

To the Monitoring Officer and Independent Person

Thank you for the opportunity to respond to the complaint lodged against me that I have breached the Council's code of conduct for members in that I expressed opinions regarding transgender people and in doing so have engaged in bullying or intimidating behaviour.

#### SUMMARY

**The only opinion that I expressed was that I do not find Eddie Izzard funny, which is not in any way bullying or intimidating. The complaint claims that in retweeting with or without comment posts made by others I expressed opinions whereas my intention was to bring to the attention of those in my informal network opinions and news items of interest.**

#### RETWEET MARKED AS B IN THE COMPLAINT

The complaint refers to two retweets, one that I posted without comment and one that I posted with a comment. The first retweet interested me because the main part of the thread referred to a case where a professor told a student to leave her class because the student had expressed the opinion that there are only two genders, male and female. This disturbed me because I believe that freedom of speech for students in many universities is being threatened by an unwillingness of student bodies and leaders to entertain concepts and opinions with which they do not agree. Examples of this are the no-platforming of Germaine Greer by student unions in some UK universities and in February the disruption with aggressive and intimidating behaviour of a talk by Jacob Rees-Mogg at the University of the West of England. In retrospect, I realised that I should have taken more care in retweeting and that I should have removed the last post in the thread that contained comments unacceptable to me and to others. The complaint states that in retweeting I endorsed the characterisation of transgender people as mentally ill and this I reject.

#### RETWEET MARKED AS A IN THE COMPLAINT

The second retweet related to a light-hearted comment on Eddie Izzard's ability to reconnect the Labour party with its traditional supporters which referred to his pro-European opinions, his transvestism and his substantial fortune. Taken at face value the tweet indicates that its author believes Eddie Izzard will be successful but his tone belies that. The complaint states that the author's scepticism reflects opinions on the capability of transgender people whereas it simply sets out what all who seek elected office soon discover – that different constituencies are influenced in different ways by different individuals. The complaint goes on to make much of the original tweet's reference to Eddie Izzard's transvestism and links that to my supposed negative personal view of transgender people's abilities. As a comedian, I do not find Eddie Izzard particularly funny but I have no doubt that he portrays a very positive image of transgender people through his heroic sequences of daily marathon runs for charity and his public persona as a man who wears glamorous feminine clothes and makeup. There is much to admire about him.

## APOLOGY

I do not hold the views that the complainant attributes to me. I strongly believe that all people deserve to be respected for who they are, whoever they are. After I learnt that I had caused offence to some I resolved to clarify my personal views and on 9 April in two tweets I tweeted the following:

I resolve to look closer at tweets before I retweet them and I regret any offence I may have given in this way. I absolutely do not believe that anyone with gender issues is mentally ill. I do believe without doubt that people of any gender and sexual orientation must be respected and I will make sure that my behaviour online and off reflects that.

## SUPPORT

I received supportive comments for these last tweets through Twitter from Newbury Labour Party and private individuals. In comments made to the Newbury Weekly News and included in an article in the paper, Richard Benyon MP stated that I am an “honourable man”. A previous Labour Party Parliamentary candidate for Newbury wrote the following to me through Messenger:

Hi Dominic. Saw the NWN stuff about the Twitter thing and I wouldn't worry about it. People in Newbury know that you are not a bad person, and obviously political people will make more of this than what it actually is. Keep up the good work.

## CONTEXT

I presently have 126 followers. **BrexitTory** and **Tim**, whose tweets I retweeted, have 24,900 and 20,300 followers respectively.

Twitter is a fast moving informal platform that allows users to consume a wide range of news, stories and opinions. Some users express truly offensive opinions, on the right and left of the political spectrum, as well as threats of violence and real intimidation. By contrast, while some may have found my retweets unpalatable I have struggled to find evidence that anyone felt bullied or intimidated by them.

I have not found any direct responses to my retweets other than an initial one from the Newbury Labour Party. After that came retweets and likes from four political organisations and twelve individuals, that I have seen. All the individuals are politically active and included the complainant, Thomas Tunney, who tweeted “let’s unseat this Tory”.