

Victoria Wilders

From: Victoria Wilders
Sent: 18 November 2024 20:09
To: Victoria Wilders
Subject: FW: Promoting the Public Meeting Monday 18th Dec. 19.00 @ Community Center: "To Discuss Neale Drive" + the Residents' Video

From: Monitoring EHCofficer <monitoring.ehcofficer@eastherts.gov.uk>
Sent: Friday, January 5, 2024 2:51 PM
To: Vicky Glover-Ward <Vicky.Glover-Ward@eastherts.gov.uk>
Cc: Ben Crystall <Ben.Crystall@eastherts.gov.uk>; Victoria Wilders <Victoria.Wilders@eastherts.gov.uk>
Subject: RE: Promoting the Public Meeting Monday 18th Dec. 19.00 @ Community Center: "To Discuss Neale Drive" + the Residents' Video

Dear Cllr Glover-Ward

I hope you had a wonderful Christmas and New Year.

I'm conscious that I have not yet had the opportunity to consider this complaint, and so in order to not hold things up any longer, Victoria as the Deputy Monitoring Officer has offered to assist by taking it on.

I'm sure Victoria will be in touch with you in due course.

Regards



James Ellis
Head of Legal and
Democratic Services
and Monitoring Officer
and Interim Head of
Waste
East Herts District Council
01279 502170
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From: Vicky Glover-Ward <Vicky.Glover-Ward@eastherts.gov.uk>
Sent: 13 December 2023 12:28
To: James Ellis <James.Ellis@eastherts.gov.uk>
Cc: Ben Crystall <Ben.Crystall@eastherts.gov.uk>
Subject: Fw: Promoting the Public Meeting Monday 18th Dec. 19.00 @ Community Center: "To Discuss Neale Drive" + the Residents' Video

Dear Mr Ellis

I would like to refer this matter to you as the monitoring officer. Cllr Woollcombe has been advised on a number of occasions and via a Joint Statement by HCC and EHDC that it would not be legally possible to alter the junction as it would be a breach of planning regulations. He is making allegations about me that he is unable to support; for example that I agreed to wait for the Local Government Ombudsman decision before making a decision on what type of junction should be installed despite me and officers confirming that the layout of the junction cannot be changed.

He has also, in my opinion, assigned the basest motives to the scheduling of the date of the meeting. Sara and other council officers will be able to confirm that it is the only date that we were able to have HCC and EDHC officers plus have the use of the hall in Buntingford.

It is my opinion that Cllr Woollcombe has defamed me, misrepresented the situation and has damaged my standing with other councillors. As such I would like to refer this to you as monitoring officer. I would also note that I have raised concerns about how Cllr Woollcombe interacts with non male members of the council and would request any information you have on training that is available for members regarding diversity and treating non males as fully functioning people rather than a section of the population that can be ignored and patronised

Regards

Vicky Glover-Ward
Cllr Hertford Kingsmead
Executive Member for Planning and Growth

East Herts Council
Wallfields
Pegs Lane
Hertford
SG13 8EQ

From: David Woollcombe <David.Woollcombe@eastherts.gov.uk>

Sent: 13 December 2023 11:35

To: John Dunlop <John.Dunlop@eastherts.gov.uk>; Alex Daar <Alex.Daar@eastherts.gov.uk>; Ben Crystall <Ben.Crystall@eastherts.gov.uk>; Rachel Carter <Rachel.Carter@eastherts.gov.uk>; Vicky Burt <Vicky.Burt@eastherts.gov.uk>; Vicky Smith <Vicky.Smith@eastherts.gov.uk>; George Williams <George.Williams@eastherts.gov.uk>; Graeme Hill <Graeme.Hill@eastherts.gov.uk>; Nick Cox <Nick.Cox@eastherts.gov.uk>; Sarah Hopewell <Sarah.Hopewell@eastherts.gov.uk>; Carl Brittain <Carl.Brittain@eastherts.gov.uk>; Tim Hoskin <Tim.Hoskin@eastherts.gov.uk>; Steven Watson <Steven.Watson@eastherts.gov.uk>; Vicky Glover-Ward <Vicky.Glover-Ward@eastherts.gov.uk>; Sue Nicholls <Sue.Nicholls@eastherts.gov.uk>; Maura Connolly <Maura.Connolly@eastherts.gov.uk>

Cc: Martin Butcher <Martin.Butcher@eastherts.gov.uk>; Chris Hart <Chris.Hart@eastherts.gov.uk>; mark.youngman@hertfordshire.gov.uk <Mark.Youngman@hertfordshire.gov.uk>; Sara Saunders <Sara.Saunders@eastherts.gov.uk>; Neil Button <Neil.Button@eastherts.gov.uk>

Subject: Promoting the Public Meeting Monday 18th Dec. 19.00 @ Community Center: "To Discuss Neale Drive" + the Residents' Video

Dear Green Party Councillors + friends, colleagues and all who care about doing good by the people of Buntingford:

Public Meeting Monday 18th Dec. 19.00 @ Community Center: "To Discuss Neale Drive" – Sweep or T-?

As District Councillors, we don't actually take the Hippocratic Oath: but I hope that we can all agree that our first duty to the citizens who elected us is that we "do them no harm." The problem on the Neale Drive issue, is that successive EHDC Councillors seem determined to do the Residents of this part of Buntingford serious harm. The Public Meeting on Monday is a chance – perhaps our last chance – to change that. So I urge you all to come to the Meeting and, before you do, watch the video made by the residents, called: The Maples - Please keep us ALL safe.

To be clear, I have nothing against Cllr Vicky Glover Ward personally: she is a superb and indefatigable Councillor, and she shares my interest in Swift boxes which makes her a true Green in my book. But, on the Neale Drive issue, I'm afraid she has been wrong and ill-advised every step of the way. Which is why, sadly, I have to write this letter.

For a start, she has promoted Monday's Public Meeting as a chance "to answer your questions regarding the access arrangements to the A10 via Neale Drive."



This is odd! Having worked continuously on this issue since shortly after my election on May 4th, I have not met any one who has questions about the access from Neale Drive to the A10. We all agree that that access should be opened as soon as possible: it should have been opened ages ago. Also, we all agree that Ermine Street, the other main road leading to the A10, should have speed limits and traffic-calming measures. Some, like me, go further: we think that EHDC was criminally negligent for not making it a condition of the Maples development that those speed limits and traffic-calming measures were installed before a brick of that development was laid. But, at this stage, that's water under the bridge.

What Monday's Public Meeting should really be about, is whether the Junction between Neale Drive and Ermine Street is a **Sweep or a T-junction??** Opinion is divided and, if you cannot visit the site, do watch the [video](#) to help you decide. Having lived here for 30+ years, and travelled that road almost daily, I am firmly of the opinion that a T-Junction is the safer option: why re-direct traffic via a tricky-to-negotiate Sweep junction off a perfectly good through route to travel through a Residential estate where children play, people park and cross the street to visit neighbours and old people negotiate narrow pavements on their mobility scooters? Most Buntingford residents I have spoken with agree that it's crazy and, if you watch the [video](#), you will see why. The Buntingford Town Council, who did visit the site, agreed that it was best to "leave the junction lay-out as it is."

Yet Cllr. Glover Ward and other EHDC Councillors seem determined to push through the sweep junction. They say it was always on the Plans for the Maples development. The [video](#) shows this is not true as it shows maps distributed by EHDC, which I have seen, that show the Maples development with a T-junction. Cllr. Glover Ward and others assert that the Neale Drive residents must have known their road would be a Thru-route with a sweep junction on to it. The Neale Drive residents have always asserted, loudly and noisily, that they did not.

