

## **Investigation reference: 94 & 95/2020**

### **Bethany Symonds' ('BS') note of meeting with 'RT' on 21<sup>st</sup> October 2020**

BS initially asked RT how she came across the post. RT comments that she is not sure – she doesn't know Cllr Culley personally and lives in Middlesbrough so wouldn't have been following her page for local information. RT thinks she must have seen it shared somewhere, or seen the Northern Echo article shared on Facebook, and clicked on it.

RT comments that she felt immediately the need to complain but couldn't immediately find out how to do it – RT reflects that in a restaurant if a waiter said something racist you would speak to the manager but in this instance it wasn't immediately clear who Cllr Culley would be accountable to.

RT says she reflected on this and decided the Council was the most appropriate organisation to complain to. RT commented that she wanted to bring this to the Council's attention as presumably the Council wouldn't know unless someone complains. RT comments that she was surprised at the response from the Council; she is glad it's being investigated but had expected a response to her complaint saying there had been lots of other complaints and that Cllr Culley was no longer in post. RT was shocked that Cllr Culley was still in post at the time of the meeting.

BS asked RT to outline her interpretation of the post and why she felt inclined to make a complaint. RT commented that the first thing she noted was the image and that she takes objection to the depiction of BAME men with beards holding semi-naked white women in that way. RT commented that there is a lot of Islamophobia in society and that image is probably unhelpful, offensive and unnecessary.

RT expanded that the text of the image really tries to undermine the transatlantic slave trade that went on for centuries, by saying that there were other slave trades in which white people were the victims. RT said that this may be factually true but that she objects to the implication that these were equal to the transatlantic slave trade (TAST). RT comments that the TAST went on for centuries, was very well organised and it was mainly white people and western countries which profited from this. As a result, says RT, there is a legacy of institutional racism against BAME people which is still present in society today and the post is an attempt to undermine that or deny that it exists.

RT notes that any instances of slavery where white people were the victims were not on the same scale as the TAST which was unique and has long lasting consequences which this post undermines.

RT offers a comparison of the TAST to the holocaust and suggests that discrediting the TAST is the equivalent of discrediting the holocaust by suggesting that Jews "aren't special" because there have been other genocides where people of other religions have been murdered. RT makes the comparison to somebody who might say "well the Jews

aren't special because people of all religions have been murdered". RT commented that of course there are other examples of genocide and bad things happening to white people, but the point is that the TAST has left a legacy that is still causing a problem today. RT interpreted the post as seeking to deny this by saying "you're not special". RT's view is that the wording, and the meaning behind it, is 'horrific' and 'clearly racist'.

BS asked RT to comment on whether the recent BLM campaign has had any impact upon her views of this post. RT comments that the post is very ignorant towards the BLM campaign; the point of the BLM campaign is not about the slave trade as the campaigners probably assumed that everyone accepts the severity of the TAST.

RT says that the point of the BLM campaign is to highlight the institutional racism that has been left as a legacy of TAST, and asks people to look at ways in which they are complicit in that.

RT states her belief that Darlington Borough Council as a public authority is responsible for setting the example on institutional racism in Darlington, and expands that Cllr Culley can either overlook prejudice and contribute to institutional racism continuing by disputing that such prejudice exists, or she can use her position to try and dismantle it. RT believes that Cllr Culley is choosing the former.

RT interprets the post to be suggesting that BAME people and/or BLM campaigners are making non-BAME people feel guilty. RT comments that this wording is emotive, and tries to reject any dialogue about racism with the statement of "don't make me feel guilty". RT feels that this is worrying.

RT expanded that in her view not only is this post undermining the severity of the TAST and therefore suggesting there is nothing historically for BAME groups to be angry about, but it also suggests there is no institutional racism to dismantle. RT's view is that this post tries to influence others in to thinking that there is nothing unique about the TAST, and there is no historic legacy that needs to be dismantled.

RT's view is that the notion of white prejudice is hard for people to accept, and that a lot of people are looking for a way out of it; perhaps the post is a way of rejecting white prejudice because it is too uncomfortable to accept. RT says that she is shocked at the attitude of someone in public office and thinks this is inciting people not to engage with the issues faced by BAME communities, and therefore allowing those issues to continue.

RT also outlines a concern that the words in the image are so quoteable; she feels that this could easily be quoted casually by people and contribute to the spreading of historically inaccurate information.

BS asked RT to comment on whether the post has any reputational impact upon the Council. RT states that this post reflects extremely badly on the Council. RT believes that

Cllr Culley is entitled to her own personal beliefs, but that the Council should show that it doesn't agree. RT states that she is not BAME however she is still offended and so can't imagine how a BAME person would feel if it was their Cllr who posted this.

RT expanded that in her opinion this post shows contempt for BAME people in the area, and that the Council are supposed to care about them. RT acknowledges that she cannot speak for BAME people, but that it seems obvious to her that this kind of post being allowed would make it harder for BAME people to access their Council services.

RT acknowledges that she is not personally affected by racism and prejudice and therefore cannot know how this post would make her feel if she were. However, she feels this may make it easier for her to raise her objections to the post and less distressing for her to discuss them.


RT comments that if all Cllr Culley is asked to do is offer an apology and there are no proper repercussions then this paints a very bleak picture; she reiterated that she can't believe Cllr Culley has retained her position thus far and says that it reflects terribly on the Council if nothing is done.

RT mentions that Cllr Culley has previously posted along the lines of 'Black Labs Matter' and that although she finds that post to be rude and offensive she feels that this post is 'outrageous'.

BS explained to RT that Cllr Culley is elected by the people in her area, and asked RT to consider if that means she should be able to post her views freely online. RT commented that there should be some limit on this and protection from people undermining racial issues and being offensive. RT pointed out that Cllr Culley has chosen to take on public office, and RT comments that its widely accepted that in some jobs you can't do certain things. RT uses the example of her husband being a vicar and says that there could be instances where his private life might impact on his employment or gain local press attention.

RT feels that Cllr Culley can have discretion over her personal Facebook page but points out that this post was made on a public page.

**I, RT, confirm that this document is an accurate record of the comments I made to Bethany Symonds on 21/10/2020.**

Signed.....

Dated.....23.11.20.....