

Dorset Council – Complaint No. 023/20

Investigation in respect of an alleged breach of the Shaftesbury Town Council Code of Conduct adopted on 18 June 2019

Investigation undertaken by Jacqui Andrews, Service Manager, Democratic and Electoral Services, Dorset Council

Background

Section 27 of the Localism Act 2011 requires relevant authorities to promote and maintain high standards of conduct by members of the authority and, under section 28, to have mechanisms in place to investigate allegations that a member has not complied with the Code of Conduct.

On 3 June 2020, complaint number 023.20 was considered by an assessment meeting. The complaint has also been considered by Dorset Council's Independent Person. It was agreed that on the information provided they were satisfied that the complaint should be investigated further.

Introduction

In order to be able to carry out a thorough investigation of the complaint raised, I took the opportunity to view, in detail, the following:

- Shaftesbury Town Council's Code of Conduct adopted on 18 June 2019
- A video recording of Shaftesbury Town Council's Full Council meeting dated 2 June 2020

To supplement the information provided to me and available in the public domain on the Shaftesbury Town Council website, I also met virtually with the following people in order to seek their comments on a number of issues:

- Mr James Thrift – 11 June 2020
- Cllr Peter Yeo – 9 July 2020

A record of our discussions is attached at Appendices A and B – Mr Thrift has agreed the statement attached as a true reflection of our discussion.

Councillor Yeo was given the opportunity to agree the notes at Appendix B as an accurate record of what was said during the interview but has, instead, chosen to rewrite the interview record. Councillor Yeo's extensive changes are shown in red on the second version attached at Appendix C. During the interviews I was accompanied by a note taker and I am satisfied that the original version of the interview with Councillor Yeo was an accurate record of what was actually said. The

changes made by Councillor Yeo are additional points or expanded points which he has made in hindsight.

It is not my intention to set out everything said in the interview, a record of which can be found in the appendices, but I refer to any issues within the main body of the report that I believe are pertinent to this investigation.

Complaint 023/20

A complaint was received from Mr James Thrift alleging unacceptable behaviour by Councillor Yeo at the meeting of Full Council on 2 June 2020.

The nature of the complaint was as follows:

“Shaftesbury Town Council held an Extraordinary Full Council meeting via Zoom last night, Tuesday 2nd June 2020 at 19.00. The meeting was to debate a motion of no confidence in one of the councillors, and as such was conducted with approximately 45 people present online, including over 30 members of the public. Under the circumstances of such a motion one could expect, and to a large part accept, that feelings might get a little heated. However all councillors would have been aware of the Code of Conduct that they all have agreed to abide by as it was only adopted on the 18th June 2019, and states quite clearly in 2.2.g "behave in a way which could reasonably be regarded as bringing their office or the Council into disrepute."

<https://www.shaftesbury-tc.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/Code-of-Conduct-Members-Adopted-18th-June-2019.pdf>

Unfortunately Cllr Yeo chose to ignore these standards, and while muted as another Councillor spoke could be clearly seen mouthing the word "wanker" while making the equivalent hand gesture in front of the camera. Despite an immediate request by the chair of the meeting he made no attempt to retract or apologise for his actions. The online proceedings are recorded as a matter of course, with recording of meetings made available for the public to view via the Town Council website. Not only does this action display Councillor Yeo in a very poor light, but has far reaching ramifications not only for the Town Council, but the very image of Shaftesbury itself."

At an assessment meeting on 3 June 2020, it was agreed that the complaint warranted investigation.

Undisputed facts

The undisputed facts relating to the meeting on 2 June 2020 are that:

At 32 minutes and 46 seconds, Councillor Yeo pointed at the screen, mouthed the word "wanker" and made the equivalent hand gesture. The Chairman sought an apology and asked that Councillor Yeo's video and audio capability was removed when he failed to do so.

Facts/statements not directly agreed

On the following occasions, Councillor Peter Yeo mouthed the word “bullshit”:

- 4 minutes 8 seconds
- 20 minutes 23 seconds
- 24 minutes 23 seconds (not as clear as on the other occasions)
- 29 minutes 59 seconds
- 30 minutes 59 seconds
- 48 minutes 51 seconds

During our interview, I did not specify the time points at which I viewed Councillor Yeo mouthing the word “bullshit” but I advised that I had witnessed this on a number of occasions. Councillor Yeo did not deny this and actually commented that at one point he audibly used the word “bullshit” (at 11 minutes 40 seconds), and when I asked if he thought this language was appropriate his response was that he “absolutely” felt it was appropriate when, in his view, a Councillor was lying to the public – he felt that something needed to be said.

I noted that when the word “bullshit” was clearly audible, the Chairman asked Councillor Yeo to retract the word but Councillor Yeo refused to do so.

Findings

Councillor Yeo’s statement covered a lot of issues that are not related to this complaint but, perhaps, demonstrate a long-standing frustration that he has held in respect of his perception of the governance of Shaftesbury Town Council.

