

**INTERVIEW: MEMBER COMPLAINT
REFERENCES 94 & 95/2020**

Date:	17 November 2020
Venue:	Via Teams
Present:	Councillor Anne-Marie Curry (AM) Councillor Stephen Harker (SH) Councillor Matthew Snedker (MS) Bethany Symonds (BS)
Method of Recording:	Digital

Initials of speaker	
BS	Hopefully that has worked. It's come up that we're recording
SH	It has yeah
BS	Excellent so I'll just repeat that this is a discussion as part of the investigation into the Facebook post made by Councillor Culley that's been the subject of a complaint so I'm going to dive straight in and I don't know who wants to begin. I don't know if I want to ask a question and then you just kind of want to respond generally or if you want to take it in turns to answer but I think the first thing that I wanted to speak to you all about was how you came across the post and how it came to your attention
SH	Well I was alerted to it by a party member I seem to recall
MS	Same with me. It was a couple of party members sent it to me as a screen grab. They were appalled to see it and obviously they came to me both as group leader and as the joint vice coordinator of the local party and it wasn't just a whinge. It was yeah we need to do something about this, this is unacceptable so that's how I came to hear about it
BS	Okay and what kind of thing did they say to you when they asked you to look into it. What specifically was it that they felt outraged about

MS	Well the (<i>connection issues</i>) what was obviously an official Councillor account because it had her name and the Ward combined in the title of the Facebook page so it was clearly identifiable as a Councillor speaking out rather than a private conversation between her and her friends in sort of like a private Facebook page and the other one was it seemed to (<i>connection issues</i>) of a move by certain people to downplay the effects that slavery had on black, in particular black and minority ethnic peoples over, you know a huge impact on them over a long period of time and it seemed to be saying that well this has always happened or this has happened to other people as well so it isn't a big thing and the comment that it contained with it don't try and make me feel guilty and that led them to believe that as a Councillor she would, there was a danger that (<i>connection issues</i>) would be seen as not someone you could approach about an issue around discrimination, particularly about race but also the wording that well if something bad has happened to lots of people or it happened at another time it was somehow less
BS	Okay
MS	And that was the concern that a Councillor would be, Councillors in general and the Council as a body would be seen as less approachable, less caring and less likely to take on board complaints from the public about these concerns
BS	Okay thank you and was there one party member that approached you or was it more than one
MS	From recollection it was two but then I, the conversation then moved to a Messenger group of the coordinating group of Darlington Green Party where that, and then so people who hadn't seen it were then brought into the conversation, how we as a party should respond
BS	Okay and so is that kind of, sorry Councillor Harker I interrupted there. Was that kind of the general feeling that that, those feelings that, those opinions that you've just described to me was that the general feeling amongst everybody within your party who was aware of it and who discussed it
MS	Yes there was an awareness that this wasn't, this post, this sort of meme wasn't generated by Councillor Culley but the willingness to share it was,

	<p>and it wasn't the only meme that was going around at that time from a, maybe a sector who were trying to downplay the seriousness of this topic and so they were aware of other memes and the area of society or the area of public life that was propagating and amplifying this message that somehow it wasn't as serious as it really is so yeah that was a general feeling of the party</p>
BS	Thank you
SH	<p>I think for me I mean although I think you know initially it was one person that contacted me again because of you know the world that we live in, social media, WhatsApp groups it became you know very quickly a lot of members were aware of it and I mean I think the thing that struck me, a view that I had when I first looked at it that it's, that on first glance it screams that there's something dodgy about this because the actual pictures themselves reminded me of many images in the past where people try and paint a picture of, you know and it's this classic literature from, you know English literature from the early 50s the expression that was often used swarthy Middle Eastern men that were you know guilty of doing things and to me that image screamed out there's something wrong with this and when you start to read it and think about what he's actually saying it's as Matthew said there's many issues in there that are tangentially referred to and trying to minimise much of what the Black Lives Matter movement is about it sort of ignores the fact that yeah slavery was committed by many different ethnic groups, many different nations over a long period of time but it ignores the fact that in terms of what the American and European slave trade did you know it was industrialisation of slavery in a way that had never ever been seen before in terms of the vast numbers of people that were affected it. It ignores the fact that many of the issues that are facing BAME communities today and specifically African (<i>connection issues</i>) hanging over from (<i>connection issues</i>) of the slave trade despite the fact that it was 200 years ago. It isn't saying that people today have a responsibility for what happened two hundred years ago. It's all about this as the society we live in today. What are we going to do about the prejudices that people face today and as Matthew's saying the fact it says you know, I forgot what the expression was, was it you're not special, is a horrible thing to say in any</p>

