

Report details

Meeting Date:	19 July 2022
Portfolio:	Finance, Governance and Resources
Key Decision:	N/A
Policy and Budget Framework	Yes
Public / Private	Public
Title:	Code of Conduct Matter: Cllr Robert Betton
Report of:	Monitoring Officer
Report Number:	GD.43/22

Purpose / Summary:

To report a finding of the Standards Committee that Cllr Robert Betton has breached the Code of Conduct.

Recommendations:

That Council receive the Report.

Tracking

Executive:	
Scrutiny:	
Council:	19 July 2022

1. Background

- 1.1. Councillor David Morton submitted a complaint that Cllr Robert Betton had breached the Council's code of conduct by virtue of his actions on 21 and 22 October 2021. Cllr Morton was concerned that Cllr Betton's late submission of documentation on 21 October 2022 for the Development Control Committee was disrespectful to the staff that had to process it. Further, on 22 October 2022, at the meeting of the Development Control Committee, Cllr Betton had requested an additional three minutes speaking time when making his submissions to the said Committee. The request was denied by the Chair but when he spoke, despite being asked to sum up by the Chair, Cllr Betton continued his submissions. Cllr Betton was asked to stop talking on several occasions but ignored the Chair's clear instructions. Cllr Betton continued to speak even though his microphone had been deactivated. Eventually, the Head of Legal and Democratic Services had to approach Cllr Betton and ask him to stop. Ultimately, Cllr Betton spoke for approximately fifteen or sixteen minutes, it was estimated.
- 1.2. Cllr Morton felt that Cllr Betton's actions were disrespectful and brought the Council into disrepute.
- 1.3. Cllr Morton's complaint was deemed to meet the threshold test for further investigation and the Monitoring Officer duly commissioned an Investigation Report. The matter was brought before a meeting of the Council's Standards Committee for a Hearing on 29 June 2022.

2. The Standards Committee

- 2.1 The Standards Committee held its Hearing of the complaint on 29 June and received evidence from several witnesses and representations on behalf of Cllr Betton.
- 2.2 After due deliberations the Standards Committee decided that Cllr Betton's actions had not brought the Council into disrepute and nor had he treated staff with a lack of respect.
- 2.3 The Standards Committee did decide that, whilst making representations as the Ward Councillor, Cllr Betton's wilful ignoring of clear instructions from the Chair of the Development Control Committee did breach the Council's Code of Conduct as he failed to treat the Chair of the Committee with respect. Cllr Betton's breach was exacerbated by the public nature of the forum.
- 2.4 The Standards Committee decided that the sanctions for the breach should be this Report to Council; the decision of the Committee to be published on the Council's website; a letter to Cllr Betton inviting him to apologise to Cllr Morton and the other

Members of the Development Control Committee. Further, Cllr Betton to be offered some suitable and relevant training.

2.5 For completeness, the Standards Committee also requested that the Right to Speak Scheme be reviewed and revised for better clarity.

3. Risks

3.1 None.

4. Consultation

4.1 The Independent Person's view was that there was insufficient evidence to support a finding that Cllr Betton had brought the Council into disrepute or that he had failed to treat staff with the appropriate respect. However, Cllr Betton, by ignoring clear instructions at the Development Control Committee on 22 October 2021, had breached the Code of Conduct by failing to treat the Chair of the Development Control Committee with the appropriate level of respect

5. Conclusion and reasons for recommendations

5.1 The report fulfils the instructions of the Standards Committee.

6. Contribution to the Carlisle Plan Priorities

6.1 Delivers upon the commitment of all Councillors to promote high standards in those holding public office.

Contact details:

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Appendices attached to report:

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Note: in compliance with section 100d of the Local Government Act 1972 the report has been prepared in part from the following papers:

- None