

Appendix 1

A statement from Cllr Sameera Saleem, Chair of the Local Adjudication Panel

Following an investigation into the conduct of three Luton Council councillors who broke Covid-19 guidelines, we are disappointed to confirm that we do not have the jurisdiction to enforce a formal sanction given they attended the event in a personal capacity.

The panel, made up of cross-party councillors and independent members, were in unanimous agreement that the actions of the three councillors were ill advised, caused distress, broke trust in our communities and brought themselves and the council into disrepute.

Despite all of this, the panel can only take action when there has been a breach of the Councillor code of conduct which relates to councillors when they are acting in an official capacity. There was no evidence provided to the panel that could make us conclude that the councillors were representing Luton Council at the event.

We also want to be absolutely clear that we expect members to uphold high standards of conduct at all times and to take the lead in adhering to the responsibilities that are incumbent on us all.

However it is with deep regret to us as a panel that due to the Standards legislation in England – set by National Government – we cannot make any enforceable sanctions against them when they fall short at a time when they are not acting in an official capacity.

Despite this we feel very strongly that all three councillors should:

- voluntarily make a donation to a local charity to the value of at least one month's allowance
- make sure they keep up to date with latest national and local Covid-19 legislation and guidance and adhere to it at all times

We would also like to remind all members of Luton Council that they should behave as leaders at all times.

Finally, we would call on the government to strengthen and extend the powers available to local standards committees when writing the new code of conduct so they are able to take action in cases such as this one in the future.

We fully appreciate that today's decision will further cause concern, anger and strength of feeling on this issue in our communities. We want to assure people that the investigation and indeed the decision that was reached was fully in line with the standards process and the powers that are available to us.

While we are extremely disappointed in the actions of the councillors and equally frustrated by the limited powers available to us in this case, we want to condemn in the strongest terms the abuse they and their families received from members of the public which is absolutely unacceptable and not welcomed in our town.

On behalf of everyone on the panel I would like to once again thank the people of Luton for their patience on this issue and also for everything they are doing to reduce the spread of Covid-19 in Luton, despite the anger many of you are feeling over this issue.

We would also like to thank everyone involved in the investigation and today's meeting and the co-operation of all those involved. A written decision will be published in due course.

Notes to editors

The three councillors – Cllrs Waheed Akbar, Asif Masood and Tahir Malik – all admitted they had broken the guidelines and publicly apologised for their actions; and Cllr Tahir Malik resigned from his role as Mayor of Luton as a direct result of his actions.

Councillor code of conduct

https://www.luton.gov.uk/Council_government_and_democracy/Lists/LutonDocuments/PDF/Legal_Services_Division/Council_Constitution/Part%209%20Code%20of%20Conduct%20Members.pdf

12th October 2020