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STANDARDS INVESTIGATION AT KENTS HILL AND MONKSTON PARISH
COUNCIL

A Report for Milton Keynes Borough Council

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Investigation Report into three complaints under the Code of Conduct for Members of Kents Hill and Monkston Parish Council brought by Dr Jane Harrington, Ms Vicky Mote and Ms Abi Bassett against Councillor Vikas Chandra, Member of Kents Hill and Monkston Parish Council.

Background

I was instructed by Paul Cummins, Head of Legal Services and Deputy Monitoring Officer, Milton Keynes Borough Council, the principal authority for Kents Hill and Monkston Parish Council, to investigate three complaints of an alleged breach of the Code of Conduct for Members of Kents Hill and Monkston Parish Council in respect of Councillor Chandra.

On 2 November 2018, the Independent Person for Milton Keynes Borough Council, considered the complaints on behalf of the Monitoring Officer. The conclusion was that Councillor Chandra was acting as a Councillor at the time the alleged breaches of the Code of Conduct and had a case to answer.

In order to undertake this investigation I have looked at a number of documents and interviewed the key people involved. I would like to thank everyone involved for their cooperation.

A full list of the documents considered, as well as the people interviewed, is contained in Appendix 1 to this report. The documents in Part Two of the Appendix were all submitted by Councillor Chandra.

The Code of Conduct

Kents Hill and Monkston Parish Council adopted a Code of Conduct for Members on 8 October 2012, under the provisions of the Localism Act 2011. That code of Conduct was revised in April 2018 and adopted by the Parish Council on 29 October 2018. Under Section 28 of the Localism Act 2011 Milton Keynes Borough Council has put in place arrangements under which allegations can be investigated and decisions made on such allegations.

My starting point for this investigation is the complaints and identifying the potential breaches of the Code of Conduct which are alleged. The relevant paragraphs of the Code of Conduct that applied prior to 29 October 2018 are:-

“Part 1: General Obligations

The members of Kents Hill and Monkston Parish Council must:

.....

2. respect others and not bully any person;

....

5. respect the confidentiality of information received by them as a Member:-

- (a) not disclosing information to third parties unless
 - (i) required by law to do so: or

(ii) where there is a clear and overriding public interest in doing so and the disclosure is made in good faith and in compliance with the reasonable requirements of the Council”

The Code of Conduct states that members will be expected to observe the provisions of the code and appreciate that the code is based on the principles of selflessness, integrity, objectivity, accountability, openness, honesty, and leadership.

In respect of the complaints that relate to events on and after 29 October 2018 the relevant paragraphs of the Code of Conduct adopted on that date are:-

“Part II: Member Obligations

When an elected or co-opted member of the Council acts, claims to act or gives the impression of acting as a representative of the Council, he/she has the following obligations:

...

- q) Members shall at all times conduct themselves in a manner which will tend to maintain and strengthen the public’s trust and confidence in the integrity of the Authority and never undertake any action which would bring the Authority, of its members or officers generally, into disrepute.”

The Code of Conduct states that the Parish Council adopted the code “to promote and maintain high standards of behaviour by its members and co-opted members whenever they conduct business of the Council, or when they claim to act or give the impression of acting as a representative of the Council.” The code is stated to be based on the principles of selflessness, integrity, objectivity, accountability, openness, honesty, and leadership.

Summary

My conclusion is that there was not a breach of Paragraph 2 of the older Code of Conduct. Councillor Chandra’s conduct has been bordering on bullying. His constant challenges and questions are hindering the work of the Parish Council and are disproportionate to the responsibilities of the Parish Council and the resources available to it.

Councillor Chandra has consistently disrupted the work of the clerk and the locum clerks to the Parish Council when he challenges their work and repeatedly tells them and the other members of the Parish Council that because he is a lawyer his view is the one that they should follow.

I have found that Councillor Chandra breached his duties to respect the confidentiality of information he received whilst acting as a councillor. My conclusion is that there has been a breach of Paragraph 5 of the Code of Conduct.

