

The Code of Conduct Casebook

Issue 20 May 2019

Introduction

The Public Services Ombudsman for Wales considers complaints that members of local authorities in Wales have broken the Code of Conduct. The Ombudsman investigates such complaints under the provisions of Part III of the Local Government Act 2000 and the relevant Orders made by the National Assembly for Wales under that Act.

Where the Ombudsman decides that a complaint should be investigated, there are four findings, set out under section 69 of the Local Government Act 2000, which the Ombudsman can arrive at:

- a) that there is no evidence that there has been a breach of the authority's code of conduct;
- b) that no action needs to be taken in respect of the matters that were subject to the investigation;
- c) that the matter be referred to the authority's monitoring officer for consideration by the standards committee;
- d) that the matter be referred to the President of the Adjudication Panel for Wales for adjudication by a tribunal (this generally happens in more serious cases).

In the circumstances of (c) and (d) above, the Ombudsman is required to submit the investigation report to the standards committee or a tribunal of the Adjudication Panel for Wales and it is for them to consider the evidence found by the Ombudsman, together with any defense put forward by the member concerned. It is also for them to determine whether a breach has occurred and, if so, what penalty (if any) should be imposed.

The Code of Conduct Casebook contains summaries of reports issued by this office for which the findings were one of the four set out above. However, in reference to (c) and (d) findings, The Code of Conduct Casebook only contains the summaries of those cases for which the hearings by the standards committee or Adjudication Panel for Wales have been concluded and the outcome of the hearing is known. This edition covers January to March 2019.

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Case summaries

No evidence of breach

There are no summaries in relation to this finding.

No action necessary

Pembroke Dock Town Council - Promotion of equality and respect

Case Number: 201706079 - Report issued in January 2019

The Ombudsman received a complaint that a Member ("the Member") of Pembroke Dock Town Council ("the Council") had breached the Code of Conduct ("the Code") for members. It was alleged that the Member had acted in a disrespectful and bullying manner towards the previous Clerk to the Council, both in Council meetings and when communicating with her by email, between 2014 and her resignation from the Council in 2017.

The Ombudsman investigated whether the Members actions amounted to a breach of the parts of the Code that concern showing respect and consideration, bullying and harassment, bringing the Council into disrepute and a Member's duty to disclose an interest if they have one in any Council business. Information was sought from the Council, Pembrokeshire County Council and the Member. Interviews were also undertaken with relevant witnesses.

Having considered the evidence, the Ombudsman concluded that he was not persuaded that the Member acted in a disrespectful or bullying manner towards the Clerk at meetings or when communicating with her by email. He also decided that the evidence was not suggestive of a breach of the Code that the Member had not brought the Council into disrepute. The Ombudsman further concluded that it was likely that the Member may have breached the Code when failing to declare a personal interest at meetings.

Saltney Town Council - Promotion of equality and respect

Case Number: 201800177 & 201800178 & 201800179 & 201800180 - Report issued in January 2019

The Ombudsman received a complaint that Members ("the Members") of Saltney Town Council ("the Council") had breached the Code of Conduct by engaging in an argument with other councillors in front of members of the public, following a Town Council meeting.

The Ombudsman commenced an investigation on the basis that there may have been breaches of paragraphs 4(b), 4(c) and 6(1)(a) of the Code of Conduct.

The Ombudsman found that the behaviours complained about was below the standard that he would expect from elected members but that their behaviour was petty and immature and therefore to take further action and use further public resources would not be in the public interest.

Referred to Standards Committee

There are no summaries in relation to this finding.

Referred to Adjudication Panel for Wales

There are no summaries in relation to this finding.