

Response to complaint

I moved to Woolhampton in 2007, and due to my friendship with then-Cllr Grover began attending meetings of Woolhampton Parish Council in February 2011.

Between this date and July 2014 I attended 25 of 30 meetings as a member of the public. During this time I was regularly subjected to improper comments stemming from the perceived nature of my relationship with Cllr Grover.

Following the resignation of Cllr Grover and another member (both moved out of the area), Cllr Wright approached me on three separate occasions, raising concerns about the Parish Council's ability to remain quorate, and I was invited to join the Council in August 2014. On each occasion, knowing Cllr Renouf's already existing opinion about me, I replied that I would be prepared to do my 'civic duty' if nobody else could be found to take on the responsibility in my place.

I formally joined the council in **September 2014**, stating that I wished to improve communications within the village as this would encourage greater engagement with the community. I completed and signed the declaration forms, received the WPC Code of Conduct, and asked to receive a copy of the Standing Orders, any other Governance documents and a copy of the Training Plan. I also asked what other form of induction would be available. I was assured that I would receive these in due course.

In **October 2014** Cllr Large expressed his concern (on privacy grounds) that I took photos of the Council to post on social media, and other members unanimously agreed with this view, saying that they did not wish me to do so. I noted that as a holder of public office sitting in a public meeting to which press and public are formally invited 'there is no expectation of privacy'. In **November 2014** following consultation with the Clerk, WPC adopted Standing Order 3.13 to permit this. Councillors rejected my concern regarding the legality of the Standing Order (a council "may not permit what it may not prohibit") and promised to undertake a review after 6 months. As of January 2017 this has not occurred and the Standing Order remains in force, which – if illegal – is contrary to Cllr Renouf's declarations in the Annual Governance Statement in both 2015 and 2016.

Since this incident I have been subjected to an increasing campaign of bullying and intimidation, orchestrated by Cllr Renouf with the direct support of Cllrs Wright and Lovell on malicious and political grounds, with the assistance of various others at different times.

In **January 2015** I noted that WPC had no list of councillor responsibilities and suggested to the council that I would be happy to volunteer to take on the communications role previously fulfilled by Cllr Grover, and that I had set up a Facebook group to help facilitate this. I encouraged them to engage with and help promote this. Cllr Renouf stated that Cllr Grover had never had this responsibility, and that the Parish Council had 'no wish whatsoever' to engage with any form of digital media. I noted that members of the public had previously volunteered to build and manage a website for the parish, but Cllr Renouf said that this was beyond the council's capacity. I replied that volunteers add capacity, but he asserted that the council had made its' views clear and this was 'the end of the story'.

In **March 2015** a member of the public [REDACTED] intervened during the meeting to physically threaten me when I took a photo at the start of the meeting. He stated that this was improper and

that he wished me to delete any photos as he had not given me permission to take any pictures of him. I showed him the pictures on my phone to demonstrate that he was not in any of them, and pointed out that rather than being prohibited, it is officially encouraged by DCLG, as public meetings are public domain. [REDACTED] He had conferred privately with Cllr Lovell before the start of the meeting, and Cllr Lovell then made a number of gestures to him immediately prior to his outburst, which taken together I took as an indication that there was a high likelihood that the aggressive threats were directed by Cllr Lovell.

In April 2015 WPC discussed whether to hold parish elections. Cllr Large was very keen to avoid elections on privacy grounds and stated that the estimated cost of £1,500 was "a burden the public would not want to bear". Cllr Renouf commented that as no expressions of interest had been received for candidates and 'in his experience' attendees only came to meetings because they want to complain. I noted that councillors have a responsibility to promote democracy, not restrict it, and I had seen no effort to advertise the existing vacancy.

Following the WBC elections, Cllr Renouf explained in May 2015 that he had serious concerns about my motives for being on the Parish Council and my ability to represent the community due the fact that I was a candidate for Aldermaston Ward.