But whether they did or not, is irrelevant at this stage because the issue now is one of Safety. Only a Council with a real desire to punish the residents of Neale Drive would want to push through the current unsafe plan. It is a matter of huge regret to me that HCC Cllr. Jeff Jones and EHDC Cllrs. Nicholls and Glover Ward and others in Buntingford seem determined to inflict that punishment on the Neale Drive residents by making their road unsafe to live on. Forget "Do no harm...": these Councillors appear intent on doing them real harm.

It would be simple for us, as the EHDC, to shirk the question and say it is all a matter for HCC Highways. But it is not: HCC Highways tell me that their only responsibility is to execute Planning Decisions made by EHDC and HCC. They will advise and offer opinions, but ultimately, it is we, the Councillors, who must decide. And the Public Meeting on Monday will, I hope, help us make a final decision.

I would have liked to have been part of that decision but, perhaps because Cllr. Glover Ward knows I vehemently oppose her positions, she has scheduled the Public Meeting for a day that she knows I am going to be away. A further concern is that Cllr Glover Ward has already made her mind up to install the Sweep Junction whatever happens on Monday. She has written to me saying: "*The public meeting will not include any discussion whatsoever of alternative layouts of the junction as it is not possible to change the layout of the junction.*"

And yet, that is the only thing that the Residents want to discuss! **Sweep or T-??** Some residents are in favour of the Sweep as they feel it will assist the calming of traffic on Ermine Street. Neale Drive residents obviously want to retain the T-junction. It is a situation that cries out for external adjudication – a position which Cllr Glover Ward originally supported, offering me the option to "*await the determination of the Local*

Government Ombudsman” on the case. Sadly, she has now backed away from that position and seems determined to bullock through the Sweep Junction option and start work on implementing it in January, before the LGO has had a chance to make its ruling.

All of which, I hope you agree, is deeply regrettable. It is also politically inept as it means we, the Green Party, are capitulating to an unwise, unsafe decision made by the previous, Tory-led EHDC rather than sticking up for what is safe for our residents. We talk about being a “Listening Council,” but Cllr Glover Ward has not listened to me or the Residents: she hasn’t even met them.

She will on Monday – by which time, I do hope she will have watched the video and realised that now is the time to STOP trying to defend the indefensible, and retain the T-Junction, or something like it, and introduce the Ermine Street traffic-calming measures as soon as possible.

That would deliver us all a truly Happy Christmas.

Sincerely,

Cllr. David Woollcombe



- Facebook icon EastHertsDC
- Twitter icon EastHerts
- Instagram icon easthertscouncil
- Globe icon eastherts.gov.uk

Cllr David Woollcombe

Sent by email only: David.Woollcombe@eastherts.gov.uk

6th February 2024

Dear Cllr Woollcombe

Complaint: Councillor Code of Conduct – confidential

I am writing to confirm that I, as the Council's Deputy Monitoring Officer, have received an allegation from Cllr Vicky Glover Ward ("the Complainant") that you failed to comply with the East Herts Council's Code of Conduct ("the Code"), a copy of which I enclose for completeness.

A summary of the Complainant's allegation is as follows:

In your email dated the 13th December 2023 at 11:35 ("the Email") which was sent to all East Herts Green party councillors and also officers of East Herts and Hertfordshire County Council you made a number of unsupported allegations about the Complainant namely:-

- That she agreed to wait for the Local Government Ombudsman decision before making a decision on what type of junction should be installed despite both herself and officers confirming that the layout of the junction cannot be changed;


- Making baseless assertions that she scheduled the public meeting specifically on a day when you were not able to attend when it was the only date that both EHDC and HCC officers could attend plus venue availability.
- That the language you use about her is disrespectful, written in a patronising manner, is inflammatory and seeks to damage her standing with other fellow councillors and officers.
- It also came to the Complainant's attention via a third party that you had sent the Email on the same day to several local residents. Due to the language and comments you have made about her, the Complainant feels that you have shown her no respect by seeking to damage her reputation amongst these residents.

In sending the Email to residents, one of the recipients has voiced their disappointment to the Complainant that you did not use the BCC function and as a result their email address (along with all the other recipients' email addresses) have all been shared. This is a personal data breach and therefore I have had to report this to the Council's Data Protection Officer who will be writing to you separately. In relation to this process this may potentially be a breach of paragraph 7 of the Code (explained further below) and I would welcome your comments on this please as part of my initial investigation.

By the above alleged conduct the Complainant feels that you have breached the following parts of the Code:-

1. Respect

As a councillor:

- 1.1 I treat other councillors and members of the public with respect.
 - 1.2 I treat local authority employees, employees and representatives of partner organisations and those volunteering for the local authority with respect and respect the role they play.
- 

1.1. I treat other councillors and members of the public with respect.

The Complaint feels that the language you use in the Email was unpolite, discourteous and subjected her to a personal attack. Specific extracts from the Email include the following: -

- "The problem on the Neale Drive issue, is that EHDC Councillors seem determined to do the Residents of this part of Buntingford serious harm"
- "But on the Neale Drive issue, I'm afraid she has been wrong and ill advised every step of the way"
- "For a start, she has promoted Monday's Public Meeting as a chance to "answer your questions regarding the access arrangements to the A10 via Neal Drive" This is odd!"
- "It is a matter of huge regret to me that that HCC Cllr Jeff Jones and EHDC Cllrs Nicholls and Glover Ward and others in Buntingford seem determined to inflict that punishment on the Neale Drive residents by making their road unsafe to live on"
- "Forget "Do no harm..." these Councillors appear intent on doing them real harm"
- "I would have liked to have been part of that decision but, perhaps because Cllr Glover Ward knows I vehemently oppose her positions, she has scheduled the Public Meeting for a date she knows I am going to be away".
- "A further concern is that Cllr Glover Ward has already made up her mind to install the Sweep Junction whatever happens on Monday"
- "Sadly, she has now backed away from that position and seems determined to bullock through the Sweep Junction...before the LGO had had a chance to make its ruling"
- "It is also politically ineptunsafe decision"

1.2.1 I treat local authority employees, employees and representatives of partner organisations and those volunteering for the local authority with respect and respect the role they play.

The Complaint has raised concerns that you have made some very serious allegations against the Council and by implication its officers. I have extracted parts of your Email below: -

- “Some like me, go further; we think that EHDC was criminally negligent for not making it a condition of the Maples development”
- “Only a Council with a real desire to punish the residents of Neale Drive would want to push through the current and unsafe plan”.

I would be grateful if when responding to this complaint that you can include what basis you have for stating that EHDC was “criminally negligence” as this is a serious accusation to have made in the public domain.

7. Use of local authority resources and facilities


As a councillor:

7.1 I do not misuse council resources.

7.2 I will, when using the resources of the local authority or using their resource by others:-

- a. Act in accordance with the local authority's requirements

When sending the Email to the residents and failing to BCC recipients a personal data breach has occurred. As part of the complaint against you I will be looking into whether you may have potentially breached part 7.2.1 of the Code. As part of your



response please can you confirm whether you have completed the data protection introductory training which was referenced in your Members Induction and Further Training programme that was provided to you?

Please note that no conclusion has been reached on these allegations, and is merely repeated for your information and to enable you to provide a response and/or why you feel this was not a breach of the Code.

I should be grateful if you would consider the allegation and provide a written response/explanation addressed for my attention either by e-mail or by post within the next 14 days (by **Tuesday 20th February 2024**).

Your response will then be taken into account as part of the Complaints Procedure and considering what action, if any, to take. It is in your interests to co-operate with the initial assessment so that "your side" may be considered as part of this initial process. Please note that if the decision is taken to investigate the allegations fully, then you would be expected to co-operate with that investigation. If you do not respond to the complaint then the conclusions will be based solely on the allegations made.

The potential initial assessment conclusions are:

- • Rejection of the complaint,
- • Informal resolution, or
- • Full investigation.

