

RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

STANDARDS COMMITTEE

Minutes of the Special Meeting of the Standards Committee held on Wednesday, 15th March, 2017 at 10 a.m. at the County Borough Council Offices, The Pavilions, Clydach Vale.

PRESENT

Independent Members Mr.M.Jehu (Chairman)
Mrs.A.Jones

County Borough Councillors C.Davies and G.Stacey

Other Members in Attendance

County Borough Councillor P.Jarman (Complainant)
County Borough Councillor M.Webber (Respondent)

Witnesses

County Borough Councillors D.R.Bevan and G.E.Hopkins (for the Respondent)

Officers in Attendance

Mr.A.Wilkins – Head of Legal – Corporate & Democratic Services and Deputy
Monitoring Officer
Ms.K.May – Head of Democratic Services

APOLOGY FOR ABSENCE

An apology for absence was received from Community Councillor R.Butler.

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

RESOLVED – to note that there were no declarations of interest made at the meeting pertaining to the agenda.

**COMPLAINT BY A MEMBER UNDER THE COUNCIL'S LOCAL PROTOCOL –
STANDARD OF CONDUCT EXPECTED BY MEMBERS**

The Chairman welcomed everyone to the meeting and outlined how the meeting would be conducted which would be in accordance with the procedures as outlined in paragraph 3.9 of the report.

The Chairman outlined the procedure and the nature of the complaint brought under the Local Protocol by County Borough Councillor P.Jarman against County Borough Councillor M.Webber. This related to the contents of a statement provided to Media

Wales by Councillor Webber which also appeared on the Rhondda Cynon Taf Labour Facebook page. The statement related to the debate at the Council's Cabinet meeting held on Thursday 9th February, 2017 in connection with the agenda item dealing with `Council Fees & Charges Policy 2017/18`. The basis of Councillor Jarman's complaint was set out in her email dated 19th February, 2017 to the Council's Monitoring Officer which was attached to the report at Appendix 2. Councillor Jarman alleged that the following parts of the Protocol had been breached by Councillor Webber:-

Paragraph 2.1 – Public Behaviour

Members shall:

- (a) Show respect to each other
- (c) Not publish anything insulting about each other
- (e) Not publish or spread false information about each other
- (g) Use social media responsibly and in accordance with the Members' Code of Conduct and this protocol

Attached to the report at Appendix 3 was Councillor Webber's response to the complaint.

The Chairman then invited County Borough Councillor P.Jarman to address the Committee.

Councillor Jarman stated that the basis of her complaint related to the content of a statement made by Councillor Webber to Media Wales and on RCT Labour Facebook page regarding the alleged statement that Councillor Jarman made at a Cabinet Meeting held on the 9th February, 2017 regarding Pontypridd Lido. Councillor Jarman indicated that the statements were a distortion of what she actually said at the Cabinet meeting with the purpose being to bring her reputation into public disrepute.

Councillor Jarman stated that she did not say what had been claimed by Councillor Webber in relation to the Lido, either relating to the level of the entry fee charge or the subsidy over the last two seasons.

Councillor Jarman then referred to the statement that she had made at the Cabinet meeting and asked the Chairman if she could repeat the full statement at today's meeting from the script that she had prepared and which had been recited at the Cabinet meeting. Councillor Jarman stated that this was her usual style as individuals only have a limited time to speak. The statement related to the agenda item entitled Council Fees and Charges Policy 2017/18 and Councillor Jarman referred to Minute No.117 of that Cabinet Meeting which was attached to the report at page 13.

At this juncture in the proceedings the Chairman agreed that the script, as read out at the Cabinet meeting by Councillor Jarman, would be photocopied and circulated to Members of the Committee, Councillor Webber and the witnesses present. This was duly complied with.

Councillor Jarman confirmed that when she read Councillor Webber's version of events she did not recognise the words used and considered Councillor Webber's motive was to bring her public reputation into disrepute.

Councillor Jarman was then asked questions by Committee Members where she confirmed that she did speak on three agenda items at the Cabinet meeting on the 9th February and that she did not speak "off the cuff" but from a script. Councillor Jarman did admit using the words "plucked out of thin air" which were not in the script that was circulated at the meeting as they had been uttered once the Cabinet decision had been made in respect of Council Fees and Charges policy.

Following the questions asked by Members, the Chairman invited Councillor Webber to address the Committee as Respondent to Councillor Jarman's complaint.

Councillor Webber stated that whilst Councillor Jarman had indicated that she had spoken at the Cabinet meeting from a written script, her opening remarks at that meeting were that "the Cabinet had plucked £1 out of thin air", these words were uttered at the commencement of the debate and not following the decision that had been made in respect of that item.

Councillor Webber further stated that if those words had not been uttered then she herself would not have found it necessary to speak on the item, as the comments made led Councillor Webber to believe that Councillor Jarman was intimating that the Cabinet should increase the charges at the lido in line with charges for other leisure facilities, as Councillor Jarman had also mentioned fees at Bronwydd swimming pool.

Councillor Webber concluded by saying that the comments that she made to the press were in line with what had been spoken by Councillor Jarman at the Cabinet meeting and furthermore, on more than one occasion, the Leader as Chair of the Cabinet had to ask Councillor Jarman to stop talking and at one point asked her to stop heckling as she was disrupting the meeting. As a final point, Councillor Webber indicated that she had not sought to bring Councillor Jarman's reputation into disrepute.

Councillor Webber was then asked questions by the Standards Committee Members

Councillor Webber's witnesses, namely County Borough Councillors G.Hopkins and D.R.Bevan were then invited to address the Committee and as County Borough Councillor A.Morgan was unable to attend this meeting, the Chairman allowed the circulation of Councillor Morgan's written statement. This was read out in full by the Deputy Monitoring Officer and hardcopies circulated to Committee Members, Councillor Jarman and Councillor Webber.

Following the questions asked by Members to the witnesses, the Chairman invited Councillor Jarman to address the Committee with any closing remarks.

Councillor Webber was then invited to address the Committee with her closing remarks.

At 11.40 a.m. the Committee retired to consider the matter in private and deliberate on the representations put to them by all concerned.

At 12.25 p.m. the meeting was reconvened to seek clarification from Councillor Webber as to whether or not she sanctioned the comments that were made on Social Media, to which Councillor Webber replied no.

The meeting adjourned at 12.33 p.m. to allow Members of the Standards Committee further opportunity to consider the case brought before them.

Following their deliberations, all concerned were invited back into the meeting and the Chairman made the following statement on behalf of the Standards Committee Members which outlined their decision in this matter:-

"I give the findings of the Standards Committee in relation to each of the allegations regarding Councillor Jarman's complaint against Councillor Webber.

In relation to the Local Protocol - Paragraph 2.1 – Public Behaviour:-

Members shall:

- (a) Show respect to each other –

The Committee has found that there is no basis to the complaint

- (c) Not publish anything insulting about each other

The Committee has found that there is no basis to the complaint

- (e) Not publish or spread false information about each other

The Committee has found that there is basis to the complaint but no further action will be required.

- (g) Use social media responsibly and in accordance with the Members' Code of Conduct and this protocol

The Committee has found that there is no basis to the complaint."

In closing the meeting the Chairman stated that Members need to take time to consider the content of press releases and the impact it may have on others.

**M.JEHU
CHAIRMAN**

The meeting closed at 1.03 p.m.