At WPC AGM 2015 I repeated my request for any relevant Governance Documents to be circulated to me together with the Training Plan and I again noted the lack of councillor responsibilities meant the council was not receiving reports. I explained that I was a regular attendee at neighbouring parish meetings and would be happy to encourage closer liaison between councils – as closer cooperation was likely to be encouraged considering WBC's budgetary position and comments from WBC leadership that services could be cut to the 'statutory minimum', which would affect residents. I also volunteered to be nominated for the AWE LLC in place of Cllr Hale, due to his regular non-attendance at LLC meetings and the lack of reports to WPC on this subject. Cllr Large expressed his view that my declared political allegiance disqualified me from this role, due to his inaccurate perception of the national party policy as 'anti-nuclear'. I replied that this was wholly irrelevant and his opinion was clearly political.

Following the April 2015 meeting, at which a new bus shelter on the A4 outside The Angel was agreed, the landlord raised his concerns with me about its' proposed location and possible negative effects on the business. Cllr Renouf responded to the landlord to allay his concerns, inviting him to meet to discuss these. At the June 2015 meeting it was decided that no further action was possible since the landlord had not turned up at the arranged time. Cllr Lovell commented at this point to speculate about the reason, asking rhetorically, "and what substance was he on?" I felt this was a potentially defamatory comment relating to a resident about whom a decision was made. I immediately attempted to draw Cllr Renouf's attention to this, but he did not respond.

Consequently, the next day, I visited the landlord of The Angel to inform him that WPC would not be taking any further action, telling him that he should seek legal advice if he wished to continue the matter. I was later informed, however, that the landlord aggressively approached Cllr Wright in the village shop to demand a reversal of the decision. I was then invited by Cllr Wright to meet with him at the end of June 2015 to resolve any differences. During the 90 minute meeting Cllr Wright said he would inform Cllr Renouf of my position and I asked him to copy this to me in email so that I could agree his interpretation.

Cllr Wright did not do this, so I wrote a detailed account of the meeting of my own which I sent to Cllr Renouf. In the subsequent exchange Cllr Wright explained that he'd told Cllr Renouf in person

that I hadn't changed my opinion, and I asked him why he had told "the complete opposite" of my views.

In addition to my detailed account of the conversation, Cllr Wright said that "Woolhampton is well-known as a dumping ground for social misfits" and that my association with certain of "them" harmed my reputation, because he'd proposed my co-option that "I make him look bad", and that he would do all he could to get me removed from the parish council. Cllr Wright also explained that Cllr Lovell is an extremely wealthy man with many business interests, and that I should not get on his wrong side as he would use his wealth and influence to defend himself against any reputational damage which might lead to his loss of directorships from FTSE-listed companies. Furthermore, he stated that I was bound to run into problems due to my political affiliation compared to Cllrs Renouf, Lovell and Large, and that I would be 'safer' if I registered as an Independent.

In July 2015 the landlord of The Angel attended WPC to ask for a response and it was agreed that further investigation would be required. Although no complaint had been raised and no apology had been requested, a P2 meeting was convened in August 2015 according to Standing Order regulations, proposed by Cllr Renouf and supported by Cllrs Wright and Hale - whereupon I asked for and was finally given a copy of the Standing Orders.

The investigation (P2 a) consisted of Cllr Renouf asking members if they had heard anything which they might consider defamatory at the June meeting. All stated they hadn't, but when Cllr Lovell asked me what I thought I'd heard he clearly recognised his words, and I noted that as I am not legally trained I could only offer the opinion that his words were 'potentially defamatory'. I said I felt the P2 meeting was a "massive overreaction" and I felt I had behaved according to all the council's guidelines. I was then informed with shouted comments from Cllrs Renouf and Wright that I couldn't be trusted not to tell the public what happened during WPC meetings. I said I felt the comments and the manner in which they were expressed was outrageous, noting that the public is excluded only from P2 meetings such as this, as councillors have a responsibility to keep the public informed and the public has a right to know what happens during normal sessions which is why we are required to publish minutes. Members then decided against my objections to restrict any WPC member from reporting to the public. This decision was not minuted, but has been cited subsequently.

P2 b) related to my removal as AWE LLC representative, agreed at the AGM, which Cllr Renouf described as sufficient 'punishment'. With 5 grown men shouting and attempting to intimidate me for a period of 20 minutes I finally agreed to withdraw from the role in favour of reinstating Cllr Hale, on the proviso that "regular, accurate and relevant" reports would be provided in future (I gave the specific example of road closures in the parish resulting from works to upgrade electricity supply to AWE which were scheduled for the latter part of the year). This function has since been completed by the Clerk adding AWE LLC minutes to 'correspondence', and Cllr Hale attended 1 of 4 meetings in 2016. This condition was not minuted.

