

Dear [REDACTED]

Complaint about Cllr Taaffe – Sambourne Parish Council

I refer to your Code of Conduct complaint about Cllr Taaffe dated 15 June 2022. You allege that Cllr Taaffe has breached the following rules of the Sambourne Parish Council code of conduct:

- Do not treat others with disrespect
- Do not bring the Council or the role of councillor into disrepute.

On 13 July 2022 you summarised your complaint in an email due to the difficulty in reading the handwritten form. I deal with each aspect of your complaint below. I have considered comments from Cllr Taaffe and the Independent Person.

In April 2020, PT accused me of "sucking up to [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

You have not provided a copy of this email and Cllr Taaffe is unaware of it. I consider that due to the trivial nature of it which in my opinion does not constitute a breach of the Code and the over 2 year delay between the incident complained of and your complaint, it would not be in the public interest to investigate this aspect of your complaint further.

Also as a result of my [REDACTED] and reference the investigation report into PT from last year, [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]. This is clearly an offensive and disrespectful remark to a member of the public, and by implication, a direct threat.

I understand that this email dates from 5 April 2020. Cllr Taaffe greatly regrets the use of this word in an internal email between councillors. I understand that once Cllr Taaffe was reminded of this email, he visited [REDACTED] and offered his sincere apologies. Since then, Cllr Taaffe tells me that he and [REDACTED] have met by chance on many occasions in the local pub and have a cordial relationship, [REDACTED] has also attended several parish council meetings where I understand they have spoken to each other in a friendly manner.

Accordingly, I find that although Cllr Taaffe's comments about a local resident in an internal email over two years ago were disrespectful and potentially a breach of the Code, it is not in the public interest to investigate this aspect of your complaint any further.

I paraphrase the next section of your complaint as follows:

Cllr Taaffe lied to the independent investigator about not having seen the emails sent by former chairman [REDACTED]. Cllr Taaffe saw correspondence where residents were called derogatory names including being personally shown the offensive emails in a face to face meeting in 2020 and by a resident in the presence of witnesses

The offensive emails that you refer to were written by former chairman [REDACTED] and the [REDACTED] comment was made, as I understand it, by [REDACTED]. The former chairman's emails were investigated pursuant to a code of conduct complaint about him, and the matter was concluded.

Cllr Taaffe says that he was not shown a complete transcript of the emails in context. He was shown a piece of paper with text pasted on which he was told were communications between [REDACTED] and [REDACTED]. He briefly scanned it and handed it back as he did not wish to read it as it was private communication between two individuals.

The parish council sent a letter to all households on the issue of these emails which included the following text:

All members and the clerk of the Sambourne Parish Council find all forms of sexism, homophobia and anti-Semitic views abhorrent and do not support any of the views that were part of a private email exchange between two previous Parish Council members. None of the present PC members or clerk were sent these emails that have had the contents quoted in the press. These views are totally unacceptable in any capacity that someone is in, be it private or public...

I consider that the matter of [REDACTED] emails has been comprehensively investigated and concluded as far as the councillor complaints process is concerned and I do not consider that Cllr Taaffe has breached the Code of Conduct in relation to this matter.

During this investigation by [REDACTED] PT also denied contacting residents and being rude and inappropriate when speaking with them as a Councillor. Evidence was presented to the Investigator by way of a sourced document clearly showing phone calls made by PT of an inappropriate and threatening manner. Again PT denied this and yet there is irrefutable evidence to say that he made the calls.

I see this as an attempt to revisit your previous complaint about Cllr Taaffe which was fully investigated by [REDACTED] and concluded. I do not consider it would be in the public interest to investigate this matter any further.

At the face to face meeting in July 2020, PT refused to listen to my concerns as a [REDACTED] at that time, preferring instead to turn a blind eye to the bigoted views of the disgraced Chairman (at the time) and turned his back on me and disengaged. There were witnesses to this.

I understand this refers to a meeting between you and Cllr Taaffe in the Green Dragon public house over two years ago. I understand that this meeting lasted almost two hours and that several topics were discussed including flooding and the Gateway scheme. I do not consider it likely, therefore, that Cllr Taaffe refused to listen to your concerns. It is questionable whether Cllr Taaffe was acting in capacity in this meeting and you have not substantiated any breach of the Code.

