

Confidential

Dorset Council – Complaint No. COM/00005980

Investigation in respect of an alleged breach of the Code of Conduct for Councillors.

Investigation undertaken by Jacqui Gooding – Assistant Director, SWAP
Internal Audit Services.

2023/2024

Investigation Report

Issue Date: 6th December 2023 – updated 2nd January 2024

Executive Summary

1. 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.

Following an initial review by the Complaints Team and having received the views of Dorset Council's Independent Person, complaint number COM/00005980 was referred for investigation on 5 October 2023.

2. 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:

- The complaint from the Complainants - Councillors Fry, Sutton and Ireland submitted on, 26th July 2023
- The concern that was raised after the complaint was received in relation to the People and Health Scrutiny Committee meeting on 11 September 2023
- The Council Code of Conduct for Dorset Councillors
- Arrangements for dealing with Code of Conduct complaints against Councillors.
- Members and Officers Protocol
- Email 3rd August 2023 to Councillor Pipe from Antony Bygrave – Assurance Complaints Manager
- Emails 18-9-23 and 20-10-23 to Councillor Pipe from M Prosser and J Mair re Duty of Care
- Email 15-9-23 from Councillor Flower to Councillor Pipe and Councillor Suttle – draft of apology.
- The video recording of the Full Council meeting on 13 July 2023 and the People and Health Scrutiny Committee meeting on 11 September 2023.

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

- Interviewee D – 6th October 2023
- Interview - Councillor Nick Ireland – Leader of the Liberal Democrats, Councillor Les Fry – Leader of the Independent Group, Councillor Clare Sutton – Leader of the Green Party – 9th October 2023
- Interviewee G – 24th October 2023
- Interview - Interviewee A - 26th October 2023
- Interviewee E – 1st November 2023
- Interview - Interviewee B - 2nd November 2023

- Interview - Interviewee C - 7th November 2023
- Interviewee F - 10 November 2023
- Interview - Councillor Bill Pipe - 13 November 2023 accompanied by Councillor Louie O’Leary

The names of three individuals interviewed have been withheld for reasons of anonymity. I am satisfied that these individuals remaining anonymous, does not impact on the evidence that they provided, or the investigation itself. Their interview records have been anonymised accordingly. All anonymous individuals have been made aware that, certain disclosures which have been made, may identify them from the events or comments which have taken place.

The record of our discussions is attached at Appendix A and supporting documents and emails at Appendix B.

It is not my intention to set out everything said in the interviews, 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.

3. Complaint

Complaint No. COM/00005980

A complaint was received jointly from Councillor Nick Ireland – Leader of the Liberal Democrats, Councillor Les Fry – Leader of the Independent Group, Councillor Clare Sutton – Leader of the Green Party on 26 July 2023 alleging:

We are concerned about the conduct of Cllr Bill Pipe for several reasons.

In October 2020, Cllr Bill Pipe was removed from the police and Crime panel for inappropriate comments about stop and search made during a meeting.

On the 25th of April 2023 we were made aware of a Cabinet Reshuffle <https://news.dorsetcouncil.gov.uk/2023/04/27/dorset-council-cabinet-reshuffle/only> by way of public press release. Cllr Bill Pipe was appointed as lead member for Education.

A few days after Annual Full Council on the 11th of May 2023 through conversations we heard that Cllr Pipe had resigned. Information then reached us that he had been in a meeting relating to education and had mimicked the [REDACTED] accent of a Senior member of Dorset Council, when asked to apologise by an officer of a higher position he had refused. He had then resigned saying he did not want the role anyway.

An Echo article - <https://www.dorsetecho.co.uk/news/23611259.councillor-steps-top-education-role/> - 26.6.23 reported that Cllr Pipe had resigned less than 3 weeks later. This, just weeks after the resignation, was the first members (or most members) had heard about it.

Other than this press report nothing has been made public and no explanation offered to Group leaders about why a member with a history of inappropriate behaviour was appointed in the first place to Education and why subsequently he resigned. We feel that Cllr Pipe has seriously undermined the good working relationship between members and officers and his ongoing behaviour has brought the Council and position of elected member into disrepute.

There is also a story circulating that Cllr Pipe made an inappropriate comment about a Visible Panty Line during this same meeting.

We do know who the two officers are, but out of interest and respect to them have not approached them.

We appreciate that there is a time lag on this matter, but as the issue has not been formally raised, we have to act with the information that we have.