Whilst the complaint was about one word and one gesture made by Councillor Yeo, on viewing the recording of the meeting of Full Council on 2 June 2020, Councillor Yeo can be seen to mouth “bullshit” on at least 6 occasions (detailed above), and on a further occasion this was clearly audible (again, detailed above). I considered it appropriate when investigating this complaint to take these further incidents into consideration as it would seem that the incident complained about by Mr Thrift did not appear to be a single momentary lapse of control with offensive language being used.

The Shaftesbury Town Council’s Members’ Code of Conduct was adopted on 18 June 2019. The paragraphs that are relevant to this complaint are:

2. General Obligations

2.1 A Councillor must:

- (a) comply with this Code of Conduct and any other of the Council’s policies, protocols and other procedures relating to the conduct of councillors;
- (b) treat others with respect;

2.2 A Councillor must not –

- (g) behave in a way which could reasonably be regarded as bringing their office or the Council in to disrepute.

I have taken the opportunity to watch the video of the meeting on 2 June 2020 on a number of occasions in order that I could both observe and hear what was being said. The nature of the business being discussed at the meeting on 2 June 2020 (a vote of no confidence in Councillor Tippins) meant from the outset that there was likely to be tension, and I believe this was clear viewing the body language of some of the members visible on the recording of the meeting.

At approximately 29 minutes, Councillor Yeo sought to raise a point of order, as set out in his statement. In my view, the Chairman did not give Councillor Yeo a fair opportunity to indicate on which part of the Standing Orders he was trying to raise his point of order and at one point both the Chairman and Councillor Yeo were talking over one another. Whilst Councillor Yeo is of the view that he didn't need to be able to quote the standing order reference, he did need to explain which standing order he was referring to and, in my opinion, wasn't given an adequate opportunity to do so. However, having said this, whilst I can understand that Councillor Yeo undoubtedly felt frustrated by being unable to raise his point of order as the Chairman had requested that his microphone be muted, this in no way excuses Councillor Yeo's choice of language or gestures that were demonstrated on a number of occasions through the meeting. It was clear that Councillor Yeo's intention, in some cases, was for a viewer to be able to understand exactly what he was saying as the formation of the words was exaggerated and aimed directly at the camera. On other occasions the words were mouthed less directly at the camera. However, Councillor Yeo was aware that the meeting was being live broadcast. During the interview, Councillor Yeo did not deny his actions and felt they were "necessary" and "appropriate". The statement attached at Appendix B sets out his reasoning for this response.

Debate and having different views are all part of healthy democracy – Councillors can be expected to express, challenge, criticise, and disagree with views, ideas and opinions. However, it is important that this is done in a civil manner. Rude and offensive behaviour lowers the public expectations and confidence in elected members and, in the case of the use of the word "wanker" with the associated hand gesture, no-one should be expected to accept an unreasonable or excessive personal attack. The repeated mouthing of the word "bullshit" was also unacceptable in a public meeting. The actions of any Councillor could have an adverse impact on other Councillors, or on the Council as a whole.

Conclusion

In response to both this complaint and complaint number 013/020, Councillor Yeo has raised a number of concerns and frustrations about the operation and governance of Shaftesbury Town Council. It is not within my remit of investigating this complaint to comment on these issues.

On concluding my investigation, I am of the view that Councillor Yeo is in breach of the Code of Code as follows:

2. General Obligations

2.1 (a) - Councillor Yeo failed to comply with the Code of Conduct

Conclusion: in my opinion, Councillor Yeo was in breach of the Code of Conduct for the reasons set out below.

(b) treat others with respect;

Conclusion: in my opinion, Councillor Yeo failed to treat fellow Councillors with respect and is therefore in breach of paragraph 2.1(b) of the Members' Code of Conduct. Whilst it was clear that Councillor Yeo was frustrated at having been muted during the meeting, this does not remove his responsibility to abide by the Code of Conduct. The language and gestures used and mouthed by Councillor Yeo during the live-broadcast meeting were childish, unprofessional, offensive and wholly disrespectful both to fellow Councillors, staff and members of the public viewing the meeting.

2.2 (g) - Councillor Yeo behaved in such a way which could reasonably be regarded as bringing his office or the Council in to disrepute.

Conclusion: the Full Council meeting on 2 June 2020 was a meeting in public that was live-streamed to the internet, and a recording of the meeting was subsequently uploaded to the Shaftesbury Town Council website. Regardless of Councillor Yeo's personal use of the type of language used in the meeting, I believe it would be generally accepted that the word "wanker" and "bullshit" are offensive and rude and, as such, the actions of Councillor Yeo were clearly likely to have an adverse impact on other Councillors and the Council as a whole. The use of offensive language is not acceptable, whatever the circumstances, and is likely to lower the public's expectations of professionalism and confidence in its elected members. I therefore conclude that Councillor Yeo has brought the office of Councillor and the Council in to disrepute, breaching paragraph 2.2 (g) of the Members' Code of Conduct.

