

Date of issue: 13th March 2025

MEETING	STANDARDS COMMITTEE
DATE AND TIME:	TUESDAY, 11TH MARCH, 2025 AT 6.30 PM
VENUE:	COUNCIL CHAMBER - OBSERVATORY HOUSE, 25 WINDSOR ROAD, SL1 2EL
DEMOCRATIC SERVICES OFFICER: (for all enquiries)	NICHOLAS PONTONE 07749 709 868

DECISION NOTICE

<u>AGENDA ITEM</u>	<u>REPORT TITLE</u>	<u>PAGE</u>	<u>WARD</u>
4.	Decision Notice - Complaint Reference 2324/07 and 2324/08 – Cllr Iftakhar Ahmed	1 - 8	All

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Decision Notice of the Standards Committee

Complaint Nos: 202324/07 and 202324/08

Against: Councillor Iftakhar Ahmed

The Complaint

1. On Wednesday 25 October 2023, Cllr Iftakhar Ahmed breached the Council's Councillor Code of Conduct during a residents' meeting held at the Grove School, Chalvey by:
 - a. Behaving aggressively and unprofessionally towards his fellow councillor Cllr Puja Bedi;
 - b. Accusing council officers of bullying residents;
 - c. Making intimidating and threatening gestures;
 - d. Bringing the reputation of the Council into disrepute by his conduct;
 - e. Failing to treat officers of the Council and a fellow councillor with respect.

The Investigation

2. Mr Richard Lingard conducted a thorough investigation between 12 January 2024 and 1 May 2024, concluding with a formal report dated 1 May 2024. Mr Lingard interviewed the two complainants, Cllr Ahmed, Cllr Bedi and four other elected members who were present at the meeting.
3. Cllr Ahmed was provided with a copy of the draft report and provided no additional comments. Cllr Bedi was also provided a copy of the draft report and provided some points of clarification. None of the comments on the draft report caused Mr Lingard to reconsider his draft conclusions.
4. Mr Lingard found that Cllr Iftakhar Ahmed was clearly acting in his capacity as a councillor at the material time and therefore bound by the Councillor Code of Conduct. He was found to have breached Paragraph 1, 2, 3 and 5 of the Council's Code of Conduct.
5. Mr Lingard noted that the accounts of the meeting at the Grove School were broadly consistent, the only discrepancy being the emphasis placed on the perceived demeanor of Cllr Ahmed. He found the meeting to be under-organised, badly run and generally chaotic, a situation almost certainly aggravated by the contentious subject matter under discussion, namely the application of parking restrictions.
6. Mr Lingard noted that whilst councillors should not slavishly follow officer advice and it is for councillors to make policy, any differences of opinion should be aired and resolved in a courteous and civilised manner and not

found over in a public slanging match. Much less should any councillor overtly align himself with the residents in criticising the officers.

7. Mr Lingard made clear he applied the civil standard of proof, namely “balance of probabilities”.
8. **Paragraph 1 – Councillors must treat other councillors, members of the public and local authority employees with respect and must respect the role they play.**
9. Cllr Ahmed’s vocal assertion that “we will not be bullied” is a clear reference to the officers and Cllr Bedi who were not saying what the residents wanted to hear. His conduct in the meeting demonstrated a complete lack of respect for the officers and Cllr Bedi and even if Cllr Ahmed had a habit of speaking loudly, what he said and the way in which he said it amounted to a personal attack on the officers. This was not appropriate language or attitude and is a clear breach of Paragraph 1 of the Code.
10. **Paragraph 2 – Councillors must not bully or harass any person**
11. Cllr Ahmed’s demeanor was plainly such as to intimidate Cllr Bedi and whilst it is not alleged that he actually hit her, there is no doubt that she and others, including Cllr Stedmond and an officer, were legitimately fearful of what he might do and accordingly two of the people present interposed themselves between Cllr Bedi and Cllr Ahmed. Two elected members felt it appropriate that they should escort Cllr Ahmed out of the building in order to defuse the situation. Bullying and harassment does not have to involve a prolonged course of action or series of incidents. This one incident counted.
12. **Paragraph 3 – Councillors must not compromise, or attempt to compromise, the impartiality of anyone who works for, or on behalf of, the local authority**
13. It is legitimate for councillors to question officers in order to understand their reasons for proposing to act in a particular way, but they must not try to force them to act differently or change their advice if doing so would prejudice their professional integrity.
14. The officers allege that Cllr Ahmed accused officers of bullying residents because they would not scrap the CPZ proposals. This was an attempt by Cllr Ahmed to intimidate the officers. Mr Lingard does not comment on the CPZ consultation or process adopted, but even if the process was found wanting, he found that the approach taken by Cllr Ahmed in the public meeting was in direct contravention of the duty not to compromise the impartiality of the officers.