1. We feel that Cllr Pipe has brought the Council into disrepute and that he should formally be held to account.
2. Information should be provided to Group leaders with an explanation of what action has been taken to redress Cllr Pipe's behaviour

A further matter worthy of investigation is that at Full Council in July, the day after [REDACTED], Cllr Pipe [REDACTED]. Does this matter have a link with his [REDACTED] accent incident, does he have an issue with [REDACTED] people?

Can our complaint, the incident and the outcome or any action taken please be independently investigated and reviewed.

A further concern was raised by Jonathan Mair (Monitoring Officer) on 2 October 2023 since the complaint was received:

- It is alleged that Councillor Bill Pipe said at the start of the People and Health Scrutiny Committee on 11th September 2023 towards Interviewee A, "Good morning, Interviewee A and I hope everyone will see I didn't say that in an [REDACTED] accent."

Following discussion with the Monitoring Officer it was agreed that out of scope of the investigation would be:

- Information should be provided to Group leaders with an explanation of what action has been taken to redress Councillor Pipe's behaviour and Councillor Pipe's removal from the Police and Crime Panel.

4. Undisputed Facts

The undisputed facts relating to the complaint are:

- 4.1 Councillor Pipe did mimic the [REDACTED] accent of a Senior Officer of Dorset Council, at the [REDACTED] Extended Leadership Team meeting on 10th May 2023. The Senior Officer was Interviewee A.

4.2 At the People and Health Scrutiny Committee on 11th September 2023 towards Interviewee A, Councillor Pipe said at the start of the meeting “Good morning, Interviewee A, if you hadn’t noticed that was said in an English accent”. The complaint does refer to an [REDACTED] accent, but Councillor Pipe confirmed at his interview that he used the phrase “Good morning, Interviewee A, if you hadn’t noticed that was said in an English accent.”

4.3 Councillor Pipe was appointed as Lead Member for Education on 1st May 2023 and resigned from the role on 19th May 2023.

4.4 Councillor Pipe did [REDACTED] the Full Council meeting on 13th July 2023.

5. Facts/statements not agreed

The following facts/statements are not agreed.

5.1 Councillor Pipe was asked to apologise after the [REDACTED] Extended Leadership Team meeting.

5.2 Councillor Pipe made an inappropriate comment about a Visible Panty Line during this same meeting - Children’s Services Extended Leadership Team meeting on 10th May 2023.

5.3 A further matter worthy of investigation is that at Full Council in July, the day [REDACTED], Cllr Pipe [REDACTED]. Does this matter have a link with his [REDACTED] accent incident, does he have an issue with [REDACTED] people? -Note [REDACTED] not disputed.

6. Findings

The Dorset Council Constitution republication date was 23 August 2023.

The Councillor Code of Conduct is Part 4 Code of Protocols – Section 29 of the Constitution. The Code of Conduct is adopted from the Local Government Association Model Councillor Code of Conduct 2020.

The paragraphs that are relevant to this complaint are:

General Conduct

1. Respect

As a councillor:

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.

2. Bullying, harassment, and discrimination

As a councillor:

2.1 I do not bully any person.

2.2 I do not harass any person.

The Member Officer Protocol is Part 3 - Scheme of Delegation - Section 31 of the Dorset Council Constitution.

The paragraph that is relevant to this complaint is:

1.2 The relationship between Members and Officers is based on the following principles:

(d) in everything they do, Members and officers of the Council must act within the law and comply with relevant codes of conduct.

(e) dealings between Members and officers are based on mutual trust and respect.

6.1 Informing Councillor Pipe of the complaint.

The Assurance Complaints Manager sent Councillor Pipe an email on the 3rd of August 2023, informing Councillor Pipe that a complaint has been received against him that alleges a breach of the Code of Conduct. In the email the full complaint from Councillor's Fry, Sutton and Ireland was provided to Councillor Pipe. At interview Councillor Pipe stated that he had not been made aware of the complaint and did not receive the email. The first occasion he was aware of the complaint, was when he was invited to interview. Councillor Pipe was asked if he was happy to continue with the interview and he confirmed that he was.

I can conclude that Councillor Pipe was sent an email informing him of the complaint on 3rd August 2023.

6.2 Mimicry of the [REDACTED] accent to an officer.

There are two occasions reported in the complaint, where Councillor Pipe is alleged to have mimicked the [REDACTED] accent of an officer. The first occasion was at the [REDACTED] Extended Leadership Team meeting on 10th May 2023, where Councillor Pipe is alleged to have greeted Interviewee A in an [REDACTED] accent. The second occasion was at the People and Health Scrutiny Committee on 11th of September 2023.

