

Dear Councillor Hughes,

I am writing to confirm, by way of brief summary, the content of the conversations which you and I have had in relation to the Ashford Parish Council, so that you may formally report to the Council as to the conclusions which we have reached.

We firstly met on 5th March 2020, when you expressed your concerns that the Parish Council had set up a Communications Committee, one of the aims of the Committee being to set up a dataset of the contact details of the residents of Ashford Parish.

You indicated that the establishment of the Committee had been well-intentioned, but had become beset by allegations that the Chairman of the Committee had a conflict of interest in being part of the committee. My informal advice at the time, and this has not changed, was that, although there was nothing intrinsically inappropriate about the establishment of the committee, it would be sensible to disband the Committee if it was giving rise to adverse comment.

My intention in March 2020 was to attempt to deal informally with the apparent conflict of interest by writing to the Chairman of the Committee, and subsequently meeting him and offering advice, rather than by carrying out a formal investigation. This intention had to be shelved, because of the lockdown from late March 2020.

Subsequently we met again on 6th August 2020, following a meeting of the Parish Council when challenges had been made, by a member of the public, to the activities of the Communications Committee, and the retention of the residents' dataset. Although the Communications Committee had been disbanded, I advised that it would be a sensible idea if the dataset was extracted from the company holding it and retained by the Parish Council.

I wrote to the Chairman of the Communications Committee, as Monitoring Officer, on 14th August 2020, indicating that I did not believe it was in the public interest to investigate the conflict of interests formally, and that I did not believe that a serious breach of the Code of Conduct had occurred, although on the face of it a conflict of interest was apparent. I also mentioned the advisability of handing over the dataset to the Parish Council.

Subsequently, I have received a reply from the Chairman of the Communications Committee, and am preparing a formal response.

I hope this assists you

Kind regards,

Trevor Blatchford