Jacqui Andrews
Service Manager, Democratic and Electoral Services
10 July 2020

Meeting with complainant, Mr James Thrift

Date: 11 June 2020 – 3.30 pm

I explained to Mr Thrift that the purpose of the meeting was to gather information so that I could understand that facts as he saw them to enable me to formulate my report and provide conclusions for consideration by the assessment meeting. Whilst Mr Thrift's submission was very clear, I wanted to provide an opportunity for him to explain how he felt about the incident that gave rise to his complaint.

Mr Thrift explained that he was not normally someone who would submit a complaint, but he felt compelled to do so following the Shaftesbury Town Council Full Council meeting on 2 June 2020.

Mr Thrift said that he was a member of the Town Council in "less pleasant" days when there was a lot of infighting and unpleasantness and, regrettably, the Town Council gained a reputation for that and the conduct of members was regularly reported in the local paper, the Western Gazette. Mr Thrift said he worked extremely hard with others in the community to change Shaftesbury's fortunes and events such as the Food Festival and Fringe were established so that Shaftesbury's reputation changed and the town was seen as a pleasant place to visit. Mr Thrift explained that this was a lot of work but was achieved by everyone, including community groups, working together.

Mr Thrift said that the Town Council started working well with less of the unpleasantness and arguing.

However, Mr Thrift spoke about attending Town Council meetings at the start of the year, and he was disappointed to observe that they were operating as had previously been the case in what he referred to as "the bad old days". After one of the meetings, Mr Thrift contacted Councillor Yeo, with whom he had been working planning VE celebrations, and expressed his concerns saying that he felt the Town Council were heading backwards with behaviours that Mr Thrift felt were a thing of the past. Mr Thrift said that Councillor Yeo's response had been that it was everyone else's fault and that Councillor Yeo quoted the Nolan principles saying that these weren't being observed.

Mr Thrift referred to the Full Council meeting on 24 April 2020 that was watched by people across the Shaftesbury Community and reported in both the Independent and the Daily Mail, and expressed disappointment at conduct generally in this meeting. Mr Thrift then joined the 2 June meeting as an observer and, after witnessing Councillor Yeo's conduct, particularly the mouthing of the word "w*nker" with the associated hand gesture, he felt that "enough is enough" and decided that he wanted to submit a formal complaint.

Mr Thrift also referred to Councillor Yeo's use of the word "bullsh*t". He said that it was clear that the meeting could potentially be volatile due to the nature of the motion being discussed, and if the word was used in the heat of the moment it would be easier to let it pass. However, Mr Thrift was very concerned that after Councillor Yeo had been muted for the use of the word "bullsh*t", his conduct did not improve.

Mr Thrift was of the view that Councillor Yeo intended for his use of offensive language to be understood as the comments were made directly to the camera.

Mr Thrift felt that often complaints about people's conduct could be subjective, but he felt that the poor conduct in this case was black and white. He said that Councillor Yeo was always hauling up everyone else for their perceived failures to meet procedures but then ignored them himself.

Mr Thrift was very concerned that the Town Council would return to a historical position of having a very poor reputation, and he found it difficult to understand why the Councillors could not have vigorous debate and disagreements in a professional manner.

Jacqui Andrews
Service Manager, Democratic and Electoral Services

11 June 2020

Statement approved by Mr Thrift via email at 18:16 on 11 June 2020

Meeting with Councillor Peter Yeo

8 July 2020

I explained to Councillor Yeo that the purpose of the meeting was to enable me to understand that facts as he saw them, and to explore the issues raised to enable me to formulate my report any conclusions for consideration by the assessment meeting.

Complaint 023/20

The second complaint related to the Full Council meeting on 2 June 2020 that was live-streamed to the Shaftesbury Town Council website.

Before inviting Councillor Yeo to comment on the allegation set out in the complaint, I asked him if he was willing to agree as an undisputed fact that he did point at the screen and mouth the word “wanker” and make the equivalent hand gesture (32 minutes and 46 seconds)? Councillor Yeo confirmed that he did but felt he had a very good reason to do so. He said that there was a breakdown of governance in the meeting and he felt that the Chairman failed to do what he was supposed to do. Councillor Yeo felt that the Chairman had no right to mute him or switch off his camera, and Councillor Yeo felt that he had no other option but to use sign language.

Councillor Yeo referred to the English dictionary definition of the word “wanker” that gives the description of a “very stupid” man, and he responded in this way as he felt that Councillor Cook, chairing the meeting, had failed in his duty, and had acted ultra vires and illegally by muting a Councillor who was speaking in a public meeting. Councillor Yeo felt that Councillor Cook should be investigated for failing in his duty to conduct the meeting in a proper manner and in accordance with the Localism Act.

