

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE
STANDARDS HEARING COMMITTEE
HELD AT NELSON TOWN HALL
ON 15TH NOVEMBER, 2023**

PRESENT –

Mrs P. Higginbottom – Chair

Members of the Panel:

*Councillor Z. Ali
Councillor R. Anwar
Councillor K. McGladdery
Councillor A. Sutcliffe*

Also present:

*Councillor N. Ahmed
Councillor N. Butterworth
Councillor R. Carroll
Councillor D. Cockburn-Price
Councillor D. Lord
Councillor K. Salter
Councillor M. Stone*

Officers present:

<i>K. Howells</i>	<i>Investigating Officer, MIAA</i>
<i>H. Culshaw</i>	<i>Monitoring Officer</i>
<i>E. Barker</i>	<i>Head of Legal Services</i>
<i>J. Eccles</i>	<i>Committee Administrator</i>



1. DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

Members were reminded of the requirements of the member Code of Conduct concerning the declaration of interests.

2. INVESTIGATION REPORT

The meeting of the Standards Hearing Committee had been called to consider a report of an investigation into 2 complaints made against Councillor S. Cockburn-Price.

It was alleged by Councillor D. Whipp that, during a Special Budget Policy and Resources Committee meeting on 9th February 2023 Councillor S. Cockburn-Price made a disrespectful remark contrary to the Code of Conduct calling him a misogynist. It was also alleged by Councillor T. Whipp that Councillor S. Cockburn-Price made a comment at full Council on 23rd March 2023 implying sexism on the part of Councillor D. Whipp, which was contrary to the Code of Conduct requiring members to treat fellow members with respect.

The complaints from Councillors D. Whipp and T. Whipp had been received by the Council's Monitoring Officer who decided that an investigation of the complaint should be carried out. K.

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Howells from the MIAA had carried out the investigation on the Council's behalf who presented his report at the meeting.

Full details of the allegations were provided in the report along with the Investigating Officer's conclusions and findings. The report concluded that making a public allegation of misogyny and a further allegation of sexism on a subsequent occasion, without justification, amounted to failing to treat a fellow Councillor with respect.

In accordance with the Council protocol on complaints a Hearing had been called.

Councillor S. Cockburn-Price was represented at the meeting by Solicitor Ian Anderson who questioned the conclusion of the Investigating Officer's report and the words "without justification" saying that it failed to take into account the views of certain Councillors who were present at the meeting on 9th February and should have looked at more evidence. It was not denied that she called Councillor D. Whipp a misogynist, but the issue was whether the remark was justified so as not to be disrespectful. He referred to the document that he had provided and had been circulated to Members of the Committee and the complainants prior to the meeting summarising the allegations, issues, evidence and submissions on Councillor S. Cockburn-Price's behalf. This included 11 witness statements calling into question Councillor D. Whipp's behaviour, including statements from Councillors who had attended the meeting on 9th February but not been interviewed by the Investigating Officer. A further witness statement was circulated on the day of the meeting.

The Investigating Officer said he would have liked to have interviewed the Chair of the Special Budget Policy and Resources Committee but still felt that he had spoken to a good cross section of Councillors present at the meeting.

Councillor S. Cockburn-Price then spoke and explained how she felt justified in both instances using the language which formed the basis of the complaints.

The Committee carefully considered the investigation report, the representations made by and on Councillor Cockburn-Price's behalf. They sought clarification from the legal advisor on a couple of occasions. The Chair was clear that Committee Members should only consider information relevant to the specific complaints before them.

FINDINGS

1. On the evidence provided in the Investigating Officer's report and the representations made by and on Councillor S. Cockburn-Price's behalf the Committee found that whilst accepting Councillor S. Cockburn-Price was frustrated and upset, the language she used at the Special Budget Policy and Resources Committee meeting held on 9th February 2023 was ill-considered and inappropriate. She had therefore breached the Code of Conduct in respect of the following paragraph –

You must always treat members of the public, other councillors, employees of the Council, employees and representatives of partner organisations, and volunteers for the Council with respect. Respect means politeness and courtesy in behaviour, speech and the written word. As a councillor you can express, challenge, criticise and disagree with views, ideas, opinions and policies in a robust but civil manner.

2. Councillor S. Cockburn-Price's comment at full Council on 23rd March 2023 was considered to be vague and unwise, but not venomous and not a breach of the Code of Conduct.

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3. Procedures are in place within Pendle Council to raise concerns about poor or destructive behaviour by any Councillor and should be used.

There was no sanction imposed.

CHAIR _____