



STANDARDS PANEL DECISION NOTICE

Complaint Number COC093 Councillor Tony Bradford of Ledbury Town Council

On 18 November 2024, the Council received a complaint that Councillor Bradford had failed to comply with the Code of Conduct of Ledbury Town Council. The complainant alleged that Councillor Bradford had failed to observe the Code of Conduct for members, adopted by Ledbury Town Council.

Following initial assessment, the Monitoring Officer, having consulted with two of the Council's Independent Persons, decided that the matter should be formally investigated.

The events giving rise to the complaint are described in the investigation report dated 05 February 2025, completed by a Senior Governance Lawyer. The investigator concluded that Councillor Bradford had breached the Code of Conduct of Ledbury Town Council.

The Monitoring Officer agreed with the investigator's findings and considered the options available to her upon completion of a formal investigation.

The Monitoring Officer wrote to Councillor Bradford and proposed to resolve the matter informally, including an apology to the complainant. In an email dated 13 February 2025, Councillor Bradford replied to say that he would not agree to such informal resolution.

Accordingly, the Monitoring Officer decided that the matter could not be resolved other than by a hearing. The Monitoring Officer consulted with two of the Council's Independent Persons, who agreed with this decision. As Councillor Bradford rejected the resolution offered, the Monitoring Officer referred the matter and jurisdiction for a decision, to the Standards Panel.

ALLEGED BREACHES

The complaint against Councillor Bradford can be summarised in two parts that both relate to the same incident. The incident occurred on the 29 October 2024 at the reception area of the offices of Ledbury Town Council.

1. Inappropriate Joke – that during the incident, Councillor Bradford allegedly told the complainant a sexually inappropriate joke. This was considered under the following paragraphs of the LTC Code of Conduct:
 - 1.2 *I treat local authority employees with respect and respect the role they play;*
 - 2.1 *I do not bully any person;*
 - 2.3 *I promote equalities and do not discriminate unlawfully against any person.*
 - 2.2 *I do not harass any person*

2. Response of Councillor Bradford to the complainant's objection about the joke – when the complainant objected to the joke being told, Councillor Bradford asked whether she would report him and then said that he would simply deny it. He is alleged to have replied that he would 'deny, deny, deny'. This was considered under the following paragraphs of the Ledbury Town Council Code of Conduct:
 - 2.1 *I do not bully any person;*
 - 6.1 *I do not use, or attempt to use, my position improperly to the advantage or disadvantage of myself or anyone else;*

8.3 I do not intimidate or attempt to intimidate any person who is likely to be involved with the administration of any investigation or proceedings.

DECISION

Inappropriate Joke

In relation to Councillor Bradford telling the complainant a joke at Ledbury Town Council offices on 29 October 2024, the panel considered the following matters:

- Councillor Bradford told the joke using words which he agrees were spoken by him, these were intended to be humorous. The words were misheard. However, the words were not received as humorous by the complainant (even with the misheard single word). The panel agreed that the content of the joke could only be considered as of a sexual nature.
- Councillor Bradford had showed poor judgement in telling the joke and then not taking the opportunity to defuse the situation. The panel were disappointed that Councillor Bradford had allowed this complaint to get this far. Although the panel did not consider there was malice by Councillor Bradford in telling the joke, he has demonstrated poor judgement and actions that are ill considered.
- It was discussed whether the joke, irrespective of whether it had been heard correctly, was inappropriate. The panel consider it was wrong when Councillor Bradford did not know the complainant well.
- The panel explored and considered the joke further and concluded that whether it had been told in 1st or 3rd person didn't excuse the fact that it was sexual in connotation and therefore inappropriate.
- The panel voted that Councillor Bradford had breached the code.

The panel agreed Councillor Bradford was in breach of paragraph 1.2 but not of 2.1, 2.2 and 2.3 of the Ledbury Town Council Code of Conduct.

The panel considered that Councillor Bradford was disrespectful (para 1.2) but it was a single event and he did not intend to bully (para 2.1) or harass (para 2.2) the complainant. Although mindful of the impact on the complainant, the panel did not consider that it amounted to unlawful discrimination or impact equalities (para 2.3).

Response of Councillor Bradford to the complainant's objection about the joke

This relates to his alleged comments to the complainant that he would "deny, deny, deny" that he had said the joke and his comments that he would report the matter to the relevant authorities.

Views considered in coming to their decision.

- The Panel noted that Councillor Bradford's and the complainant's recollection of this part of the conversation differs. Councillor Bradford appears to be clear about what he didn't say but less clear on what he did say, to conclude the conversation. The complainant provides a clear statement of what was said, which is then corroborated by statements made by other officers. The Panel, as does the complainant, acknowledges that the complainant misheard one word.

- The panel considered that the evidence is finely balanced, Councillor Bradford's own recollection was inconsistent, in that he remembered points perfectly but could not remember what exactly was said. Likewise, the panel considered that the complainant had in turn misheard a word in the joke itself. Although there was corroborating evidence from witnesses, this evidence was based upon the version offered by the complainant. However, the panel considered that the corroborating information was provided to the witnesses soon after the incident and was consistent.
- When considering these multiple factors and on a balance of probabilities, the panel favoured the version of events as presented by the complainant, in that the words 'deny, deny, deny' were said.
- The panel considered the attempts by Ledbury Town Council to mediate the situation. Councillor Bradford's references in this process to reporting the matter to other authorities and further untrue allegations about the complainant's conduct was intimidating, contravening paragraph 8.3 of the Code.
- The panel agreed, in the case of bullying, on the balance of probabilities, that this did occur as the motivation for saying the denial.
- In relation to the further references to reporting the complainant to other authorities and the untrue allegations relating to her conduct, the Panel does not condone such action by Councillor Bradford but understands that he may have acted out of character. However, the Panel concluded that this was an attempt to dissuade the complainant from taking this further and a breach of paragraph 8.3.

The panel voted that Councillor Bradford was in breach of paragraphs 2.1 and 8.3 but not in breach of paragraph 6.1 of the Ledbury Town Council Code of Conduct.

STANDARD PANEL'S DECISION AND SANCTION

The Panel considered that Councillor Bradford had breached the Code of Conduct in relation to both allegations. In relation to determining fair, reasonable and appropriate sanctions.

The Panel considered that it should recommend sanctions that be restorative, rather than punitive and recognised that the complainant had requested certain sanctions and actions be taken.

The Panel determined that this Decision Notice amounts to censure by Herefordshire Council.

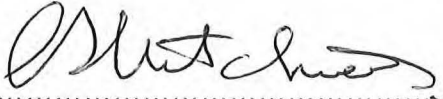
The Panel recommended the following actions are taken:

1. Councillor Bradford should apologise to the complainant for his poor judgement in his handling of interactions and its impact on the complainant. The wording of the apology should be agreed by the Monitoring Officer so far as scope and tone is concerned, before it is sent to the complainant.
2. Councillor Bradford should undertake training focussed on member responsibilities around dignity and respect, to be arranged by the Ledbury Town Council, within three months of the Decision Notice.
3. The Chairperson of the panel write to the Clerk of Ledbury Town Council to determine what support, processes or procedures could be considered, to try to build trust and confidence between Councillor Bradford and the complainant. If the panel considers they

are appropriate, then such will be a recommendation of the panel to the Town Council to implement;

The Panel acknowledged that this Decision Notice of the breach would be published by Herefordshire Council in accordance with its adopted procedure.

There is no right of appeal against this decision notice.



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Chair of the Standards Panel
Cllr David Hitchiner

Dated: 08th April 2025