I asked Councillor Yeo how he thought the public would have perceived the use of that language ie “wanker”. Councillor Yeo asked if I had seen all the Zoom meetings that had taken place since the Covid-19 lockdown. I confirm that I hadn’t and I was only interested in the meetings that were the subject of the code of conduct complaints.

Councillor Yeo suggested that there was only one member of the public viewing the meeting, Mr James Thrift, who he said was a friend of numerous Town Councillors. Councillor Yeo said that Shaftesbury had a group of councillors who he felt wanted to run as a Kabul – and he felt that this was what was going on in Shaftesbury Town Council, with full control of the Council’s decision making being given to eight councillors in this “Kabul”. Councillor Yeo suggested that Mr Thrift, the complainant, was a close friend of theirs, and Councillor Yeo suggested that these Councillors either themselves, or asking members of the community, submitted Code of Conduct complaints because they didn’t want himself or Councillor Tippins on the council.

Councillor Yeo explained that he was trying to raise a point of order and felt that Councillor Cook, chairing the meeting as Mayor of Shaftesbury, should have been

able to run the meeting correctly, but had asked Councillor Yeo to give the number of the Standing Order against which he wished to raise the point of order. Councillor Yeo said that Standing Orders do not require a member of the Council to quote the reference number, but can state in words why they wished to raise a point of order.

Councillor Yeo advised that Councillor Tippins had involved her solicitor when the Full Council was arranged with a tabled Vote of No Confidence. Councillor Yeo felt the vote was part of a harassment and bullying campaign against Councillor Tippins because she was a good councillor.

Councillor Yeo stated that, in his view, if Dorset Council was doing its job, someone would be sent to observe meetings of the Town Council, and that the Town Council should be taken into special measures. Councillor Yeo highlighted a number of issues that were of concern to him including the accounts not being signed off, and the Neighbourhood Plan not being referred to Full Council but being signed off by an un-elected group.

Councillor Yeo reiterated that he felt that Councillor Cook had no right to mute him. Councillor Yeo alleged that Councillor Hollingshead was lying to the public, and making statements about Councillor Tippins that were not proven or upheld. Councillor Yeo felt he had every right to interrupt him, and that he did not have to quote a reference number to the Chairman to raise a point of order. Councillor Yeo said that he felt he had no other option to signal to the public when the Chairman had muted him, and said that if the Chairman had not prevented him using his democratic right to speak, he would not have had to resort to sign language.

I advised Councillor Yeo that I had viewed the recording of the meeting on 2 June 2020 and noted that he had also mouthed the word "bullshit" on a number of occasions. Councillor Yeo confirmed that he actually said the word "bullshit" audibly when the Mayor of Shaftesbury, in his opinion, lied to the public at the start of the meeting. Councillor Yeo felt that what had happened was unbelievable, and that the BBC were very interested in the Town Council's activities.

Councillor Yeo spoke about an incident on 10 February when he and Councillor Tippins went to an HR meeting at the Town Hall that was held at 8am so there was no public present. Councillor Yeo said that the door to the offices was locked and the meeting was held in the Mayor's office, rather than in the Council Chamber. Councillor Yeo said that he asked Councillor Hollingshead, who chaired the HR Committee, why the front door was locked, and he replied that people could 'press the buzzer' if they wanted to come in. Councillor Yeo said that he asked 'Why is this meeting not in the council chamber?', and was told 'No good reason'.

Councillor Yeo said that he and Councillor Tippins were advised that they were attending the meeting as members of the public, as they were not on that Committee, and when the meeting went in to confidential session, they were asked to leave as they were there as "members of the public". Councillor Yeo said that when he and Councillor Tippins refused to leave as they were elected Councillors and felt they were entitled to remain, the Chairman called 999 and, Councillor Yeo said that the Chairman lied to the police, supported by the Town Clerk, and reported that they were creating a breach of the peace.

I referred back to my earlier comment that I had viewed Councillor Yeo mouthing “bullshit” on a number of occasions throughout the meeting and reminded Councillor Yeo that when he became a Councillor we was bound to abide by the Code of Conduct, part of which is not to bring the office of councillor or the council into disrepute. I asked Councillor Yeo if he felt the word “bullshit” was likely to bring the council in to disrepute bearing in mind it was said/mouthed in a public meeting or if he felt that this language was appropriate.

Councillor Yeo responded that he “absolutely” felt it was appropriate when in his view a Councillor was lying to the public – he felt that something needed to be said. Councillor Yeo felt it was illegal for the Mayor of Shaftesbury to lie to the public, and that something needed to be said, and if, as he felt, the Mayor was allowing Cllr Hollingshead to lie to the public when Councillor Tippins had actually done nothing. He said that when, as he felt, they were conspiring against Councillor Tippins and saying she had done something wrong when she had not then, “yes”, that language was appropriate. Councillor Yeo said that he had no other way of signalling because the Chairman had muted him because he couldn’t quote the number of a standing order when there was no need to do so, and Councillor Yeo felt that the public needed to know what’s going on.