15. Paragraph 5 – Councillors must not bring their role or the local authority into disrepute

16. The public have a legitimate expectation that their elected representatives will conduct themselves and the business of the Council in a decorous, competent and professional manner. Two officers were so perturbed by Cllr Ahmed's conduct that they felt compelled to complain and be identified as the complainants. They will not have taken this course of action lightly. By his conduct, Cllr Ahmed brought the Council as a whole into disrepute. Where a councillor engages in conduct which directly and significantly undermines the authority's reputation, such conduct will, and has in this instance, tip the balance in favour of disrepute to the role of the authority as a whole. Cllr Ahmed's blatant attempt to drive a wedge between himself and the residents on the one hand and the officers and certain other members on the other plainly undermined the credibility and reputation of the Council.

Standards Committee deliberations

17. The Committee had to consider some preliminary matters at the written request of Cllr Ahmed.

Whether the hearing should be held in private

18. The Committee considered Cllr Ahmed's request that the meeting be held in public. The Committee was advised of the two-stage test under the Local Government Act 1972 and determined that the investigation report contained personal information about several individuals, including two officers and therefore paragraph 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 applied.

19. The Committee then considered the public interest factors and concluded that the public interest in maintaining confidentiality outweighed the public interest factors in holding the hearing in public. This was because there was an overriding factor to protect witnesses and the complainants who had come forward. The Committee noted that their final decision would be made public and that this should contain sufficient information to enable the public to understand the nature of the complaint and their decision.

Request for adjournment

20. The Committee received details of Cllr Ahmed's request for an adjournment. The following matters were considered:
- a. Presence of the Monitoring Officer – the Committee noted that the role of the Monitoring Officer was to provide advice and that the Committee had no power to consider or determine whether it was appropriate for the Monitoring Officer to refer the matter to the Committee for determination. The role of legal advisor could be fulfilled by the lawyer deputising for the Monitoring Officer in his absence.
 - b. Complainants and other witnesses not being present to be questioned – the Committee noted that the investigator had indicated he was not

intending to call any witnesses as details of their evidence was contained in his report and had been shared with Cllr Ahmed. Cllr Ahmed had been asked on more than one occasion to confirm whether he intended to call witnesses and had not given such an indication until the day before the meeting.

- c. Other individuals unable to attend due to Ramadan – the Committee noted that no details of witnesses had been provided by Cllr Ahmed when he was asked via email of 10 February 2025 and no further information had been provided in relation to individuals who were unable to attend.
- d. Cllr Ahmed unable to attend due to Ramadan – the Committee was sympathetic to requests to take into account religious observance, however they noted that there was no custom and practice in the Council for formal meetings to be cancelled during Ramadan. Cllr Ahmed had not indicated any other adjustments that could be considered to allow the meeting to continue such as a later start time or regular breaks. There was already a significant delay between the incident in October 2023 and the meeting and it was felt that further delay was not in the interests of justice. The Committee noted that the meeting was not a court hearing, there was ample information before the Committee to allow it to conduct a fair process and reach a decision.
- e. Concern as to the legal advisor and HB Public Law being involved – Cllr Ahmed raised a concern about the legal advisor. The Committee were satisfied that they had access to legal advice from a competent advisor and they also had access to the views of the Independent Person and the investigator.

