

Finance & Assets (Ethical Governance) Subcommittee censures Councillor

Following its meeting on 18th March 2022, East Cambridgeshire District Council's Finance & Assets (Ethical Governance) subcommittee formally issues this censure in relation to Councillor Matthew Downey's failure to comply with two of the sanctions imposed by the Finance & Assets (Ethical Governance) subcommittee meeting on 29th July 2021. Cllr Downey was required to apologise in writing to the Complainant and undertake training in good political debate.

The Finance & Assets (Ethical Governance) subcommittee are appalled that the sanctions were not undertaken. The subcommittee noted that a late "apology" was submitted by Cllr Downey on the morning of 18th March but did not accept that this amounted to an apology due to a lack of remorse or regret. Furthermore, the "apology" was a reiteration of the remarks which Cllr Downey made which had brought about the original complaint and for which he had been found to be in breach of the Member Code of Conduct at the July subcommittee.

The subcommittee hearing in July determined that Cllr Downey had breached the Councillor Code of Conduct in respect of paragraph 3.1 - You must treat others with respect and paragraph 3.2(e) - You must not conduct yourself in a manner which could reasonably be regarded as bringing your office or authority into disrepute. East Cambridgeshire District Council and the Finance & Assets (Ethical Governance) subcommittee considers the sanctions imposed for the breach were reasonable and should have been undertaken within a reasonable time. Some 8 months have now elapsed and both the Council and the subcommittee distances itself from the failure to comply and wishes to make it clear that it does not endorse Cllr Downey's failure to comply.

In addition to the formal censure, the subcommittee requires Cllr Downey to issue an actual apology for the disrespectful remarks aimed at the Complainant and other Councillors. The apology must be submitted in writing to the Complainant within 30 days of the subcommittee, Cllr Downey must undertake training in good political debate within 6 months and that a Press Notice be issued, the contents of which are to be drafted by the Monitoring Officer and approved in consultation with the Chairman of the subcommittee.

Cllr Downey was found to have breached the Member Code of Conduct in respect of two aspects of the Code in July 2021.

Under the Localism Act 2011, the Council has no powers to remove or suspend a councillor for breach of the Code. However, the Finance & Assets (Ethical Governance) subcommittee wishes to make its censure in the strongest possible terms and to place on record its deep disapproval and utmost disappointment that the sanctions imposed in July have not been complied with.