Twitter Thread by Dermot Feenan

Dermot Feenan
@dermotfeenan

Durham County Council has upheld my complaint that Councillor David Boyes breached its Code of Conduct for communications in respect of Travellers. This would appear to be the first time in England that a councillor has been so held to account for such communications. [1/16]

> The press are now also covering Durham's decision to hold the hearing into the complaint against Cllr Boyes behind closed doors. See this item by @JHarrisonLDR, which includes reference to representations by @GypsyTravellers for a public hearing.https://t.co/C6M4KR65cW https://t.co/LuS8jQ2moi
>
> — Dermot Feenan (@dermotfeenan) December 15, 2020

The grounds for the complaint are already set out by me: https://t.co/0MDqO6dyja. In summary: on 7 May 2020, Cllr Boyes posted on a Facebook site he shared with another councillor a video of scorch damage from barbeque trays and littering on and around a picnic table.
[2/16]

> For those unfamiliar with the details of this complaint, I set out the basis of the complaint in the following 7 images: [8/14] pic.twitter.com/wrU18mBlMa
>
> — Dermot Feenan (@dermotfeenan) November 11, 2020

The table was in a picnic area in a nature reserve in the Easington constituency which Cllr Boyes represents. The video was accompanied by a comment from Cllr Boyes linking the ‘state’ of the tables with Travellers. That post attracted a number of comments which he liked.
[3/16]

Those liked comments included:

■■ ‘scum should be f**k*ng shot oxygen thieves’ [edited]

■■ ‘And they wonder why many people do not welcome them’.

[4/16]

Cllr Boyes accepted at the hearing that he did not have proof that Travellers caused the damage and that it was wrong for him to so implicate Travellers.
[5/16]

The Council's decision, issued to me today, was made by the Standards Committee Hearing Panel which sat on Monday, 14 December 2020. The Panel upheld the Investigating Officer's findings that Cllr Boyes breached paragraphs 4.3(h) and 4.3(j) of the Code.
[6/16]

Paragraphs 4.3(h) and 4.3(j) of the Code require members to:

4.3(h) Behave in accordance with all legal obligations, alongside any requirements contained within the Council's policies, protocols and procedures, including on the use of the Council's resources;

[7/16]

4.3(j) Always treat people with respect, including the organisations and public they engage with and work alongside;

[8/16]

The Council decided that Cllr Boyes' liking of the comments amounted to a failure to:

■ treat those who were the subject to such comments with respect, &

■ act in accordance with the Council's legal obligations under the Equality Act 2010 and the Council's policies.

[9/16]

The Council's record of the hearing shows that Cllr Boyes 'accepted that he should not have mentioned Travellers in his initial posts' and that he was prepared to apologise for any offence. This is a shift from his position before the hearing.
[10/16]
https://t.co/S3Zhn8ZrV8

SANCTIONS

The Council imposed the following sanctions, in summary:

(1) Cllr Boyes should issue an apology on the Facebook page where the initial communications occurred, and

(2) Cllr Boyes should undergo training (with all other members of the Council).

[11/16]

The training will cover the use of social media and the Council's public sector equality duty and related policies & procedures.

Cllr Boyes has posted an apology on his Facebook page. That apology & comments posted in reply to that apology are now under review by me.

[12/16]

I will be writing further about this complaint, including its context, the tactics used to secure this result, and its significance for challenging anti-Traveller views. In the interim, I would like issue the following thanks.
[13/16]

Much appreciation to Yvonne MacNamara (CEO) and Patricia Stapleton (Policy Manager) @GypsyTravellerM for promptly addressing matters relating to this successful complaint against Cllr David Boyes. [14/16]

Thanks also to Sarah Mann (Director), Victoria Gilmore (Policy and Project Worker), and Lucy Hetherington (Communications Officer) @GypsyTravellers for their prompt assistance regarding the complaint.

Thanks also to Chelsea McDonagh (@chelsmcdonagh). [15/16]

My updates about this complaint were posted regularly in the interests of openness and to help empower and build confidence among those affected by anti-Traveller views. Thanks to everyone who supported those posts, especially fellow socialists @TravActivist & @LabourGRT. [16/16]