

## **STATEMENT of Michelle Donohue-Moncrieff**

**Monday 12th September 2016**

My name is MICHELLE DONOHUE-MONCRIEFF. I am 41 (forty-one) years of age. I live in Hunmanby, North Yorkshire. I am a Scarborough Borough Councillor. Until Thursday 8th September 2016, I was the Cabinet Portfolio Holder for Democracy, Stronger & Safer Communities. As of today, Monday 12th September 2016, I learn, obliquely, that my delegated membership of the Police & Crime Panel for North Yorkshire has been withdrawn, by the Leader of Scarborough Council, Councillor Derek BASTIMAN.

The following Statement is true to the best of my knowledge and belief.

### **Preamble**

1. I had a difficult upbringing, having suffered from neglect and domestic violence in my teenage years. I have suffered from depression and mood problems (in particular around my menstrual cycle) throughout my adult life.
2. In 2010, Henry, my husband of eight years, during a biopsy at Scarborough Hospital which went wrong, suffered three cardiac arrests.
3. In the subsequent weeks, he was diagnosed with heart failure and bronchoaveolar cancer. The medical team advised that there was no possible treatment. I was forced by my employer to leave my job and became a full time carer for my husband.
4. In December 2010, Henry was admitted to Scarborough Hospital where we were advised that his cancer had spread to his liver and that he had days to live.

5. The conditions at Scarborough hospital were so disturbingly unsatisfactory that his sister fought to have him moved to St. Catherine's Hospice, where he died peacefully on 8th December 2010. The DWP has recorded my condition dating from this time.
6. After Henry's death, I returned to work but found the impact of grief and trauma from my experiences had affected my performance. I had contact with the Crisis Team and Community Mental Health Teams throughout 2012.
7. Throughout 2011, I was involved with many successful campaigns with our local Parish Council, Hunmanby PC, of which I was Chair, and I was asked to contest a by-election, as a member of the Conservative Party, for the Hertford Ward of Scarborough Borough Council.
8. I was duly elected to the Borough Council on 15th March 2012.
9. During the period throughout 2012, I progressed well in the Council and, in October, I returned to work in October 2012, in a temporary capacity, at Kingspan Ltd in Sherburn. My contract finished in February 2013. In parallel to this employment, I had carried out my duties as Councillor for the Hertford Ward without demurral or complaint. I was never criticised.
10. In May 2013, I secured a job at SWC Trade Frames Ltd in Scarborough as a Technical Estimator. In July 2013, the responsibilities of my role were expanded significantly. This led to my suffering from stress and taking time off sick in December 2014. I returned to work in February 2015, when the company split my role into two jobs. During this time, I was prescribed *Citalopram* to help with anxiety and stress issues.
11. During this period of employment, I was offered the role as Cabinet Portfolio Holder for Safer and Stronger Communities by the then Leader, Cllr. Tom Fox. This was in November

2013. Again, I carried out this role to the satisfaction of the Leader, with no concerns being raised about my performance.

12. Again during this period, whilst in full-time employment, I campaigned successfully for the Conservative party candidates across the country in Morley & Outwood, Stockton South and Brigg & Goole. I also planned and prepared my own Borough Election literature and worked with Councillor Godfrey Allanson on a successful campaign. I also assisted the Conservative candidate in the Borough Council candidate for Filey, Tony Viney, with canvassing and campaign issues.
13. In the run-up to the May 7th 2015 General Election, I advised Kevin Hollinrake and his election agent Nigel Knapton on issues in the Filey and Hunmanby area which were relevant to the success of his campaign in the Thirsk & Malton constituency. I canvassed with Kevin in both Hunmanby and Filey in a campaign which produced a 19,000 Conservative majority for Kevin Hollinrake MP.
14. On the same day as the General Election, I was re-elected as Conservative member for SBC Hertford Ward and I was re-appointed to my Cabinet Portfolio by the new Council Leader, Councillor Derek Bastiman. During this period I was suffering from physical exhaustion which, as I learned from discussions with my GP, was attributed to depression and I continued to use medication as prescribed.
15. Due to this, I was finding working full-time to be physically difficult. I was also struggling with intense menstrual cycle mood swings which was affecting my performance at work.
16. At this time, I had discussions with my employer about future pay rises, only to be told that they would not be available. During July 2015, a job was advertised by a local employment agency for a very similar role at SWC. Upon investigation, I found that it was my own role - but at a higher salary. I raised this with my employer who failed to give me a satisfactory

answer. I decided to resign my position. Before I left, I was asked to take on a temporary part-time contract which I agreed to. This arrangement lasted until 11th September 2015.