At the following meeting in September 2015 I noted the two unrecorded minutes and asked that the draft record be amended before it was agreed. Cllr Renouf disputed my criticism. In response I stated that I felt this was improper and the conduct of Parish Councillors should be a matter for WBC Standards Board. Cllr Renouf commented that as a member of the Advisory Panel he had a personal relationship with Standards Board members and he would ensure my 'misconduct' would be dealt with 'strongly'. I stated that I felt he was abusing his position and should not pre-empt any decision which was theirs to make. I added that if he felt my behaviour amounted to 'misconduct' then he should lodge a formal complaint himself so a decision could be reached to clarify the matter. He replied that because of his experience on the panel he 'could state with assurance that I didn't have

a leg to stand on', and that as the Standards Board 'has no teeth' and could only require an apology, not remove me as a councillor, this would be a waste of his time and energy.

In **October 2015**, given it had not yet been agreed, I asked for clarification on the unrecorded P2 a) minute, and whether I was able to provide reports from meetings to the public (for example via the Facebook group that I had set up to aid the purpose, or following the example of Aldermaston PC via a council newsletter). I noted that Cllr Renouf had not once published any reports in the parish magazine or elsewhere, despite this being a requirement of the Transparency Code and relating to the potentially-illegal Standing Order 3.13. Cllr Renouf explained that this was unnecessary and that I had been explicitly told "in August" not to report from council meetings. I replied that he should check the Transparency Code, whereupon Cllr Hale commented that "we don't want any government diktats telling us what to do." I confirmed that I would therefore not publish reports from any meetings of WPC, but instead would provide reports from the published minutes (ie one month later). I then requested suggestions for other items through which I could promote engagement between residents and WPC. To date I have received none. I was unable to attend the November 2015 meeting, and the original draft minutes of the P2 meeting in August 2015 were approved in my absence.

Following the P2 meeting in August 2015 several members of the public approached me to describe the events and express their opinion on the subject. I feel this was a clear indication that the confidentiality of the P2 meeting was breached by another of the councillors with the intention to use third-parties to intimidate me physically. This was also contrary to Cllr Renouf and Wright's comments during that meeting about not informing the public of their content.

I began regularly attending meetings of neighbouring parish councils in January 2015 (not least to discover how they are managed and understand what constitutes 'best practise' in the area), and in **September 2015** it was confirmed that it had been agreed at the AGM that I had volunteered to be given 'informal' responsibility for liaison with them because I had in this time built up a relationship with members of those parish councils and 'attended them anyway'. To this end I registered and attended the District Parish Conference in September 2015. Due to the subject of the DPC, I suggested that this be included as an agenda item for the next meeting in October. No agenda item for this was included so I presented a written report for consideration under Matters Arising, however Cllr Lovell expressed his view strongly that reports should be circulated with Minutes as he is often busy so needs forewarning about whether his attendance at meetings would be required, and described my report as 'bullshit'.

On **27th October 2015** Cllr Renouf wrote to Midgham PC on an issue of shared concern relating to lack of sewerage and waste capacity (The Woolhampton Drainage Area includes most of the parishes of Woolhampton, Brimpton and Midgham). At Brimpton PC the letter was noted in correspondence received, with the council also deciding that it would take no action (no reasons were given). At Midgham PC in November 2015, Cllr Lombardo argued that this letter should be ignored for three reasons: that it may amount to 'predetermination' of future planning applications, that it was an insult to Midgham parish councillors who are fully capable of reaching competent decisions taking all considerations into account when they received them, and that to accept Cllr Renouf's recommendation would create a personal conflict of interest harming his private business as a planning agent working in the area. Cllr Lombardo described it as a "silly letter" which should be ignored. I was not provided a copy of this letter, so when I was asked to defend it by Cllr Lombardo. I was unable to do so.

I reported these developments to Woolhampton PC in December 2015, arguing that there are better and more effective ways to resolve capacity and maintenance issues with the local sewage system now that Cllr Renouf's initiative had 'reached a dead-end', highlighting Cllr Lombardo's opinion as a professional in planning. I asked to be forwarded a copy of the letter in line with my listed responsibility. Cllr Renouf sent a copy to me on 8th January 2016.