To finish, I asked Councillor Yeo if there was anything else he wished to add in respect of the Code of Conduct complaints. He responded that he felt the complaints were all part of a contrived plan by the “Kabul of Shaftesbury” that Councillor Yeo felt were conspiring against himself and Councillor Tippins. He felt it was perverse Councillor Hollingshead reporting him for being in a meeting I was supposed to be in.

Councillor Yeo felt that Matt Prosser should be getting a group of people down to Shaftesbury Town Council to scrutinise everything, and put it into special measures and that the Town Council should be closed down.

Councillor Yeo asked for a recording of the meeting but I advised that no recording was being made. However, Judy Saunders had been taking notes and that I would type these up into a statement that Councillor Yeo would be asked to agree as a true record of our discussions.

To close, Councillor Yeo said that when the Shaftesbury councillors suddenly decided to do the Vote of No Confidence in Councillor Tippins it was just after her mother had passed away. He suggested that this was a “kangaroo court” and that members of the Town Council were in an email group that included members of the public, the Chamber of Commerce and the Civic Society in the circulation list and it became evident to this wider group that a “vote of no confidence motion” was being tabled. Councillor Yeo made reference to a local Shaftesbury resident, Kerry Jones, who sits as an unelected participant on 3 of the Town Council Committees and also manages a local media group. Councillor Yeo felt that all these people were working together to arrange a method of undermining Councillor Tippins, organising a “hate” petition. Councillor Yeo suggested that Mr Thrift would have been complicit in this, and suggested that he was part of the “faction” conspiring against himself and Councillor Tippins. Councillor Yeo said that Mr Thrift was part of the orchestrated plan to “rubbish” himself and Councillor Tippins and that he had evidence (Councillor Yeo specifically asked for this to be noted in his statement).

Councillor Yeo said that when he did hand gestures and swear words, this was in response to Councillor Cook lying to the public and Councillor Yeo said that he could provide evidence that Councillor Cook was lying. Councillor Yeo said that he would have to start submitting his own Code of Conduct complaints to get these issues investigated.

Councillor Yeo said that when he was signalling to the camera, it was aimed at both Mayor Cook for muting him and not letting him speak when he should have done, and also at Councillor Hollingshead who he said was lying and acting improperly. Councillor Yeo said that Councillor Hollingshead claims there was evidence that Councillor Tippins had done a whole series of things, including bullying the Town Clerk and members of staff and bringing the council into disrepute. Councillor Yeo said that this was all lies, and that Councillors had been harassing and putting pressure on Councillor Tippins, hoping that she'd resign. In Councillor Yeo's opinion, Councillor Tippins was the best councillor on the council.

Jacqui Andrews
9 July 2020

Statement not agreed by Councillor Yeo who submitted an amended statement (amendments shown in red) which is attached at Appendix C.

Meeting with Councillor Peter Yeo

8 July 2020

I explained to Councillor Yeo that the purpose of the meeting was to enable me to understand that facts as he saw them, and to explore the issues raised to enable me to formulate my report **and form** any conclusions for consideration by the assessment meeting.

Complaint 023/20

The second complaint related to the Shaftesbury Town Council (STC) Full Council meeting on 2 June 2020.

Cllr Yeo stated that this was an Extra Full Council Zoom meeting on the subject of a 'Vote of No Confidence in Cllr Karen Tippins' that was rapidly arranged by the Town Clerk, Mrs Commons, and nine councillors to cause maximum upset and distress to Councillor Karen Tippins in the weeks follow her mother's death (she having informed the Town Clerk of this bereavement) in order to try and make Cllr Tippins resign. He stated that was a repeat of a tactic used by STC against Cllr Tippins when she had previously been on the council in 2015, but had resigned two months later to look after her ill mother, not as a result of the previous malicious 'Vote of No Confidence' against her and that Shaftesbury Town Council still has six of the previous councillors and the same Town Clerk.

Cllr Yeo highlighted that there was no legal reason that justified holding this meeting and there was no legal outcome that it could have generated as Cllr Tippins was elected by 968 citizens who have total confidence in Cllr Tippins, and not by nine councillors who who want her bullied off the council because she and himself want the council to become run in a proper manner. The link to view this Zoom meeting later was put on the Shaftesbury Town Council website by the Town Clerk, Mrs Commons.

Cllr Yeo stated that STC had been assisted in their mission of undermining and harassing Cllr Tippins by the Shaftesbury 'press' [REDACTED] a Shaftesbury resident who runs the '[REDACTED]' news website and Facebook page and somehow sits on all three of STC's unelected 'Advisory Groups' and had spread his totally biased reports, telling only one side of the story of this meeting, on local Facebook Groups and investigation shows that he had also sent his totally biased reports of this meeting on to national newspapers.

