
EXCERPT FROM THE MINUTES OF THE STANDARDS COMMITTEE HELD ON 10 DECEMBER 2012

ST.17/12 INVESTIGATION REPORT

Mr Walker presented his report which was dated May 2012. The report set out the details of the allegations that:

Councillor Watson OBE had attended the Council meeting on 8 November 2011 which contained an agenda item relating to elected Police Commissioners. As a member of Cumbria Police Authority, for which he was remunerated, Councillor Watson failed to declare this as being a prejudicial interest in the matter, declaring only a personal interest. Another Councillor had sought clarification of this from the Council's Monitoring Officer and advice was given on the issue with clarity. Councillor Watson did not change his declaration. At the commencement of the debate two other Councillors with similar declared prejudicial interests left the room, Councillor Watson remained in the Council Chamber and seconded and spoke on the motion.

The complaints alleged that Councillor Watson failed to declare a personal and prejudicial interest in the matter and voted and spoke on a position where he had a financial interest in the outcome. The complaints alleged that had the motion been carried the Council would have lobbied for a continuation of the present system of Police Authorities, from which Councillor Watson derived an income and that such actions risked the reputation of all present.

The report then set out the relevant provisions of the City Council's Code of Conduct and attached copies of supporting documentary evidence. The report set out the findings of fact and the reasoning behind those findings, together with the Investigating Officer's conclusions and findings.

Councillor Watson OBE presented his case and the Investigating Officer and the Members of the Committee questioned Councillor Watson on details of his submission. He clarified that the Police Reform and Social Responsibility Bill gained Royal Assent on 15 September 2011 which was before the City Council meeting, therefore, the decision to move ahead with the Police and Crime Commissioners had already been made.

The Investigating Officer and the Member then summed up their cases and the parties left the meeting at 2.50pm whilst the Committee considered the matter.

The parties returned to the meeting at 3.20pm when the Chairman announced that the Committee, having carefully considered the submissions by the Investigating Officer and the Member, had reached a decision and asked the Monitoring Officer to read out the decision.

Having weighed the evidence the Standards Committee held that:

1. A member of the public with knowledge of the relevant facts would reasonably regard Councillor Watson's personal interest as so significant that it is likely to prejudice the Member's judgement of the public interest.
2. Accordingly, Councillor Watson OBE had failed to declare a personal and prejudicial interest and withdraw from the Council meeting on 8 November 2011 and had, therefore, breached the Code of Conduct for Members.
3. However, in weighing the evidence the Standards Committee did find that Councillor Watson OBE had brought his office or the authority into disrepute.
4. The Standards Committee Decision be reported to Full Council.