This should be confirmed to you and the complainant in no more than three months; however I would expect to resolve it much sooner in practice.

At this stage you are advised not to contact or discuss this matter with the Complainant, or other parties who are likely to be witnesses to these allegations. However, you may wish to seek some independent advice in confidence. I will treat this complaint confidentially, although relevant witnesses may be contacted regarding the allegations.

Once I have received your response the matter will be given due consideration and I shall liaise with the Independent Person, Mr Nicholas Moss (a person appointed under the Localism Act to assist with Councillor Complaints), with the aim of oversight of the conclusions reached.

Please note that any written request for information made to the EHDC will be dealt with in accordance with our legal obligations under information access regimes (Freedom of Information Act/Environmental Information Regulations and GDPR and Data Protection Act).

I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely



Victoria Wilders
Legal Services Manager/Deputy Monitoring Officer



Dear Victoria:

Here we go again! I am sorry that I have been such a problem to you – and would like to say, at the outset, that, as you know, I have had lengthy discussions about this complaint with the Leader of the Council and his deputy. They have advised me to apologise unreservedly to the Complainant. This I am prepared to do.

However – in my defense, and in response to the points raised in your initial letter of 6th February, I would say the following:

General Points:

ONE: The Code of Conduct states: *“As a councillor, you can express, challenge, criticise and disagree with views, ideas, opinions and policies in a robust but civil manner...”* Nowhere does it say that you should not *“express, challenge, criticise and disagree with views, ideas, opinions”* of an individual. We all come to the Council from different fields: I come from the field of teaching and drama. If a child in one of my classes gives a wrong answer, I correct him or her, not the whole class. Likewise, if a member of a cast forgets their lines, I criticise them, not the whole cast. It is the same in almost every other field of human activity: it makes no sense to make the error of one councillor appear to be the error of all. Yet by some magical process of osmosis, councillors are supposed to understand that, in the EHDC world, we cannot criticise an individual: to do so is punishable by the complaint that you are currently investigating. The leader of the Council required me to accept this point with some vehemence (*some might opine that he “bullied and harassed” me to accepting the point, using the threat that the Standards Committee would find against me if I did not!*) I find the regulation utterly baffling - both irrational and unhelpful to robust decision-making within the Council. But, as I want to remain a councillor, I will accede to it. To demonstrate my commitment, I have re-written the letters quoted in the complaint without naming the complainant (*see below.*) You can draw your own conclusions as to whether that makes my “views and opinions” more or less “robust but civil”?

TWO: I have received literally hundreds of emails from the complainant over the last ten months – and in many of them, she has criticised me, often in a sneering and sarcastic way. I have not made a complaint against her and have no wish to do so: dealing with attacks and criticism is what I have found this job to be all about. And this response to you is all about her complaint against me, not mine against her: I have no desire to get into a tit-for-tat argument with her. But many of my colleagues are astonished that she has dared to make this complaint about me: she is rude and abrasive to all of us – and if I have attacked her in the way she suggests, it is only because she has chosen, so often, to attack me. She reaps what she has sown.

THREE: As I argued in response to the earlier complaint against me, these infractions of your Code of Conduct could have been avoided if new councillors were given an effective orientation. I understand that the woeful inadequacy of the orientation was not your fault, as the Leader of the Council and his deputy told me that a group of Councillors had drawn up an outline briefing on the orientation that officers should give new Councillors. They agreed with me that the outline briefing could be improved and that, as I feel so strongly that I have been badly let down by the orientation I received, they would welcome my input to the group planning the orientation of future new councillors. This I am happy to do because, as noted above, the rules that apply in the EHDC universe are almost entirely alien to those coming into it from other fields. I therefore commit to ensuring that future new councillors will be apprised of the elephant traps into which I appear to have fallen and make every effort to advise them, in clear terms, about the unfamiliar procedures to which they have to adhere in order to steer clear of the accusations contained in this, and the earlier, complaint.

Specific Points raised in the Letter:

ONE: Unsupported allegations about the Complainant namely:-

- **That she agreed to wait for the Local Government Ombudsman decision before making a decision on what type of junction should be installed despite both herself and officers confirming that the layout of the junction cannot be changed;** This ‘allegation’ is entirely supported by this email from the Complainant: On 24 Sep 2023, at 11:07, Vicky Glover-Ward Vicky.Glover-Ward@eastherts.gov.uk wrote:

Dear David

I note your email below and ... think there are a number of options open to you:

1. You could join other members of the Green Party and campaign to have me removed as Exec for Planning and Growth.
2. You have escalated to Ben so he may have a different opinion and instruct a different response
3. You could join other members of the GP and have me kicked out of the party as 'not a Green' (*I don't think 1 or 3 will actually change the response of either council but it would mean you could show your residents that you have taken action.*)
4. You could, and I would not recommend this as I think the chances of success low and the costs prohibitive, encourage your residents to take legal action against HCC
5. You could wait for the answer from the LGO and regroup at that point

My response: On 2 Oct 2023 12:13, David Woollcombe <David.Woollcombe@eastherts.gov.uk> wrote:

Dear Ben and Vicky:

I have reflected long and hard over your detailed responses to my "What should I do next?" on the Neale Drive situation. THANK YOU for taking the trouble to answer me in such detail with such care and consideration for the difficult position in which I find myself. MUCH APPRECIATED!!

Of the options you listed, my instinct is, as I have told the residents, is to go for Option 5:

"...wait for the answer from the LGO and regroup at that point"

- **Making baseless assertions that she scheduled the public meeting specifically on a day when you were not able to attend when it was the only date that both EHDC and HCC officers could attend plus venue availability.** My defense here is that the residents asked me to protest the timing of the meeting as I am the sole EHDC Councillor who has consistently defended their position against what they describe as "gloating indifference" from the HCC Councillor for Buntingford, and the failure of any EHDC Officer or member of the EHDC Executive to visit them and see for themselves the dangers that the Agreed plan poses to their lives. They begged me to protest the timing of the meeting which they were convinced was set to ensure I was not present to defend them. I feel that it was a fair assumption for them to make – and I was happy to repeat it to the Complainant when I requested that she change the date.
- **That the language you use about her is disrespectful, written in a patronising manner, is inflammatory and seeks to damage her standing with other fellow councillors and officers.** I disagree, obviously: such assessments are necessarily subjective. Jane Honey described my sober and precise reporting of the meeting referenced in the point above as "inflammatory" – something which the residents in my ward described as a clear and shameful example of censorship. The reference point for such judgements is whether or not they are accurate and represent a defensible position. In all the examples you cite, I believe that my words do.
- **It also came to the Complainant's attention via a third party that you had sent the Email on the same day to several local residents. Due to the language and comments you have made about her, the Complainant feels that you have shown her no respect by seeking to damage her reputation amongst these residents.** It would be completely impossible for me to damage the complainants reputation any more than she has damaged it herself: by refusing to come and visit my constituents before she signed off on a joint statement with HCC on it, by failing to consult with them, or me, before calling what we all knew would be a total car-crash of a meeting on 18th December. To them, she was the "tory of the Green Party..." If my remarks reflected that current opinion so widespread in my constituency, I apologise. But the opinion came first – not my words.
- **In sending the Email to residents, one of the recipients has voiced their disappointment to the Complainant that you did not use the BCC function.** Again – I would be happy to do this if some one had told me too. All Councillors' emails are publicly available on the website – and frequently copied in to multiple emails from officers and other councillors. Why should I be punished for doing what every other councillor and officer seems permitted to do? [*Later in this complaint, you reference a data protection introductory training: as I point out, I was not made aware of this. There is no reference to it in the manual delivered to me on election night – the only training manual I ever received and, from my*

*extensive notes of the induction day, I cannot see any mention of a requirement to “use the BCC function.”
If there was, I apologise – and your instructions are noted for future correspondence.]*

TWO: Respect: The Complaint feels that the language you use in the Email was unpolite, discourteous and subjected her to a personal attack. Specific extracts from the Email include the following: I am not going to comment on her subjective opinion of my language: as I state at the start of my letter, I have enormous respect for the work of the Complainant as a councillor. However, sometimes her advice and her strategies are, in my opinion, factually, incorrect. Nothing in the Code of Conduct prevents me from disagreeing with another councillor and – as I said at the outset – if she feels my language indicates a lack of respect, I apologise.