17. I decided to take some time out to focus on my Cabinet and Council work. I became more involved with my Portfolio and attended both the formal Cabinet meetings and the informal Cabinet meetings organised by the Leader. We made progress on many policy issues.

18. During this period, I became increasingly exhausted, even to the point of finding myself out of breathe using the Town Hall stairs. I became concerned that this was not straightforward depression and that there was an underlying physical problem with my health, as I had also lost a lot of weight.

19. In December 2015, I visited my GP and expressed my concerns about my health. The locum GP arranged blood tests and asked a range of questions about how I was feeling. A blood test revealed that I was severely anaemic and I was prescribed Iron tablets. I took this as a wake-up call and decided I should get myself together and apply for Employment Support Allowance (ESA). I submitted a backdated claim with the relevant information to the DWP.

20. I received a request for further information relating to my Council allowance payslip. I submitted this documentation and returned it as requested. Again I heard nothing. In February 2016, I again contacted the DWP who assured me they would look into it. Yet again I heard nothing. I decided to manage my finances as best I could from my Council allowance, a small pension I inherited from my late husband and a credit card.

21. As I had applied for ESA, I was able to get my prescriptions for *Citalopram* and Iron without charge.

22. In March 2016, this stopped as my claim was deemed unsuccessful.

23. I continued my Council work, also becoming more involved in wider political issues. I travelled to Scotland to help campaign for Ruth Davidson and the Scottish Conservatives. I also started to get involved with the Vote Leave campaign. I also campaigned with Councillors from other parties on street stalls and began leafleting my ward.
24. Over the next few months my finances were steady and the Iron began to have a positive effect on my anaemia and general health. I was well enough to go and campaign in Glasgow in the run up to the Scottish elections. In June, I wrote articles for national newspapers in Ireland about my perspective on the EU Referendum as an Irish born Conservative. I did several appearances on Irish national radio, debating against Denis McShane, Lance Price, Kevin Maguire and several leading Irish politicians. I campaigned in my community discussing the Referendum and ward issues with residents. It was a positive and rewarding experience.
25. In July 2016, it was confirmed that I had been selected as the Conservative County Council candidate for Hertford and Cayton division.
26. During this time, due to some unforeseen expenses my finances became strained and I was going into overdraft. I began to struggle to with day-to-day expenditure. I struggled to afford food and the prescriptions for my Iron and *Citalopram*. I was feeling better and things in general seemed to be going well.
27. I visited my GP and discussed the mood swings and increasing aggression I suffered during my menstrual cycle. I had raised the issue several times before but had not been given any additional medication. This time I was prescribed a tablet called *Cerelle* which is known as the mini-pill. The GP advised that it would even out my hormone levels. I did not get the prescription immediately, as I hadn't realised that it would be free irrespective of my ESA status as it is also prescribed as a contraceptive.

## August/September 2016

28. In August, I became concerned that I was struggling to manage my finances, so decided I had to find another source of income. I gave some thought as to what type of work would be compatible with being both a Borough and County Councillor. I used some of my savings to pay down part of my credit card debt and to keep my current account in credit.
29. I went to the chemist and started taking the *Cerelle* tablet. I found adjusting to it very difficult. It caused me to have a premature period and I was getting very intense feelings of aggression. These were worse than anything I had experienced during my normal menstrual cycle. I persevered with the drug as I hoped it would settle down.
30. During this time I had been working very closely with Kevin Hollinrake's office on several ward issues. I did raise my frustration at not being able to claim ESA with his secretary, Hazel Dales. I told her I was too embarrassed to discuss it with Kevin directly. She assured me that she would take up the case without Kevin being involved.
31. On 12 August, I sent her the relevant information. I received a call on the morning of Monday 15th August 2016 stating that my claim had been refused as my Council Allowance slip indicated I was working. I explained that a Councillor counted as allowable work. They agreed to refer the case up for a definitive decision. The next morning they rang and told me my claim had been approved.
32. During this same period, the husband of a friend from my Darts team died in St.Catherine's Hospice. This got me thinking about Henry and the way he died. The Grandmother of a second friend from Darts died in the hospice a couple of weeks later. Several people did keep asking me if I was alright. Many remarked on my loss of weight and others did express concern about my emotional state, although I thought I felt fine.