	<p>circumstance, particularly with something as gross as slavery to say you know just cos it's happened to someone else you know what are you complaining about is a horrible thing, a horrible expression to use to try and dismiss something as having, of no importance. I think it was trying to, it was just trying to undermine a protest that was taken at the time and minimising the importance of it and minimising why people, should make people feel that it's not significant and they shouldn't do anything about it. A couple of things that Matthew didn't mention that I think were raised with me is this issue about public/private Facebook. Whilst it was probably clear it was posted on a Facebook page that Pauline was using for her Council work, my view and I don't know what the other members said you know that's irrelevant. If you've got a Facebook page and the public can see it doesn't matter whether it's called Councillor Harker's Facebook page or Stephen Harker's Facebook page. If you have those views and they're visible and even if they're not visible it doesn't matter whether you're saying it as a Councillor or you're saying it as a private person to me it's one of those issues it's irrelevant who you're saying it as you know they're abhorrent that you should say it in private or in public. There are things in public life that you can do in private are purely private matters you know. In my mind and many other people who spoke to me this isn't one of them. If you've got those views you've got those views and the second point that was made to me was that whilst Pauline in terms of her Councillor role she's a back bencher and therefore not particularly prominent within the Local Authority. Her role in the wider Conservative Party she does have a significant role in that she's chair of the Southwest Durham Conservative Association so within her own party she's a significant figure and therefore for someone to be posting something like that it has a bigger impact than someone that you know was perhaps just a party member who had no role in public life. It's that that also worried some of the people that I spoke to about you know the influence that she can have in having those views because of her role outside of her role on the Local Authority</p>
BS	Thank you. That's really helpful. Councillor Curry what would you wish to comment on that

AC	Yeah I actually saw the image being shared around Facebook and my concerns was that it was trying to widen what the issue really is at the moment. At the moment it's Black Lives Matter because of the discrimination that's going on in society. Slavery still happens but it's not the issue at the moment people really really care about. It's the discrimination that is causing deaths of many black people or incarceration of black people and I think that it was the wrong time, the wrong place to highlight that sort of thing. You could have, the way she worded it was wrong. If she kind of said history has shown that this has gone, well we've moved on and now there is an issue with discrimination that would, she could have countered it so easily by using that image but I feel that this group of people who were trying to make it, Black Lives Matter a non-campaign had bring it the wrong wrong way and I'm scared that she's part of that group
BS	Thank you. Councillors Snedker and Harker have said that they had complaints from members of their party. Was that the same for you Councillor Curry
AC	No no but a lot of my active members of the party are elderly and probably don't scroll through Facebook a lot. My two fellow Councillors don't use Facebook very much so they probably haven't seen it
BS	I see so did you see the post because you were following or friends with Councillor Culley on Facebook
AC	Somebody who was a friend of mine had seen it and shared it
BS	Lovely thank you. So Councillors Snedker and Harker you've mentioned receiving complaints from people in your party, obviously you've received those and then you felt strongly enough to put in a formal complaint yourselves about that. Does that reflect the feeling within the party or was that, is that your own views that actually this was something that was serious enough to make a complaint yourselves
MS	I think as I already said the conversation was immediately what are we doing about this you know we are a political party. We do have representation within the Council and you know it seems part of our duty of being a Councillor and being a political party is to counter that when we see that happen that you know so the, what can we do and what can you