I have found that Councillor Chandra breached Paragraph q) of the newer code as he did not conduct himself in a manner that would maintain and strengthen the public’s trust and confidence when he threatened to leave the Parish council meeting

on 29 October 2018 because he did not agree with the manner in which the proposed vote to fill co-optee vacancies was to be handled.

I have not found that Councillor Chandra acted in a disrespectful manner.

The complaints

Complaint forms were completed by Ms Abi Bassett, Dr Jane Harrington and Ms Vicky Mote. Two forms were submitted by Ms Abi Bassett. Each of the complainants raised concerns about similar patterns of behaviour by Councillor Chandra and so those issues been considered together.

I have also seen copies of many email exchanges between the parties and others. I have not reproduced the content of that correspondence in this report but will refer to relevant parts of it. Whilst a great deal of the evidence that I had to consider is historical in nature, taken together it provides a background and a flavour of the state of relations within the Parish Council.

Ms Abi Bassett complained that Councillor Chandra breached his duty to respect the confidentiality of information that he had received about her and that complaint has been considered separately.

I have not reproduced the content of the complaint forms and supporting documents in this report but they are annexed to the report as Appendix 2.

Ms Abi Bassett's first complaint form, dated 30 October 2018, states that during a Parish Council meeting on 28th August 2018 the Parish Council resolved to exclude the public for the Parish Council to consider an item pertaining to her employment and details of her mental health. Ms Bassett alleges that Councillor Chandra disclosed the details of the information to Martin Rudd who was not at the time a member of the Parish Council. Ms Bassett also alleges that Councillor Chandra recorded the meeting after it had moved into the "private session" and she states that she subsequently wrote to Councillor Chandra requesting that he deleted the recording and that he refused to do so.

Ms Ali Bassett's second complaint form, dated 31 October 2018, describes the events of a meeting of the Parish Council on 29 October 2018. Ms Bassett alleges that Councillor Chandra threatened to walk out of the meeting to "leave you without a quorum" so prevent the Parish Council voting on an issue that Councillor Chandra did not agree with.

Ms Bassett alleges that Councillor Chandra was "not acting in keeping with the code regarding selflessness, objectivity, integrity or leadership. His actions were not in the interests of the public as the vote was going to decide on co-options to the Council's vacancies; a process that Vikas has been intent on blocking since it started months ago.

His behaviour could reasonably be regarded as bullying and disrespectful. As there was a public audience at the meeting, I believe his actions brought the Council into disrepute."

Dr Jane Harrington's complaint describes behaviour of Councillor Chandra that is historical in nature. It relates to the period mid 2017 until Dr Harrington resigned from the Parish Council on 22 November 2017. Dr Harrington states that during that time there was "an onslaught of emails from Vikas Chandra (which on the surface appear to be shrouded in politeness and concern) to the Council continuously criticising, patronising, arguing and insulting the clerk and other councillors about a number of situations that arose. This behaviour has had a negative effect on the councillors ... I believe this complaint provides additional evidence of the negative impact of Vikas Chandra's behaviour whilst councillor for KHMPC and how this behaviour breaches the code of conduct by not acting in the interest of the Parish as a whole, not acting in the public interest and bullying"

Dr Harrington has enclosed a document entitled "Details of events leading up to councillor resignations and this complaint" which sets out verbatim content from various email correspondence. The catalyst for the email thread is described by Dr Harrington as being "On 30.8.17 our clerk circulated the draft agenda for any additions for September's meeting scheduled for 11.9.17. Vikas Chandra suggested that the anonymous communications should be discussed at the next meeting as he perceived it to be racist. The clerk suggested that this could be discussed under the "correspondence" heading of the agenda. Vikas Chandra disagreed with the clerk and this resulted in a large number of increasingly argumentative emails."

I will not repeat the content of this document as it sets out in fine detail the events leading up to Dr Harrington's resignation and also the content of several email threads but wish to highlight that as a result of Councillors Chandra's emails to Ms Vicky Mote, copied to all members of the Parish Council, Ms Mote wrote to the members of the Parish Council on 6 September 2017 explaining that she was no longer willing to perform the role of locum clerk to the Parish Council. Ms Mote wrote "If a councillor wishes to express a contrary view they should not pressurise the officer to make a recommendation contrary to the officer's professional view, nor victimise the officer for discharging his/her responsibilities".

