



**MINUTES**

**BRANTHAM PARISH COUNCIL MEETING**

Wednesday 04 January 2023, 7.30pm held at Brantham Village Hall

**PRESENT:** Cllrs Cllr Aherne, M Bridgeman, L Cherry, C Couchman, , J Heywood and T Rowlinson

**CHAIRPERSON:** Cllr McCraw

**IN ATTENDANCE:** S Keys (Clerk), SCC Councillor Harley and 2 members of the public

**PC 01.23.01 OPENING**

The Chair declared the meeting open at 7.30pm and thanked all for attending. A statement was read out by the Chair indicating that, in accordance with legislation, the public and councillors were permitted to film, record, photograph or use social media in order to report on the proceedings of the meeting. A full transcript is available from the Clerk.

The Chair reminded the public that a Council meeting is not a public meeting, it is a meeting conducted in public. Members of the public, the press, and District, Borough or County Councilors are invited to attend our meetings and contribute during the public forum. Comments from the public during the remainder of the meeting should be by invitation from the Chair only.

**PC 01.23.02 APOLOGIES**

The Council noted and approved apologies from T Lancaster, E Osben and P Seward.

The Chair read the following statement to the meeting:

*“Early last year, after a Code of Conduct complaint against Councillor Mark Aherne, the following ruling was made by the Monitoring Officer at Babergh District Council. They are the responsible independent body in Code of Conduct matters.*

*Further to the conclusion of the Code of Conduct complaint submitted in reference to Cllr Mark Aherne the following sanctions were agreed and communicated to Cllr Aherne:*

- a) To publicly apologise to the Clerk at the next available full Council meeting.*
- b) To undertake Code of Conduct training and Equality and Diversity training as soon as possible, but no later than three months from the date of this letter.*
- c) To undertake training on your responsibilities as an employer within three months of the date of this letter.*

*Despite repeated requests at BPC meetings, so far these requirements have not been met:*

- Cllr Aherne has not apologised and has stated that he has no intention of doing so*
- Cllr Aherne has been supplied with dates for training and has stated that he has no intention of attending training of this kind.*

*The original matter was that of Councillor Aherne's conduct towards the Clerk and other members in a Finance Committee meeting chaired by Councillor Aherne. Members of the public were present. An investigation was carried out immediately, by myself as Chair, taking evidence from all those present. I myself had not been present at this finance*



meeting. It should be pointed out that before the Code of Conduct complaint was made, that a simple public apology by Councillor Aherne to the Clerk in a Council meeting would have ended the matter. This was explained but refused outright.

In the absence of the actions required of Cllr Aherne, this council have carried out their own sanctions.

Councillor Aherne was removed, by full Council vote, from his position as Chair of the Finance Committee, that committee having passed a vote of no confidence in him. Subsequently, he was also removed from his appointment as Vice-Chairman of the Council and all other BPC appointments he held, also by full Council vote.

Councillor Ahernes Parish Council email address had to be suspended due to abuse of the privilege. A stream of emails was being sent to all members at all times. That stream has continued since from his own personal email addresses, but now primarily directed towards the Clerk and I. Over the course of just over a year, over 50 emails (that we know of) have been sent to us copying many others.

In these, Councillor Aherne has attacked the integrity and ability of the following, the Parish Clerk; myself as Chairman, Councillor and individual; other councillors; the Monitoring Officers and Chief Executive at Babergh District Council; the process itself; and others unrelated to any part of the process. A misogynist element in these has been particularly distasteful.

None of this is acceptable for a duly elected Councillor. The Code of Conduct, based on the Nolan Principles in public life may not be much observed in parts of Westminster, but elsewhere and here in Suffolk they are not optional. They are a requirement of acceptance of office. If this councillor didn't wish to follow them, he should not have signed the declaration of acceptance of office (twice). If this councillor wished to claim ignorance of their content and meaning, he should not have chaired the annual reviews of our Standing Orders that include that Code of Conduct, voting for them each time.

It is unprecedented in my experience, and every other persons I have spoken to, for a member to refuse outright to comply with such a ruling.

Enough is enough! We have carried out such sanctions as were available to us. We have acted with patience, compassion and understanding for over a year.

We share a common purpose to serve our community, operating by consensus and accepting of collective responsibility. We can disagree at times about our decisions but are bound by them, regardless of our own votes at the time. Our work continues throughout. Despite this kerfuffle, it has done so.

This has placed massive stress on all members throughout, but the largest burden has fallen on the Clerk and myself as Chairman, where the principal attacks and harassment have been directed. The Clerk and I have jointly taken action in that matter.

BUT, I believe we have reached the point where a public protest needs to be made, along with this statement. As a protest against Councillor Ahernes refusal to make the required apology, to undertake the required training and his actions and behaviour throughout this period, I will be withdrawing from this meeting. **Walking Out.** I ask other councillors present who feel likewise to join me now and make this very public protest. Our work will not be greatly affected and I hope that the seriousness of this situation will be understood."



**BRANTHAM**  
Parish Council

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At 7.38pm Cllrs M Bridgeman, L Cherry, C Couchman, , J Heywood, A McCraw and T Rowlinson left the meeting. The Clerk declared the meeting inquorate and the meeting was therefore closed.