

STANDARDS COMMITTEE held at COUNCIL CHAMBER - COUNCIL OFFICES, LONDON ROAD, SAFFRON WALDEN, CB11 4ER, on THURSDAY, 13 APRIL 2023 at 2.49 pm

Present: Councillor H Asker (Chair)
Councillors A Khan and B Light

Independent
Person: Mrs G Butcher-Doulton

Officers in
attendance: C Shanley-Grozavu (Democratic Services Officer)

Also Present: Councillor J Lodge
Councillor G Smith (Complainant)
Councillor N Gregory (Representative of Councillor Lodge)
Q Baker (External Monitoring Officer, Hertfordshire CC)
G Sinclair (Investigating Officer)

ST7 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no apologies for absence.

Councillor Light declared that she had previously submitted a Code of Conduct complaint against Councillor Lodge and was also a witness to the police investigation which he had been subject to.

Councillor Gregory requested confirmation from Councillor Light that she was also the former Deputy Leader of Residents for Uttlesford (R4U) and had been fired from the position by Councillor Lodge. He raised concerns about Councillor Light's appointment to the Panel as there were at least three known instances in which she had been in dispute with the subject member. The Chair confirmed that they had taken counsel from the External Monitoring Officer who had advised that Councillor Light was able to sit on the Panel as long as she was willing to approach the task without a pre-determined view and with an open mind.

In response, Councillor Gregory requested that the hearing be deferred in order to hold a fair selection process. He said shambolic procedural errors had occurred when selecting the Panel and there was a need to start again; this time obeying to the proper and appropriate processes to achieve fair, open and robust proceedings.

Councillor Asker declared that she knew the subject member, and that they were a member of the same political group.

ST8 **EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC**

RESOLVED that under section 100I of the Local Government Act 1972, the public be excluded for the following item of business on the grounds that it involved the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in paragraphs 1 part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Act.

ST9 **COMPLAINT AGAINST A COUNCILLOR**

Before the introduction of the Investigating Officer's report, Councillor Gregory addressed the Panel in the capacity of representative for Councillor Lodge and requested a deferral so that the selection process could be rerun.

The hearing was adjourned between 15:08 and 15:15 to consider Councillor Gregory's request for a deferral.

The Investigating Officer provided an introduction to her report and the Panel considered the complaint.

The Chair gave the subject member and complainant an opportunity to provide final comments.

The Panel retired at 17:36, with the Independent Person, to make their decision. The meeting reconvened at 18:25.

The Chair announced that the Panel had made the decision to uphold the findings of the Investigating Officer's report. Councillor Lodge was found to be in breach of the UDC Code of Code by:

- Failure to disclose his employment/office in the relevant part of his register;
- Failure to declare in the register his shareholding and that of a relevant person, in a private limited company;
- Failure to declare the nature of the 'Personal/Prejudicial' interest in a planning application when declaring his interest

There was agreement by all members present that the decision would not be used in the upcoming Local Election.

The Panel later requested that the minutes and Decision Notice not be published until after May's Local Election.

The Panel retired at 18:31, with the Independent Person, to discuss possible sanctions. The meeting reconvened at 18:59.

On return, the Chair announced that the Panel had agreed to impose the following sanctions on the subject member:

- To report its findings to Council
- To issue a reprimand to the member

A full decision notice would be published with the minutes.

The Meeting closed at 19:08