	<p>as a Councillor do was asked immediately and the, a formal complaint, a check of the constitution and you know a read through as to what the Nolan principles say and what the, what is considered behaviour that is inappropriate was immediately discussed and it was felt that a formal complaint was, well had to be made really so yes that was, that feeling was very strong from the very outset</p>
BS	Thank you
SH	<p>I mean I think for me it was on looking back I think some of the people that had seen it were younger people who you know I know are, have much more clear views, much crystallised views about what they see as wrong, what they see as right and they were in some respects quite outraged at it and I think they contacted me partly out of you know well what can we do about it. I think a feeling you know and I wouldn't have done this but had I not done something about it they would have pursued it themselves separately. I mean what my initial action was actually emailed Heather Scott and Peter Gibson through my Councillor email but emailed to them you know essentially privately to say I've seen this post what are you going to do about it and I never got a response to that email. I think I sent that early September and after having had no response I then spoke, I can't remember the circumstances of that but I clearly spoke to Matthew and Anne-Marie Curry and I possibly said you know I'm going to send a formal complaint in to Luke Swinhoe clearly which you'll have seen and the gist of that was I think saying you know we're not happy with this post and specifically I have tried to contact Heather separately and because I've had no response you know I can't just let it go and the only avenue I've got in a sense is either to contact Luke as a legal person or possibly Paul Wildsmith but we sent that in basically saying we've raised a concern about this and we're unhappy that</p>
BS	Okay
SH	Basically nothing's been said to us about it
BS	Okay thank you. What would you have expected Heather to do about this
SH	<p>I mean it's a very difficult question to answer and for me it's about the level to which you think something is you know especially bad or less so and I think, I think I'll always take the view that someone might post</p>

something being unaware of what they're doing, careless kind of thing and to give someone the opportunity to actually undo what they've done without making a huge song and dance about it which is why initially I emailed Heather because you know in some sense I think the ball's in, the person who's done it it's in their court initially to try and redress what they've done. The post was taken down fairly swiftly. I suspect that was done probably not out of a feeling that there was anything wrong with it but the fact that presumably Heather and I guess Peter was also getting lots of emails from people saying this is outrageous. It certainly needed taking down. I think it certainly needed someone saying something be that Pauline, be that Heather or Peter to actually have some acknowledgment of the fact that what had been posted was wrong. Whether at the time if someone had apologised privately would that have been sufficient possibly but maybe not given the number of people that had seen it cos it's not about punishing someone. It's about for me the fact that what that message said and how much it was undermining other people's good intent the damage that that has done is what I'm more concerned about and I think in trying to undo it the manner in which you're undoing it needs to have something said that actually yes I made an error in posting it but also acknowledging the fact that why it was wrong to post it and be clear about it's conveying the wrong message and making other people think actually it's either okay to say these things or to feel that in this instance the Black Lives Matter movement is of no substance and has no consequence. You know it's that that's more important in my view about getting around what that was doing in terms of undermining the work that people are doing. Sadly the fact that the email wasn't responded to and we're here today formally investigating it pushes it into the extreme of well you know you didn't deal with it in a sensible way at the time. You're digging your heels in not accepting what I would say is a widely accepted message that is wrong and say well I don't see what the problem is, it's okay to offend people which is what I think Pauline has said from the transcript I've read of the preliminary investigation. There comes a point where you think well you know if you're not going to accept that it's wrong you know something greater than just requires an apology is going to be necessary because I don't see any sense of Pauline or the