Before inviting Councillor Yeo to comment on the allegation set out in the complaint, I asked him if he was willing to agree as an undisputed fact that he did point at the screen and mouth the word "wanker" and make the equivalent hand gesture (32 minutes and 46 seconds)? Councillor Yeo confirmed that he did **do this, however he said that he had very, very** good reasons to do so.

Cllr Yeo stated that the meeting was chaired by Cllr Cook (Mayor of Shaftesbury) in an unlawful manner.

Cllr Yeo stated that Cllr Cook had unlawfully prevented Cllr Yeo from speaking when Cllr Yeo had correctly raised 'points of order' exactly in accordance with STC Standing Orders which specifies that the 'Point of Order' can be explained in words and there is absolutely no need to quote a Standing Order Reference Number.

Cllr Yeo stated that Cllr Cook had repeatedly prevented him from speaking by falsely stating that Cllr Yeo had to state the Standing Order Reference Number that was being broken *before* he could speak.

Cllr Yeo explained that this is absolutely untrue and incorrect because STC Standing order 1P states that "A Councillor raising a point of order shall identify the standing order which he considers has been breached or specify the other irregularity in the proceedings of the meeting he is concerned by".

Cllr Yeo stated that he attempted to raise points of order exactly because of the 'irregularities in the proceedings' of the meeting when Cllr Hollingshead was stating a long list of fabricated 'evidence' against Cllr Tippins which falsely stated that she had bullied Shaftesbury Town Council officers (when she had not been found guilty of any such offence), that she had brought the council in to disrepute and that she had been problematic and had affected the smooth running of the town council since being re-elected in the Dec 2019 by-election.

Cllr Yeo stated that all of these remarks were untrue, fabricated and unsubstantiated and was therefore defamatory and slanderous and bringing the council in to disrepute in this public Full Council meeting and that he therefore had a moral duty to alert the public to this shocking misleading and bullying which was being perpetrated against Cllr Tippins by a majority of Shaftesbury Town Councillors with the full support of The Town Clerk.

Cllr Yeo stated that Mrs Commons had facilitating this bullying and harassment of Cllr Tippins by allowing the unlawful meeting to occur and by her failing to highlight that it was improper, unlawful and ultra vires either before or when the meeting was in progress.

Cllr Yeo stated that as Chairman of the meeting, Cllr Cook should have immediately reprimanded Cllr Hollingshead for his unlawful defaming a fellow councillor in a public meeting and should have stopped him from stating as fact the numerous slanderous falsehoods against Cllr Tippins, but he did not.

Cllr Yeo stated that it seemed that it was Cllr Cook's objective to stop him from speaking because it was Cllr Cook who had sent a very unpleasant threatening letter on 30 April 2020 to Cllr Tippins which was signed by nine Councillors - Cllr Cook, Cllr Hollingshead, Cllr Welch, Cllr Brown, Cllr Chase, Cllr Hall, Cllrs Proctor, Cllr Lewer, Cllr Loader (Cllr Prichard had resigned) which stated that if Cllr Tippins did not resign as a Town Councillor by 2pm on Weds 6th May 2020 that she would face a public Extra Full Council Zoom meeting on a "Vote of No Confidence in Cllr Karen Tippins".

Cllr Yeo said Cllr Cook had supplied an appendix of 'evidence' to support the motion, none of which was substantiated, because none of it was true.

Cllr Yeo stated that despite this appallingly threatening letter, Cllr Tippins did not resign, but did engage a solicitor who informed STC by legal letter that this meeting

was unlawful and against her human rights. Shaftesbury Town Council ignored this legal letter and held the 'Kangaroo Court' Extra Full Council public Zoom meeting on Tuesday 2nd June 2020.

Councillor Yeo felt the vote of no confidence meeting was part of a harassment and bullying campaign against Councillor Tippins because she was an excellent councillor, but that they did not want her on the council because she was not prepared to be bullied or told how to vote.

Cllr Yeo stated that the Zoom meeting recording shows that Cllr Cook, instead of stopping Cllr Hollingshead from continuing his listing of false 'evidence' against Cllr Tippins, unlawfully muted Cllr Yeo from being the only person present to speak the truth in Cllr Tippins's defence.

Cllr Yeo said Cllr Tippins had read a statement at the start of the meeting and then excused herself from the meeting because of its unlawfulness and its impropriety.

Cllr Yeo stated that Cllr Cook then immediately let Cllr Hollingshead carry on with his shocking defamation of Cllr Tippins.

