has instead caused division and hatred. It is embarrassing to be associated with the town when a counsellor takes to social media and describes residents as she has done. I travel regularly and when asked I will tell people I am from Pendle, and certainly not ever mention Nelson.

4. In accordance with the Council protocol on complaints against councillors I wrote to Town Councillor Tennant with details of the complaints, asking for her comments to help me decide what action if any I should take on the complaint.
5. Councillor Tennant responded promptly and in detail denying that she was in breach of the Councillor Code of Conduct (the Code).
6. On 14th July I informed the Complainants and Councillor Tennant that I had decided that I should carry out an investigation of the complaint. I stressed that this should not be taken to imply that at that stage I had come to any view as to whether there had been a breach of the Code. However I felt the complaint if proved was a serious matter and I considered it was proportionate that it was investigated fully.
7. I also informed the Complainants that the decisions, actions or non-actions of Nelson Town Council or its councillors in respect of the celebration of the Platinum Jubilee and of the flying or non-flying of the Union Flag were outside my remit as Monitoring Officer and would therefore not form part of the investigation. It would be confined to the comments made by Councillor Tennant and whether these amounted to a breach of the Code.

The Background

8. In summary the background was the Platinum Jubilee celebrations and criticisms that the Town Council had not organised an event in the town centre and that no bunting or flags had been put out. Councillor Tennant responded to the criticisms on the Nelson Now and Then facebook group saying that she and other town councillors had hung bunting around the Shuttle and along Leeds and Manchester Roads, and that a well attended event had been held at Unity Hall, close to the town centre.

Councillor Tennant's response to the complaints.

9. Councillor Tennant's says that her response summarised above led to numerous posts disputing what she said, calling her a liar, asking why the Town Hall was not used for the event and making wild accusations about councillors "pocketing taxpayers' money". She accepts that she used the phrase "Moaning minnies". She says that the posts became increasingly racist and misogynistic and as a result she left the conversation.
10. In frustration and after receiving further abuse she posted the pigeon/chessboard meme (shown in the Neil McGowan complaint above) on her personal facebook profile. She says that it is a well known and popular meme which has been applied to numerous situations by thousands of people. She says that the "arseholes" and "tossers" comments were aimed at those who had sent her vile and abusive messages and was not aimed at the general populace of Nelson nor the vast majority of people on the page.
11. Councillor Tennant says that the "flag shagging orgy" comment was her reaction to those obsessed by the Union Flag issue. She says it was not aimed at any individual but was a reference to a well known term to describe people who wrap themselves in the Union Flag to claim patriotism when in reality they are racists.
12. She also points out that her personal facebook profile is set to friends only and suspects the screenshots were hacked.
13. In respect of the complaint from **KB** she disputes that she has been insulting, aggressive or intimidating to any one and has not spoken to anybody in a derogatory manner or stated any personal or political opinions.
14. In respect of the complaint by **MM** she disputes that she has been unprofessional, rude or disrespectful to the people of Nelson. Her use of the phrase "moaning minnies" was directed to those who were critical of the event without even being there.
15. In respect of the complaint by **JG** she disputes she posted on the Nelson Now and Then Group but merely responded to a post by MM. She says

she answered questions truthfully and politely and did not slander anyone. She was not criticising the people of Nelson but was defending them from the minority on the page who were intent on causing division. She says she never posted anything on the Labour pages.

16. She considers **Neil McGowan** to be a political opponent who will use any excuse to attack her.

The Councillor Code of Conduct

17. The Code contains the following relating to the conduct of councillors which are relevant here:

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

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

Conclusions and Findings

18. The complaints are about comments and language used by Councillor Tennant on social media. In my view in making these comments she was acting in her capacity as a town councillor.
19. Social media is fundamentally about sharing content and creating conversations. It is also very transparent and posts can be seen by numerous people. An inappropriate post by a councillor can amount to a breach of the Code. In my view it can be a failure to treat people with respect and can fall short of the high standards of leadership and example expected of all councillors.
20. I consider that the phrase "moaning minnies" is a mild one and its use does not amount to a breach of the Code.
21. I do however consider that the pigeon/chessboard meme and in particular the phrase "stupid people", and also phrases such as "arseholes" and "flag shagging", are offensive and disrespectful and amount to a breach of the Code. Their use falls short of the high standards of behaviour expected of councillors even if used in response to provocative comments and language from others.
22. **My finding therefore is that there is sufficient evidence of a failure to comply with the Code of Conduct.**

PHILIP MOUSDALE
MONITORING OFFICER
AUGUST 2022