On 30 September 2017 Dr Harrington wrote an email to Jenni Ferrans and Jamie Tamanini-Barbosa stating that "Vikas's ever growing list of complaints a major concern as it seems to me hi is intent on causing the council as much damage as possible without taking any of the responsibility for his actions. Frankly I now feel bullied by the way he is carrying on in particular the last email which he sent to me at 7.38 in the morning."

Dr Harrington also set out in some detail the chronology and correspondence relating to the draft minutes for an item on the Parish council agenda regarding Houses in Multiple Occupation. The Parish Council resolved to "formulate a spreadsheet and maintain it with regard to HMOs in the Parish providing it does not breach data protection regulations", the Clerk, Ms Abi Bassett, was asked to find out whether the Parish Council could keep a register of HMOs in the area.

Dr Harrington explains that Councillor Chandra had a lengthy exchange of emails with Jenni Ferrans and Jamie Tamigini Barbosa (who were also members of the

Parish Council). One extract from the exchange that Councillor Chandra wrote is “When something is mentioned in legal provisions, then it is assumed to be there for a purpose, We can take our standing orders to be such legal provisions and need to interpret them in such a way that they are given full effect, within the powers that we have. When the word ‘inspect’ is mentioned in primary authority provisions it means what you have alluded to. However we also have a standing order in the parish council that mentions the word ‘inspect’. It is incorrect, in my opinion, to say that the standing order is not applicable because we do not have the powers to inspect ...”

The exchange continued and contained Councillor Chandra’s understanding of the word “inspect”, including dictionary definitions and he concludes by saying “I do not mind training of any type. But I hope you can also recognise that I have had several decades’ worth of legal training, and the points that I make are informed by that training. I am of course, always happy to show the relevant authorities to support my reasoning”

Councillor Chandra also had an email exchange with Ms Abi Bassett in which he challenges the draft minutes. He wrote “Thank you for your explanation and clarification. I am mindful that these particular draft minutes are also relevant to your getting your salary on time, and I hope there are no further complications and delays.

I accept your point that the minutes are not a verbatim account. However if you look at Minute 85/2017 relating to “illegal off-road rally”, you will see that the exchange between JTB and JF is noted in some detail. I would expect the same detail to be recorded with respect to all items on the agenda, including agenda item 84/2017. Especially if I make a formal request that my position be minuted, as I am. The minutes should not also leave out critical bits of information; that would be misrepresentation. Right now, it seems that I had no contribution to make on that agenda item. Especially with regard to legality of the HMO activity. I also only raised 2 issues – there may be more – with respect to the HMO item, one relating to “inspection” and the other relating to “data protection”. Whereas the “inspection” part relating to the standing orders is completely missing from the minutes, the “data protection” part is in a form that I do not recognise having been discussed at the meeting. The resolution was certainly not put in the form it has been put in now in the minutes, when the Council was asked to make a decision

Can I also request that for a future discussion on this matter the Parish Council be provided with fuller details of the project. For instance, what does “formulating a spreadsheet” mean? What does “maintaining it” mean? How will it be populated with content? Who will have access to add/change details? Will residents have access under the Freedom of Information Act and/or Data Protection Act? Will it need to be kept up to date? Who takes responsibility for that? Is the Parish Council going to spend funds for its setting up and maintenance? What happens if the composition of the Parish Council is changed at the next election, does the register become one that has to be ‘statutorily’ maintained under our standing orders? What are the processing times in relation to activities relating to the register and if persons whose data is being processed will have to be informed that their data has been processed? Is there some kind of consent required from residents? Can they withdraw consent? Can residents ask for their personal information to be changed if part of it comes into

the public domain, such as action being taken by the Local Authority? Do we need a public consultation in the first place to carry out this activity? “

I have included this detail as whilst each set of correspondence took place a long time ago they do give an insight into the behaviour complained of by each of the complainants.