	<p>wider Conservative Party accepting that that image is wrong and given other people that you know have, not just the conversation we're having today but a number of people that I've spoken to and if you look at social media it's quite clear that most people accept that what that image is really about is (<i>connection issues</i>) as Matt said and to me the evidence is overwhelming in terms of that's what it's about and therefore it was a mistake to post it and if you continue insisting that I don't see what the problem with it is it just gets worse and worse and worse trying to extricate yourself from that situation and what you have to do to do that becomes ever more bigger and you know whether Pauline needs censuring in some sense I don't know but I think it's gone way beyond a quiet apology saying oops sorry I shouldn't have done that, done and dusted</p>
AC	<p>Because of social media being the way it is it's been shared and shared and shared so more and more people have seen it and got angry about it and you know what do we do with that. That anger that offence that's been made against the Black Lives Matter campaign is out there and we don't know how far that has gone because of social media</p>
MS	<p>I mean my feeling on this was that kind of the size of the offence or the audience of the offence dictates the size of the apology or the recompense that needs to be made for it so if you know you say something to someone one on one that's offensive and it's pointed out to you then you know it could be quickly apologised there and then and you can say oh sorry I didn't realise what I said or you know that was a bit crass you know and as the audience gets bigger the apology needs to be bigger but also the person who says it you know your standing in society as that goes up the form of that apology needs to be bigger so as Steve said if it'd been a back bencher Councillor that's different from the Chair of the association and also when we say the size of the apology time, the time lag also has a bearing on this because if you say something, you use a word that's offensive and you're all yep sorry I shouldn't have said that it's soonest mended soonest forgotten kind of thing and it feels very much as if you know the non-reply to the email and the, it seems to be the resistance to acknowledging the offence caused sort of multiplies the offence and it makes me concerned that the hope is that people will</p>

	<p>accept that viewpoint as equally valid because that seems to be the position that's being pushed there by not offering a swift and full apology. That seems to be you know extending the fight to say that this is okay, this is an all right thing to say and it isn't and by coming to this hearing and by having this formal complaint that's us putting a marker down to say no you know this is not acceptable and that's why we would like the formal action taking place. If it had been dealt with earlier, swifter, sooner, fuller then we wouldn't be here now and it's the actions of Councillor Culley that have led us to be here and doing this now I feel</p>
BS	<p>So would I be right in saying that it's not just the post that's the issue it's the response to that</p>
MS	<p>It is now. It is now yes</p>
BS	<p>Okay thank you. Just picking up on something that Councillor Harker said earlier on. You referred to the damage that's been done. Can I ask you to expand please on what damage it is that you think has been done. What do you think is the impact of this post</p>
SH	<p>I mean the post is what it is and we talked about what it means and what it's saying and how invidious it is. I think the issue in terms of today is the fact that this has drifted on is what's been left in the air is I suppose the question is well if someone's insisting that it's fine then people might be thinking well actually they might be right you know perhaps they're right perhaps we're wrong in terms of complaining about it and the longer it takes to resolve that the longer that post is out there with people thinking well actually perhaps it is okay to say these things. Perhaps the messages in there is correct and the people complaining about it are wrong. In my view because that image is, I'll just turn this phone off, in my view cos this image is wrong the longer it hangs around as being an unresolved issue the longer it allows for certain people who are, have those views to say well actually it is right. You know no one's doing anything about it. The person that made the post is saying it's absolutely fine to say it and it's just these people complaining about it kind of thing and to me that's the damage about it, the fact that it's, this process takes a long time allows it to be there in the public domain for people to comment on and to see and it's you know the quicker, if you make an offensive statement or you say something wrong the quicker you sort it</p>