Cllr Yeo said he once again raised a Point of Order at this improper and irregularity of Proceeding, but Cllr Cook once again unlawfully prevented him from explain why it was improper and an irregularity in proceeding and then unlawfully instructed the Town Clerk to mute Cllr Yeo Zoom meeting Microphone, which Mrs commons unlawfully did, which allowed Cllr Hollingshead and the other eight members of the 'cabal' that control Shaftesbury Town Council to carry on with their public bullying and harassing 'Kangaroo Court' against Cllr Tippins, unchallenged by myself.

Cllr Yeo said that having been unlawfully muted and his democratic rights as an elected councillor having been contemptuously removed, that he had to resort to mouthing words and using sign language to convey his disgust at his unlawful muting and at the appalling defamatory proceedings that he could see and hear but which he could not verbally intervene in.

Cllr Yeo stated that Cllr Cook then unlawfully ordered that his camera was switched off too by the Town Clerk, Mrs Commons, which she did.

Cllr Yeo stated that this left him with nothing but a Zoom meeting icon with his 'Cllr Peter Yeo' name on, misleadingly showing him as being present in the Zoom meeting, but with no actual ability to say anything or for the citizens who elected him to even see him, and that he was therefore totally barred from participating in the meeting, unable to raise any points of order and was only briefly un-barred so he could vote 'against' the malicious motion of a 'Vote of no confidence in Cllr Tippins'.

Councillor Yeo referred to the Cambridge English Dictionary definition of the word "wanker" that gives the meaning as "a very stupid or unpleasant person, usually a man", and he said he responded in this way as he felt that Councillor Cook (chairing the meeting) had wilfully totally failed in his duty to conduct the meeting in a lawful manner, and had acted ultra vires and illegally by muting a Councillor who had a legal right to speak in a public council meeting and having been unlawfully silenced he had no other way of communicating his disapproval of the unlawful conduct of the meeting.

Cllr Yeo stated that as a result of the improper and unlawful conduct of this meeting and the fact that since this meeting he has also been unlawfully totally 100% ejected from a subsequent Full Council meeting - as a result of the misuse of STC Standing Order 2b – a standing order meant for protestors or other persons disrupting a meeting, and not Councillors - which Cllr Welch proposed and which Cllr Hollingshead seconded on 7th July 2020, that on Weds 22 July 2020, Shaftesbury Town Council received a legal letter from his solicitors informing them of their unlawful actions.

This letter states that the corporate body of STC has acted improperly and unlawfully as their behaviour constitutes a breach of the duties of the Town Council as a public body under Article 11 of the European Convention of Human Rights, which protects the right of Association and Assembly, particularly for elected representatives.

Councillor Yeo stated that Councillor Cook should be investigated for failing in his duty to conduct the meeting in a proper lawful manner and in accordance with the Localism Act 2010 and Article 11 of the European Convention of Human Rights.

I asked Councillor Yeo how he thought the public would have perceived the use of that sign language i.e. “wanker”. Councillor Yeo asked if I had seen all the Zoom meetings that had taken place since the Covid-19 lockdown. I confirmed that I hadn’t and I was only interested in the meetings that were the subject of the code of conduct complaints.

Councillor Yeo pointed out the fact that that there was only one complaint from the 8,500 citizens of Shaftesbury, a Mr James Thrift, who is a friend of Mrs Commons the town clerk and a friend of the faction of Councillors operating as a ‘Cabal’ – Cllr Yeo gave the definition of a ‘cabal’ as being “a secret political clique or faction united to promote their private plots and schemes, unbeknown to those outside of the group”.

Cllr Yeo stated that rather than bringing the Town Council into disrepute he had received much praise from various citizens who had seen the meeting or heard about it and they were pleased that he was doing something to stand against the improper and disreputable way that this meeting was conducted and in which Shaftesbury Town Council has operated for many years.

Cllr Yeo stated that it was the standard operating practice of the cabal of nine councillors and The Town Clerk, Mrs Commons, to either personally submit malicious Code of Conduct Claims against Cllr Yeo and Cllr Tippins purely because they did not want himself or Councillor Tippins to be on the council.

Councillor Yeo stated that, in his view, if Dorset Council was doing its job as the Unitary Council with responsibility for the correct operation and governance of its Parish Councils, someone from Dorset Council’s legal and its monitoring teams would be sent to observe all meetings of Shaftesbury Town Council, and that they would soon find that Shaftesbury Town Council should be taken into ‘Special Measures’ as a failing school would be, or be closed down totally. Councillor Yeo highlighted a number of issues that were of concern to him including the accounts not being signed off for the last two years, and the Neighbourhood Plan not being referred to Full Council for discussion or approval but instead being ‘signed off’ by an

un-elected group of citizens, and particularly the shocking 'bypassing' of the Full Council democratic process by means of the improper use of a 'Scheme of Delegation' that the Town Clerk repeatedly uses to give Full Council business to be resolved by the six favoured councillors who are 'The General Management Committee' with much business never being resolved by The Full Council and minutes of meeting being fabricated.