THREE: Very serious allegations against the Council and by implication its officers: I have extracted parts of your Email below: -

- “Some like me, go further; we think that EHDC was criminally negligent for not making it a condition of the Maples development”
- “Only a Council with a real desire to punish the residents of Neale Drive would want to push through the current and unsafe plan.”

Thank you for raising this issue: it is, as you say, a very serious one – and one that I have tried to raise with fellow councillors as the residents who have been pestering me in Buntingford have hired their own lawyers to defend their case. Though sometimes sensationalised as “the EHDC has blood on its hands...,” the serious issue relates to the provisions of the Corporate Manslaughter and Corporate Homicide Act 2007. If, as I fear they shortly will, residents serve a notice under this act on Councillors and Council officers, we all could become liable under the Act should a resident get killed because of our negligence in relation to the passing of an unsafe development plan. I urge the Legal Department to investigate their responsibilities under this act and advise Councillors and EHDC staff of their potential liability. That was why I mentioned it in this letter.

FOUR: The data protection introductory training: can you confirm whether you have completed the data protection introductory training which was referenced in your Members Induction and Further Training programme that was provided to you? I have not. I have checked my notes taken during the Induction training and saw no mention of it. Neither have I seen a Further Training programme. Also, during my meeting with Ms Wilders on Tuesday 23rd January, she mentioned a Code of Conduct training, but made no mention of this one. Further, I made an enquiry of Kate Mogan in relation to the “intercepts” carried out by EHDC on our emails, and was referred by her to Tyron Suddes, who responded on 27th February:

Dear Cllr Woolcombe,

Thank you for raising these concerns and in response to your questions:

1. **Did this Council ever authorise officers to make these intercepts?** The council cannot apply a blanket approach in authorising the use of personal information without complying with the UK GDPR and will only intercept emails where no personal information will be processed (i.e. in the case of the essential maintenance or support of the email system) or where an exemption under the Data Protection Act 2018 (DPA 2018) applies (i.e. where the council has a regulatory obligation or to prevent or deter crime). These considerations are carried out in line with the council’s Data Protection Policy and my guidance and/or approval.
2. **Do other Councillors share my constituents’ concern about these intercepts?** I’ve not had any other similar concerns reported.
3. **If not, should this footer appear on all emails and not just on some?** This footer appears on all emails sent to external recipients (i.e. to any recipient where the email address does not contain ‘@eastherts.gov.uk’) and the same information is noted in the council’s Corporate Privacy Notice.

Regarding your concern that your constituents were not aware that emails may be intercepted by council officers, as noted above, and in addition to the footer wording, the council’s Corporate Privacy Notice sets out (in part 6) that information may be shared for the same purposes.

I’d also strongly advise against using your private email account to carry out council business as the council cannot ensure appropriate security measures outside of its secure email system and so there is an increased risk of breaching several parts of the UK GDPR and DPA 2018 which may lead to enforcement action being taken by the Information Commissioner’s Officer against the council.

Regards,

Tyron Suddes

Information Governance and Data Protection Manager and Data Protection Officer East Herts District Council

In relation to this complaint, Mr Suddes wrote to me on 6th February as follows:

Dear Cllr Woolcombe,

I've been made aware of a personal data breach which occurred by way of an email sent by you to recipients without using the BCC function in outlook. This meant that all email addresses would have been visible to all recipients.

A valid lawful basis is required under the UK GDPR to share personal data which should have been consent in this case, however, I have been informed that a recipient has responded to the email noting that consent was not given.

I do not anticipate any harm to the affected data subjects in this case as only their email addresses have been breached and so it will not be reported to the Information Commissioner Office (ICO) on this occasion. In line with the Council's Data Breach Policy, I will draft a breach report and this will be noted as part of a regular update on data protection compliance to the Council's Leadership Team and Audit and Governance Committee.

Please also be aware that the UK GDPR sets out a strict 72 hour timeframe to report data breaches to the ICO wherever these pose any risk to data subjects. Although there was no risk in this case please can I ask that you report any suspected breaches to me as soon as possible in future.

I'd advise that you revisit the data protection training video that was made available to you as part of induction and please take care whenever using personal data.

Regards,

Tyron Suddes

Information Governance and Data Protection Manager and Data Protection Officer East Herts District Council

SAMPLE LETTERS – RE-WRITTEN TO NOT NAME THE COMPLAINANT

My Original Letter of 13th December 2023 @ 11.35am

Dear Green Party Councillors + friends, colleagues and all who care about doing good by the people of Buntingford:

Public Meeting Monday "To Discuss Neale Drive" – Sweep or T-?

As District Councillors, we don't actually take the Hippocratic Oath: but I hope that all of us agree that our first duty to the citizens who elected us is that we "do them no harm." The problem on the Neale Drive issue, is that successive EHDC Councillors seem determined to do the Residents of this part of Buntingford harm. The Public Meeting on Monday is a chance – perhaps our last chance – to change that. So I urge you all to come to the Meeting and, before you do, watch the video made by the residents, called: [The Maples - Please keep us ALL safe.](#)

To be clear, I have nothing against Cllr Vicky Glover Ward personally: she is a superb and indefatigable Councillor, and she shares my interest in Swift boxes which makes her a true Green in my book. But, on the Neale Drive issue, I'm afraid she has been wrong and ill-advised every step of the way. Which is why, sadly, I have to write this letter.

For a start, she has promoted Monday's Public Meeting as a chance "*to answer your questions regarding the access arrangements to the A10 via Neale Drive.*"

<image001.png>

This is odd! Having worked on this issue since shortly after my election on May 4th, I have not met any one who has questions about the access from Neale Drive to the A10. We all agree that that access should be opened as soon as possible: it should have been opened ages ago. Also, we all agree that Ermine Street, the other main road leading to the A10, should have speed limits and traffic-calming measures. Some, like me, go further: we think that EHDC was criminally negligent for not making it a condition of the Maples development that those speed limits and traffic-calming measures were installed before a brick of that development was laid. But, at this stage, that's water under the bridge.

What Monday's Public Meeting should really be about, is whether the Junction between Neale Drive and Ermine Street is a **Sweep or a T-junction??** Opinion is divided and, if you cannot visit the site, do watch the [video](#) to help you decide. Having lived here for 30+ years, and travelled that road almost daily, I am firmly of the opinion that a T-Junction is the safer option: why re-direct traffic via a tricky-to-negotiate Sweep junction off a perfectly good

through route to travel through a Residential estate where children play, people park and cross the street to visit neighbours and old people negotiate narrow pavements on their mobility scooters? Most Buntingford residents I have spoken with agree that it's crazy and, if you watch the [video](#), you will see why. The Buntingford Town Council, who did visit the site, agreed that it was best to "leave the junction lay-out as it is."

Yet Cllr. Glover Ward and other EHDC Councillors seem determined to push through the sweep junction. They say it was always on the Plans for the Maples development. The [video](#) shows this is not true as it shows maps distributed by EHDC, which I have seen, that show the Maples development with a T-junction. Cllr. Glover Ward and others assert that the Neale Drive residents must have known their road would be a Thru-route with a sweep junction on to it. The Neale Drive residents have always asserted, loudly and noisily, that they did not.