	<p>out the sooner there is clarity around the fact that everybody accepts that what you or someone said was wrong or is damaging in some sense and people then move on. If you wait a long time for that to be resolved then it allows you know as I said people to think well perhaps it is okay, perhaps it's not quite as clear cut as someone is saying and depending on who said it, the more important that person is, the more influence they have that then exacerbates the fact that people will be thinking well actually you know she is a significant person in the past why would she make statements wrong cos people don't do that</p>
BS	Okay
SH	Yeah it's, yeah it's the length of time that it sort of sits there unresolved
BS	Thank you. Councillor Curry do you think this is a reputational issue. Do you think this affects the reputation of the Council this kind of post
AC	<p>I think those people out in the public that don't really understand the dynamics within the Council, the fact that it's a Councillor is she representing all of us as Councillors because some people don't understand that and if they've seen that and seen that a Councillor is saying that is the Council saying that or are all Councillors saying that and there is people out there who think like that we're all wrong, you know the whole Council is in the same boat. Some people don't have a high opinion of the Council and this won't help. This won't help. This will manifest even to more complaints and more problems that people have and the distrust of the Council and I think that we've got to be able to nip it in the bud and it's too late now. We haven't nipped it in the bud. It's going, you know it's still out there</p>
SH	<p>I mean I think on that specific point the answer sort of I think depends on the individual person you're thinking about. There's some people that, you know we're political (<i>inaudible</i>) we spend a lot of time in politics but for most people it's something they get involved with relatively infrequently. They vote occasionally you know they read the newspapers so they don't always take a huge interest in whether politicians are of a particular party or not</p>
AC	Yep

SH	<p>People often just see you know they are a politician, they've said this and it is damaging to all politicians. You know clearly I am heavily involved in politics as we all are here and therefore to me it is significant, it's a person from a political party so yes it is damaging to her party more than it is with others but I'm acutely conscious that you know things that people say reflect on all politicians and to answer your question specifically it does have the potential to reflect on the local authority itself because to some people it doesn't matter that Pauline's of a particular political party. It's the fact that she's a Councillor on the Council saying these things and will make some people think well if she's saying that what do the others on the Council think. Are they of a similar view. You know it will make some people concerned that the people that you know have quite serious responsibilities in terms of governing the Council have views like that and are allowing those views to pervade you know within the Local Authority. What does it mean you know about our staff, do the staff have similar views. It is, it has the potential to cause damage and as we said before the longer it takes to sort out the longer people might be sitting there thinking actually is there a wider problem than just one member having those views</p>
BS	<p>Thank you. Councillor Curry do you wish to comment on that or say anything further</p>
AC	<p>Yeah he said, Councillor Harker said that slightly more eloquently than I did and tried to get the message across. That was the sort of message I was going to say is that we are political. Most people out there are not political. A lot of people will tar us with the same brush and I think it goes beyond just us as Councillors. As Councillor Harker said the Council may actually get damaged by this and I have concerns about that, that people of ethnic minorities may not feel that it's safe to come to the Council for any issues or complaints because they feel that we take that sort of stance and we've got to clearly have a statement going out that it was a personal statement and it does not reflect on any other Council or anybody else from the Council that they don't support this, that stance</p>
MS	<p>For me one of the points is clearly this meme, I didn't only see it on Councillor Culley's Facebook page. You know again as Councillor Harker said there we are politicians. We are involved in that and I do see and</p>

	<p>interact with people who I probably wouldn't want to in normal life but it's part of my duty is to at least listen to people and be aware of what people are saying and so I do see messages and I do hear opinions that are distasteful to me so this meme was shared by people whose position was seen as, could be characterised as far right and to see that message repeated by someone who is in elected office adds legitimacy to that viewpoint because there are people out there who feel that white people are superior to black people. There are people out there who feel that slavery, the slave trade was not as big a deal. It was something that was somehow acceptable or of its time. People who say that you know enslaving people should be seen in context and somehow excused because it happened some time ago and to see an elected politician, you know someone of that status repeating those views adds legitimacy to those views and makes people feel more secure in sharing those views and repeating those views when in fact you know our position should be to limit and delegitimise those views so that's why I feel so strongly that it does damage the reputation of the Council as a whole to have those repeated by a Councillor of that standing</p>
BS	Thank you
SH	<p>And that reminds me, I don't know why it reminds me but it's something that someone said to me at the time with it you know on a smaller level that you know as Councillors one of our responsibilities is working with residents when they've got you know problems, difficulties with the Local Authority and a whole host of things and if a resident sees someone you know one of us posting something like that who is from the BAME community what are they supposed to think, you know can I go to that person and get genuine help when clearly it might appear to them that that particular Councillor has you know a dim view or a poor view of BAME people. You know as Matthew said just now we are, you know we are supposed to help all our residents irrespective of what our political views are or their political views are, we are here to help and therefore as an individual we do need to portray ourselves as people willing to listen to people's problems and issues and if you say something like that you know frankly there's a section of this community that probably wouldn't go to Pauline for help because they'll be sitting there thinking well is she</p>