At the [REDACTED] Extended Leadership Team meeting, Interviewee A confirmed that Councillor Pipe had used their name on several occasions stating "Yes, so I walked into the meeting which was quite a busy room, and we just received a call from [REDACTED], and we were trying to get ourselves a little bit settled. As I arrived, he mimicked my accent a couple of times which I duly ignored and sat down and just carried on with the meeting. The meeting was fine, it was ok during the actual content of the meeting and then towards the end of the meeting, he did the same again, mimicked my accent, which I also ignored then ended up leaving the room. When I was outside of the room, I was talking to another colleague, making arrangements and he came over and he did it again. It was three times he (Councillor Bill Pipe) mimicked my accent during the period of that meeting. I didn't really say anything to him, and I was just trying to ignore him and move forward but after he left, a member of my team came over and said, "oh my god, how did you manage to keep your cool?", it was clear it was intentional, during, before, and after that meeting". Interviewee A felt this was intentional and obnoxious as Councillor Pipe kept using their name multiple times in an [REDACTED] accent. From interviews, Interviewee B and Interviewee F, who both attended the meeting, confirmed that they had heard Councillor Pipe address Interviewee A in an [REDACTED] accent. Councillor Pipe stated at interview "I agree to using an [REDACTED] accent, I greeted Interviewee A in an [REDACTED] accent, I have been doing it for 7, 8 or 9 years, Interviewee A, has never complained, or never asked me not to do it, there have never been previous complaints. I have worked with Interviewee A previously in other Councils and nothing was raised, so for me it was a normal day". Councillor Pipe also stated that after the meeting Interviewee F approached him and said I quote "f**k me mate you are in the s**t" (*Full disclosed language provided in interview notes – Note – this is Councillor Pipe's version of what was said*) I said what for, he said speaking in an [REDACTED] accent, I said I have done it for many of years and no one has complained before, and that was it really off he went.

The People and Health Scrutiny Committee on the 11th of September 2023, was a public meeting. At the meeting it is alleged that, Councillor Pipe said at the start of the meeting to the officer “Good morning, Interviewee A and I hope everyone will see I didn’t say that in an [REDACTED] accent.” From interviews, there is a disagreement on the actual wording with Councillor Pipe and the Interviewee D stating that Councillor Pipe said, “Good morning, Interviewee A, if you hadn’t noticed that was said in an English accent” and Interviewee A confirming that Councillor Pipe said, “Good morning, Interviewee A and I hope everyone will see I didn’t say that in an [REDACTED] accent”. Although, there are slight discrepancies in the terminology used, the comments made by Councillor Pipe, have still resulted in the same outcome. Councillor Pipe made a point that he has previously addressed Interviewee A using the [REDACTED] accent, and so, in this particular incident by referring to the English accent, Councillor Pipe is making the point that this relates to the previous incident. Interviewee A has stated that when Councillor Pipe spoke to Interviewee A, as Interviewee A entered the meeting, it was “really loud, in high volume and he ignored other people that came in before me as well so the tone of it was intended in my view to intimidate me, it was loud”.

At interview, when I asked Councillor Pipe, if he accepted, based on the allegations that have been made, regarding his conduct, had fallen below the expected conduct of a Councillor, this being in relation to the respect of employees and members of the public, Councillor Pipe stated “I mean to Interviewee A, I feel it’s acceptable in my own mind as it’s got to this far, this stage, clearly in the fact now, I know I shouldn’t be doing it. Yes, but out of 7,8,9 years, I thought it was ok do, yes, I do feel it falls below the conduct “and “In retrospect yes, but not intentionally maliciously”.

On the day, after the [REDACTED] Extended Leadership Team meeting, during lunch Councillor Pipe asked Interviewee A where do you park your car? At interview Councillor Pipe stated, “I am not aware of that oh yeah, there is a huge shortage of car parking spaces and Interviewee A got a nice little hideaway and no one knows about it, so I asked, “where do you park your car”, that was the end of the conversation, nothing else. I gave the impression I would sneak along and steal her parking space in a bit of a joke. It was only a remark and wasn’t intended to upset or whatever.” Councillor Pipe was asked in interview, if this question could have upset Interviewee A, Councillor Pipe, responded “Well, I don’t know I am not Interviewee A, I don’t have a crystal ball, I didn’t intend to upset Interviewee A, that’s all I can say”. Interviewee A stated, that although at the time she made light of the situation on reflection, the comment has made Interviewee A really uncomfortable, and Interviewee A has since moved where they park their car.

