

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

<b>MSH6</b>	Decision	<p style="text-align: right;"><b><u>Decision Notice</u></b></p> <p><b>Case Reference 143-24, Councillor David Darling</b></p> <p><b>FINDING OF BREACHES OF THE CODE OF CONDUCT FOR MEMBERS</b></p> <p><b>Hearing of the Member Standards Hearing Committee, 6 November 2025</b></p> <p><b>Members:</b> Councillor Matthew Snedker (Chair) Councillor James McGill Councillor Ian Calvesbert, High Coniscliffe Parish Council</p> <p><b>Investigating Officer:</b> Ellie Dewar, Independent Investigator</p> <p><b>Summary</b></p> <p>The Member Standards Hearing Committee considered the case following a complaint from Cllr Colin Pease made on 15 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</p>
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	<p>investigation.</p> <p>The complaint was heard by the Member Standards Hearing Committee on 6 November 2025 who made a finding of breaches of the Code of Conduct.</p> <p><b>The Complaint</b></p> <p>The complaint that was considered was that Cllr Darling read off a pre-prepared list of complaints against Cllr Pease at the Parish Council meeting. This had not been approved by the Parish Council and they were unaware of his intended action. Cllr Pease said it was a significant list and that he would address each point in turn. Cllr Pease states that he had barely finished commenting on the first point before Cllr Darling took off his glasses and stormed towards him. Cllr Pease claims to have stood up as Cllr Darling approached and states that Cllr Darling pushed him and then grabbed him around the head, breaking his glasses. Cllr Pease states that there was a scuffle as he defended himself before Parish Councillors intervened to break it up and that, even then, Cllr Darling was struggling with them to get at him.</p> <p><b>Relevant Sections of the Code of Conduct</b></p> <p><b>1.Respect</b></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>
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		<p><b>2. Bullying, harassment and discrimination</b></p> <p>As a councillor:</p> <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><b>5. Disrepute</b></p> <p>As a councillor:</p> <p>5.1 I do not bring my role or local authority into disrepute.</p> <p><b>Findings of Fact</b></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>
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	<p>Cllr Darling quickly stood up, removed his glasses and shut the door meaning that Cllr Pease could not leave.</p> <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><b>Consideration of the Code of Conduct</b></p> <p>There were three separate elements to the complaint against Cllr Darling that could have given rise to a breach: his initial questioning of Cllr Pease, his reaction to Cllr Pease’s finger pointing and calling him a “prat” i.e. removing his glasses, closing the door and moving towards him, and finally, his involvement in the physical altercation with Cllr Pease.</p> <p>With regard to the questioning element, and with the benefit of the audio recording of the meeting, we considered this to be a pre-meditated, antagonistic act. The questions asked were direct and personal and Cllr Pease was not given sufficient opportunity to respond. We considered this behaviour to be disrespectful and, in addition, that it would have an adverse impact on public confidence in the Parish Council.</p> <p>In relation to Cllr Darling removing his glasses and closing the meeting room door, we considered this to be a fast and purposeful movement that was the catalyst for the physical altercation which immediately followed. More than half of the witnesses interviewed stated that they apprehended violence at this point and we couldn’t find any other logical explanation as to why these actions were taken. In our view, these actions constituted both disrespectful and bullying behaviour as well as Cllr Darling bringing himself</p>
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	<p>and the Parish Council into disrepute.</p> <p>Whilst the accounts from the witnesses of the scuffle that took place vary, and both Cllr Pease and Cllr Darling reference the other party as the initial aggressor, we found that the physical altercation between Cllr Darling and Cllr Pease was instigated by Cllr Darling. Cllr Pease's role in the altercation was found by us to be one of self-defence. We found clear breaches relating to respect, bullying and disrepute could be attributed to Cllr Darling in relation to this physical altercation.</p> <p><b>Decision</b></p> <p>We have found that Cllr David Darling breached paragraphs 1, 2 and 5 of the Code of Conduct for Members with regard to respect, bullying and disrepute. By way of sanction, we recommend that Middleton St George Parish Council report these findings at their next meeting, that they formally censure Cllr Darling, that they look to arrange training for Cllr Darling with regard to the Code of Conduct for Members and, if applicable, remove Cllr Darling from any external roles to which he has been nominated or appointed by the Parish Council.</p> <p><b>Dated 10 November 2025</b></p> <p>Councillor Matthew Snedker Councillor James McGill Councillor Ian Calvesbert, High Coniscliffe Parish Council</p> <p><b>Member Standards Hearing Committee</b></p>
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