

Decision Notice of the Standards Sub-Committee panel for Bolsover District Council relating to a complaint against Cllr Allison Beckett.

At the Bolsover District Council Standards Sub-Committee hearing held on 9<sup>th</sup> February 2023 members of the hearing panel considered a referral to it made by the Bolsover District Council's Monitoring Officer concerning allegations that Cllr Beckett had lied during a Tibshelf Parish Council meeting on 15<sup>th</sup> September 2020.

The members of the panel were Mrs Ruth Jaffray (co-opted and independent member), Cllr David Downes, Cllr David Dixon and Mr Stephen Wainwright (one of the District Council's Independent Persons). Mrs Jaffray was selected to chair the hearing.

The specific allegation was that at the meeting in question "*during a discussion around the Tibshelf Neighbourhood Plan, Cllr Beckett sought to strengthen her own argument by making a statement which she claimed to be from the Head Teacher of Tibshelf Infant School, Mrs Zoe Andrews. This lie was heard by a member of the public who knew Mrs Andrews and recognised Cllr Beckett's comments as untruthful*"

This complaint was investigated by Mr Kevin Shillitto, Deputy Monitoring Officer at Bolsover District Council. Mr Shillitto concluded that there had been a breach of Tibshelf Parish Council's Members Code of Conduct in that one of the Nolan Principle of Public Life relating to honesty had been breached. Cllr Beckett disagreed with Mr Shillitto's findings and requested that this matter be dealt with by a hearing.

In reviewing the matter the hearing panel considered Mr Shillitto's report, and heard oral statements from the following

- Mr Shillitto and his witness, Mr James Knight;
- three of the complainants, Cllr Deborah Watson, Cllr Ray Heffer and Cllr Mike Coupe; and
- Cllr Beckett and two witness, Cllr Phil Billington and Lian Kingscott .

The panel considered all of the evidence and found that on the balance of probabilities Cllr Beckett had deliberately made a statements during the Parish Council meeting that was untrue. In making this decision the Council acknowledged that there are significant issues with deep rooted conflicts amongst the councillors of Tibshelf Parish Council. The evidence provided by both the complainants and Cllr Becket and her witnesses could not be given great weight. However significant weight could be given to James Knight's evidence due to his independence and impartiality. Also Mr Knight was able to refer to Whatsapp messages with Mrs Andrews which were sent during the

September 2020 meeting which clearly corroborated the complainants' allegation.

The panel further found that by making this statement Cllr Beckett had breached one of the Nolan principle of Public Life, namely the requirement to be honest. This amounted to a breach of the Tibshelf Parish Council Members' code of conduct (as adopted on 16<sup>th</sup> October 2012, reviewed and adopted on 19<sup>th</sup> May 2015).

The panel was of a view that a breach of the requirement to remain honest is serious as it affects the integrity of government and lessens the trust members of the public have in their elected representatives.

The panel recommends to Tibshelf Parish Council that this public formal censure of Councillor Allison Becket is read out at the next meeting of Tibshelf Parish Council.

The panel also requests that a copy of this decision notice is published on Tibshelf Parish Council's website