

Councillor Ford censured for refusal to apologise for actions that fell short of Torridge Members Code of Conduct

Torridge District Council Ward Member for Appledore, Councillor Len Ford, has been censured by the Councils Standards Committee for breaches of the Councils Members code of Conduct. The original complaints against Councillor Ford were heard at a Standards Committee Hearing in August 2021. The committee, which comprised of seven serving councillors and three independent persons, had also received a report conducted by an independent outside investigator, which Councillor Ford had agreed to and cooperated with.

Councillor Ford was invited to submit his own evidence for the hearing and invited to attend, which he chose not to exercise. The committee subsequently upheld eight out of ten complaints made against him as “proven”.

Five of the upheld allegations of misconduct were submitted by the public with the remaining four from fellow Torridge District Council members. They included:-

threatening, intimidating and verbally abusive behaviour both in person and at public places;

threatening, intimidating and verbally abusive behaviour at a complainant’s home address

threatening, intimating and verbally abusive behaviour through emails and other literature.

Some of the actions also resulted in the threat of potential legal action against the Council.

In summary the committee found that Councillors Ford’s actions contravened the Member Code of Conduct in the following areas:

- A requirement to treat others with respect, including members of the public, officers of the Council and any other person whom they come into contact.
- Not to act in a way which could reasonably be regarded as bringing either their office or Member of the Council into disrepute.
- Not to bully or intimidate or attempt to bully or intimidate any person.
- Not to use the resources of the Council for purposes which conflict with the Councils requirements or for political or personal purposes.
- To treat everyone equally, impartially and fairly and represent the residents of the whole of the Council area (not just the ward in which they were elected).

The resolutions from the Standards Committee were endorsed by Full Council, which excluded Councillor Ford from access to Council offices with the exception of meeting rooms for attending committees and full council meetings or to offices by prior arrangement with the Chief Executive.

The resolution also required Councillor Ford to apologise in writing to people where the complaints were upheld and to other complainants where Cllr Ford had accepted during the course of the investigation that his behaviour towards them was unacceptable.

Because Councillor Ford did not comply with this latter directive his case was automatically referred back to the Standards Committee for further consideration. The committee met on Wednesday 5th January and after debate voted to censure Councillor Ford by making the previous findings in the case public

Westward Ho! Ward Member and Chair of Torridge District Councils Standards Committee – Councillor Nick Laws said:

“I wholeheartedly support every Councillors right to support causes that are close to their own beliefs or that of the electors they represent. However this needs to be done at the right forums and in a way that doesn't intimidate and respects other people's rights to have a different view. I feel sad that despite accommodating Councillor Ford through meetings with the leader, deputy leader, chief executive, other members and senior officers we have not been able to navigate a different path and outcome to these issues. However standards in public life are important and no one should expect their behaviour to go unchallenged if they contravene the basic principles of how to conduct themselves with other Councillors and particularly members of the public.”