21. Having considered the views of the Independent Person, the Committee determined that the meeting should proceed.

Concerns about role of previous Monitoring Officer and relationship to investigator

22. Cllr Ahmed had raised concerns about the impartiality of the investigator and that he had a previous relationship with the previous Monitoring Officer which could have impacted on his impartiality.

23. The investigator addressed the Committee confirming that he had never met or spoken to Mr Taylor prior to a call from him enquiring about whether he could undertake an investigation. He confirmed that Mr Taylor had no influence whatsoever on his approach or findings and he only met him once on the day of the interview with Cllr Ahmed, solely for the purpose of putting a face to a name.

Standards Committee findings

24. The Committee found that Cllr Ahmed was acting as a councillor at the time. He was wearing his councillor badge and did not appear to be present as a resident or business owner. The way he interacted with other councillors and

officers also gave the impression he saw his role as one of councillor at the meeting.

Paragraph 1 – Councillors must treat other councillors, members of the public and local authority employees with respect and must respect the role they play

25. The Committee found that Cllr Ahmed showed a clear lack of respect based on the accounts of many witnesses to both officers and Cllr Bedi. Cllr Ahmed spoke to officers in a way that would be a serious breach in an office environment, leading to serious discipline or even dismissal. Cllr Ahmed showed no respect for others. Elected members serve the public and should be working together and in unity, members can disagree and put a point across, but it must be in a respectful way.

Paragraph 2 – Councillors must not bully or harass any person

26. The Committee found that Cllr Bedi must have felt a horrendous amount of fear for her safety by Cllr Ahmed's conduct and that this constituted harassment. It was clear the meeting was not going to plan and there were some very angry residents. As a strong woman, Cllr Bedi was described by Cllr Ahmed as "very sensitive" and this is an example of misogyny. Cllr Ahmed should be ashamed of this. The Committee found that it was an aggravating feature that his behaviour was particularly targeted at a female councillor.

Paragraph 3 – Councillors must not compromise or attempt to compromise the impartiality of anyone who works for, or on behalf of, the local authority

27. The Committee noted that highway officers were present at the meeting. Cllr Ahmed's words to the effect of "we are members of this community and we will not be bullied" and "I was voted for by you – we will not be intimidated" were very concerning. There is significant evidence of intimidatory behaviour towards council officers. Officers are not elected representatives who have signed up to the cut and thrust of politics. The Committee found that officers were subjected to intimidatory behaviour which was an attempt to compromise their impartiality.

Paragraph 5 – Councillors must not bring their role or the local authority into disrepute

28. The Committee found that the behaviour of Cllr Ahmed was a long way from the expectations of high standards for elected representatives. The behaviour was at a public meeting with residents present and would have had the effect of bringing the role of councillor into disrepute. An aggravating feature was the fact Cllr Ahmed was a member of the Standards Committee at the time.

Sanctions imposed or recommended

29. Censure in the form of Appendix 1, to be announced at the next meeting of Full Council and published on the Council's website. This censure should not be debated at the meeting, but Cllr Bedi should be given the right to address the Council.
30. The censure should particularly note that Cllr Ahmed has chosen not to apologise or recognise his poor conduct.
31. Recommendation that Cllr Ahmed attends training in relation to working with female officers and councillors.

Notification of Decision

32. This Decision Notice is sent to:

- The complainants
- Cllr Bedi
- Cllr Ahmed

What happens next

33. This matter will be reported to the Council's Standards Committee and the Censure will be published on the Council's website and announced at the next Full Council meeting.
34. There is a strong public interest in the disclosure of this matter now the formal processes have been completed, because transparency is essential to the maintenance of proper standards in public life.

Appeal

35. There is no right of appeal against this Decision. The Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman has a narrow remit in relation to code of conduct complaints, limited to considering if there was fault in the way the Council considered the complaint.