Dr Harrington concluded her document by stating “I resigned from the parish council on 22.11.17 with huge regret after being a councillor for almost six years. Vikas Chandra caused a lot of time wasting and tension because of his ongoing email barrage (vendetta) which in my view is not rational behaviour. He behaved as a self-appointed legal advocate and scrutineer of decisions and minutes rather than as a councillor. I found this very stressful and not something that I should have to put up with in a voluntary role particularly as I had considerable stresses in my personal life at this time. Most importantly this behaviour was not in the best interest of the council as a whole or residents of the parish.”

I met with Dr Harrington to discuss her complaint form and the issues raised in it. Dr Harrington was very distressed that the Parish Council was still at the time of our meeting struggling to properly conduct any business because of the impact of Councillor Chandra’s behaviour. Dr Harrington told me that she had resigned, reluctantly, from the Parish Council because she found Councillor Chandra’s constant disruption unbearable.

Dr Harrington explained that in her view the Parish Council had operated smoothly before Councillor Chandra became a member of it. She said that Councillor Chandra is never rude but hides his controlling behaviour behind his intelligence and charm. Dr Harrington explained that she thinks that Councillor Chandra is constantly suspicious of others’ ulterior objectives during Parish Council meetings and that is why he is always questioning and challenging every part of the process without actually bringing any fresh ideas to the table. She feels that it is directly because of Councillor Chandra’s behaviour that almost all of the members of the Parish Council had resigned from it.

Dr Harrington is astounded that Councillor Chandra does not seem to have realised that his disruption is affecting the effective operation of the Parish Council and that he has not taken any responsibility for what has happened and so not apologised to anybody, even when told how he has made individuals feel.

Dr Harrington made reference to other, earlier complaints and counter complaints made to the Monitoring Officer but those issues are outside the scope of this investigation.

Ms Vicky Mote’s complaint form dated 18 September 2018 sets out in detail examples of the behaviour of that she alleges as evidence of Councillor Chandra’s breaches of the Code of Conduct. Ms Mote was a locum clerk, standing in for the clerk on 21 June 2018.

I will not repeat the content of the form here but it is attached to this report in Appendix 2 and in it Ms Vicky Mote has explained why she believes that Councillor Chandra has amongst other things:

- Failed to provide leadership to the Parish Council – she says that “he is a bad example of a Councillors who does not have the public at the forefront of his decisions and views”;
- Bullied officers – she says “he believes that since he has a legal background that makes him far superior and what he says is right”
- Vistimised others – Ms Mote says “Cllr Viaks Chandra continues to publically undermine the role of an officer”;
- Breached the requirement in the Code of Conduct not to do anything which may cause the Parish Council to breach its equality duties – Ms Mote states “Cllr Vikas Chandra continues to undermine equality in his behaviour towards the officer (clerk) of the parish council; he sees himself as superior as he continues to quote that he has a legal background, which is clearly meant to intimidate”;
- Breached the requirement in the Code of Conduct not to do anything which compromises or is likely to compromise the impartiality of those who work for, or on behalf of, the Parish Council – Ms Mote sates that “Cllr Vikas Chandra continues to publicly undermine the professionalism, integrity and impartial role of the Officer (clerk)”;
- Failed to respect the confidentiality of information received in accordance with the Code of Conduct – Ms Mote says “he took it upon himself to go out and get residents to complete councillor co-option forms and send their personal details to the Deputy Monitoring Officer, his secretary and an intern”;
- Failed to comply with the Code of Conduct requirement not to conduct himself in a manner which could reasonably be regarded as bringing his office of the Parish council into disrepute – Ms Mote states “Cllr Vikas Chandra continues to obstruct the effective running of the Parish Council to the benefit of his own personal and political views”

Ms Vicky Mote refers in her complaint form to various other matters relating to the process of co-option to the Parish Council and alleged breaches of the General Data Protection Regulation and the involvement of BALC in this process.