33. I attended several events as Cabinet Portfolio Holder, including the Scarborough Cricket Festival. I had worked closely with Officers to reduce the cost of this year's event. I attended the several CLLD events as the Council's representative. No issues were raised about my performance. I also went to see a charity called Scarborough Survivors to see if there was any assistance I could give them.
34. In my role as a Councillor, I was making progress on the long-standing issue of overgrown trees in Hunmanby. I encouraged a friend to book an appointment with our MP about the long delay in her daughter's CBT treatment. I helped get a young resident some assistance with Scarborough Jobmatch. I had taken up anti-social behaviour issues with Scarborough Borough Council. I was really enjoying the role, as I love the engagement with residents.
35. I helped arranged a meeting between Hunmanby Gap residents and Kevin Hollinrake which took place in Filey on 30th August 2016, only a couple of days before the incident at *The Cottage* (public house). Indeed, I was sent an email on the 2nd September 2016 by Hazel Dales (Kevin's constituency secretary) thanking me for setting up the meeting.
36. I received a text on Thursday 1st September 2016 asking if I was available to go to *The Cottage* on the following evening to give the landlord his 'thank you' present from the Darts team.

### **The Alleged Incident**

37. In the week running up to Friday 2nd September 2016 (the night of the incident), I was still getting surges of intense and incomprehensible anger. Even the slightest discord and I would feel the adrenaline rising. I was acutely aware of it and consciously acted to keep control.

38. On Friday 2 Sep, I attended a meeting at the Town Hall about the Overview & Scrutiny Board with the Leader, Lisa Dixon (Director of Legal) and one other Officer. This was a productive discussion as to how we would get more Councillors involved in Task Groups. I followed up with an officer to ensure that we reminded Councillors that the last session of safeguarding training was being held. I was keen to finally get all Councillors trained as is required by Council Policy.
39. I recall having extremely intense and quite irrational feelings of anger on the evening of Friday 2nd September 2016; however, I felt I was succeeding in forcing them to subside. I was even thinking about stopping the *Cerelle* as I just did not feel alright on it.
40. That same day, I went for lunch in Scarborough and then returned home and had a rest. I got up and got ready to meet the Darts team for 7:00pm at *The Cottage*. When I arrived, no-one was about. I did become agitated, feeling that the party may have been cancelled without anyone remembering to tell me, so I texted one of the girls to find out where they were. About 25 (twenty-five) minutes later, I rang the team captain, who said she was on her way.
41. Once in the pub, I bought a pint of lager and sat down with friends and started chatting. We all signed the landlord's card. It was very relaxed and fun. After a while we presented the tankard that we had bought. He started hugging and kissing each of us in turn. When he hugged me he knocked over a large glass of gin and tonic onto my shirt. We all thought it was hilarious and set about mopping up the mess.
42. One of the ladies whose husband had died started talking about how her mother was convinced she had seen her late husband at the end of the drive. It was one of those conversations which gets you thinking about your own family. I then had a discussion with a lady whose grandmother had died recently as they had buried her only a couple of days



before. It was the first time I had seen her since the death, so we discussed how her Grandmother had known there was something wrong.

43. We discussed how they had found out she was dying. She had found the Hospital to be unsatisfactory and fought to move her grandmother to the Hospice. She and I then had a long discussion about my experience with Henry. I must have been visibly moved because towards the end of the conversation she lent over and said, "*You are alright, aren't you?*".

44. I went to bar to get another pint of lager. While I was there I saw a well known 86-year-old gentleman from the village who normally sits on his own and drinks his pint. Most people don't talk to him so I went and had a long chat with him. We discussed his new house and how his neighbour keeps complaining to the Borough Council about the state of his old property, which he still owns. We then spent a long time chatting about Hunmanby Railway Station and the land owned by Northern Rail on Sands Lane in Hunmanby.

