

## NORTH NORFOLK DISTRICT COUNCIL

### STANDARDS COMMITTEE HEARING PANEL

18 JULY 2017

### DECISION NOTICE

<b>PANEL MEMBERS</b>	Mrs M Evans (co-opted Chair) Cllr B Hannah Cllr M Prior
<b>SUBJECT MEMBER;</b> Cllr Laura Stango (Mundesley Parish Council) Supported by Cllr Harding (Mundesley PC) and Mr Stango	<b>COMPLAINANT;</b> Cllr West (Mundesley PC) – not in attendance
<b>Investigating Officer</b>	Cara Jordan

<b>PRELIMINARY</b>	Cllr Stango raised the issue that Cllr West had “withdrawn” his complaint. The Monitoring Officer advised that Cllr West had requested that the complaint be withdrawn, but in the light of the nature of the complaint and other complaints in relation to the subject member and the wider governance of Mundesley parish Council that it was her view that the complaint needed to proceed to hearing.
<b>ALLEGATIONS</b>	In summary, it is alleged that Councillor Stango of Mundesley Parish Council breached the Code of Conduct in that she failed to declare an interest in Mundesley Ambulance First Responders at a Mundesley Parish Council meeting on 20 June 2016, where an award of a financial grant was discussed and a decision to award a grant to this body was made.
<b>EVIDENCE HEARD</b>	The Panel members;  <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Read the Investigator’s report and appendices.</li><li>2. Heard evidence from; Cllr Stango and Cllr Harding</li><li>3. Heard submissions from the Investigation Officer</li></ol>
<b>INDEPENDENT PERSON ASSESSMENT (Mr A Oram)</b>	<p>These comments are based on the papers circulated to the Committee.</p> <p>It appears undisputed that Councillor Stango is the secretary / treasurer of “Mundesley First Responders” and that her husband is a “First Responder”. There is no additional information in the report with regards the nature of these roles; I therefore assume the neither position results in the type of beneficial interest that might constitute a disclosable pecuniary interest (their respective roles with Mundesley First Responders result in no profit or gain). Had either Councillor Stango or her husband been in receipt of such a benefit then Councillor Stango’s participation at the meeting of 20 June 2016 would have been a much more serious breach of the Code.</p> <p>As it is, a member of course cannot automatically participate in a discussion or vote even if they do not have a DPI in the matter under consideration. An interest</p>

	<p>may still amount to a declarable interest, which is also subject to restrictions on member participation in discussions and voting.</p> <p>Having carefully considered the report I am of the view that a reasonable member of the public in possession of the relevant facts would consider that Councillor Stango's interest in the Mundesley First Responders was so significant it would be likely to prejudice her judgment of the public interest. I note that there appears to have been some confusion as to what the relevant agenda item related to at the outset of the meeting. While this may explain why Councillor Stango did not declare an interest when the Chairman invited members to declare any interests toward the start of the meeting, as soon as Councillor Stango became aware that the financial grant considerations related in part to the First Responders she should have declared her interest and not voted on the matter.</p> <p>Accordingly I can confirm that my view is line with the findings of the investigator's report; Councillor Stango failed to comply with the Parish Council's Code of Conduct at the meeting of 20 June 2016.</p>
<b>FINDINGS</b>	<p>The Panel made the following findings;</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Cllr Stango was aware of the grants process and had previously declared an interest when a grant had been awarded to the Mundesley First Responders.</li> <li>2. A reasonable member of the public in possession of the facts would consider that Cllr Stango's interest and involvement in the Mundesley First Responders would be so significant as to prejudice her judgement of the public interest, in that that it would be reasonable to assume that Cllr Stango might prioritise the grant award to Mundesley First Responders over another grant application.</li> <li>3. Cllr Stango's evidence was inconsistent, in that she said that she was not aware that the Mundesley First Responders application was on the agenda, and that is why she did not declare an interest. However Cllr Stango was the individual making and signing the grant application and she said that she was "surprised" when it didn't appear on the list of grant recipients at the agenda item.</li> <li>4. Cllr Stango effectively placed the grant application on the agenda by removing a copy of the grant application that she had completed from her bag and insisting it was considered.</li> <li>5. When the decision to make a grant award was not minuted Cllr Stango contacted the Clerk on this item and amended the minutes. This could be viewed as seeking to obtain an unfair advantage over one grant applicant over another.</li> <li>6. Cllr Stango should have declared at interest either at the beginning of the agenda (as other members did) or when it became apparent that she wanted to discuss the Mundesley First Responders application.</li> </ol> <p>Consequently Cllr Stango failed to comply with the Code of Conduct in that she failed to declare an interest in the application when considered by the Parish Council.</p>
<b>DECISION</b>	<p>The Panel have considered what recommendations should be made to Mundesley Parish Council in respect of sanctions to be imposed;</p>

The Panel felt that Cllr Stangos behaviour fell short of that required of someone holding public office, and were concerned that either she had a lack of awareness of the standards required under the Code or a disregard for them.

In the light of Cllr Stango already being before the Panel earlier in the day, the Panel were concerned about patterns of behaviour emerging in relation to the conduct of business at Mundesley PC.

The Panel had already recommended a reprimand, training and removal from positions of leadership in the Council in relation to a previous matter. The breach of the Code of Conduct underlined for the Panel, the need for the Parish Council to take these issues seriously and not be pressured into sweeping the issues under the carpet.

The Panel considered that the following sanctions and actions were appropriate;

1. Cllr Stango should be reprimanded by the Council for a breach of the Code of Conduct.
2. That the Chair of the Parish Council, Cllr Harding, be asked to provide evidence of steps the Parish Council are taking to embed good practice within the Parish Councils and to ensure that Members are aware of their obligations under the Code.

*M Evans*

.....  
Mrs M Evans  
Panel Chair

*27/07/17*  
..... July 2017

**PLEASE NOTE THAT THERE IS NO PROVISION FOR APPEAL AGAINST THIS DECISION**