These matters are subject to counter allegation by Councillor Chandra in relation to Ms Mote’s handling of the recruitment exercise and I do not believe those issues should be taken together with the main complaints under investigation. It has not been possible to come to a reliable conclusion about this aspect of the complaint because of the conflicting allegations. It is my understanding that the matter of co-option to the Parish Council has been a difficult subject and there has been some assistance given by Milton Keynes Council to the Parish Council.

I met with Ms Vicky Mote to discuss her complaint against Councillor Chandra and she was very keen for a solution to be found for Ms Abi Bassett who as clerk to the Parish Council was described as being in a very difficult position. Ms Mote described Ms Bassett as “broken” by the constant criticism by Councillor Chandra which has an unbearable undermining effect.

Ms Mote has referred me to a recording of the meeting on 21 June 2018.

I have listened to that recording and in it the Parish Council can be heard carefully making plans for how the process of co-option can be progressed. There was a need to set a date for interviews with the applicants and the Parish Council welcomed the wealth of applications. There was a large number of vacancies on the Parish Council at that time and so everyone was keen to conclude the recruitment process.

Ms Vicky Mote makes reference to other earlier complaints to the Monitoring Officer about Councillor Chandra but those are outside the scope of my investigation.

Councillor Chandra's response to the complaints

Councillor Chandra wrote three emails to Opheas Shiridzinodya, an officer of Milton Keynes Council setting out his response to the complaints as follows:

“Complaint by Dr Jane Harrington

Dr Harrington calls me “well mannered” in her complaint. So that part at least is acknowledged. I have always tried to be professional despite difficult and distressing circumstances. I have only ever requested proper scrutiny of decisions, including asking for proper disclosure of interests that have a bearing on matters on the agenda, financial reports where the relevant amounts have suddenly changed (for instance from £500 to £10,00), and protection of residents' personal data. To put pressure on me not to ask those questions is in fact acting against the public interest, in addition to the duress it puts me under.

There are just claims and opinions in the complaint, and no evidence of any kind. I expect the complaint to result in the same decision as in the case of former Cllr Jamie Tamagnini's complaint. Incidentally, Dr Harrington was one of the named persons, and presumably a witness, in that complaint. Dr Harrington cannot be allowed to revive a dismissed complaint in this way. They are also very old (false) allegations as Dr Harrington resigned in November 2017.”

“My preliminary response to the settlement related complaint are:

1. This is a public interest matter and it involves extreme financial liabilities on the parish council, of the order of nearly half of its yearly precept.
2. The settlement claim was made on 2 July 2018 in an email to the then chair, Cllr Tamagnini. The internal audit was carried out on 17 July 2018. However, this risk/claim does not appear to have been brought to the attention of the internal auditors. I have attached copies of the claim as well as the internal audit report.
3. The settlement was sought to be agreed by forcing a vote at the parish council meeting of 28 August 2018 and it was only through my strong intervention that a decision was made to consult with a legal professional. I have attached a copy of the audio recording for that session of the parish council. You can hear how I was

verbally abused in the process. Participants in the audio recording are former Cllr Tamagnini, former Cllr Laws, locum clerk Brian Barton, and myself.

4. It appears from the recording that the settlement had been discussed with the monitoring officer and it was agreed that pressure would be put on me to resign at a meeting with the monitoring officer. The grave public interest of the matter cannot be overstated.
5. The internal auditors would certainly not be happy that required risk assessments have not been done. The matter will shortly go to the external auditors and will then be published for comments from the public. The parish council has twice deferred action on the Annual Governance and Accountability Review (also attached) and sought explanations from the clerk for the 'no response'. Given that the residents of the parish have known for a long time that there are governance issues in the parish council, especially relating to finances and non-disclosure of interests, it is important that they are assured there is no risk to public money. Incidentally, the internal auditors have recommended that the parish council get fidelity insurance cover. I am sure they are informally aware of the issues with the previous clerk and the current holder of the office through coverage in the national and local media".

Councillor Chandra also made some comments in his third email about the turbulent co-option process that was attempted in June 2018 but I have already stated that I will not deal with this element of the complaint against Councillor Chandra as it is the subject of various counter allegations against Ms Vicky Mote by Councillor Chandra and so it is not helpful to include the detail in this report.