Cllr Renouf subsequently contacted Cllr Lombardo to ask him to confirm his comment of a 'silly letter', which he denied making but asked for greater context about what it related to. At the January 2016 meeting Cllr Renouf asked me to provide an explanation for my 'dishonesty', but said he saw no need to waste his time any further as he felt it was clear Cllr Lombardo had not said what I reported. During February 2016 I met Cllr Lombardo, who explained that he can't be expected to remember what words he used several months earlier without knowing what they referred to, and that anyway the words used are not worth getting so excited about next to the the substance of the matter.

Also in December 2015, when discussing the proposed closure of the village Post Office under Matters Arising, Cllr Wright did not declare his interest properly. He informed the council, subsequent to notification of the imminent closure of the Post Office discussed the previous month (in my absence), that as the village shopkeeper he had been approached by Royal Mail about the possibility of taking on the service. He stated that it would not be financially worthwhile and it was sad that the long-serving Postmistress would lose a substantial sum of money as a result on her retirement. I noted that the Parish Plan included a commitment to "ensure the village shop and Post Office remain open" and that Cllr Wright was ensuring that it closed. Cllr Wright has subsequently leased the former premises of the Post Office which he now uses as storage.

Following up on the unsuccessful meeting with WBC Highways on 29th October, there was further discussion about the Parish Plan. Cllr Renouf explained that the 'Safer Woolhampton Hill' project to develop a footpath depended on support from landowners over whose land it would pass (Cllrs Lovell and Hale), and stated the concept originated in the S106 agreement for the development of Abbey Gardens in 2003, and that this was why it wasn't included in the Parish Plan which was adopted in 2007. I suggested it would be helpful to receive a progress report on the Parish Plan, noting that this was nearly 10 years old. I asked how had members established the 'community interest', pointing out that we should refer to existing plans when setting the annual budget and precept in January, expressing the view that this may contradict Cllr Renouf's declaration in WPCs Annual Governance Statement. I also raised my concern about the cost of the footpath project (estimated then at 60,000, excluding survey) and suggested it would be far easier and cheaper to construct a path to the school along the line indicated by the Rights of Way Improvement Plan (RoWIP) and this would additionally provide better access for maintenance of a culvert that regularly suffered blockages and caused flooding to a number of properties. Cllr Renouf replied that the landowner was not disposed towards this route, and Cllr Lovell explained it would reduce his farming acreage despite following an existing track.

In January 2016 I expressed my concern about the accuracy of the minutes relating to the August 2015 P2 meeting, and stated I would seek clarity on this as it may be a matter for a formal complaint.

Cllr Renouf then informed WPC that he had received an anonymous complaint from a member of the public about a post I published at 3.20pm on 5th January on the Woolhampton Village Facebook group (which I had set up and continue to manage).

Cllr Wright stated that the council told me "in August" that I may not publish any reports, to which I responded that there is no minute to this effect, as the council had just discussed. Cllr Renouf told me that the post was 'dishonest' as it gave a 'false impression', and ordered me to remove it. I asked how he'd received the complaint (written, verbal etc) and commented that the council had decided not to engage with social media and therefore had no power to force me to remove it or the site, not least because NALC's Good Councillor Guide advises councillors have a responsibility to keep the public informed, but also because communication strategy wasn't covered in the List of Councillor Responsibilities and I was acting voluntarily. I stated I was more than happy to be cooperative if he could suggest alternative wording, and asked what reason the complainant gave for remaining anonymous. Cllr Wright interrupted me, stating the identity of the complainant didn't matter, only that they had made a complaint and that I was obviously a 'troublemaker'. Cllr Renouf rejected my offer since he thought I should close the group as "there is no need for it", and all other members agreed.

During the budget discussion I also asked what funding would be available for the Training Plan, as I had not yet received any induction, as promised. Cllr Renouf stated it was up to members to identify their own training needs, and confirmed with other members that they did not feel there was a need to allocate any funding in the budget. I asked what training is available and if this information could be made available. The Clerk answered that training is advertised in the monthly BALC Newsletter, which was noted under Correspondence Received. I asked if I may see these newsletters. Following repeated requests it was agreed in March 2016 that councillors should be provided a copy, although this has only been sporadic since and I've been forced to beg copies from contacts in neighbouring areas.