	<p>genuinely going to help me because if she's got those views she may not be particularly interested in me as an individual so you know it's at all ends of the spectrum in terms of the potential impact it has in terms of her work as a Councillor from (<i>connection issues</i>) resident with a particular issue to conveying a view about what people think this Council is about collectively our views on certain issues</p>
BS	<p>Right that's very helpful thank you. I just want to pick up on something Councillor Snedker said a few moments ago that the post has been reposted by people whose views can be characterised as being far right and that Councillor Culley reposting that has added some legitimacy to that. If and I don't know what Councillor Culley's personal views are but if her personal views are what you would characterise as far right is she not entitled to that legitimacy to that if those are her personal views. As a politician is she able to agree with that</p>
MS	<p>I think we're in the position of looking at the free speech question and this has been characterised is should you be allowed to stand up and shout fire at the top of your voice. Well clearly yes but not in the middle of a crowded theatre when there isn't a fire you know so to say something (<i>connection issues</i>) words we say so is a person allowed to hold the view that white people are superior to black people. Is a person allowed to hold the view that the mass transportation and murder of millions of black Africans was something which was lesser because it happened a while ago and should someone be allowed to hold those views. Of course they should however they're wrong, they're reprehensible, they're divisive and they're dangerous those views and so by saying them you are acting irresponsibly and dangerously and that is the concern here that to repeat those views which are you know of that trope which delegitimises the anguish of what happened to black African people through slavery is dangerous (<i>connection issues</i>) think that being of that status that she is chair of the local Conservative committee and a Councillor. That is why the sharing of those views is something that needs investigating because if the Council as a body behaved in that way, i.e. treating white people better than black people, if the Council decided that treating a group of society poorly but a while ago was okay and didn't want to atone for that</p>

	that would be bad I think to happen and so that is why it reflects poorly on the Council that that's happening
SH	<p>And in addition I think for me it's particularly because the whole point of that meme its origins were in about undermining the Black Lives Matter movement which you know fundamentally is about trying to tackle some of the issues that the BAME community faces in terms of prejudice, lack of opportunity and all that and all those related issues, it was really trying to undermine that and you know it does become very difficult when you say well freedom of speech you are allowed to say what you think yeah but you can cross the line and I think you know the litmus test in a sense is you know what the majority of people think and I would argue the majority of people think from whatever background they are is that in today's society there are certain sections of our society that do not have the same chance in life as others and one of those groups of people is the BAME community and that meme that was posted is trying to undermine the work that's going on to try and redress that and for me you know that's why in this instance it's not something that someone should be saying particularly someone in public office. Yes some people would agree with her. I clearly personally think they're wrong and I would argue that the majority of people in the UK would also say that she's wrong but you know reflecting the fact people have very very diverse views. Many things most people will agree on but that's not still the case that people on the fringes of society have some really really extreme views. We've had a long discussion about whether it's their right to say such things but I think in this instance it was wrong to do it because fundamentally what it was trying to do was to undermine a movement that's about trying to redress inequalities in certain parts of our modern society</p>
BS	Thank you
AC	<p>I think I would add to that it's the fact that she used the Facebook page which was, if it was a personal view then why use a Facebook page which identified her as a Councillor of Darlington Borough Council of Mowden Ward. To me if it's a personal view then it, she should have put it out on her personal page if she had one or had she changed the personal page. It shouldn't have gone out on an official page that she'd classified as being linked to the Council. That was the biggest problem. I don't like</p>

