

Decision Notice by the Monitoring Officer – 15 December 2020 Complaint against County Councillor Liam Walker

On 19 October 2020, Cllr Liam Walker (member for Hanborough & Minster Lovell and Cabinet Member for Highways) endorsed an offensive and derogatory tweet by a member of the public during a discussion of public cycling policy.

11 complaints were received by the Monitoring Officer. The Monitoring Officer considered these complaints under the County Council's [Arrangements for Dealing with Complaints Against Members](#). The question at issue was whether Cllr Walker's actions had breached the [Members' Code of Conduct](#) and, if so, what if any appropriate sanctions should be proposed.

In considering the matter, the Monitoring Officer sought the advice of an Independent Person appointed by the Council for such purposes. The Monitoring Officer was also mindful that Cllr Walker had previously been found in breach of the Code for a misuse of social media. Given the nature of the complaints and of this wider context, the Monitoring Officer convened a meeting of a Members' Advisory Panel to advise him further. The Independent Person supported these conclusions.

Members' Advisory Panel

Under the *Arrangements for Dealing with Complaints Against Members*, the Panel was formed from councillor members of the Audit & Governance Committee, with members drawn from at least two political parties.

The two-person Panel met to consider the matter on Friday 11 December 2020. Cllr Walker was invited to attend the Panel but did not choose to do so due to work commitments and did not submit any written information. The Panel was unanimous in advising the Monitoring Officer of their view that, on the basis of the evidence:

- The actions complained about by Cllr Walker were a breach of the Members' Code of Conduct;
- Given Cllr Walker's status as Cabinet Member for Highways, the breach was particularly serious. As such, and given the context of a previous breach regarding social media, the Monitoring Officer be advised to adopt the sanction whereby the Leader of the Council be asked to remove Cllr Walker from the Cabinet; and that the Panel's views be reported to Full Council;
- The Panel considered it regrettable that Cllr Walker had not taken the opportunity to attend or to provide any written comments to the Panel. Cllr Walker had said he could not attend due to work commitments; and was not aware that written comments were possible.

Decision of the Monitoring Officer

Taking the above into account, the Monitoring Officer finds that:

- 1. Cllr Walker's actions in endorsing the tweet were a breach of the Members' Code of Conduct.**
- 2. The breach was rendered particularly serious given Cllr Walker's status as Cabinet Member for Highways; and given that Cllr Walker had previously been found in breach of the Code for a misuse of social media;**

- 3. Accordingly, the Leader of the Council be recommended to remove Cllr Walker from the Cabinet with effect from 1 January 2021; and that Full Council receive note of the Panel's view.**

**Steve Jorden
Interim Monitoring Officer
Oxfordshire County Council**