

**Councillor Darren Clifford****29 January 2020****Report of the Standards Committee****PURPOSE OF REPORT**

To inform Council of the findings of the Standards Committee, and the sanctions imposed, following two separate hearings into breaches of the Councillors' Code of Conduct by Councillor Darren Clifford.

This report is public.

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

**(1) That the report be noted.**

**1.0 Background**

1.1 At its meeting on Thursday 16 January 2020, the Standards Committee held two hearings regarding complaints of misconduct by Councillor Darren Clifford. The complaints were in respect of two separate matters. The first was voting on Council Tax proposals whilst in arrears. The second was granting of unauthorised access to restricted areas in Lancaster Town Hall.

1.2 Councillor Clifford did not attend the meeting. The hearings proceeded in his absence.

**2.0 Matter One - Voting on Council Tax Proposals whilst in arrears**

2.1 The first allegation concerned Councillor Clifford voting on a future increase in council tax, despite being in arrears with his own. This occurred at a meeting of Cabinet held on 15 January 2019 (Councillor Clifford being a Cabinet Member at that time). This is a breach of Section 106 of the Local Government and Finance Act 1992, which makes it an offence for a Councillor to be more than two months in arrears with their council tax and take part in votes on financial matters.

2.2 An investigation found that Councillor Clifford had given assurances to Statutory Officers that he was up to date with his payments before the Cabinet meeting commenced. During the meeting he took part in a vote which recommended the City Council's increase in council tax for 2019/20. Further investigations, however, found that he had only cleared his arrears after the meeting on 15 January 2019 had taken place. This was substantiated with CCTV footage and electronic evidence.

2.3 The Standards Committee upheld the complaint that Councillor Clifford had

breached the Code of Conduct in this matter. The Committee imposed sanctions, as follows:

- a) *That the matter be reported to full Council; and*
- b) *a press release be issued by the Council.*

### **3.0 Matter Two – Granting Access to Restricted Areas in Lancaster Town Hall**

3.1 The second allegation concerned Councillor Clifford conducting a private tour of Lancaster Town Hall on 15 August 2019, despite having been warned, in writing, not to do so by the Council’s Monitoring Officer after a previous similar incident in May 2019.

2.2 Evidence showed that Councillor Clifford had granted access to restricted areas of Lancaster Town Hall to two people on 15 August 2019. Neither of the two visitors had been signed into the building.

2.3 The Standards Committee upheld the complaint that Councillor Clifford had breached the Code of Conduct in this matter. The Committee imposed sanctions, as follows:

- a) *That the matter be reported to full Council.*
- b) *That Councillor Clifford be excluded from Council offices, with the exception of meeting rooms as necessary for attending meetings of Council/Committees for a period of six months.*

### **4.0 Conclusion**

4.1 This report is submitted by the Committee accordance with Rule 2.1 (i) of the Council Procedure Rules in the Council’s Constitution, and is for noting.

<b>CONCLUSION OF IMPACT ASSESSMENT</b> <b>(including Health &amp; Safety, Equality &amp; Diversity, Human Rights, Community Safety, Sustainability and Rural Proofing)</b> None.
<b>LEGAL IMPLICATIONS</b>  This report is submitted to Council for noting, as required by the sanctions imposed by the Standards Committee.
<b>FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS</b>  There are no financial implications as a result of this report.
<b>OTHER RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS, such as Human Resources; Information Services; Property; Open Spaces:</b>  None.

**SECTION 151 OFFICER'S COMMENTS**

The Section 151 Officer has been consulted and has no further comments.

**MONITORING OFFICER'S COMMENTS**

The Monitoring Officer has been consulted and has no further comments.

**BACKGROUND PAPERS**

Investigating Officer's report submitted to the Standards Committee.

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**Ref:**