I can conclude that Councillor Pipe mimicked the [REDACTED] accent of Interviewee A at the [REDACTED] Extended Leadership Team and mocked Interviewee A at the People and Health Scrutiny Committee meeting by making a point to them that he was speaking in an English accent. On both occasions the comments were directed to same person Interviewee A. I can also conclude that Councillor Pipe discussed where Interviewee A parked their car and in joking gave the impression that he would steal the car parking space. Councillor Pipes actions have made Interviewee A feel humiliated and intimidated in his presence.

6.3 Apology

In the complaint, part of the allegation, is that, after Councillor Pipe mimicked the [REDACTED] accent of an Officer at the [REDACTED] Extended Leadership Team meeting, when asked to apologise by an officer of a higher position he had refused.

None of the five officers interviewed were aware that Councillor Pipe had been asked to apologise.

Interviewee F states at interview “On that particular occasion, I am not aware he was asked to apologise, what I am aware of is when I become aware this issue was taken forward, I think I recall having a conversation with the Leader of Council who mentioned there may be an issue. Bear in mind there have been other

incidents that the Leader of Council has been made aware of, the Leader of Council informed me he asked Bill Pipe to apologise, so I cannot be 100% on dates. I was led to believe sometime later Cllr Pipe was asked to apologise, a couple of weeks later.”

Councillor Pipe stated, he was not sure if anyone asked him to apologise but did say that he had an apology ready for the Interviewee A, however the apology was never sent due to a misunderstanding. On further discussion with Councillor O’Leary, during the interview with Councillor Pipe it was established that this apology was in fact written after the comment that Councillor Pipe made at the People and Health Scrutiny Committee on the 11th of September 2023. Councillor Pipe informed Councillor Suttle, that he had written an apology and sent the apology to Councillor Suttle to read. Due to a misunderstanding between the two Councillors the email with the apology was never sent.

On 1st December 2023 Jonathan Mair Director of Legal & Democratic (Monitoring Officer) provided a Teams message from Councillor Suttle which stated “yes, he [Cllr Pipe] emailed me an apology and I asked him to send it on, however when Spencer and I discussed it with him he thought we were sending it on? Clearly, we would expect him to.”

On 1st December 2023, the Leader of the Council – Councillor Flower provided an email to Jonathan Mair - Director of Legal & Democratic (Monitoring Officer) with the draft apology that Councillor Pipe had written. The email from Councillor Flower to Councillor Pipe was sent on 15th September 2023 suggesting that the apology was sent to Interviewee A and Interviewee D, however the apology was never sent.

I can conclude that Councillor Pipe did write an apology after the incident at the People and Health Scrutiny Committee on the 11th of September 2023 and this apology was shared with Councillors Suttle and Flower. The apology was not sent to Interviewee A and Interviewee D as suggested by Councillor Flower and therefore Councillor Pipe did not make an apology.

6.4 Full Council Meeting 13 July 2023.

At the Full Council meeting on the 13th of July 2023, [REDACTED], the complainants raised whether this matter has a link with his [REDACTED] accent incident, and does he have an issue with [REDACTED] people? [REDACTED] and remains a controversial topic today in [REDACTED] where some [REDACTED] remember it as the [REDACTED].

It is not disputed that Councillor Pipe [REDACTED]. At the meeting Councillor Pipe also [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

Councillor Pipe stated “[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

[REDACTED], why I should be singled out I don't know". Councillor Pipe did not recall asking a question about [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

Councillor O'Leary supporting Councillor Pipe at interview stated "[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED] [REDACTED] [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED].

Interviewee F stated "I personally can't recall [REDACTED]
[REDACTED], I have never personally experienced any racism by Bill towards [REDACTED]. I have not experienced that again as [REDACTED]. I have not personally experienced a racist viewpoint from Bill because of my [REDACTED] heritage".

The Interviewee A who was also in attendance at this meeting stated at interview in relation to the briefcase "Yes, I went to the Full Council meeting and in that meeting, firstly there was a comment made about [REDACTED] [REDACTED] but I didn't get too worried. I didn't actually notice the [REDACTED] [REDACTED], I have watched the recording back, which is when I noticed that, but I wasn't comfortable about the [REDACTED] [REDACTED], I was annoyed about it". "I come from [REDACTED] [REDACTED]. There was a period of time where [REDACTED] [REDACTED]. Making comments about [REDACTED], I figured it was very much a [REDACTED] comment that was at the start of the meeting and there was absolutely no reason for that comment to be made, [REDACTED] and others and a member of Cabinet responded. In my view it was intentional, drawing attention to [REDACTED]".