Following the Jan 2016 meeting I approached Cllr Renouf, who confirmed that the complaint had not come from a member of the public, but from the Vice Chair, Cllr Wright – I feel this was clearly malicious and is contrary to NALC advice ("a member of an authority who cannot represent themselves cannot represent the public"). I also reached agreement with the Clerk that I would amend the FB post to "Woolhampton Parish Council confirmed at the December meeting that it has decided not to proceed with the 'Safer Woolhampton Hill' project at this time and removed from the agenda plans for a footpath to the village school. For more minutes check the parish website [link]". I amended the post at 5.43pm on January 21st, as it remains and can still be viewed together with edit history.

In February 2016 I stated that I had not been able to find any advice about whether my concerns constituted valid grounds for a formal complaint, but noted that CAB was currently promoting mediation services to resolve neighbourly disputes, and that I felt this would perhaps be helpful – especially considering CAB had asked WPC for a donation to support their services. Cllr Renouf said mediation was not necessary, that the only disagreement was with me regarding my 'dishonesty'.

At the Annual Assembly in May 2016, Cllr Renouf devoted a significant portion of his annual report to this 'Facebook complaint', singling me out for specific criticism (albeit not by name, it was clear to all present that I was the target – several members of the public asked me about this following the meeting). I asked Cllr Renouf if he could provide a copy of his report, to which he replied, "No. You can see it when it is published next year."

Following my requests for more information about the outstanding S106 funds available to the parish and a question about whether there was a time limit on allocating these funds for spending, in November 2016 Cllr Renouf announced that he had reached agreement to spend the roughly £13,000 received from the Douai Abbey development in 2003 on a feasibility study for a 'permitted

footpath' along a route which crossed land owned by Cllr Lovell and Cllr Hale. Cllr Lovell noted that the estimated cost for the creation of the path had increased from £60,000 to £120,000. In December 2016 I asked that these figures should be included in the minutes so the council so this could be factored into future budget considerations, but Cllr Renouf denied that any sums had been mentioned, although I noted he had described in his annual report from May 2015 that the funds available from the developer contribution negotiated by WBC as "woefully inadequate" and must therefore have had a good idea then of the costs involved.

In March 2016, a discussion was had on attendance and the agenda for the DPC to be held a week later. Cllr Renouf insisted that it would be 'disrespectful' and undermine the Clerk if he didn't register attendance (although I had already registered, and he registered himself by contacting the then-Leader of West Berkshire Council, Cllr Peter Argyle). The Clerk noted that he was very busy at that time as he was due to fly on a long-standing holiday, and he would try to fit this into his schedule. I described subsequent events to WBC Communications Manager, Martin Dunscombe, and clearly indicated my wish to complain about Cllr Renouf's behaviour. Following his return from holiday, the Clerk then convinced me that this course of action would only cause further aggravation and prevent me from achieving for the community since this requires the cooperation of the council.

A discussion was had about the potential cooption of a new councillor to fill the existing vacancy, and I asked whether new councillors would be provided an induction and what this would include. The Clerk confirmed that this was a requirement, and I asked whether I could also expect to receive a long-awaited induction. Cllr Renouf replied that as I had by then been a member of the council long enough to know 'how things operate' I did not need an induction. I noted recent disputes between myself and other members, stating that "it would be a concern if new councillors received the same level of support as I had."

In April 2016 a discussion was had about the Annual Meeting. I noted NALC advice that this should be held on a separate date to the AGM to avoid any confusion, and asked what efforts WPC could undertake to encourage greater community engagement (such as provision of refreshments, invitation for a guest speaker on a topic of interest etc). Other members unanimously rejected these suggestions were an unnecessary waste of time and expense, and Cllr Hale said, "Good luck with trying to change our minds," while Cllr Renouf said this would amount to 'bribing the public with their own money'.

During the Planning report, Cllr Lovell requested WPC support the removal of a compulsory condition to pass BREEAM fire safety certification for the new pavilion being constructed by Douai Park Recreation Association, which he stated would cost £11,000. I expressed my concern about 'cutting corners' on compulsory fire safety and that WPC was being used this way by him to support a private sports club which offers few benefits to general residents of the village, however I offered 'no objection' with the view that "compulsory certification means just that" and the condition would be unlikely to be removed with or without WPC support.