	<p>what she said. I understand that it is factually true but it's not the right time, the right place to do it and it's the fact that she used that page which demonstrates the lack of understanding that it was not a personal, she was putting it out as a Councillor not as a personal person. If she'd put it out on a personal page I don't think, we'd still all have not liked it but we wouldn't have had a claim at all on making this formal complaint. It's because it's on the page that she said was for Mowden Ward you know from Mowden (<i>connection issues</i>) Councillor. That to me is fundamentally she's speaking as a Councillor there</p>
BS	<p>Okay so in</p>
SH	<p>Sorry I think for me I would disagree with part of that. I think this is one of those issues where in my opinion it's not right to have those opinions either as a private person or as a public person because clearly if that's what you believe even, that's what you say in private then it's not unreasonable to think well that's how you're going to conduct yourself in public life and therefore if your view is that you know the BAME community doesn't suffer prejudices in society it means that when someone from that community goes to you for help as a Councillor you're clearly not going to help them because you're probably going to feel well it's okay for them to be suffering inequality because that's what you believe in private. I said earlier there are certain things I think can be made private in our lives as public politicians but there are certain things that clearly cannot and if you have a view about what are people's rights that isn't something that you keep in your private life and not influence your public life. If that's what you believe you're going to do, you're going to believe that, public and private life and the actions that you take will be the same in your public life as in your private life and to me in this instance there's no distinction between whether it was posted privately or publicly. It's what she believes in and that will have an impact potentially in how she behaves in her public role as a Councillor</p>
BS	<p>Okay thank you so to expand on that a little bit more and I appreciate this could be a very difficult question to answer, how much should politicians be able to express their own views even if those views are unpopular</p>
SH	<p>It is a difficult question. You can express your views publicly but there will be consequences to it you know. If someone as an individual person</p>

	<p>expresses a view that someone else finds is intolerant if it's a one to one conversation they may be challenged, they may end up just not being able to agree or disagree, someone may change their views. On the other extreme you know if you're a national politician and you say something that society as a whole doesn't agree with you know there'll be consequences to that and depending on I guess the severity of what you've said, how wide the impact is you know it could be potentially from a mild censure right the way through to someone being forced to stand down from their party you know either resigning if it's a national politician, it's an MP, resigning from their party because the party finds it intolerant so I don't think there's a simple answer because, and we sort of discussed earlier, it depends on the seniority of that person, how much influence they have on society, how significant their role is and what it is that they've said. It's a whole spectrum as to what the consequences is of someone saying something because of that</p>
MS	<p>For me it's, yeah of course it's a difficult, it's a philosophical question about holding a view and speaking that view but for me it comes down to harm because if what you say causes harm then you need to be acutely aware of that and the amount of harm it causes needs to be taken into account which as Steve said is about your standing and your position in public life and to attempt to amplify the message that you know Black Lives Matter isn't a legitimate concern and that the discrimination and disadvantage, national discrimination faced by black people and minority ethnic people is harmful you know because it will distort public policy, it will distort spending, it will distort activity within communities at local government and at a national level if you support and amplify that message and so it causes harm and that's why it should be censored. You know there are laws passed in this country against behaviours that are not physical behaviours that you're not allowed to do on the grounds of discrimination, for example Equalities Act, etc and so there are behaviours that do not directly physically hurt someone but they are proscribed in law and these behaviours may well be based on prejudice and so the holding of a prejudicial view that leads to an action that is prejudicial causes harm and they are quite rightly outlawed and so what we are is we are kind of one link up the chain and that's, it was a really</p>