I cannot determine conclusively whether the issue with the [REDACTED] were intentional to make Interviewee A feel uncomfortable, or whether this demonstrates that Councillor Pipe, has an issue with [REDACTED] people. I can conclude that the actions at the meeting did make Interviewee A feel uncomfortable even if this was not the intention.

6.5 Lead Member for Education

Councillor Pipe was appointed as Lead Member for Education on the 1st of May 2023 and resigned from the role on the 19th of May 2023. At the time of his resignation the reason given for the resignation was due to family issues/spending more time with his family.

Interviewee A confirmed that the Interviewee D had raised [REDACTED] concerns about Councillors Pipe's behaviour with the Chief Executive, so was not surprised to hear that Councillor Pipe had resigned.

At interview Councillor Pipe stated the reason for his resignation was "Well, apart from this and my diary had gone from that (Hands gesture of small size) to that (hand gesture to large size). I am a single parent with 3 children and looking at diary, filing up with lots of stuff, here at County Hall, Weymouth, and all over the County, I just couldn't give it the time and looking after my children which in the main is a full-time job, so I resigned. This investigation was the straw that broke the camel's back, the diary, no work life balance whatsoever, this complaint isn't the reason. I am single parent with young children, 'redacted text', and my diary, I won't have any time with them, I will need childcare in school holidays which were coming up".

Councillor Pipe also stated that "Interviewee F, who came to my ward, and we had coffee and cakes in a local café, in my constituency, we spoke for about an hour, I could see there was something on his mind, he said sorry mate you're sacked, he lifted and shifted and off he went. He said, it's not me, it's not my decision, it came from Spencer."

When asked at interview "The conversation with Interviewee F, you said came formally prior to your resignation, if you were never in your words "sacked" would you have still resigned"?

Councillor Pipe responded "Yes, regardless of this conversation, I still would have resigned, that meeting with Interviewee F (Believed to be the 19th of May 2023), I would assume it was in May, so I will have it in my diary, it was a planned meeting, it was for a catch up. Which turned out to be anything but, Interviewee F, he said it's to do with this [REDACTED] s**t. (Full disclosed language provided in interview notes - Note – this is Councillor Pipe's version of what was said) I have never spoken to Spencer Flower about it, it's his decision he is the Leader so that's final I wouldn't question his ability".

On the balance of probability, I can conclude, that although not formally stated in the reason for Councillors Pipes resignation, the behaviour of Councillor Pipe at the [REDACTED] Extended Leadership Team, was a significant factor in Councillor Pipe resigning from the role of Lead Member for Education.

6.6 Visible Panty Line

The allegation that Councillor Pipe made an inappropriate comment about a Visible Panty Line during the Children's Services Extended Leadership Team meeting cannot be substantiated.

6.7 Harassment, Bullying, Racist element

As part of the investigation, I asked all the interviewees whether they felt Councillors Pipes comments and behaviour amounted to bullying or harassment and whether the mimicry of an [REDACTED] accent may suggest a racist element. I also asked interviewees what impact if any Councillor Pipes behaviour and comments had on them.

Interviewee F said it was not fair for him to comment on the racist element but did say that if it was someone else, he did not know had made the comment he may see it as racist. In relation to harassment and bullying Interviewee F again said he could not comment but did say "What he said is ridiculous its not to say he's not a bully. I personally think he's a bit of an idiot and stuck in the past and no there is no justification. I truly think, he thinks he didn't do anything wrong. You can't say things like that now, that's the world we live in, even if you think it, because someone might take it the wrong way, that said, I am absolutely devastated, Interviewee A is a person I have respect for, who is a fantastic officer who has felt this way. Very sad episode, I can't give you a yes or no answer".

Interviewee D, Interviewee A, Interviewee B, and Interviewee C all felt that Councillors Pipes comments and behaviour amounted to bullying and harassment and that his mimicry of the [REDACTED] accent suggested a racist element.

Their views were drawn from the intentional and intimidating nature of Councillor Pipe's behaviour, his undermining way, and the impact of how uncomfortable a position it has created for Interviewee A saying that it felt like harassment and that Interviewee A had been singled out.

I can conclude that Councillor Pipe's comments and behaviour amount to bullying and harassment as Councillor Pipe's actions are directed to one individual making the individual feel intimidated and offended. I can also conclude that although Councillor Pipe does not view his actions in this way there is a perceived racist element to his actions.

6.8 Other matters for consideration not in the original complaint.

During interviews three other concerns were raised about Councillor Pipes behaviour.

