

# **Decision of the Plymouth City Council Standards Hearing Sub-Committee 11 March 2011**

## **Case Summary**

Case No: 2010/M1/R1  
Member: Councillor William Stevens  
Date Received: 8 February 2010  
Date Completed: 11 March 2011

## **Allegation**

The Member failed to treat others with respect; acted in a way which may cause the Council to breach an equality enactment; bullied other persons and brought their office or authority into disrepute.

## **Standards Committee Outcome**

The Hearing Sub-Committee, having accepted the withdrawal by the Investigation Officer of two of the above allegations following further consideration of evidence, found that the Member failed to comply with the requirement of the Code of Conduct to treat others with respect and conducted himself in a manner that brought his office or authority into disrepute. The Hearing Sub-Committee suspended Councillor Stevens from office for a period of 8 weeks.

## **Case Summary**

The complaint alleged that Councillor Stevens, a Member of Plymouth City Council, breached the Members Code of Conduct by making comments at a meeting of Full Council on 1 February 2010 that included false accusations, vexatious words and allegations about Councillor Ricketts.

The comments followed an article that Councillor Stevens says he came across on a website known as 'Tory Bear'. The comments that Councillor Stevens relayed at the full Council meeting were comments that he says were attributable to someone known as Steve Ricketts, not necessarily meaning Councillor Steve Ricketts.

There is no dispute that Councillor Stevens said the words as recorded in the Full Council transcript. These are not herein reproduced as we do not wish to cause further offence.

The Hearing Sub-Committee, following consideration of evidence, including witness testimony from the complainant Councillor Ricketts and a leading Member of the local Muslim Community, accepted the following submission from the Complaint Investigator which was endorsed by Councillor Stevens through his representative:

Whilst accepting that there is a right for political colleagues to hold each other to account and challenge each other's behaviour, it is now accepted by Councillor Stevens that the way he sought to assert that right at the Council meeting was clumsy and ill thought out. Whilst there was no intent on his part to fail to treat others with respect or bring his office or the Council into disrepute, Councillor Stevens now accepts that this is the case and by virtue of his actions he inadvertently caused disrespect and brought the Council into disrepute and he apologises for that conduct. In terms of the alleged breach relating to bullying and acting in a way which may cause the Council to breach an equality enactment, having heard the evidence and further considered his report, the Complaint Investigator did not consider that on the balance of probability, there was a sustainable breach of the Code.

The Hearing Sub-Committee, having upheld the above breaches of the Code and upon considering representations on sanctions, including mitigation from Councillor Stevens, decided to suspend Councillor William Stevens for a period of 8 weeks with immediate effect.

**Relevant paragraphs of the Code of Conduct**

The allegations in the case relate to paragraphs 3(1) 3(2) (a) and (b) and 5 of the Code of Conduct.

Councillor Stevens may appeal against this decision to the First Tier Tribunal.

Mr S Pearce  
Independent Chair  
Standards Hearing Sub Committee  
Plymouth City Council