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Cllr Stephen Parnaby OBE Leader of the Council

29th September 2017

To: All Members of the Council

[Annotated (in blue) by Nigel WARD]

Dear Colleague

I have recently returned from holiday and received several complaints and concerns at a posting on Cllr Strangeway's website which, in my opinion, is unacceptable and is clearly a sexist comment.

Councillor PARNABY [*Con.*] does not specify which (of several) Andy STRANGEWAY websites, though he appears to be referring to a Photoon [published on Andy STRANGEWAY's personal blog \(not his 'Councillor Andy Strangeway' site\) on 19th September 2017](#), featuring ERYC CEO Caroline LACEY and ERYC Deputy Leader Jonathan OWEN [*Con.*]. (A Photoon - a harmless 'spoo' - is a photograph or photographic collage containing attributed script, in 'speech bubbles', satirising those featured in the image - see below).

Members who have voiced their concerns have asked me as Council Leader what action I can take. As you will be aware I have no powers to deal with this type of activity. I am therefore writing to you as Council Leader not in a political capacity to confirm my inability to take any action, as I have been informed several Members are very upset by the situation.

Leaving aside syntactical irregularities, Councillor PARNABY is correct in confirming that he is constitutionally unable to act . . . though the dispatching of this letter to all members *excluding* Councillor STRANGEWAY [*Ind.*] is itself arguably an unconstitutional act. It is a personal and politically-motivated attack designed, on the face of it, to silence Andy STRANGEWAY (the *private citizen and transparency campaigner* who has played a significant and very public part in the exposure of Councillor PARNABY's actions) by invoking the Standards regime in an attempt to conflate his actions *as a private citizen* (over whom the Council exerts no authority) with those conducted in his capacity as *Councillor Andy STRANGEWAY, elected member*. A cheap trick.

The issue relates to Cllr Strangeway's brief attendance at the Cabinet meeting on 19th September which in my absence was chaired by the Council's Deputy Leader, Cllr Jonathan Owen. Cllr Strangeway took a photograph of Cllr Owen and the Council Chief Executive, Caroline Lacey. Later he posted it on his website with the caption, purporting[*sic*] to words being said by Cllr Owen to the Chief Executive "Psst, don't look now but Strangeway's taking photos, and by the way do you know your flashing your legs".

The right to take photographs of public servants at public meetings is enshrined in law. The right to freedom of expression is also enshrined in law. The fact that many Councillors and Officers actively resent both is utterly irrelevant to the present matter; unless (or until) the law changes, they must live with it.

This comment is not one expected by an Elected Councillor and would not be condoned in any workplace.

The Photoon in question was not published by 'Councillor' Andy STRANGEWAY - it was published by *private citizen* Andy STRANGEWAY on his *personal* blog and cannot, therefore, fall within the remit of the Standards regime. Further, Councillor PARNABY is appealing to an extremely petty application of 'political correctness' that disregards the amicable leg-pulling banter which permeates every aspect of social interaction. Neither he nor his Council has the authority to suppress the freedom of expression of private citizens, even when the joke is on them.

Councillor PARNABY is fully aware (or, if he is not, his ignorance is most astonishing) that Photoons are a form of satirical expression pioneered by *Private Eye* magazine on its front covers since 1963. They are a modern-day progression from the pictorial lampoons made popular by William HOGARTH in the eighteenth century. Clearly, Conservative Councillors consider themselves 'entitled' to immunity from the sometimes ribald humour of the *hoi polloi*. Like Russian dolls, they are simply full of themselves. By complaining, they invite further derision.

If any Member wishes to take this matter further then you need to take it up with the Council's Monitoring Officer and Head of Legal and Democratic Service, Mathew Buckley.

Here, Councillor PARNABY proffers a thinly-disguised request to his faithful followers to lodge a Formal Complaint against Councillor STRANGEWAY. In my view, he is abusing his authority as Leader to coerce those with misplaced loyalties into launching an invalid proxy attack, on his behalf, against Andy STRANGEWAY, whilst affecting the pretence of standing aloof from the fray.

Cllr Strangeway did at a later point post the same photograph attributing the comment to both Cllr Owen and the Chief Executive. Members have raised with me before postings by Cllr Strangeway that have been offensive and with sexual innuendo, and indeed one of his latest posts relates specifically to a sexual act, however I believe this is a step too far.

Councillor PARNABY appears to be affecting such stupidity as to have totally missed the point: If commenting that a *woman* has granted sight of her legs is 'sexist', then, *mutatis mutandis*, commenting that a *man* has granted sight *his* legs is equally 'sexist'. Are we all, on that basis, to avoid any reference to human beings who have exhibited their legs - for fear of 'offending' those with no legs? But Councillor PARNABY is fully aware of all this; he is simply 'blowing smoke'.

We come now to the underlying issue at the heart of Councillor PARNABY's reference to [Andy STRANGEWAY's publication of 27th September 2017](#), alerting the public to the information that a worker in a Council swimming-pool had been arrested in connection with the theft of 8/9-year-old school-girls' underwear. The offender is believed to have been caught *in flagrante delicto*, masturbating over the stolen items. This is not merely a reference to "*a sexual act*", it is **Child Sexual Abuse** - Pam ALLEN's area of expertise. It is now also known that underwear was reported missing on the previous day. This may have been going on for some time. Clearly, it was vital that parents of children attending the pool (whether in recent days or over a far longer period) should be informed, so as to be able to check their children's belongings and recover any material evidence.

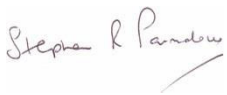
Meanwhile, ERYC have remained **non-responsive** to urgent requests for a public statement to reassure parents that the Council's Duty of Care was now being fully implemented. Nevertheless, the desire to play down this monumental Safeguarding failure forms only a part of the motivation behind PARNABY's present action. Disclosure of the Council's disastrous litigation record, its Planning improprieties, and its secret 'gagging orders' could (and should) destroy public confidence in the Leader. Councillor PARNABY knows this. In positioning himself between Caroline LACEY's legs

and a major Child Sex Abuse scandal, Councillor PARNABY has exacerbated his own predicament.

It is not without significance that Councillor PARNABY's letter appears under the ERYCC letter-head and above his signature and full title. Notwithstanding PARNABY's attempted disclaimer, it is an official letter. He is therefore attacking the lawful conduct of a private citizen by using (some might say abusing) *his official position as Leader of the Council* and, in the process, furthering his apparent *personal* interest in silencing Andy STRANGEWAY - in a way that cannot be applied in the case of Mr Peter ROBINSON, or others now queuing up to hold him to account. Make no mistake, Andy STRANGEWAY is now PARNABY's nemesis. He holds all the cards.

In my view, Councillor Stephen PARNABY OBE is a desperate man in a desperate situation - an emperor in rags, one might say, virtually naked (certainly 'flashing' more than his legs). And in my view, he is cruising for another Misfeasance in Public Office action, his legal defence of which may swallow his life's savings (if the [Lakeminster](#) action does not). Councillor Simon FRAZER [Con.] must be rubbing his hands.

Yours sincerely



Cllr Stephen Parnaby OBE
Leader of the Council

The 'contentious' Photoons

