

**CANNOCK CHASE COUNCIL**  
**MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE**  
**HEARING OF THE PARISH COUNCILS STANDARDS SUB-COMMITTEE**  
**THURSDAY, 20 SEPTEMBER 2007 AT 4.00PM**  
**IN THE CIVIC CENTRE, BEECROFT ROAD, CANNOCK**  
**PART 1**

PRESENT:

Members of the Panel:

Mr. R. Betteridge – Independent Member (Chairman)  
Mr. M. King – Independent Member  
Mr. M. Elliott – Independent Member  
Councillor Mrs. D.J. Bennett – Cannock Chase Council  
Councillor A. Pearson – Hednesford Town Council

Mr. B. Gill – Investigating Officer

Mr. T. Stokes – Former Member of Rugeley Town Council  
Mr. R. Wassall – Representing Mr. Stokes

Cannock Chase Councillor. C. Collis – Witness called by Mr. Stokes  
Mr. R. Bridgwater – Witness called by Mr. Stokes

Also Present: Mr. P. Lloyd-Williams – Monitoring Officer, Cannock Chase Council  
Mr. M. Challoner – Principal Committee Officer, Cannock Chase Council

**1. Declarations of Interests of Members in Contracts and Other Matters and Restriction on Voting by Members**

<u>Member</u>	<u>Nature of Interest</u>	<u>Type</u>
Councillor A. Person	Hearing Against Mr. T. Stokes – Confirmed he knew of Mr. Stokes and his witness, Mr. Bridgwater	Personal

## 2. Hearing Against Mr. T. Stokes, Former Member of Rugeley Town Council

The Chairmen welcomed all parties to the hearing and those present introduced themselves.

The Chairman read out the following allegations made against Mr. Stokes:

- (a) That Mr. Stokes failed to treat others with respect contrary to the Code of Conduct when during a meeting in June 2003 Mr. Stokes attended the office of the Parish Clerk at an unarranged meeting. During the course of the meeting Mr. Stokes leaned over the Clerk's desk and pointed at her leaning into her and shouting at her.
- (b) That on 25 June 2003 at a meeting of the Rugeley Rose Committee Mr. Stokes began getting aggressive towards Mrs. Campbell and started banging the table. Further, during the course of the meeting that Mr. Stokes challenged the accuracy of the minutes by questioning the honesty and integrity of the Clerk
- (c) That during a meeting on 3 March 2004 Mr. Stokes questioned the accuracy of the minutes produced by the Clerk and during the course of the meeting that Mr. Stokes shouted at the Clerk and accused her of "doctoring things". This resulted in the Clerk being reduced to tears having to leave her post and the meeting had to be abandoned.
- (d) That during a meeting of the Council on 7 April 2004 Mr. Stokes raised a staffing matter and queried why the Clerk had not dealt with it. It is alleged that Mr. Stokes raised the matter with the intent of showing the incompetence of the Clerk in her role.

The Panel determined that the hearing should be held in public.

The Investigating Officer was invited to make representations to support the relevant findings of fact in the report and in doing so considered that Mr. Stokes had breached the following Sections of the Code of Conduct for Members of Rugeley Town Council: -

- (1) A Member must have observe the Authorities Code of Conduct whenever he –
  - (a) conducts the business of the Authority
  - (b) conducts the business of the office to which he has been elected or appointed or
  - (c) acts as the representative of the Authority
- (2) A Member must –
  - (b) treat others with respect
- (4) A Member must not in his official capacity or any circumstance, conduct himself in a manner which could reasonably be regarded as bringing his office or authority

into disrepute

Mr. Stokes, and his representative, was given the opportunity to challenge the evidence put forward by the Investigating Officer. Members of the Panel also asked questions of the Investigating Officer.

The Hearing then heard evidence from Mr. Stokes and his witnesses, namely Councillor C. Collis and Mr. R. Bridgewater. Mr. Stokes also presented written evidence to support his version of events and to refute the allegations. He circulated two character references received from Mrs. Christine James of Staffordshire Fire and Rescue Service and Councillor Mrs. Mary Easton (this letter was also signed by Councillor Ray Easton).

The Investigating Officer was given the opportunity to ask questions of Mr. Stokes, his representative and his witnesses. Members of the Panel also asked questions.

Both the Investigating Officer and Mr. Stokes were given the opportunity to sum up their respective cases.

The Panel then left the meeting and deliberated in private, calling on Mr. P. Lloyd-Williams the Council's Monitoring Officer for advice.

#### FINDINGS OF FACT:

The Panel found that in relation to all four allegations, an exchange had taken place between Mr. Stokes and the Town Clerk of Rugeley Town Council and that this was not disputed between the parties.

However, the Panel were not convinced that, on the balance of probabilities the exchanges between the Town Clerk and Mr. Stokes amounted to a breach of the Code of Conduct. The Panel considered that the evidence presented by the Investigating Officer was not corroborated and was insufficient to establish a breach of the Code.

The Panel emphasised that all Councillors (in particularly newly elected Councillors) should familiarise themselves with the Code of Conduct and undertake the training provided by the relevant Council.

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CHAIRMAN