By deliberately misleading the Investigator, PT has told falsehoods to the Monitoring Officer and in turn, mislead the public and frustrated the pursuance of truth. PT has shown a maligned allegiance to [REDACTED] when his duty should have been to the parish residents, and integrity of the process

This is a repletion of above points. There is no evidence that Cllr Taaffe has deliberately misled the investigator or the Monitoring Officer. The parish council and its members have made clear their opinion on the offensive emails.

I have evidence that PT, together with [REDACTED], is attempting to silence me in my quest for truth, honesty and integrity. This has included approaching friends of mine locally, in an effort to engage in conversation about me, saying "Don't believe what [REDACTED] is telling you".

No evidence of this has been provided.

I also have evidence that PT has spoken with the landlord of our local pub and misinformed them that I have been communicating maliciously about them, [REDACTED]

No evidence of this has been provided.

Gateway Scheme

In an email to me dated 28 July 2022 you wished to raise concerns about the Gateway traffic calming scheme and Cllr Taaffe's involvement. You wanted the following concerns added to your complaint about Cllr Taaffe:

- He attempted to bully you and other residents through the process and was rude.
- He attempted to exclude you from meetings and sent inappropriate messages about you and was dismissive and adversarial.

- He withheld important information about the Gateway Scheme and was devious in the way he presented data to residents.
- He railroaded the scheme through during covid times and offered no or few explanations for what he was doing.
- He held closed meetings away from public glaze to avoid scrutiny and transparency in decision making.
- The public were given little or no opportunity for engagement.
- *This matter has already been investigated in depth by ██████████ in connection with the previous complaint about Cllr Taaffe and I do not propose to re-visit the matter. ██████████ found as follows:*
- *there was nothing untoward in the way that the Sambourne Gateway Scheme was designed or implemented by the expert team from Warwickshire County Council.*
- *the Parish Council behaved with propriety insofar as it had responsibility for oversight and governance of the project, and he shares WCC's conclusion that the Scheme was not "illegal";*
- *All councillors were given the opportunity to contribute to the project but some chose not to. There was no conspiracy to exclude them from decision-making as implied by the suggestion of "clandestine" or "behind the scenes" conversations. Indeed we have seen emails from Cllr Taaffe updating his fellow councillors on progress and he facilitated contact between ██████████ and a WCC officer so that he could discuss the Scheme with him.*
- *The Council communicated details of the Scheme in ways which were reasonably possible in the midst of the pandemic, though it would have preferred to do more.*
- *the influence the Parish Council and the residents were actually able to have on the design was relatively small and there was a need to progress the project to conclusion. The County Council had both the expertise and the final say in that.*
- *Cllr Taaffe provided sound leadership on behalf of the Council. He appears to have taken his responsibility seriously. He tried in particular to engage on behalf of the Council with residents on the Sambourne and Middletown Matters Facebook page, sometimes in the face of vocal opposition. If he did indeed make occasional comments, details of which later proved to be incorrect (as may well be possible, even likely), it appears to us that they would have been minor and inconsequential*

It follows that this matter has already been comprehensively investigated and no breach of the Code by Cllr Taaffe was found.

School governor

In an email to me dated 12 August 2022 you said that Cllr Taaffe has failed to register with the Monitoring Officer that he is a School Governor, which you say is a breach of the Code.

In my view, being a School Governor is not a Disclosable Pecuniary Interest. It may be an 'Other Registrable Interest' – this is not clear cut. I will suggest to Cllr Taaffe that he adds the details to the public register to be on the safe side.

It is possible that Cllr Taaffe's position as a School Governor may be relevant to a particular matter at a parish council meeting, such that the interest ought to be disclosed at the meeting. That would need to be assessed on a case by case basis with Cllr Taaffe taking advice from the clerk as necessary.

Conclusion

In conclusion, I find that Cllr Taaffe has not breached the councillor Code of Conduct as alleged, and that the complaint does not warrant further investigation. [REDACTED] it is not in the public interest to investigate the matter further. My decision, therefore, is to reject the complaint against Cllr Taaffe in accordance with the Council's complaints procedure.

Yours sincerely

R Chambers

Ross Chambers

Solicitor and Deputy Monitoring Officer Legal Services

cc Cllr Taaffe Clerk to SPC

Phil Grafton, Monitoring Officer