Issued:

13 March 2025

Sarah Wilson
Assistant Director Legal and Governance
HB Public Law

Acting as deputy monitoring officer
Slough Borough Council

Appendix 1 – Censure

Councillor Ahmed, the Ward Member for Wexham Court, has been censured by the Council's Standards Committee for breaches of the Councillor Code of Conduct. The complaints against Councillor Ahmed related to a public meeting in October 2023 and were heard by the Standards Committee on 11 March 2025.

Councillor Ahmed was invited to attend the hearing but choose not to exercise that right. The Committee found that all four of the breaches of the Code were proven:

Paragraph 1 – Councillors must treat other councillors, members of the public and local authority employees with respect and must respect the role they play

Cllr Ahmed showed a clear lack of respect based on the accounts of many witnesses to both officers and Cllr Bedi. Cllr Ahmed spoke to officers in a way that would be a serious breach in an office environment, leading to serious discipline or even dismissal. Cllr Ahmed showed no respect for others. Elected members serve the public and should be working together and in unity, members can disagree and put a point across, but it must be in a respectful way.

Paragraph 2 – Councillors must not bully or harass any person

Cllr Bedi must have felt a horrendous amount of fear for her safety by Cllr Ahmed's conduct and this constituted harassment. It was clear the meeting was not going to plan and there were some very angry residents. As a strong woman, Cllr Bedi was described by Cllr Ahmed as "very sensitive" and this is an example of misogyny. Cllr Ahmed should be ashamed of this. The Committee found that it was an aggravating feature that his behaviour was particularly targeted at a female councillor.

Paragraph 3 – Councillors must not compromise or attempt to compromise the impartiality of anyone who works for, or on behalf of, the local authority

Highway officers were present at the meeting. Cllr Ahmed's words to the effect of "we are members of this community and we will not be bullied" and "I was voted for by you – we will not be intimidated" were very concerning. There is significant evidence of intimidatory behaviour towards council officers. Officers are not elected representatives who have signed up to the cut and thrust of politics. Officers were subjected to intimidatory behaviour which was an attempt to compromise their impartiality.

Paragraph 5 – Councillors must not bring their role or the local authority into disrepute

The behaviour of Cllr Ahmed was a long way from the expectations of high standards for elected representatives. An aggravating feature was the fact Cllr Ahmed was a member of the Standards Committee at the time.

It is of note that Cllr Ahmed has chosen not to apologise or recognise his poor conduct. The Committee recommended that he attend training on how to improve his working relationships with female officers and councillors.

Cllr Bedi was subjected to particularly poor treatment and should have an opportunity to address Full Council on this matter if she chooses to.

Cllr Tomar, Chair of the Standards Committee, stated:

"The findings of the Standards Committee regarding Councillor Ahmed's conduct are deeply concerning. As elected representatives, we are entrusted with upholding the highest standards of behaviour, treating colleagues, officers, and residents with respect. The Committee's decision highlights significant breaches of the Councillor Code of Conduct, including bullying, intimidation, and bringing the Council into disrepute.

Public meetings can be challenging, particularly when contentious issues such as Controlled Parking Zone restrictions are discussed. However, councillors must navigate these discussions with professionalism and decorum. The report makes it clear that Cllr Ahmed's actions, including aggressive behaviour and public accusations against officers, crossed the line of acceptable conduct. His refusal to engage meaningfully with the investigation or acknowledge any wrongdoing has only exacerbated the situation.

It is particularly concerning that the Committee found evidence of intimidation directed toward a fellow councillor, especially in a manner perceived as misogynistic. Such behaviour has no place in local government, where collaboration and mutual respect are essential. The Committee's sanctions, including public censure and mandatory training, are appropriate and necessary steps to reinforce the standards expected of all councillors. Moving forward, all members must reflect on this case and reaffirm their commitment to respectful and constructive public service."

13 March 2025