45. We discussed how it was difficult to access the Station from the village. I believe I may have gone and bought another pint of lager and some crisps during this period. The girls from Darts came and said goodbye. We continued chatting until the old man went home.

46. At this point, I was about to go home when the Chairman of Hunmanby Parish Council and his wife arrived at the bar. We went and sat down together and had a long conversation, the details of which I have only the very vaguest recollection. I do not remember when they left or indeed anything very much after that point.

47. My next recollection is one of me being angry and bellowing something about the NHS had ruined my life. I then walked off towards Bayley Gardens and sat down on a bench and became extremely upset, agitated and tearful. I broke down completely. I have no personal

recollection of the incident that was later described to me. I am aware that an off-duty Police Constable who is known to me came to my aid and stayed with me.

48. I settled down at once and got up to go home. As I set out to leave Bayley Gardens, two Police Officers stopped me. They said I could not leave as they were concerned about my safety. They took me to a Police van and I was taken to Cross Lane Hospital.

### **Aftermath**

49. I was assessed the next morning, Saturday 3rd September 2016, and told I would be referred to the Community Mental Health Team. I was then allowed to go home. I went home in a taxi and rested. Later on, I went up to Bayley Gardens to see if it might jog my recall about what had allegedly happened. I saw a nearly full pint glass by the bench where I broke down. I took the pint glass and left it on one of the tables outside *The Cottage*. There was nothing that jogged my memory.

50. For the rest of the weekend I felt shaken up and in shock. I attended Church on Sunday as I needed emotional support.

51. On Monday 5th September 2016, I decided to go into the Town Hall early as there was a Safeguarding Meeting which several Councillors had not in the past attended and I wanted to see if there was a good turn-out. As I waited, I was rather upset that the turn-out for the training was not very good at all.

52. I was not too happy and complained to our Group Leader about lack of attendance. The Council Leader was not pleased and I was summoned for a discussion. At that point, it was suggested that I should go home and think about things. I did send an email to Group Leader Councillor Joe Plant attempting to resign but this was not accepted.

53. In the end, I went for a coffee with Councillor Joe Plant and we had a long discussion. I told him that there had apparently been an incident in Hunmanby in the early hours of Saturday morning. I told him I had been detained under the Mental Health Act for my own safety. There had been an incident but I could not remember what had happened. We returned to the Leader's office and I felt more calm.
54. In the presence of both Cllr. Joe Plant and Cllr. Helen Mallory (Portfolio Holder for Finance, Procurement and Legal Services), I told the Council Leader Councillor Derek Bastiman about the detention. We discussed it and I said I was conscious of reputational concerns, given my role. I was assured that it would be treated as a private matter. After this discussion, I headed down stairs as we were about to have a Group meeting. I saw Cllr. Tom Fox and told him about the incident. We had a long chat which reassured me.
55. I went back upstairs and had my lunch. I decided to attend the Full Council meeting as I felt I could get through and I was not anticipating any difficult questions. I am sufficiently experienced in Council Meetings to know how to manage through difficult situations.
56. The next couple of days were very quiet and I spent my time working on ward issues and attended Folkton Parish Council.
57. On the evening of Wednesday 7th September 2016, I received an email from the Council Leader asking me to attend a meeting with him and Cllr. Joe Plant at 12:30pm the next day. I replied saying I would attend and enquired as to the subject. I received no reply.
58. The following morning, Thursday 8th September 2016, I went to Hunmanby GP surgery for a meeting with the Practice Manager. We discussed some issues they were having with getting new accommodation.

