

## Ethical Standards and Member Development Committee

13 August 2020

<b>Subject:</b>	National Cases
<b>Director:</b>	Director of Law and Governance and Monitoring Officer - Surjit Tour
<b>Contribution towards Vision 2030:</b>	
<b>Contact Officer(s):</b>	Trisha Newton Trisha_newton@sandwell.gov.uk

### **DECISION RECOMMENDATIONS**

#### **That the Ethical Standards and Member Development Committee:**

1. note the contents of the report and the case at Appendix 1 and consider any issues for the Council.

## **1 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT**

- 1.1 Within its terms of reference, the Ethical Standards and Member Development Committee has a duty to promote high ethical standards amongst Members. As well as complying with legislation and guidance, the Committee will need to demonstrate learning from issues arising from local investigations and case law. Furthermore it is advisable for the Committee to be kept informed of any particularly notable cases which are publicised as they may also add to learning at the local level.

## **2 IMPLICATIONS FOR SANDWELL'S VISION**

- 2.1 High standards of conduct are an essential part of good corporate governance and this in turn has a direct relationship with the delivery of high quality services.

### **3 STRATEGIC RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS**

3.1 There are no resource implications arising from this report.

### **4 LEGAL AND GOVERNANCE CONSIDERATIONS**

4.1 By considering national cases of significance the Ethical Standards and Member Development Committee will be better informed and placed to discharge its duty to promote high ethical standards.

**Surjit Tour**

**Director of Law and Governance and Monitoring Officer**

## **Racial slur councillor suspended**

### **A councillor who repeatedly used "incredibly offensive racial slurs" at a council meeting has been suspended from the local Liberal Democrat party**

Dennis Parsons said the offensive word - the name of his family's black cat in the 1950s - four times at a Cheltenham Borough council meeting.

He apologised for using the word but said he used the cat's name to show "how different the culture was then".

Local party members voted to suspend his group membership.

The Local Democracy Reporting Service said the comments were made during a debate to review the authority's policies in the wake of George Floyd's death last month.

During the meeting, Mr Parsons described his family's cat saying his mother would shout its name from the front gate.

He added that "now obviously you can't do that" because "the culture has changed".

Lib Dem councillor Karl Hoble said he was "staggered" Mr Parsons "chose to speak those words".

While Lib Dem councillor Max Wilkinson said he knew Mr Parsons "wouldn't have meant offence" but it was "truly offensive".

In response, Mr Parsons said he was "obviously sorry" if he had "offended people's sensitivities" but he had "quoted something that was perfectly acceptable in 1945".

Following the meeting, calls were made for him to resign from the local group while an online petition calling for his resignation from the council, has attracted more than 200 signatories.

Rebecca Mountford said on the petition: "I can't believe he hasn't gone yet. Zero tolerance on racism is the only way we're going to eradicate it altogether."

And Shola Efunshile, said: "Our elected representatives cannot be allowed to behave in this way, especially at a time when our collective society is working to do better."

In a statement Mr Parsons said he "very much" regrets and is "hugely embarrassed" by his action.

"My parents were not racist. I am not racist. I was using the name of the family cat to illustrate how different the culture was then," he said.

"Unfortunately, in doing so, I articulated the N-word - which was unacceptable."

Mr Wilkinson, chairman of the standards committee, said it would "treat this matter with the seriousness it deserves".

He also confirmed that all borough councillors would receive training on issues of race, equality and diversity.

*Taken from BBC News 18 June 2020*