

DATE 23TH JULY 2019



BABERGH MID SUFFOLK JOINT STANDARDS COMMITTEE

HEARING PANEL

DECISIONS NOTICE

**DECISION BY THE BABERGH MID SUFFOLK JOINT STANDARDS HEARING
PANEL ON 4TH JULY 2019**

Hearing Panel:

Councillor Paul Ekpenyong
Councillor Bryn Hurren (Chair)
Councillor Alastair McCraw

Complainant:

Subject Member:

Councillor P Coupland of South Holland District Council

Officers:

J Snell - Deputy Monitoring Officer, Babergh/ Mid Suffolk District Council
J Robinson - Deputy Monitoring Officer, Babergh/ Mid Suffolk District Council

In Attendance for South Holland District Council:

Mark Stinson - Deputy Monitoring Officer, South Holland District Council to answer questions on the Investigation Report and generally in respect of SHDC's Standards Arrangements
A Gibson – External Investigator appointed by SHDC through the East of England LGA to answer questions on the Investigation Report
T Wickes – SHDC's Independent Person

On the 4th July 2019 the Joint Standards Hearing Panel for Babergh and Mid Suffolk after receiving delegation from South Holland District Council, considered the investigation into a complaint concerning the conduct of Councillor Peter Coupland, South Holland District Councillor, on an external visit to a venue in London on the 18th October 2018.

The complainant alleged that on the train journey to London and later repeated in the venue the subject member made inappropriate comments that had sexual connotations attached to them. The complainant further alleged that, in the venue, the subject member took a seat next to the complainant, placed his arm around her and pulled her towards him, whilst a photograph was taken. The complainant states that the alleged behaviour of the subject member made the complainant feel uncomfortable and caused her distress.

The views of the Independent Person appointed by South Holland District Council were taken into account by the Hearing Panel. The Independent Person's view was that the subject member's actions were inappropriate, but he did not consider there to have been any sexual connotations attached to the subject member's behaviour. The alleged conduct took place in a public area with many people present.

Decision

That Councillor Peter Coupland had failed to abide by the South Holland District Council Code of Conduct under the following paragraphs:-

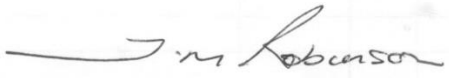
(ix) Valuing your colleagues and staff and engaging with them in an appropriate manner and one that underpins the mutual respect between you that is essential to good local government.

(x) Always treating people with respect, including the organisations and public you engage with and those you work alongside

In reaching their determination the Hearing Panel had considered all of the evidence carefully, including the photograph contained in the appendices to the report, and considered that there was sufficient evidence that Councillor Peter Coupland was (i) undertaking council functions at the time of the alleged conduct, and (ii) by behaving as he did, has brought his office into disrepute and that he had behaved in an inappropriate manner showing a lack of respect and leadership that was essential to his office.

Sanctions

- a) Publication of findings**
- b) That a report be presented to a meeting of South Holland District Council**
- c) That additional training be provided in relation to equality and diversity, culture and ethics and that the member be required to undertake such training**

A handwritten signature in black ink on a light-colored grid background. The signature appears to read "J. Robinson".

Deputy Monitoring Officer

Babergh Mid Suffolk District Council