The agenda item on 'Governance' had, according to Cllr Renouf, been included to provide an opportunity to me to provide details about my concerns about the way the council is run by him, following my correspondence with Martin Dunscombe. All I managed to say was "Thank you, I'd like to start..." before he interrupted me to quote from my email correspondence with Mr Dunscombe in which he stated he considered the matter closed (18th April) unless a complaint was lodged. Cllr Renouf asserted that I had brought WPC into disrepute by contacting a council officer in this way, that Mr Dunscombe had 'completely repudiated' my 'allegations' and that this therefore proved my 'dishonesty'. He identified my use of the word 'malcommunication' and asked what this meant, to

5

which I replied that this clearly described the actions outlined in my email. Cllr Renouf read out a list of reasons why he felt no obligation to follow Mr Dunscombe's guidance and has repeatedly refused to provide these in any form.

The meeting was then closed with the support of all other members without providing a proper opportunity for me to speak.

In May 2016 A discussion was held relating to the Annual Governance Statement (AGS), and members agreed with my suggestion to include a paragraph relating to the Transparency Code, confirming the type and method of publication of various required governance documents.

I also noted that the Village Hall Trustees representative (Cllr Wright) may wish to provide a report at the next meeting.

In June 2016 Cllr Wright reported that the VH had held their AGM, reappointing Cllr Renouf as Chair and the accounts had been approved. I noted that the AGM had discussed the need to find more (preferably younger) trustees to replenish the dwindling numbers, especially as Cllr Renouf has stated his desire to retire (he added, "for about the past 10 years") and was also potentially looking for a replacement Secretary and Treasurer. I suggested that this highlighted the need for greater community engagement to identify potential volunteers, and that this was hindered because WPC currently didn't have a Community Engagement and Communication Strategy, as well as several other documents required for completion of the AGS, including timely publication of agendas and minutes.

During this period further email exchanges indicated the issue arising from my contact with Mr Dunscombe had not been concluded despite a wish to resolve them. Cllr Renouf stated that I had failed to refer to the issue at the next meetings, according to the minutes, which he felt indicated it was closed. The Clerk suggested that it would be better for a line to be drawn if issues could be raised in a private meeting, however Cllr Renouf stated he preferred a full agenda item 'Allegations of misconduct in public office by the Chairman' as Mr Dunscombe had not provided any guidance that matters of Code of Conduct breaches should be dealt with by complaining to WBC Standards Board (which Cllr Renouf should know as member of the WBC Advisory Panel, and also know that this doesn't empower him to conduct his own hearings on Standards – to be judge, jury, witness and accuser all in one instance creates an unreliable conflict of interest, and the impartiality of other participants in such a process must be doubted).

On 1st July Cllr Wright proposed via email that he would chair a section of the meeting to consider a motion of no confidence in Cllr Renouf, and this would be followed by a vote of no confidence against myself, which I rejected based on the unfair way that I'd been treated previously and that I had no formal listed responsibilities to remove.

In July 2016 I again raised a number of inconsistencies in the minutes compared to my own notes, expressing the view that this was distorting the record and that because these hadn't been published for over 6 months there was no way for me to be certain about, or challenge what was agreed.

Cllr Wright chaired the two agenda items relating to motions of 'no confidence', and it was clear from the beginning that the outcomes had been arranged in advance. Cllr Renouf then stated that my responsibility as 'lead on neighbourhood planning' would be removed in accordance with this decision, despite the fact that this had not been conferred on me and Cllr Renouf is designated at

the Parish Council's Planning Officer. A sub-committee was then established to evaluate different options for providing a village plan.

In August 2016 during the discussion on approving the minutes, I asked for further details about the status of the Parish Plan and funding, noting that the Post Office was closed, the NHW had recently lost another coordinator, no newsletter is published, and that from a cursory overview about half of the 25 items were incomplete. The Clerk replied that he understood only 1 item on the Parish Plan remained outstanding, which was the completion of a Village Design Statement. Cllr Renouf added that WPC had determined to stop following the plan due to its 'completion' sometime before 2011. I reiterated my concern that WPC could not demonstrate how it meets the 'community interest' and this may mean Cllr Renouf's legal declarations in the AGS were false. I understand that planning documents 'remain in force until they are updated or replaced', and that therefore WPC's budgets since at least 2011 cannot have been agreed with any reference to the 'community interest'.