	<p>good question about holding a view. We're one link up the chain from acting to, to actively discriminate. We are at that point of propagating a message which encourages discrimination and that's why I took offence at it</p>
BS	<p>Thank you. Councillor Curry do you have anything to add to that</p>
AC	<p>No. I do believe that she has the right to speak but not as the, in the role of a Councillor like that. It's wrong. I do believe she has that right to say something. It's up to the Tories to tell her off if she did it in a personal point of view but the fact that she used the page that clearly identified her as a Councillor that to me was totally wrong. Totally wrong. We have to be able to be open and honest with people who come to us and ask for help and she's closing the door on a lot of people in this town</p>
BS	<p>Thank you. My final question, thank you for your time so far. I realise you've been here for a while now but my final question is obviously you've all made it quite clear that you think this post was misguided and inappropriate. Do you all feel confident that this is a breach of the Code of Conduct or do you think it's arguable that it isn't. What's your thoughts on that</p>
MS	<p>I gave a lot of consideration before reporting it. I didn't do it lightly and it's true I discussed it with Steve because I wanted to check I wasn't over-reacting and I felt that that was a possibility that the emotion of seeing this thread and this meme and the reactions of others might have led me to seek a higher level of reaction than was justified but you know having spent time, you know slept on it, I was firm with the conclusion that it did need action as a breach and that's why I agreed to sign the letter and take it to the next level</p>
BS	<p>Thank you</p>
SH	<p>It is a difficult question and as we discussed earlier it's degrees of harm. It's degrees of how influential someone is. It's degrees of how well when someone's challenged the initial reaction is to it (<i>inaudible</i>) and I think if it had been dealt with quickly initially and there'd been some you know even privately amongst members you know shouldn't have done that, that was clearly a mistake I think I still might have said well actually it is, it does need looking at even there as a breach because of its, you know we've</p>

said a lot about it. The positions that we have you know even only as Councillors we are able to influence public opinion. We are able to change how people think. We are able to do things that have consequences in terms of how the local authority works. We are able to change what people think is okay for other people to say so we do always need to be careful what we say and what we do in public and in private because people see us and they take their views on things that we do (*inaudible*) you know national politicians can have a huge influence on what society as a whole believes is an acceptable thing to do or to say and I think with this particular post especially because you know we ended up today with the formal hearing and I think neither Pauline nor Heather nor Peter Gibson which is clearly outside this really did anything to say yeah we messed up here and therefore it's the digging of the heels sort of thing, no no no we're not going to do anything about this or silently saying we're not going to do anything about it that ends up, ramps up the seriousness of what's happened and the fact that you know seemingly no one's saying oops made a mistake, we need to deal with this, we need to redress it somehow. Pauline has been a Member for some time. She does have a significant position in the regional party even though in terms of the Council she's only a backbench Member as the three of us here are today and therefore you know I raised the question not because, I raised the question because I felt something should be done about it but the fact that nothing happened did make me think well actually you know you're not taking this seriously and therefore the question does have to be asked. I think potentially you're breaching the Code of Conduct because it's become a matter where in my view it hasn't been taken seriously that something needs to be done about what happened initially and the longer you take to say yeah I need to do something about this the harder it is to step back from it and so yeah my interpretation of the Code of Conduct, you know there's certain things we shouldn't say, certain things we shouldn't do because of all those things how we influence our local society and I think sadly Pauline has sort of strayed into that area of doing those things because of (a) making the post in the first place, (b) not doing something about it quickly and (3) we've ended up having this formal hearing as a consequence so it's a long rambling answer but I

	think yes you know there has been a breach at the end of the day for a multitude of reasons unfortunately
BS	Thank you. Councillor Curry do you have anything to say on that point
AC	I think we as Councillors are not supposed to do anything that will bring ourselves or the Council into disrepute and the fact that people out there have obviously complained but could also assume that this is the stance of the Council yes I'm afraid, they assume that the Council are not taking this Black Lives Matter campaign seriously because of that meme going out I think it is very very much that we could be harmed as a Council because of it and in that case she has broken the Code of Conduct
BS	Thank you. Before I stop the recording does anybody have anything else that they wish to say on the record
MS	No thank you
SH	I was just looking at the notes I jotted down beforehand. No I don't think I do thank you
BS	Thank you. I'll stop the recording now then