59. I then travelled into the meeting in the Town Hall. I was told by the Chief Executive's secretary that the meeting was to take place in his office. I went in and sat at one end of the long table. Cllr. Joe Plant came in and sat towards the middle of table. A few minutes later, the Leader joined us and sat at the opposite end of the table.
60. He told me that he was taking my Portfolio away as the Police had told him that I had assaulted someone at *The Cottage* (public house) and that it was on CCTV. He further stated that it was being referred to Pubwatch and I would be banned from the pubs. I was in shock, as this was the first I had heard of an alleged assault.
61. I started to sweat and became distressed. Cllr. Plant did try to say that this was about me getting better. However, the tone from Cllr. Bastiman was less forgiving. He kept saying, *"You told me the other day that you were arrested"*. I stated that I had said it was a Mental Health Act detention. He starting pointing his finger and saying, *"You said you were arrested. I have got a witness"*, as he pointed to Cllr. Plant. He would not listen. I felt that he criminalised me.
62. He told me that the Police had said that I could no longer be a member of the Police & Crime Panel because of the incident. He said it was out on social media and people were saying it would be a cover-up. The Police were also concerned about my wellbeing and that I had not been taking my medication. I was not given an opportunity to explain that I was taking a different type of medication to address mood swings in the menstrual cycle.
63. I was told I had to resign, no question, because if I didn't, he would take me to task in public. I refused to resign as it was a mental health issue, which falls directly and centrally into my Portfolio. It was a point of principle.
64. Councillor Bastiman left and asked Lisa Dixon to come and speak to me. Lisa expressed concern for my wellbeing and getting well. I pointed out that I would be losing £340 per

month which helped me to pay the bills. No-one gave me any reassurance of practical help available to overcome these problems. I was not offered any media advice/support, even though the story was already breaking.

65. I became upset and Sandra Rees Community Safety & Safeguarding Manager, was sent in to talk to me. I spiralled down and was very emotional and talked about suicide. Then the Police were called to talk to me. The Officer in question was very professional and considerate. However, I was not permitted to leave the building and go home.

66. I was assured by the Police Officer that they would find out what had happened and let me know. This has not happened. Another Officer also attended the meeting room. I could not use the bathroom without a Police guard. I was asked to empty my pockets before entering the cubicle.

67. The paramedics carried out some checks and left. The Street Triage Team arrived and they got me to point where I felt ready to go home and the Team were ready to allow it. They offered to drive me home but I felt well enough leave. At 4:45pm I left the building. As I went into the car park I heard an email alert on my iPad.

68. I checked the email only to find that it was announcing Cllr. Sandra Turner had been appointed as cabinet member for Safer and Stronger Communities. I was very upset at what felt like a callous betrayal. I emailed Lisa Dixon to tell her how it had upset me. She did not respond.

69. I also checked my Twitter feed and found that there were notifications asking me about the incident. I didn't know what to do. How should I respond? I decided to email Lisa Dixon to ask for support. I sent an email at 17:21 and did not receive a response. I was left to work out what to do by myself by the Council that said it was concerned about me.

70. I decided to send out some tweets acknowledging it was me and that I had mental health issues. I desperately needed space as I was so upset at the way I had been abandoned by Scarborough Borough Council when I was at my most vulnerable. I thought they had thrown me to the dogs as soon as I left the building.
71. The Street Triage Team visited me at home and spent some time talking to me. I told them that I was going to be honest and speak to the press. I felt I had a duty to acknowledge what I had done and then speak out on behalf of other mental health sufferers. This was bigger than me. They were concerned that I was too vulnerable to do this now.
72. I decided to contact the editor of the Yorkshire Post via Twitter and ask to speak to them about what had happened. He responded and asked one of his reporters to contact me.
73. Later that evening, a former work colleague from my village came down and spent two hours giving me support. During this time I received an email from Cllr. Joe Plant as group leader about a routine group matter. There was no enquiry about my wellbeing.
74. On Friday 9th September 2016, I did speak for a few minutes to Sandra Rees. Throughout the morning I received no response from Lisa Dixon. Only one member of the Conservative Group contacted me to say they were sorry about me leaving Cabinet. Again I heard nothing from the Leader or Group Leader or any support officers of the Conservative Group.
75. I was contacted by Ruby Kitchen from the Yorkshire Post and I went through my story. We talked on and off throughout the afternoon filling in the details. She approached Scarborough Borough Council about seeking their comments.
76. On Sunday morning, I asked a friend to contact North Yorks Enquirer contributor Nigel Ward in the hope that he would help me to tell my full story, which he kindly agreed to do.

77. The Yorkshire Post published an article on the evening of Sunday 11 September 2016. The Scarborough News published the article soon afterwards.

**STATEMENT OF TRUTH**

I believe that the facts as stated in this Witness Statement are true.

Signed: **SIGNATURE  
REDACTED**

Dated: 12th September 2016

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