



Keeping track of standards: Monitoring and support

Quarterly return: Case study

Idle District Council – Councillor Mick Downing

Summary

The complainant is the council's monitoring officer. He refers to a 'member activity report', which Councillor Mick Downing along with other members is required to submit as a result of an independent review of members' allowances, and which would be formally published by the council. It is alleged that Councillor Downing has used foul and unacceptable language in his report, and that he has been disrespectful to the complainant in subsequent correspondence. He records his achievement as "letting the people of Milnthwaite and most of the North Ward of Liversock know just how bad the Idle District Council is and how crap the Labour controlled council is and that they do not care a shit about them...". He then goes on to list what he sees as six shortcomings of the authority. He also uses the 'comments' section of his report to attack the Labour group's political agenda.

This led to an exchange of letters with the monitoring officer. On 13 March 2008 the complainant wrote to Councillor Downing to point out that the council could not publish material containing foul language or which appeared to be designed to affect public support for a political party. Councillor Downing countered these points in a note dated 17 March, and the next day wrote to the complainant telling him that he was not an expert on the English language, his opinion was quite irrelevant and enclosing photocopied dictionary definitions of 'crap' and 'shit'. He also wrote:



"Mr Shah I have no time for your support from the Labour controlled council. As far as I am concerned you are not the man for the job you attempt. I was elected on the basis that I would tell council members and officers what I thought of them in no uncertain terms."

It is alleged that Councillor Downing copied his report and the definitions to all members of the council.

The complainant wrote back to Councillor Downing on 24 March to point out that the inclusion of a word in the dictionary did not make it acceptable usage in all circumstances.

The complainant refers to previous complaints to the Standards Board for England about alleged disrespect on the part of Councillor Downing, and the "apparently vain" expectation of the ethical standards officer in a case summary that he would "deal with council officers in a more appropriate and respectful manner in future".



Stages

Stage	Script	Tick
1	The district council receives the complaint on 12 May 2008.	
2	The standards committee meets on 30 May 2008 and decides to refer the matter to the monitoring officer for investigation (the monitoring officer asks an external investigator to carry out the investigation).	
3	The investigation is completed on 15 July 2008.	
4	The standards committee completes the hearing on 14 August 2008.	
5	The standards committee determines that a breach of sections 1 3 (1) and 1 6 (b) of the Code of Conduct occurred.	
6	A sanction of three months suspension is imposed starting 14 August 2008.	
7	The member appeals to the Adjudication Panel for England.	
8	The appeals tribunal Panel upholds the decision of the standards committee on 23 September 2008.	
9	The case is closed on 23 September 2008.	