I will confirm that there has been no evidence of financial impropriety at the Parish Council as alluded to by Councillor Chandra and the comments in paragraph 5 of his response are his own. There has not been any negative press coverage about such matters nor any adverse internal audit findings.

It is significant that Councillor Chandra has not responded in writing to the allegations made against him in the four complaint forms when asked to do so. Instead Councillor Chandra has attempted to raise new issues or allegations.

I met with Councillor Chandra to discuss the complaints made against him. In Councillor Chandra's view all he has ever tried to do is to uphold the law. He stated that he doesn't know what the allegations against him are. I explained that the four complaint forms set out the alleged breaches of the code of conduct. Councillor Chandra believes that the complaints against him are all because he always tries to point out the relevant legal provisions to the Parish Council and to the clerk. He explained that there is not a single email in which he has used abusive language.

Councillor Chandra did not directly respond to the complaints against him other than to defend his right to let people know that he is legally qualified if he thinks that they are not following relevant legislation and also to explain that he often sends emails early in the morning as he travels to London for work on the train and so sends the emails early.

Councillor Chandra did admit that he disclosed exempt information (under the provisions of the Local Government Act 1972 Schedule 12A – information relating to an individual) provided to him about the settlement request that the clerk Ms Abi Bassett had made to the Parish Council, in breach of the provisions of the Code of Conduct. Councillor Chandra stated that he told Martin Rudd, branch secretary of the Labour Party, about the settlement request when meeting him about Councillor Chandra's own potential selection as a candidate for election to Milton Keynes Council. Martin Rudd was not at the time a member of the Parish Council.

Councillor Chandra told me that he was not satisfied that Abi Bassett's case was sound and thought that the Parish council should seek legal advice before taking any further action on the matter. Councillor Chandra tried to excuse the disclosure of the information by saying that he did not want any unlawful expenditure (meaning any settlement payment to Ms Bassett) by the Parish Council to reflect badly on his application for selection by the Labour Party. There has been no unlawful expenditure. In my view Councillor Chandra should not have disclosed to a third party the information (the proposed compromise agreement) that had been discussed during the part of the Parish Council meeting from which the press and members of the public had been excluded. The disclosure made was intended to protect Councillor Chandra's own interests in relation to his desire to be selected as a Labour Party candidate for the Milton Keynes Council elections.

Councillor Chandra raised many matters of Parish Council procedure with which he was dissatisfied but which are not directly relevant to this investigation. Whilst the issues he raised give some background to the difficult relationship that Councillor Chandra has with the other members of the Parish Council and the clerk they were not connected to the complaints that I have been asked to investigate.

Councillor Chandra subsequently sent me several documents which I have taken into account. Those documents are listed in Part Two of Appendix One.

Councillor Chandra has sent copies of his recent email correspondence with the Monitoring Officer to me. I am not going to make reference to the content of those emails as they raise new matters which fall outside the remit of this investigation.

Conclusion

In consideration of the evidence available it is clear that there are differences of opinion between the individuals that I met as part of my investigation. All of those that I interviewed were credible and spoke about events with a good level of recollection.

I have not carried out a forensic investigation of all of the events/issues mentioned to me and there are no witness statements connected to my investigation. I have based my findings on the documents that I have seen, the contents of the complaint forms and what I was told. I took notes at each of my meetings but those are not reproduced as part of this report.

It is not appropriate to comment on and/or address any general problems within the Parish Council as part of this investigation. I heard that relations are very difficult generally.

Whilst I read and considered all of the documents I have focused my investigation on the complaints made and the responses to those complaints. Not all of the documents were directly relevant to my investigation.

I find on the facts that Councillor Chandra did breach Paragraph the Code of Conduct by disclosing exempt information to Martin Rudd that had been on the agenda for the Parish Council meeting on 28th August 2018.

Councillor Chandra told me that he had discussed the information with Martin Rudd and I do not consider that his motivation for doing so justifies the breach of that part of the Code of Conduct. The disclosure, by Councillor Chandra's own admission, was to avoid any doubt being cast over his application to be selected as a Labour Party candidate for the Milton Keynes Council election.