Councillor Yeo reiterated that he felt that Councillor Cook had no legal right to mute him or switch off his camera and that Councillor Hollingshead had no right to state unsubstantiated defamatory statements about Councillor Tippins to the public that were not proven or upheld.

Councillor Yeo felt he had every right to interrupt him, and that STC Standing Orders proved that he did not have to quote a reference number to the Chairman to raise a point of order. Councillor Yeo said that he felt he had no other option to signal to the public when the Chairman had muted him, and said that if the Chairman had not prevented him using his democratic right to speak, he would not have had to resort to sign language.

I advised Councillor Yeo that I had viewed the recording of the meeting on 2 June 2020 and noted that he had also mouthed the word "bullshit" on a number of occasions. Councillor Yeo confirmed that he actually said the word "bullshit" audibly when the Mayor of Shaftesbury lied to the public at the start of the meeting. Councillor Yeo felt that the actions of the nine councillors and the town clerks in planning, enabling and conducting this meeting against Cllr Tippins was appalling and had brought Shaftesbury and its Town Council in to disrepute, not himself. He added that the BBC were very interested in the Town Council's conduct and activities.

I referred back to my earlier comment that I had viewed Councillor Yeo mouthing "bullshit" on a number of occasions throughout the meeting and reminded Councillor Yeo that when he became a Councillor we was bound to abide by the Code of Conduct, part of which is not to bring the office of councillor or the council into disrepute. I asked Councillor Yeo if he felt the word "bullshit" was likely to bring the council in to disrepute bearing in mind it was said/mouthed in a public meeting or if he felt that this language was appropriate.

Cllr Yeo stated that in his opinion it was Cllr Cook that had grossly brought himself, the meeting and the Council into disrepute from the moment the meeting began by him lying in response to the questions asked by a Citizen, Mr Ede, and that Cllr Yeo was doing his duty to prevent lies being taken as fact by saying that it was "bullshit". He stated that he would have been failing in his duty as an elected councillor who follows the Nolan principles to have allowed this stating of falsehoods to the citizens to have gone unchallenged during the public question session before the meeting started, and that there was no other way to highlight this gross misleading of the public as Councillors were not allowed to speak without the Chairman's permission at this stage of the meeting and Cllr Cook would not let Cllr Yeo speak to explain why Cllr Cook's responses were lies. Councillor Yeo said that he could provide evidence that Councillor Cook was lying in response to Mr Ede's questions at the start of the meeting. Councillor Yeo responded that he "absolutely" felt it was appropriate when a Councillor was lying to the public and he felt that something must be said to alert the public that they were being intentionally misled.

Councillor Yeo reiterated that he felt it was illegal for the Mayor of Shaftesbury to lie to the public, and that something also needed to be said by himself when the Mayor was allowing Cllr Hollingshead to lie to the public about Cllr Tippins when Councillor Tippins had actually done nothing wrong and she had excused herself from the appalling meeting after reading out a statement at the beginning.

Cllr Yeo said that when, as he felt, they were conspiring against Councillor Tippins and saying she had done something wrong when she had not, then, “yes”, that language was appropriate.

Councillor Yeo reiterated that he had no other way of signalling because the Chairman had muted him because he couldn't quote the number of a standing order when there was no need to do so, and Councillor Yeo felt that the public needed to know what's going on.

To finish, I asked Councillor Yeo if there was anything else he wished to add in respect of the Code of Conduct complaints. He responded that the code of conduct complaints against himself and Cllr Tippins were all part of a contrived plan by the “cabal of councillors within Shaftesbury Town Council”, The Town clerk Mrs Commons and a very small number citizens that are their friends, who were all willing to partake in the conspiracy against himself and Councillor Tippins.

Cllr Yeo stated that an undisclosed number of members of this combined ‘faction’ who were appalled by the low levels that the majority of the faction group were stooping to in their campaign, and had leaked him emails to him which show the coordinated efforts that were being made to undermine and harass both Cllr Tippins and himself.

Councillor Yeo said that he had been a civil servant for 5 years and in the Army and RAF for over 20 years and was now a consultant to a Government Department and that he had never before been part of an organisation that was clearly operating in an improper, out of governance, unprofessional, ultra vires and unlawful manner until he had been elected by the citizens of Shaftesbury to be a Town Councillor. He felt that CEO Dorset Council Mr Matt Prosser should be getting a group of Dorset Council personnel down to Shaftesbury Town Council to scrutinise everything.

In conclusion with hindsight, I concede that I should have used a more appropriate word than “Bullshit” and hand gestures. In mitigation I have explained my frustration with the very improper proceedings that precipitated this.

Councillor Yeo asked for a recording of the meeting but I advised that no recording was being made. However, Judy Saunders had been taking notes and that I would type these up into a statement that Councillor Yeo would be asked to agree as a true record of our discussions.

Cllr Peter Yeo

27 July 2020