But whether they did or not, is irrelevant at this stage because the issue now is one of Safety. Only a Council with a real desire to punish the residents of Neale Drive would want to push through the current unsafe plan. It is a matter of huge regret to me that HCC Cllr. Jeff Jones and EHDC Cllrs. Nicholls and Glover Ward and others in Buntingford seem determined to inflict that punishment on the Neale Drive residents by making their road unsafe to live on. Forget "Do no harm..." : these Councillors appear intent on doing them real harm.

It would be simple for us, as the EHDC, to shirk the question and say it is all a matter for HCC Highways. But it is not: HCC Highways tell me that their only responsibility is to execute Planning Decisions made by EHDC and HCC. They will advise and offer opinions, but ultimately, it is we, the Councillors, who must decide. And the Public Meeting on Monday will, I hope, help us make a final decision.

I would have liked to have been part of that decision but, perhaps because Cllr. Glover Ward knows I vehemently oppose her positions, she has scheduled the Public Meeting for a day that she knows I am going to be away. A further concern is that Cllr Glover Ward has already made her mind up to install the Sweep Junction whatever happens on Monday. She has written to me saying: *"The public meeting will not include any discussion whatsoever of alternative layouts of the junction as it is not possible to change the layout of the junction."*

And yet, that is the only thing that the Residents want to discuss! **Sweep or T-??** Some residents are in favour of the Sweep as they feel it will assist the calming of traffic on Ermine Street. Neale Drive residents obviously want to retain the T-junction. It is a situation that cries out for external adjudication – a position which Cllr Glover Ward originally supported, offering me the option to *"await the determination of the Local Government Ombudsman"* on the case. Sadly, she has now backed away from that position and seems determined to bullock through the Sweep Junction option and start work on implementing it in January, before the LGO has had a chance to make its ruling.

All of which, I hope you agree, is deeply regrettable. It is also politically inept as it means we, the Green Party, are capitulating to an unwise, unsafe decision made by the previous, Tory-led EHDC rather than sticking up for what is safe for our residents. We talk about being a "Listening Council," but Cllr Glover Ward has not listened to me or the Residents: she hasn't even met them.

She will on Monday – by which time, I do hope she will have watched the [video](#) and realised that now is the time to STOP trying to defend the indefensible, and retain the T-Junction, or something like it, and introduce the Ermine Street traffic-calming measures as soon as possible.

That would deliver us all a truly Happy Christmas.

Sincerely,

Cllr. David Woollcombe

That letter revised to delete all mention of the Complainant:

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To be clear, I have nothing against the Council Executive: they are superb and indefatigable Councillors, but on the Neale Drive issue, I'm afraid they have been wrong and ill-advised every step of the way. Which is why, sadly, I have to write this letter.

For a start, they have promoted Monday's Public Meeting as a chance “to answer your questions regarding the access arrangements to the A10 via Neale Drive.”

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This is odd! Having worked on this issue since shortly after my election on May 4th, I have not met any one who has questions about the access from Neale Drive to the A10. We all agree that that access should be opened as soon as possible: it should have been opened ages ago. Also, we all agree that Ermine Street, the other main road leading to the A10, should have speed limits and traffic-calming measures. Some, like me, go further: we think that EHDC was criminally negligent for not making it a condition of the Maples development that those speed limits and traffic-calming measures were installed before a brick of that development was laid. But, at this stage, that's water under the bridge.

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Yet the Council Executive seem determined to push through the sweep junction. They say it was always on the Plans for the Maples development. The video shows this is not true as it shows maps distributed by EHDC, which I have seen, that show the Maples development with a T-junction. The Council Executive asserts that the Neale Drive residents must have known their road would be a Thru-route with a sweep junction on to it. The Neale Drive residents have always asserted, loudly and noisily, that they did not.

But whether they did or not, is irrelevant at this stage because the issue now is one of Safety. Only a Council with a real desire to punish the residents of Neale Drive would want to push through the current unsafe plan. It is a matter of huge regret to me that the HCC and the EHDC Council Executive + others in Buntingford seem determined to inflict that punishment on the Neale Drive residents by making their road unsafe to live on. Forget “Do no harm...” : these Councillors appear intent on doing them real harm.

It would be simple for us, as the EHDC, to shirk the question and say it is all a matter for HCC Highways. But it is not: HCC Highways tell me that their only responsibility is to execute Planning Decisions made by EHDC and HCC. They will advise and offer opinions, but ultimately, it is we, the Councillors, who must decide. And the Public Meeting on Monday will, I hope, help us make a final decision.

I would have liked to have been part of that decision but, perhaps because the Council Executive knows I vehemently oppose their position, they have scheduled the Public Meeting for a day that they know I am going to be away. A further concern is that a member of the Council Executive has already made their mind up to install the Sweep Junction whatever happens on Monday. The member has written to me saying: “The public meeting

will not include any discussion whatsoever of alternative layouts of the junction as it is not possible to change the layout of the junction."

And yet, that is the only thing that the Residents want to discuss! **Sweep or T-??** Some residents are in favour of the Sweep as they feel it will assist the calming of traffic on Ermine Street. Neale Drive residents obviously want to retain the T-junction. It is a situation that cries out for external adjudication – a position which a member of the Council Executive originally supported, offering me the option to *"await the determination of the Local Government Ombudsman"* on the case. Sadly, the member has now backed away from that position and seems determined to bullock through the Sweep Junction option and start work on implementing it in January, before the LGO has had a chance to make its ruling.

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That would deliver us all a truly Happy Christmas.

Sincerely,

Cllr. David Woollcombe

My Original Letter of 13th December 2023 @ 11.09am

From: David Woollcombe <David.Woollcombe@eastherts.gov.uk>

Sent: Wednesday, December 13, 2023 11:09 AM

To: Ben Crystall <Ben.Crystall@eastherts.gov.uk>; Vicky Burt <Vicky.Burt@eastherts.gov.uk>; Sue Nicholls <Sue.Nicholls@eastherts.gov.uk>; Alex Daar <Alex.Daar@eastherts.gov.uk>; Carl Brittain <Carl.Brittain@eastherts.gov.uk>; [REDACTED]

Subject: This is getting nasty...

Dear Ben, Simon et al:

This is getting nasty...

As you know, and as you will have read in my note to you all promoting the Public Meeting on Monday, and the video made by residents, I am vehemently opposed to the positions taken by Cllr. Glover Ward on the Neale Drive issue. She is well aware of my feelings on this issue which is why, I am sure, she has arranged to hold the Public Meeting when I am on the other side of the world.

She is well within her rights to do so: what she has no right to do is to intercept a private email between myself and the Residents and the lawyers representing them who asked for any evidence I might have that she is using the Public Meeting as a tick-box exercise. They feel sure that she has no intention of either listening to, or acting upon, the evidence that residents might bring to the Meeting – and I offered them my own written evidence that supports that opinion.

I have no idea how she got hold of my email, but I do know that she has, uninvited, responded to it. The residents and lawyer to whom it was sent have not forwarded it to any one else, so they are convinced that Cllr. Glover Ward has found a way to hack into my East Herts email. Which should be a serious breach of the Code of Conduct?

I and the residents would happily put all this behind if Cllr. Glover Ward would just see sense and agree to retain the T-junction between Ermine Street and Neale Drive. But if, as I fear, she is using devious means to undermine what I know to be an honest piece of advocacy by myself and others to reverse a bad and dangerous decision, we, the EHGP, should perhaps talk further?

I leave it to your judgement but you will understand that, when I took up this role, I expected opposition from other parties. I did not expect the kind of opposition and attempts at humiliation I have received at the hands of my own party.

Happy Christmas!

