

Darlington Borough Council – Decisions taken by the Member Standards Hearing Committee on Thursday, 6 November 2025

MSH3	Decision	<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Decision Notice</u></p> <p>Case Reference 142-24, Councillor Colin Pease</p> <p>FINDING OF A BREACH OF THE CODE OF CONDUCT FOR MEMBERS</p> <p>Hearing of the Member Standards Hearing Committee, 6 November 2025</p> <p>Members: Councillor Matthew Snedker (Chair) Councillor James McGill Councillor Alan Marshall</p> <p>Investigating Officer: Ellie Dewar, Independent Investigator</p> <p>Summary</p> <p>The Member Standards Hearing Committee considered the case following a complaint from a member of the public (who has requested to remain anonymous – referred to as MOP1) made on 14 May 2024.</p> <p>The complaint arose from a meeting of Middleton St George Parish Council held on 13 May 2024 and an exchange of words between Cllr Colin Pease and Middleton St George Parish Cllr David Darling that led to a physical altercation.</p> <p>Darlington Borough Council’s Monitoring Officer carried out an assessment of the complaint and on 4 June 2024 appointed the Investigating Officer to carry out an investigation.</p>
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		<p>The complaint was heard by the Member Standards Hearing Committee on 6 November 2025 who made a finding of a breach of the Code of Conduct.</p> <p>The Complaint</p> <p>The complaint that was considered was that Cllr Darling questioned Cllr Pease on his seemingly negative attitude and approach to matters concerning the Ward, following which Cllr Pease became verbally aggressive, leaning across the table and pointing his finger at Cllr Darling, saying, "why are you sticking your nose in", followed by "you can carry on running your own little fiefdom without me" and finally "I'm not listening to that prat" before heading for the door. At this point the altercation between them became physical, and MOP1 stated that they witnessed at least two punches being thrown at Cllr Darling's face by Cllr Pease.</p> <p>Relevant Sections of the Code of Conduct</p> <p>1.Respect</p> <p>As a councillor:</p> <p>1.1 I treat other councillors and members of the public with respect.</p> <p>1.2 I treat local authority employees, employees and representatives of partner organisations and those volunteering for the local authority with respect and respect the role they play.</p> <p>2. Bullying, harassment and discrimination</p> <p>As a councillor:</p>
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		<p>2.1 I do not bully any person.</p> <p>2.2 I do not harass any person.</p> <p>2.3 I promote equalities and do not discriminate unlawfully against any person.</p> <p>5. Disrepute</p> <p>As a councillor:</p> <p>5.1 I do not bring my role or local authority into disrepute.</p> <p>Findings of Fact</p> <p>At the start of the Parish Council meeting, the Chair of the Parish Council invited Cllr Pease to speak during the Ward Councillors report, which is a standard item on the agenda of the Parish Council meetings. The Member Standards Hearing Committee were able to listen to an audio recording of the meeting.</p> <p>Cllr Darling read a prepared list of questions to Cllr Pease. The conversation became heated between Cllr Darling and Cllr Pease, with Cllr Darling repeatedly asking questions of Cllr Pease in a raised voice and provoking manner without giving him time to answer.</p> <p>Cllr Pease stood up and pointed his finger and called Cllr Darling a “prat” before going towards the door to exit the room.</p> <p>Cllr Darling quickly stood up, removed his glasses and shut the door meaning that Cllr Pease could not leave.</p>
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	<p>Both parties were then engaged in a physical altercation. Cllr Pease had scratches and blood on his face and arm area, and his glasses were broken during the incident. Cllr Darling had a slightly red face and a bruised finger. Members of the meeting can be heard on the audio recording asking Cllr Darling to “stop” repeatedly. Members of the meeting assisted in separating both parties, and they left separately.</p> <p>Consideration of the Code of Conduct</p> <p>There were two separate elements to the complaint against Cllr Pease that could have given rise to a breach: his reaction to the questions i.e. the finger pointing and use of the word “prat” and his involvement in the physical altercation with Cllr Darling.</p> <p>By Cllr Pease’s own admission, the manner of his response to Cllr Darling’s questions was disrespectful. We agreed with his submission however that this reaction came under extreme provocation. Nevertheless, the paragraph of the Code concerning respect was technically breached by this behaviour, but we take the view that this breach was at the lowest end of the scale.</p> <p>With regard to the physical altercation, we do not find Cllr Pease at fault for this and do not believe that the paragraphs relating to respect, bullying or disrepute have been breached by him in this regard. We have concluded that Cllr Darling was the aggressor who instigated this action and that Cllr Pease acted in self-defence.</p> <p>Decision</p> <p>We find that Cllr Colin Pease technically breached paragraph 1 of the Code of Conduct for Members with regard to respect. There is no finding of breach however in relation to bullying</p>
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		<p>or disrepute. By way of sanction, we request that the Council’s Monitoring Officer write to Cllr Pease to remind him of his obligations under the Code.</p> <p>Dated 10 November 2025</p> <p>Councillor Matthew Snedker Councillor James McGill Councillor Alan Marshall</p> <p>Member Standards Hearing Committee</p>
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