I again raised the Training Plan, asking what action I would need to undertake to regain WPC's confidence. Cllr Renouf stated that would depend on my future conduct. Cllr Hale stated "we don't want to spend any money on training," and Cllr Large commented that "training is just a big waste of money." Cllr Renouf then directed the Clerk to investigate what other organisations provide training. I noted that BALC is the statutory training provider for Berkshire. In January 2017 I again raised the lack of funding for training, stating that "residents will be reassured to know that councillors what they're doing."

It was noted that WBC Chief Executive Nick Carter had been invited to a future meeting to discuss WBC's 'Devolution Agenda' and I commented this would provide a meaningful impetus to establish the 'community interest' in the parish and help drive community engagement.

I feel it is important for councils to be aware of the wider policy context, including WBCs 'Devolution Agenda'. With this in mind I contacted Mr Carter on 20th September to ask if he was happy for me to invite interested members of neighbouring councils to attend his presentation to WPC in November. He replied that he was and I provided a copy of my wording for him to confirm, which he did.

In September 2016 I again noted inconsistencies between the agreed minutes and the published minutes and asked which copy reflected the 'true' versions, but I did not receive a clear response. The Clerk advised WPC that the website would be updated to bring it up to date.

I also raised the suggestion that neighbouring parishes would also be interested in hearing Mr Carter's presentation, as this would help raise greater awareness of the issues more easily. Cllr Renouf stated that he did not wish for any members of neighbouring parishes or members of the public to be invited to the November meeting.

During September I again raised the issue of a lack of governance documents, and highlighted the NALC Local Council Awards, to which I felt WPC should consider applying as the means of resolving the issues of contention. I felt that WPC couldn't demonstrate that it meets NALC's definition of minimum standards.

In October 2016 I attended the DPC, and sent my apologies to WPC as the two meetings clashed, although my apologies were not noted and Cllr Renouf later stated that I had not given them. A number of additional governance documents were approved in my absence, including a Communication and Community Engagement Strategy, Complaints Policy and Bullying and Harassment Policy, although application for the NALC Foundation Award was rejected.

During October I contacted Cllr Renouf to note the website update, but highlighted that Cllr Burke’s name or contact details had not been added, as the Transparency Code made mandatory from 1st July 2015, and asked whether she had resigned.

In these email exchanges Cllr Renouf called on me to resign, Cllr Lovell felt that the matter could only be resolved by a formal complaint against me to WBC Standards Board, and Cllr Wright expressed his opposition to governance, stating “Here we are again on the merry go round of Non Sense!”

In November 2017 I again broached these outstanding issues of governance. I raised the Parish Plan, and asked for a review to be undertaken so any argument about its’ status could be removed; I asked about the Training Plan, noting that the website showed no member had received any training whatsoever, and asked to register for a session – to which members expressed their opposition to incurring any expenditure on training; I pointed out that the Asset Register required updating, including the addition of recently acquired grit bins and the transfer of ownership of a portion of land (located between Cllr Lovell’s land and Cllr Renouf’s property) which Cllr Renouf had stated he’d negotiated with Great Western Railway, but the transfer had not occurred and that he would not provide any correspondence relating to this; and I raised WPC’s lack of a ‘General Power of Competence’ as a concern which meant the council is not a consultee on Thames Water’s new sewerage strategy for the Woolhampton Drainage Area, and is therefore ignorant of, and unable to influence changes which would affect residents with ongoing sewerage issues in the village, among other things.

In December 2017 during consideration of the minutes, Cllr Renouf stated he did not know what was meant by the ‘General Power of Competence’, although this was referenced in BALC’s advice regarding WBC’s request to parishes for contributions to maintain library provision in the district.

The Parish Plan Review was published and circulated, in which Cllr Renouf comments,

“Doubts have been expressed at a number of Parish Council meetings about the delivery and efficacy of the 2006 Woolhampton Parish Plan’s Action Plan. It is noted that four of the Council’s current members were neither councillors at the time nor active in the Steering Group. Therefore they may not be fully aware of the plan itself and/or the substantial benefits, direct and indirect, that resulted from its adoption by West Berkshire Council.

