

Jordan A. Newell

1 October 2015

The Governance Committee
c/o Andrew Weavers
Colchester Borough Council
Town Hall
High Street
COLCHESTER CO1

Dear Committee Members,

Complaint against Cllr Ben Locker

I understand that at your meeting on 13 October, a report will be received by the Committee regarding a complaint against Cllr Locker and his remarks made on social media over a parking penalty charge notice.

As a former Parliamentary Candidate, I am a staunch supporter of the Nolan Principles and the need for holders of public office to adhere themselves to the highest possible standards while undertaking their duties. But I also hold a genuine belief that Councillors and other office holders should be able to debate, challenge and speak freely within the social norms of respect, tolerance and inclusivity.

I have been moved to write to the Committee today, to urge them to take no further action on this complaint and to accept Cllr Locker's apology.

Section 4.3 of the Monitoring Officer's Report states that: "*The question here is did Councillor Locker's original tweet give the impression, to a reasonable member of the public, that he was posting it in his capacity as a councillor?*"

As a 'reasonable member of the public' myself (albeit one with extensive experience in the use of social media), I would have inferred that Cllr Locker was tweeting as an individual, who also just happens to be a councillor. As the report indicates, one of the drawbacks for politicians – at all levels – is one of 'blurred identities' and the constant debate over where we draw the line between public and private comment.

I would ask the Committee to consider the context of these remarks, and whether a complaint would have been made had Cllr Locker expressed his frustrations about North Essex Parking Partnership to private individuals or within a physical public forum. I suspect it would not have.

It is clear from Cllr Locker's tweet that he was not criticizing individuals, but the North Essex Parking Partnership as a whole. And as a '*reasonable member of the public*', I believe any criticisms of the partnerships' operations and methods are wholly justified. As such, Cllr Locker is in fact representing the view of his constituents.

While I do not condone the language used by Cllr Locker, I understand his frustration, as will many people in Colchester. However, given that he has made a public apology I do not believe that this matter merits wasting any more of the Council's time or resources.

Yours sincerely,

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Jordan Newell