1. Use of a homophobic word.

At a meeting to discuss the data around [REDACTED] Interviewee D was explaining about the number of [REDACTED] in HMO's (Houses of Multiple Occupation) and Councillor [REDACTED] asked what an HMO was. Interviewee D stated, "and before I had time to answer Bill said, "oh we use to call them Homo's, Homo's is what we used to call them, we are not allowed to call them Homo's anymore are we Interviewee D?"

Interviewee F recalled at interview "I am not aware of any homophobic jokes, I am aware in a meeting with Interviewee D in a sort of Head of Service and Cabinet member meeting, there was an exchange in which there was talk about a number of issues you would find in a social services type settings to which [REDACTED] who is another Lead member attended, I think, I can't remember exactly what he said in front of Interviewee D, he indicated something to do with identifying people as being gay. Interviewee D took exception to that. I recall that because Interviewee D indicating, he may have called them homos, but again I can't give exact wording, I wasn't really paying attention at that meeting, he may have said something".

Councillor Pipe was asked at interview whether he remembered using the term Homo at this meeting? Councillor Pipe responded "Yes, I was relating it to Cllr [REDACTED], he is the Lead on Safeguarding he was at the same Induction, I said something along the lines of what you say, but it wasn't said as a joke it was fact that we can't say that anymore, its homos and HMO's. I don't deny saying it."

Councillor Pipe confirmed he understood the meaning of Homo and when asked why he used this terminology he stated: "I have no idea, its fact it's that simple. There are areas that do cover multiple occupancy, there see I cannot say it, so it's easier to say Homo, I just use it to describe a word of multiple occupancy and in those earlier days I was just saying that is what it used to be called. I was just saying you can't say it anymore, that's it."

2. Mimicked the [REDACTED] accent of a family.

At a practice observation meeting Councillor Pipe is alleged to have mimicked the [REDACTED] accent of a family attending the meeting. There are different accounts of this and whether the meeting was attended only by professionals and not a family. One officer who was in attendance has stated "it was an Inclusion oversight meeting, no families attended it was only professionals, uncomfortable about something that was said, but no details or what

actually happened or what was said". Councillor Pipe when asked if he had mimicked the [REDACTED] accent of a family did state: "No, absolutely not, it was alleged that I had said the word traveller in an [REDACTED] accent but that did not happen. I said very little throughout the whole presentation, it was just communicated to me somehow, I am not aware of an [REDACTED] family there."

3. The use of the phrase 'Fat Faggot'

I was also made aware of a concern from Councillor Fry that allegedly Councillor Pipe had called the [REDACTED] a Fat Faggot during a Planning Meeting. At interview Interviewee G confirmed that this took place after the Planning meeting while having coffee in the lounge at County Hall Dorchester that Councillor Pipe used the words about [REDACTED]. Interviewee G stated: - "There was me, and a number of other Councillors having a coffee which Councillor Bill Pipe was one of those Councillors, I and another Councillor engaged in a conversation about [REDACTED], as we have regular team's meetings with him as he represents our area, and that it was good to catch up with [REDACTED] etc. Councillor Pipe came in with "oh he's nothing but a fat faggot", to which I commented "I guess you don't like him then?" to which he (Councillor Pipe) replied "no not really". That was the only reference at the time. I thought it was inappropriate but that from Councillor Pipe wasn't unexpected". Councillor Pipe was not asked about this incident at interview. The Hearing Sub-Committee may wish to question Councillor Pipe further on this allegation or decide not include this in their considerations.

4. Duty of Care to Employees

After the incident at the People and Health Scrutiny Committee meeting the Chief Executive of the Council sent an email to Councillor Pipe on 18th September 2023 stating that "I understand from the Leader of Council that following an incident that occurred last Monday, immediately before the People and Health Scrutiny Committee, you have sent a letter of apology to those colleagues concerned. An apology, whilst welcome, still leaves us in a position where this and other recent incidents, including that which is currently subject to a standards investigation, have led to a sense of some colleagues feeling significantly undermined by you, lacking confidence that you are able to treat them respectfully and fairly and feel unable to interact with you as a result.

The Council owes a duty of care towards all its employees. That duty of care is discharged through me as the Head of Paid Service, and this means that in the circumstances I must take appropriate steps to protect colleagues. In this instance I consider this to mean ensuring that you do not interact with officer colleagues and accordingly I ask:

1. That you do not contact any officer in [REDACTED] other than Interviewee D. The Interviewee D will ensure that you receive a response to any questions or concerns that you raise but contact must be through the Interviewee D only or, in her absence, through me/the monitoring officer.
2. That any meetings with any officers are by appointment only, agreed in advance.
3. That you do not enter County Hall or the Council's other offices, other than to attend Full Council or committee meetings or to attend a pre-arranged appointment with an officer.
4. On those occasions when you do attend Council or committee meetings or a pre-arranged appointment you should restrict yourself to the Council Chamber, relevant committee room or the arrangements made for the appointment in advance.

