

TENDRING DISTRICT COUNCIL – Alysha Stockman (AS) and Melvin Kenyon, Investigator (MK). 2pm, 26th October 2023. Zoom.

Preamble

MK began the interview with the following preamble. “My name is Melvin Kenyon, and I am an independent, external investigator for the Monitoring Officer of Tendring District Council [Lisa Hastings] who has asked me to assist her in this matter.

“It is my normal practice to record interviews and I would like to do that now with your permission. I will use the recording to produce a summary of our conversation rather than trying to make written notes as we talk.

“I will send the draft summary to you for comment before it is finalised and, when you and I have agreed the summary, that will then form the record of our conversation. The recording will be destroyed once the summary has been agreed by us both and it will not be shared with anyone else without your permission in the meantime. Can you confirm that you consent to the recording of the interview please?”

AS gave her consent to recording.

MK continued. “For the benefit of the recording it is now Thursday, 26th October at 2pm or thereabouts. This is a conversation between Melvin Kenyon and Alysha Stockman of East Suffolk Council concerning a Standards Complaint raised by Cllr Ernest Gibson of South Tyneside Council against Cllr Nick Turner of Tendring District Council on 16th August 2023.

“Cllr Gibson alleged in his Complaint that Cllr Turner breached the Tendring District Council Code of Conduct at (actually) two separate meetings relating to the work of the LGA Coastal Special Interest Group that took place in June this year.

“I am conducting this interview under the powers given to the Monitoring Officer by the Localism Act 2011 which places councils under a duty to promote and maintain high standards of conduct.

“I will be guided in my investigation by the provisions of the “Tendring District Council Members’ Code of Conduct” and by that Council’s “Complaints Procedure” which sets out the Arrangements for dealing with Standards Allegations under the Localism Act 2011. Both these documents can be found on the Council’s website. You should refer to those documents if you wish to further understand what I am doing and how complaints are handled in any detail.

“Once my fact-finding is complete I intend to produce a written report about the complaint. Cllr Gibson and Cllr Turner will each be sent a draft copy of the report so that they can identify any matters with which they disagree or which they believe require further consideration. Having considered comments on the draft report, I will then issue a final version with findings, conclusions, and recommendations, to the Monitoring Officer for her action in line with the Council’s Arrangements. Parts of what you say today may be included in the draft and final reports.

“If the Complaint were to go on to be considered at a hearing of the Council’s Standards Committee or a Sub-Committee, as provided for in the Arrangements, please be aware that the

summary of today's conversation may be submitted as evidence and, in theory at least, you may be called as a witness.

"If you provide me with information of a private or sensitive nature (usually GDPR-type information), I will ask the Committee or Sub-Committee that it be kept confidential. However, there is no guarantee that my request will be followed, and the information may end up in the public domain. Please treat our conversation today as confidential at this stage. Please also do be aware that my role includes having to play the part of Devil's Advocate. Do you understand what I have said and are you content with it? Do you have any questions about anything I have just said?"

AS confirmed that she had understood and was content with what MK had said.

Role

In response to a question from MK, AS said, "I work as a Partnerships and Engagement Support Officer at East Suffolk Council. I sit within the Partnerships and Engagement team within Coastal Partnership East – the coastal management team for North Norfolk District Council, Great Yarmouth Borough Council, and East Suffolk Council.

"I am employed by East Suffolk Council. I was attending the meeting on 29th June on behalf of my manager, who leads the Beach and Water Safety Group for the SIG. I was a substitute on that day, and I have attended SIG meetings in the past. I am the secretary for the Beach and Water Safety Group, which is one of the SIG working groups.

"A few of the managers from Coastal Partnership East lead working groups or are otherwise quite involved in the work of the SIG. The SIG is useful to us because it allows us to feed local issues up to the SIG directly or through its working groups so that they can get national attention. For example, we are currently working with them on a national campaign to encourage people to better understand their impact on the coast."

SIG Quarterly Meeting 29th June 2023

In response to a question from MK, AS said, "I didn't attend the SIG meeting on 5th June, but I did attend the meeting on 29th June.

"I remember Ross MacLeod's presentation, because I had seen it before. He talked about the "Float to Live" Campaign and how the RNLI had been working with the Black Swimming Association on "myth-busting". He was saying that they had done a lot of research into myths around black people not being able to float or swim.

"Cllr Turner came in either during the presentation or during the questions section at the end. He was disputing what Ross MacLeod said. I don't remember exactly what he said though I do think he said, "black people can't swim or float". I think he was talking about Afro-Caribbeans because there had been references by Ross to the Black Swimming Association.

"Ross came back very professionally and said that the evidence said otherwise and that they would just have to agree to disagree. He was trying to explain how what Cllr Turner said was not borne out by the evidence the RNLI had. But Cllr Turner wouldn't let him speak. He wasn't willing to listen to what other people had to say. He appeared to be very set in his views. He came over

as disruptive in that he would not allow Ross to counter what he had to say. It seemed to me to be that that was the way he was, his personality, rather than being malicious.

“I didn’t say anything in the meeting. I could see how his comments could offend or upset people, though I didn’t take any personal offence myself because he’s not my local councillor and I felt somewhat detached from what was being said. Had my own local councillor said that (which, of course, they didn’t) I would be concerned that they were representing my community and saying other things that may not be true.

“I would be concerned that that way of thinking might prejudice anything else they might say or believe. I would be concerned that their thoughts on ethnic minorities might apply to other areas and not just to being able to swim. I think that what Cllr Turner said could be construed as racist, though I am not sure that there was enough context to define it as racist.

“I don’t remember anything being said about Germans.”

Interview ended at 2.30pm