There have clearly been lots of disagreements within the Parish Council as a result of Councillor Chandra's behaviour.

I do not consider that on this occasion the conduct constitutes a breach of Paragraph 2 of the Council's older Code of Conduct; I do though consider that it indicates a consistent lack of judgement and understanding of the role of the clerk on the part of Councillor Chandra.

Bullying is defined as offensive, intimidating, malicious, insulting or humiliating behaviour which attempts to undermine, hurt or humiliate an individual or group. It can have a damaging effect on a victim's confidence, capability and health. Bullying conduct can involve behaving in an abusive or threatening way, or making allegations about people in public, in the company of their colleagues, through the press or in blogs. It may happen once or be part of a pattern of behaviour, although minor isolated incidents are unlikely to be considered bullying.

Councillor Chandra has denied that he behaves in a bullying manner and insisted that he is always polite and never rude. Whilst Councillor Chandra is polite in the email correspondence that I have seen the level of detail and criticism is high whenever he raises matters of procedure. This is relentless. Councillor Chandra constantly challenges the actions of the clerk with his "nit picking", the effect of which is undermining. Two very experienced officers have felt his conduct to be insulting and humiliating. In considering all of the evidence presented to me I find that the behaviour is borderline as to whether it could amount to bullying. Councillor Chandra clearly tries to intimidate others by citing his legal qualifications to support his arguments. He has on repeated occasions questioned the judgement of the clerk and the locum clerks during meetings of the Parish Council and in correspondence which other parties have sight of, but always does this under the guise of procedural correctness.

The extent to which Councillor Chandra challenges the work of the clerk is persistent and entirely disproportionate to the administrative resources available to support the

Parish Council and obviously hinders the work of the Parish Council. Whilst members of the Parish Council can raise concerns the clerk should be trusted to resolve any procedural issues.

In response to the allegations against him Councillor Chandra has said “To put pressure on me not to ask those questions is in fact acting against the public interest, in addition to the duress it puts me under.” This demonstrates that he has not in any way considered the impact of his behaviour on others and his unwillingness to moderate his behaviour. It is significant that Councillor Chandra has not in any way accepted that he has acted in a way that is detrimental to the proceedings of the Parish Council nor apologised to the individuals who have complained against him. Councillor Chandra should reflect on his role and that of the clerk to the Parish Council and consider how he might better perform his duties to his constituents whilst allowing the clerk to deal with any procedural matters.

I have found that Councillor Chandra breached paragraph g) of the new Code of Conduct, adopted by the Parish Council at its meeting on 29 October 2018.

The Code of Conduct was revised and the very next item on that meeting agenda item was the issue of co-option to the Parish Council and there were 7 unfilled vacancies on the Parish Council. All parties have given me an indication of the troubled history relating to the co-option process. I have not considered the allegations and counter allegations that have been made but I have found that Councillor Chandra made a threat to leave the meeting as he did not agree with the way the matter was to be dealt with. Councillor Chandra should not have threatened to leave the meeting and to make it inquorate. In doing so Councillor Chandra would frustrate the cop-option process further as the Parish Council would be unable to take a decision on the matter.

The Code of Conduct states that “Members shall at all times conduct themselves in a manner which will tend to maintain and strengthen the public’s trust and confidence in the integrity of the Authority and never undertake any action which would bring the Authority, of its members or officers generally, into disrepute”. The meeting was held in public and members of the public were in attendance.

There is a long and complicated history related to the co-option process for the Parish council which I have not rehearsed. I understand that Councillor Chandra was discontented that issues he had raised in relation to the process had not been addressed to his satisfaction. However, it was not appropriate for Councillor Chandra to threaten to leave, so that the item could not properly be disposed of, just because he was not happy with the way the other members of the Parish Council wished to progress the matter. This made things especially difficult for the Parish Council in light of the time that had passed already during which it had carried a large number of vacancies.

My recommendation would be for consideration to be given to asking Councillor Chandra to apologise to those who have complained against him and for Councillor Chandra to be asked to attend Code of Conduct training.