To reinforce these points and as part of my duty of care to all staff, your secure area entry card will be deactivated, and you will not be able access staff office areas except by prior appointment. Before taking these steps, I have consulted Jonathan Mair, as Monitoring Officer. Jonathan has advised that the steps I am taking are both lawful and appropriate given the Council's duty of care owed towards its employees. Specifically, this is not a sanction but a measure to protect staff to whom the Council owes a duty of care".

The Chief Executive said that a review of the need for the continuation of these steps would take place following the outcome of the elections in May 2024 and in the meantime, asked Councillor Pipe to respect these limitations on his contact with employees and his access to their place of work and that Councillor does not ask other councillors or officers to admit him to secure areas.

On the 19th of October 2023 despite the clear position set out above by the Chief Executive, Councillor Pipe accessed the secure office area at County Hall without any prior appointment and tried to meet with staff. Councillor Pipe gained entry to the secure area by asking another Councillor to admit him and returned later and told a member of staff that his access card was not working, as a result of which the member of staff arranged for his access card to be re-activated by the facilities team.

Following this incident Jonathan Mair - Director of Legal & Democratic (Monitoring Officer) sent an email to Councillor Pipe reinforcing the points in the Chief Executive email and giving the following direct instruction to Councillor Pipe.

"All of the above are in direct contravention of and show no respect for the reasonable measures put in place by the Chief Executive to protect staff to whom he owes a duty of care. More than that, you actively persuaded a member of staff to re-activate an access card that the Chief Executive had expressly told you in his email would be de-activated and why.

As a result of your actions yesterday your access card has again been de-activated and the Facilities Manager has been instructed that it is only to be re-activated at my request, at the request of the Service Manager for Democratic and Elections or that of the Chief Executive. We have respected your privacy by not informing other councillors that they should not admit you to staff areas. If though you persist in gaining entry via other councillors, you will put me in the position of having to consider telling them that they must not use their access cards to admit you.

The Chief Executive phrased his email carefully and respectfully, ending by asking for your co-operation. In view of what happened yesterday he and I have agreed that I must be more direct. As a councillor you are entitled to attend Full Council and committee meetings in the Council Chamber at County Hall and officers are taking no steps to prevent you from doing this. Uncontrolled access to staff and to their offices is not though an entitlement and I must insist that until further notice you comply with the points in the Chief Executive's email as requirements upon you".

7. Conclusion

On concluding my investigation, I am of the view that Councillor Pipe is in breach of the Code of Code and the Member Officer Protocol as follows:

Standards of councillor conduct - General Conduct

1. Respect - Councillor Pipe failed to comply with the Code of Conduct

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

1.1 treat local authority employees with respect and respect the role they play.

Members and Officers Protocol

1.2 The relationship between Members and Officers is based on the following principles:

(d) in everything they do, Members and officers of the Council must act within the law and comply with relevant codes of conduct.

(e) dealings between Members and officers are based on mutual trust and respect.

Conclusion: in my opinion, Councillor Pipe failed to treat Officers with respect and is therefore in breach of paragraph 1 (1.2) of the Code of Conduct for Councillors and Paragraph 1.2 (d) and (e) of the Members and Officers Protocol. Councillor Pipe confirmed at interview that he mimicked the [REDACTED] accent of a Senior Officer – Interviewee A at the [REDACTED] Extended Leadership Team meeting on the 10th of May 2023. Councillor Pipe also confirmed that he said to Interviewee A, at the People and Health Scrutiny Committee on the 11th of September 2023 “Good morning, Interviewee A, if you hadn’t noticed that was said in an English accent”. Both meetings were attended by Officers and Councillors, also recognising that the People and Health Scrutiny Committee, was a public meeting. Both the mimicry and commentary were heard by some Officers and Councillors who attended the meeting.

Whilst Councillor Pipe has stated that he has carried out these actions of greeting Interviewee A in an [REDACTED] accent for the last 7-9 years, he did not take it to be offensive or for Interviewee A to be offended by these actions, there has been a significant impact on the wellbeing of Interviewee A. Interviewee A has felt humiliated, upset, and disappointed that this type of behaviour is allowed within the Council and is uncomfortable to attend meetings whilst Councillor Pipe is in attendance. Ultimately Interviewee A has taken the decision to leave the Council.