David

Councillor David Woollcombe, East Herts District Council
Buntingford Ward

That letter revised to delete all mention of the Complainant:

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Councillor David Woollcombe, East Herts District Council
Buntingford Ward

My Original Letter of 10th December 2023 @ 22.04pm

From: David Woollcombe <David.Woollcombe@eastherts.gov.uk>

Date: Sunday, 10 December 2023 at 22:24

Subject: Vicky Glover Ward's "Tick Box" Public Meeting exercise

Dear [REDACTED]

Further to your request for information that suggests that EHDC and its Executive in Charge of Planning, Vicky Glover-Ward, are hosting this Public Meeting as a tick-box exercise to prove that they are allowing the residents to "let off steam" – but with no real intention of changing anything, least of the lay-out of the junction between Neale Drive and Ermine Street, I offer you the following written evidence:

ONE: *The EHDC and HCC Joint Statement delivered to us all by Vicky Glover-Ward on Monday 18th September 2023, states in Paragraph 5 on Page 1:*

"There is no mechanism within the planning system that allows a LPA to reopen a case and reconsider matters that have already been through the planning process and decided upon, unless there has been a breach of the planning permission itself such as that set out above."

TWO: *In her email to me on Sunday 24th September @11.07, she wrote:*

"I realise that you think that this is a slam dunk, obvious thing that needs changing but, I have looked at the planning information in detail and I think it is clear that the junction was always intended to be a swept junction and the road a through road. This is crystal clear in my opinion. This should not be a case of 'Green councillors uniting against Jeff Jones' but should be a case of doing what is legal and right. That is what I believe I am doing."

THREE: *In her email to me of Sunday 18th November at 20:01, she wrote:*

"Dear David: I think you may have gotten hold of the wrong end of the stick regarding the content of the agenda for the public meeting that I will be chairing. So just to clarify:

As per the joint position statement that was issued from HCC and EHDC it is not possible to change the junction. The public meeting will not include any discussion whatsoever of alternative layouts of the junction as it is not possible to change the layout of the junction.

FOUR: *In response to my email of 1st December suggesting that, having spoken to both parties, I proposed holding a join "Conflict Transformation" meeting to explore the possibility of finding common ground between the Neale Drive and Ermine Street Residents, she replied to me immediately saying:*

From: Vicky Glover-Ward <Vicky.Glover-Ward@eastherts.gov.uk>

Date: Friday, 1 December 2023 at 11:50

To: David Woollcombe <David.Woollcombe@eastherts.gov.uk>

Subject: Re: Neale Drive / Ermine Street Update: a Christmas Truce??

"David

I would politely request that you desist from your efforts, well intentioned as they are, as they are only giving a false hope that the junction will be significantly modified. This is not fair on the residents."

Regards

Vicky Glover-Ward
Cllr Hertford Kingsmead
Executive Member for Planning and Growth

I think all of this is compelling proof that Cllr. Glover-Ward does not have any intention of exploring alternatives to the current, inherently dangerous layout of the Junction between Neale Drive and Ermine Street. My suggestion for a mini-roundabout with 3-way Give Way signs which would ease the flow of traffic along the direct exit to the A10 via Ermine Street is not even to be considered, even though it would be much safer than the sweep junction. Traffic Lights with a Pedestrian / Cycle crossing would be even safer, but she forbid me to hold a meeting for the residents to consider this.

For some one who has pioneered the idea of a "Listening Council" in EHDC, she seems to be curiously reluctant to listen to anyone who does not share her opinion. Particularly me and the Neale Drive residents! I cannot believe that it was accidental that she chose to host the Public Meeting on 18th December when she knows that I, her major opponent on the EHDC, will be on the other side of the world. It adds to the impression that she seems determined to ensure that the Neale Drive residents live for ever on a dangerous through traffic route. It would have been so easy to enable the No. 18 Bus, and other Maples residents to use the Neale Drive exit on to the A10, while everyone else uses the familiar Ermine Street exit. And much, much cheaper!

I will not cease in my opposition to this junction lay-out which she seems determined to force through. We don't actually take a Hippocratic Oath as councillors, but I feel my first duty to those who voted for me is: "Do No Harm!" Any sentient human being with a functioning brain would recognise that, building a dangerous junction which makes it doubly difficult for traffic trying to use Ermine Street, in order to "sweep" most through traffic down a residential street, where neighbours park cars to visit each other, children play, and elderly people have to step off narrow pavements to get past other pedestrians, is doing enormous Harm. It is, in a word, INSANE! Yet that is the insanity that my Green Party Leaders and EHDC and HCC officers seem determined to inflict on the people who voted me into office.

In other circumstances, I would be tempted to resign in disgust. But – I will not abandon my constituents. I will continue to oppose this insane decision till my last breath. I trust that other colleagues in the Green Party, the sentient human beings amongst them, will support me.

Sincerely,

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Subject: The EHDC Council Executive's "Tick Box" Public Meeting exercise

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Buntingford Ward



Facebook: EastHertsDC
Twitter: EastHerts
Instagram: easthertscouncil
Website: eastherts.gov.uk

Cllr David Woollcombe

Sent by email only: David.Woollcombe@eastherts.gov.uk

Dear Cllr Woollcombe

Complaint: Councillor Code of Conduct – confidential

6th February 2024

I am writing to confirm that I, as the Council's Deputy Monitoring Officer, have received an allegation from Cllr Vicky Glover Ward ("the Complainant") that you failed to comply with the East Herts Council's Code of Conduct ("the Code"), a copy of which I enclose for completeness.

A summary of the Complainant's allegation is as follows:

In your email dated the 13th December 2023 at 11:35 ("the Email") which was sent to all East Herts Green party councillors and also officers of East Herts and Hertfordshire County Council you made a number of unsupported allegations about the Complainant namely:-

- That she agreed to wait for the Local Government Ombudsman decision before making a decision on what type of junction should be installed despite both herself and officers confirming that the layout of the junction cannot be changed;
- Making baseless assertions that she scheduled the public meeting specifically on a day when you were not able to attend when it was the only date that both EHDC and HCC officers could attend plus venue availability.
- That the language you use about her is disrespectful, written in a patronising manner, is inflammatory and seeks to damage her standing with other fellow councillors and officers.
- It also came to the Complainant's attention via a third party that you had sent the Email on the same day to several local residents. Due to the language and comments you have made about her, the Complainant feels that you have shown her no respect by seeking to damage her reputation amongst these residents.

In sending the Email to residents, one of the recipients has voiced their disappointment to the Complainant that you did not use the BCC function and as a result their email address (along with all the other recipients' email addresses) have all been shared. This is a personal data breach and therefore I have had to report this to the Council's Data Protection Officer who will be writing to you separately. In relation to this process this may potentially be a breach of paragraph 7 of the Code (explained further below) and I would welcome your comments on this please as part of my initial investigation.

By the above alleged conduct the Complainant feels that you have breached the following parts of the Code:-

1. Respect: As a councillor:

1.1 I treat other councillors and members of the public with respect.

1.2 I treat local authority employees, employees and representatives of partner organisations and those volunteering for the local authority with respect and respect the role they play.

1.1. I treat other councillors and members of the public with respect.

The Complainant feels that the language you use in the Email was unpolite, discourteous and subjected her to a personal attack. Specific extracts from the Email include the following: -

- "The problem on the Neale Drive issue, is that EHDC Councillors seem determined to do the Residents of this part of Buntingford serious harm"
- "But on the Neale Drive issue, I'm afraid she has been wrong and ill advised every step of the way"
- "For a start, she has promoted Monday's Public Meeting as a chance to "answer your questions regarding the access arrangements to the A10 via Neal Drive" This is odd!"
- "It is a matter of huge regret to me that that HCC Cllr Jeff Jones and EHDC Cllrs Nicholls and Glover Ward and others in Buntingford seem determined to inflict that punishment on the Neale Drive residents by making their road unsafe to live on"
- "Forget "Do no harm..." these Councillors appear intent on doing them real harm"
- "I would have liked to have been part of that decision but, perhaps because Cllr Glover Ward knows I vehemently oppose her positions, she has scheduled the Public Meeting for a date she knows I am going to be away "
- "A further concern is that Cllr Glover Ward has already made up her mind to install the Sweep Junction whatever happens on Monday"
- "Sadly, she has now backed away from that position and seems determined to bullock through the Sweep Junction...before the LGO had had a chance to make its ruling"
- "It is also politically ineptunsafe decision"

1.2.1 I treat local authority employees, employees and representatives of partner organisations and those volunteering for the local authority with respect and respect the role they play.