Given that Members are to be asked to consider the options available for community involvement in the future planning of the parish. It is therefore important that the allegation that the majority of proposed actions are either incomplete or unsatisfactory should finally be put to rest.

Should it be allowed to persist unchallenged then public confidence or participation in any future plan could be undermined.”

The review confirms that a majority of items were not pursued or no action was taken, although Cllr Renouf maintains that 24/25 were formally ‘completed’ – including ‘improve the NHW network – not possible due to lack of volunteers’.

In January 2017 Cllr Renouf quoted from an email I circulated to members in September 2016 in which I pointed them to the Police crime statistics data source, <https://www.police.uk/thames-valley/N469/crime/> identifying crime as an area of ‘community interest’.

Cllr Renouf stated that he had looked at the website and asserted that “crime is not consistently higher than in neighbouring areas,” that “crime is not rising [in Woolhampton],” and that “most of the crime in the [NHP] area is committed outside the parish anyway.” He stated that my email was ‘dishonest’ and that I am “deceitful”. He then asked Cllr Burke if she would like to comment. She

stated that this was evidence of my dishonesty, that "crime is not a problem [in Woolhampton]" and that I was "scaremongering". Cllr Renouf then asked Cllr Wright to contribute, who asked me to provide the names of the members of Woolhampton Neighbourhood Watch. I noted that as I had explained previously to him via email that I was not able to do this because this information is held by the Police and is covered by Data Protection laws. I expressed my opinion that he'd therefore knowingly asked me to break the law, and noted the irony of this given the subject. Cllr Wright then claimed I was "not telling the truth" because there is no NHW in Woolhampton, to which I responded that this was a "fundamental misunderstanding of how NHW is structured."

If the agreed conclusion of WPC members at this meeting that no NHW exists in Woolhampton is correct, this would contradict the claim made by Cllrs Renouf in the Parish Plan review that this item had been 'completed', highlighting that no action has been undertaken to meet the 'community interest', and in my opinion this would contradict Cllr Renouf's declarations in the AGS. If it was not then the claims prove evidence of a campaign of bullying and harassment.

I questioned Cllr Renouf's assertion that crime is not consistently higher than neighbouring areas and he confirmed he had only looked at one month's worth of data. He shouted that it was important that members are able to back up their claims with evidence, demanding that I bring my evidence to the next meeting. I agreed that "I would be more than happy to provide this," but that it would be unfair not to expect the same of all members. Cllr Renouf said that this would be brought to the next meeting in February "to prove my dishonesty".

I informed the Clerk by email on 1st February 2017 that I felt the personal attacks and behaviour of Cllrs Renouf, Wright and Burke at the January meeting constituted bullying and harassment, and enquired as to the correct procedure prescribed by WPC's Complaints Policy.

I then received notification on 7th February that Cllr Renouf had lodged his formal complaint. This is my reply.

In February 2017 Cllr Renouf provided an update on the village NHW network, stating that he had applied to join the Station Rd scheme. He presented a report on crime statistics in the parish provided by Cod's Hill scheme coordinator, Nick Humble, and proposed several actions including liaison with local Police on three crime 'hot-spots' in the village and social housing landlords regarding anti-social behaviour.

I asked if he could provide any figures on these, as I had collected 6 years of data dating back to the point he had stated WPC had 'completed' the Parish Plan item 'to improve the village NHW network', which coincided with the period I began attending meetings of Woolhampton Parish Council. Cllr Renouf was unable to provide any breakdowns by period to back up his claims, and he asked me to pass him the data I'd collected and analysed, which I did.

My analysis shows that while Woolhampton remains a 'low crime area', it is consistently higher than both neighbouring areas and the West Berkshire Most Similar Group (WBMSG), and while 2016 saw an increase in the crime level of 58% (which represents an increase of 56% in the reporting rate), the quarterly crime rate also doubled during the year. I feel this represents a clear area of 'community interest' which members have deliberately sought to ignore, and this demonstrates evidence of long-standing failure of Governance and Ethics within WPC by Cllr Renouf and others.

James Spackman 24/2/2017