The mimicry of the [REDACTED] accent by Councillor Pipe, was disrespectful and I also consider the use of the [REDACTED] accent is personally directed to Interviewee A, as Councillor Pipe is not reported as using an [REDACTED] accent to any other individual from Ireland or Northern Ireland. At interview Councillor Pipe accepted that although he has been doing this for some time, his behaviour has fallen below that expected of a Councillor. Interviewee F confirmed at interview that he felt Councillors Pipe’s behaviour at both meetings was below what he would expect from a Councillor to an officer.

2. Bullying and harassment - Councillor Pipe failed to comply with the Code of Conduct

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

2.1 do not bully any person.

2.2 not harass any person.

Conclusion: Councillor Pipe behaved in such a way, which could reasonably be regarded as bullying and harassment. His mimicry of the [REDACTED] accent is offensive behaviour and not acceptable in any circumstance which has caused humiliation to an officer of the Council. Councillor Pipe does not accept that his actions amount to bullying or harassment, however the multiple actions by Councillor Pipe including the mimicry of the [REDACTED] accent, asking where Interviewee A parked their car and the wearing of the orange tie at the Full Council meeting were perceived by Interviewee A and by other officers as bullying and harassment.

Overall Conclusion: Councillor Pipe stated at interview that he does not see his actions as offensive but did accept in retrospect that he had breached the Code of Conduct, but this was not intentional or malicious. Councillor Pipe has failed to see how his actions and behaviour have been received, the effect, distress, and humiliation it has caused to one officer as well as the impact to the other officers within the team.

The seriousness of Councillor Pipe’s actions and behaviour has resulted in the Chief Executive taking appropriate steps to protect colleagues by restricting Councillors Pipe’s access to County Hall and other Council offices.

Both Interviewee F and Councillor O’Leary were of the view that for Councillor Pipe there is a ‘generation and cultural gap’ but did not think there was any malicious or hurtful intent by Councillor Pipe. Both accepted that what may have seemed in the past to be acceptable to Councillor Pipe was no longer acceptable, if in fact, it was ever acceptable. Interviewee F confirmed at interview that he felt Councillors Pipe’s behaviour had fallen below that expected of a Councillor.

Councillor Pipe attended, Code of Conduct training in June 2021 (this was generic training to all Councillors) and attended a specialist coaching intervention in November 2020, following an issue with comments made at a Police and Crime Panel meeting. Despite attempts by the Council to provide training to Councillor Pipe, Councillor Pipe’s behaviour has fallen below the minimum standards of conduct required by a Councillor.

On 20th December 2023 Councillor Pipe responded to the investigation report stating, “Prior to tomorrow’s noon deadline for me to accept your findings, I reluctantly accept those findings, but should point out that in my opinion, I think the complaints are malicious and politically motivated and that the complainants were encouraged to complain by a third party, an officer of the SLT”.

8. Appendices

Appendix A - Interviews		
Reference	Description	Agreed
DC 101	Record of interview with Interviewee D – 6 October 2023	Yes

DC 102	Interview with Councillor Nick Ireland – Leader of the Liberal Democrats, Councillor Les Fry – Leader of the Independent Group, Councillor Clare Sutton – Leader of the Green Party – 9 October 2023	Yes
DC 107	Record of interview with Interviewee G – 24 October 2023	Yes
DC 103	Record of interview with Interviewee A – 26 October 2023	Yes
DC 105	Record of interview with Interviewee E – 1 November 2023	Not Returned
DC 106	Record of Interview with Interviewee B – 2 November 2023	Yes
DC 104	Record of interview with Interviewee C – 7 November 2023	Yes
DC 108	Record of interview with Interviewee F - 10 November 2023	Yes
DC 109	Record of interview with Councillor Bill Pipe - 13 November 2023	Not Returned
Appendix B – Documents, Emails		
Reference	Description	
DC 007	Members Code of Conduct	
DC 008	Members and Officers Protocol	
DC 016	3-8-23 email from Antony Bygrave to Councillor Pipe formal complaint relating to the behaviour of Councillor Bill Pipe	
DC 020	Emails 18-9-23 and 20-10-23 to Councillor Pipe from M Prosser and J Mair re Duty of Care	
DC 021	1-12-23 Email from Councillor S Flower with wording of Councillor Pipe’s draft apology	
DC 109h	20-12-23 Email from Cllr Pipe acceptance of Investigation report findings	

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