

NOTICE OF DECISION

TRIBUNAL REFERENCE NUMBER:

APPELLANT: Councillor David Metcalfe

RELEVANT AUTHORITIES: Cefn Community Council (principal authority - Wrexham County Borough Council)

1. Following a decision by the Standards Committee of Wrexham County Borough Council (“the Standards Committee”) on 16 January 2024 that the Appellant breached the Code of Conduct of the Relevant Authority, and the Notice of Decision which was emailed to the Appellant on 19 January 2021 (receipt confirmed), the Appellant has made an application to appeal under Regulation 10(8) of the Local Government Investigations (Functions of Monitoring Officers and Standards Committees (Wales) Regulations 2001.
 2. I have deemed the application to be in time. The Appellant’s appeal was received by the APW on 5 February 2024, within the 21-day period in which applications for permission to appeal must be received.
 3. The Appellant sent a copy of the standards committee’s decision and the minutes with his appeal form.
 4. I have made my decision on the basis of the following evidence:
 - a. The completed APW05 form from the Appellant seeking permission to appeal (together with the additional sheets provided as attachments to that form);
 - b. The Notice of Decision from the Standards Committee sent to the Appellant;
 - c. The minutes of the Standards Committee meeting held on 16 January 2024;
 - d. The comments of the Appellant disputing the minutes of the Standards Committee meeting held on 16 January 2024
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5. The Appellant has raised several grounds of appeal, which focus on facts and the alleged breaches of the Code of Conduct found. I am required to consider whether it has no reasonable prospect of success. I will take the Appellant's case at its highest (this means assuming his version of key disputed facts is correct for the purposes of considering his application), unless it is conclusively disproved, is entirely unsupported by reasonable argument or the evidence before me, or can reasonably be viewed as fanciful allegations.
 6. If any ground of appeal is found by me to have no reasonable prospect of success, that ground will not proceed to be considered by the Appeal Tribunal. I am required to give reasons if I find a ground of appeal has no reasonable prospect of success. The threshold is low to obtain permission to appeal – even if I take the view the ground is unlikely to succeed, unless I find there is no reasonable prospect of success, I will allow the ground to be considered by an Appeal Tribunal. Where there is a dispute about the fact-finding undertaken by a standards committee, I will consider the decision of that committee to consider whether the criticisms made have no reasonable prospect of success.
 7. If any ground does have a reasonable prospect of success, I am required to arrange for an Appeal Tribunal to be convened to hear the appeal.
 8. I note that the decision letter of the standards committee is summary in nature. The draft minutes sets out evidence was received, that submissions were made, and the sanction imposed. There is no record of the Committee's reasoning, what the submissions were, the weight placed on the evidence or submissions received or whether the Sanctions Guidance was considered. I observed that compared to the detailed decisions supplied by other Standards Committee, the letter did not enable a review of the decision making process to be undertaken by an objective reader. I reviewed the minutes of the meeting (whilst noting that the Appellant disputed their accuracy); again I noted that there was no record setting out why the Standards Committee reached the conclusion that it did.
 9. The Appellant raised the following grounds in his application for permission to appeal:
 - a. He commented on the phrase of "*cripple your business*", aspects of his hopes for the Ebenezer building and the underlying dispute over its future with the principal authority– there are not relevant to the reasons why he was found to have acted aggressively in a meeting of 4 May 2021 or failed to declare an interest in council business at the same meeting, and the details of the underlying dispute cannot be resolved in this forum. **This ground has no reasonable prospect of success and cannot proceed to an Appeal Tribunal.**
 - b. The Appellant complains of a presentation made in the meeting of 4 May 2021 – this is not something that can form the basis of a ground
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of appeal. Taking his additional comments made into consideration, it appears that the Appellant asserts that there has been a “cover up” by both the community council and the principal authority regarding the Ebenezer building; again, this is not relevant as to whether the Appellant breached the Code of Conduct and the underlying dispute cannot be resolved in this forum. **This ground has no reasonable prospect of success and cannot proceed to an Appeal Tribunal.**

- c. The Appellant accepts that he did not seek advice from the clerk, the monitoring officer or any other body as to whether he should declare an interest when attending the meeting on 4 May 2021; his position is that he did not need to do so and asserts that there is no need to declare something that should have been known. This is incorrect – it is necessary to declare even if known. The Appellant admits that he made no declaration and sought no advice, but this is on the basis that his interest was known. **This ground has no reasonable prospect of success and cannot proceed to an Appeal Tribunal.**
 - d. The Appellant accepts that he raised his voice at the meeting of 4 May 2021 but says that others did so. This is not an acceptable justification as the Appellant is responsible for his own conduct. There is no challenge that he conceded to the Standards Committee that he behaved aggressively. **This ground has no reasonable prospect of success and cannot proceed to an Appeal Tribunal.**
 - e. The Appellant touched on the finding that he brought his office or the relevant authority into disrepute, but does not set out any basis on which the finding can be challenged. **This ground has no reasonable prospect of success and cannot proceed to an Appeal Tribunal.**
 - f. The Appellant says that he did not use his official capacity as a councillor to improperly obtain an advantage for himself or any other, or create a disadvantage – this was found by the Standards Committee but the Appellant has failed to explain why he challenges this finding. **This ground has no reasonable prospect of success and cannot proceed to an Appeal Tribunal.**
 - g. The Appellant denies that he had a personal or prejudicial interest in the business of the authority and failed to disclose it. On his account within the application for permission to appeal alone, it is evident that the Appellant did have a personal interest in the fate of the Ebenezer building (which was financial in nature as it could lead to the insolvency of his personal business according to the Appellant) and says that he did not need to disclose it (or withdraw) as it was known. **This ground has no reasonable prospect of success and cannot proceed to an Appeal Tribunal.**
 - h. The Appellant has made no submission that the sanction imposed was inappropriate. I have closely examined all of his documents, and
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no argument is made and no comment in the form set out challenging this. **It therefore is not a ground of appeal and cannot proceed to an Appeal Tribunal.**

10. An Appeal Tribunal will not be convened by the President of the Adjudication Panel for Wales. The Monitoring Officer will be notified to enable the period of suspension to commence.

Signed: 

Date: 8 February 2024

Claire Sharp
President of the Adjudication Panel for Wales