The Complainant has raised concerns that you have made some very serious allegations against the Council and by implication its officers. I have extracted parts of your Email below: -

- "Some like me, go further; we think that EHDC was criminally negligent for not making it a condition of the Maples development"
- "Only a Council with a real desire to punish the residents of Neale Drive would want to push through the current and unsafe plan".

I would be grateful if when responding to this complaint that you can include what basis you have for stating that EHDC was "criminally negligence" as this is a serious accusation to have made in the public domain.

7. Use of local authority resources and facilities

As a councillor:

7.1 I do not misuse council resources.

7.2 I will, when using the resources of the local authority or using their resource by others:-

a. Act in accordance with the local authority's requirements

When sending the Email to the residents and failing to BCC recipients a personal data breach has occurred. As part of the complaint against you I will be looking into whether you may have potentially breached part 7.2.1 of the Code. As part of your response please can you confirm whether you have completed the data protection introductory training which was referenced in your Members Induction and Further Training programme that was provided to you?

Please note that no conclusion has been reached on these allegations, and is merely repeated for your information and to enable you to provide a response and/or why you feel this was not a breach of the Code.

I should be grateful if you would consider the allegation and provide a written response/explanation addressed for my attention either by e-mail or by post within the next 14 days (by Tuesday 20th February 2024).

Your response will then be taken into account as part of the Complaints Procedure and considering what action, if any, to take. It is in your interests to co-operate with the initial assessment so that "your side" may be considered as part of this initial process. Please note that if the decision is taken to investigate the allegations fully, then you would be expected to co-operate with that investigation. If you do not respond to the complaint then the conclusions will be based solely on the allegations made.

The potential initial assessment conclusions are:

- Rejection of the complaint,
- Informal resolution, or
- Full investigation.

This should be confirmed to you and the complainant in no more than three months; however I would expect to resolve it much sooner in practice.

At this stage you are advised not to contact or discuss this matter with the Complainant, or other parties who are likely to be witnesses to these allegations. However, you may wish to seek some independent advice in confidence. I will treat this complaint confidentially, although relevant witnesses may be contacted regarding the allegations.

Once I have received your response the matter will be given due consideration and I shall liaise with the Independent Person, Mr Nicholas Moss (a person appointed under the Localism Act to assist with Councillor Complaints), with the aim of oversight of the conclusions reached.

Please note that any written request for information made to the EHDC will be dealt with in accordance with our legal obligations under information access regimes (Freedom of Information Act/Environmental Information Regulations and GDPR and Data Protections Act).

I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely

Victoria Wilders
Legal Services Manager/Deputy Monitoring Officer



Victoria Wilders

From: Victoria Wilders
Sent: 16 May 2024 17:02
To: David Woollcombe
Cc: Ben Crystall
Subject: Code of Conduct complaint by Cllr Glover Ward

Dear Cllr Woollcombe,

Thank you for your emails of yesterday and today.

As an officer of the Council I am simply applying its complaints handling procedure for matters relating to Councillors' Code of Conduct ("the Procedure") to a specific complaint made against you by Cllr Glover Ward.

You have an absolute right to decide that you do not wish to give Cllr Glover-Ward an unreserved apology. In the light of your decision and pursuant to the Procedure, I am referring the complaint to the Council's Standards sub-committee for that body to determine whether or not you have breached the Code of Conduct.

I shall contact you again in due course about the arrangements for that purpose

In relation to some of your comments below particularly the *"inhumane legalistic procedures"* and *"that there is something deeply wrong and immoral about the EHDC's legal set up"*, whilst I am unsure as to what you mean, given the potential severity of these accusations I have referred this to James Ellis as the Monitoring Officer. James will be contacting you separately.

Regards



Victoria Wilders
Legal Services Manager/
Deputy Monitoring Officer
East Herts District Council
01279 502195
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From: David Woollcombe <David.Woollcombe@eastherts.gov.uk>
Sent: Thursday, May 16, 2024 12:43 PM
To: Victoria Wilders <Victoria.Wilders@eastherts.gov.uk>; Ben Crystall <Ben.Crystall@eastherts.gov.uk>
Subject: Apologising to Cllr. Glover Ward

Dear Victoria and Ben:

Again – we find ourselves in different universes – you asking me to leave my conscience and values at the door – and stick to inhuman legalistic procedures which you, Ben, like to characterise as being the essence of being a “Grown-up” councillor. By contrast, I put human values first. And I feel that you, and EHDC, should too. That you cannot, suggests to me that there is something deeply wrong and immoral about the EHDC’s legal set up.

I found it incredibly offensive that you forced me to apologise to the appalling Publican in Buntingford who threw me out of his pub for trying to improve community relations. He should have apologised to me – and in any human-centred universe – you would have supported my position on this. I kow-towed to you on that issue. But now – again – you are holding a gun to my head and demanding that I apologise to Cllr. Glover Ward – who should apologise to me, and to the residents of Buntingford who elected me, for having behaved in such a high-handed way towards me, and them and their personal safety.

If I have offended her, you may report to her, as I told you, that I apologise unreservedly. But – I don’t believe I have – and I believe that, if she has the best interests of my residents and the reputation of EHDC in my ward, she would contact me personally, and allow me to set up the meeting that she promised them she would attend with me and the principles in the Neale Drive matter. As I requested in my letter to her (*attached – in adjusted form – below*)

You will understand that, at my age and with my life experience, I am not about to leave my conscience and values at the door of EHDC or anywhere else. And you should not make that a requirement of being a Councillor. Or, if you do want that to be a requirement, you should make that very clear in your orientation of new councillors.

I know that Ben feels that this is a petty-fogging issue that I should put behind me but, like the debate last night over “Chair vs. Chairman,” - it is an issue that goes to the heart of what it is to be a Councillor: do you want us to detach ourselves from our Humanity and behave like Robots obeying the rules set up by previous Councils? Or do you want us to behave like human beings and obey the rules and values that have formed the foundations of human civilisation and morality over the centuries?

It is a serious question – and I shall bring it up at our Awayday, as your answers to that question should inform the impulses that any of us have for being a councillor and, by consequence, voting for the Green Party. It also informs far more serious EHDC issues like the North Harlow development where it seems obvious to me that Thames Water has seriously misrepresented its ability to provide the water supply and STW to 10,000 new homes. Again – I would urge you to sit down with the concerned residents who voted for our party – but whose appeals to meet, you, Ben - and Cllr. Glover Ward, have consistently refused: as I told you on the phone that, to me, is a much bigger Breach of Faith / civilised Conduct than the one of which Cllr. Glover Ward has, with your support, brought against me. But I choose to pester you on that matter as a human being, not through the arcane legal procedures of the Council.

I do urge you to NOT forget that you are a Human Being first, Councillor second.

Best wishes,
Sincerely,

Councillor David Woolcombe, East Herts District Council
Buntingford Ward

Dear Councillor Glover-Ward:

I am shocked that you have chosen to accuse me of a Breach of Code of Conduct: at no point in our long-standing disagreements over the Neale Drive issue did I feel that I was being offensive towards you though – as you must know – my constituents did find your behaviour towards them extremely unhelpful and offensive. If you felt that my support of the people

who voted me into office was, by association, offensive towards you, I am happy to apologise to you on my own, and their, behalf.

Though you have consistently advised me not to place too much faith in the LGO process, my constituents have had very constructive conversations with them, and have been told that the LGO determination will be with the EHDC by the end of the month. It seems likely that, as I advised you before you called the unhelpful 18th Dec. meeting, they will recommend that you call a small meeting of the principles on the Neale Drive issue to try to resolve this issue.

I do hope that, after the LGO delivers its recommendations, that you will agree to bury hatchets, and have that meeting. I would love to work constructively with you to resolve this matter – which has dragged on for 5 years, and continues to undermine my constituents' faith in the EHDC and the Green Party.

With very best wishes,
Sincerely,

Councillor David Woollcombe, EHDC
Buntingford Ward

From: David Woollcombe <David.Woollcombe@eastherts.gov.uk>

Date: Wednesday, 15 May 2024 at 12:29

To: Victoria Wilders <Victoria.Wilders@eastherts.gov.uk>

Subject: Re: Initial assessment decision

Dear Victoria:

You are right – my apology is considerably qualified: you cannot force me to change a decision I made on grounds of conscience, values and consideration of the feelings of my constituents. It is that decision which gave rise to my disagreement with Cllr. Glover Ward. I will not apologise for holding and promoting that decision – and would even move a vote of No Confidence in Cllr. Glover Ward should she persist in her under-hand and back door methods of undermining my principled stand on the Neale Drive issue.

The Local Government Ombudsman, whose position Cllr Glover Ward has consistently sought to undermine, will report in the next two weeks: if – as they have indicated – they support my position on the issue of dispute with Cllr. Glover Ward – I see no reason for you to force me to apologise.

Rather, I feel that you should stand up and support Councillors like myself who take principled positions on behalf of those that elected us – rather than cow-tow to members of the executive who are proven wrong.

Best wishes,

David

Councillor David Woolcombe, East Herts District Council
Buntingford Ward

From: Victoria Wilders <Victoria.Wilders@eastherts.gov.uk>
Date: Monday, 29 April 2024 at 10:26
To: David Woolcombe <David.Woolcombe@eastherts.gov.uk>
Subject: FW: Initial assessment decision

Dear Councillor Woolcombe

I hope you are well.

I don't seem to have a response from you to my email below, apologies if I have missed anything. I would be grateful you can come back to me by the end of this week please.

Many thanks

Victoria



Victoria Wilders
Legal Services Manager/
Deputy Monitoring Officer
East Herts District Council
01279 502195
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From: Victoria Wilders
Sent: Wednesday, April 10, 2024 6:27 PM
To: David Woolcombe <David.Woolcombe@eastherts.gov.uk>
Subject: RE: Initial assessment decision

Dear Councillor Woolcombe,

Thank you for note. Apologies for the delay in coming back to you I have been on annual leave due to school holidays.

I am sure that you would wish me to offer you an unambiguous response to your draft apology to Councillor Glover-Ward. I am afraid that in my view and in the view of the independent person, it falls significantly short of what might reasonably be expected of what I thought you and I had agreed would be an unqualified apology. I think that is what you agreed with the Leader, also.

Indeed, you say in your second paragraph of your draft that you wish to make ‘... **make a full and unreserved apology for any offence I may have caused you.**’ However, the bulk of your letter reprises and seeks to justify the material that prompted Councillor Glover-Ward to complain in the first place. Such an approach amounts, at best, to a qualified apology. At worst it is likely to be regarded by a recipient as a non-apology. You will understand, therefore, that I am unable to accept your draft in its current form. Might I suggest that you limit to a simple, brief, apology based, perhaps, on the second line of your draft - as quoted above in bold - and leave it that? From my point of view, such an approach would enable me to conclude this matter.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Regards

Victoria



Victoria Wilders
Legal Services Manager/
Deputy Monitoring Officer
East Herts District Council
01279 502195
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From: David Woollcombe <David.Woollcombe@eastherts.gov.uk>
Sent: Saturday, March 30, 2024 1:59 PM
To: Victoria Wilders <Victoria.Wilders@eastherts.gov.uk>
Subject: Re: Initial assessment decision

Thanks Victoria – and Happy Easter!

I attach below a draft of the kind of apology I would think to send.

With best wishes,

David

Dear Councillor Glover-Ward:

I am shocked, and rather disappointed, that you chose to launch a Breach of Code of Conduct complaint against me. You could have picked up the phone and discussed it with me: that’s what most colleagues in most businesses would do in a situation like this.

As you have made this complaint, I do – as I confirmed the Leader of the Council – make a full and unreserved apology for any offence I may have caused you.

I suspect that your complaint arises from our differing opinions on the right thing to do about the Neale Drive situation in Buntingford. As you may also know, I have now made a full and detailed study of the EHDC Code of Conduct and sat through a deeply unhelpful “Training” on the Code by Council Staff. As a result, I know that it states: *“As a councillor, you can express, challenge, criticise and disagree with views, ideas, opinions and policies in a robust but civil manner...”* I do hope

that all my communications with you have been “*in a robust but civil manner.*” I named you in the correspondence as, nowhere does the Code of Conduct state that you should not “*express, challenge, criticise and disagree with views, ideas, opinions*” of an individual. Given that you were the main proponent of the views which I felt were so wrong, and created a real and present danger to the residents of Neale Drive – the people who campaigned for our party and voted for me – I hope you will understand why I named you.

I was also disappointed that you didn't take up my offer to hold a small meeting of the principles on the Neale Drive issue, rather than host an inevitably raucous and inconclusive public meeting on the subject. I hope, as the dust from this complaint settles, you will agree to bury hatchets, and look to meet with me and the principles on this issue as I suggested, perhaps at Wallfields. Please let us work together and try, at long last, to reach a resolution on this matter – which has dragged on for five years and continues to exercise my constituents most acutely.

With very best wishes,
Sincerely,

Councillor David Woollcombe, EHDC
Buntingford Ward

From: Victoria Wilders <Victoria.Wilders@eastherts.gov.uk>
Date: Tuesday, 26 March 2024 at 13:20
To: David Woollcombe <David.Woollcombe@eastherts.gov.uk>
Subject: Initial assessment decision

Dear Cllr Woollcombe

Thank you for your response.

My initial assessment decision is that I am satisfied that this complaint can be dealt with informally under the Complaints Handling Procedure (“the Procedure”). I confirm that I have consulted with the Independent Person who is in agreement with this course of action.

The informal resolution will be for you to apologise to Cllr Glover Ward. I note that at the beginning of your response to her complaint you have said that you are prepared to apologise unreservedly to Cllr Glover Ward. I look forward to receiving a draft of that apology for review please. I would be grateful if you could provide this to me **by Friday 5th April** by the latest.

I would also like you to undertake further training on the Code of Conduct and I am currently looking at arranging something that is appropriate. I will be in touch in due course.

As per the Procedure if a Councillor refuses to engage with such informal action by not apologising or attending training then I may reconsider my decision and decide whether to move the complaint to the Investigation Stage (of directly to the Standards Sub-Committee for the original complaint (and failure to co-operate) to be determined.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Regards

Victoria



Victoria Wilders
Legal Services Manager/
Deputy Monitoring Officer
East Herts District Council
01279 502195
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From: David Woolcombe <David.Woolcombe@eastherts.gov.uk>
Sent: Saturday, March 2, 2024 6:01 PM
To: Victoria Wilders <Victoria.Wilders@eastherts.gov.uk>
Subject: Cllr Woolcombe's response to Cllr Glover Ward's complaint....

Dear Victoria:

Herewith, as promised, my response Cllr Glover Ward's complaint.

Best wishes,

Councillor David Woolcombe, East Herts District Council
Buntingford Ward

