

Rebecca Pow MP
Member of Parliament for Taunton Deane



HOUSE OF COMMONS
LONDON SW1A 0AA

Leader Taunton Deane Borough Council
The Deane House
Belvedere Road
Taunton
TA1 1HE

27 April 2017

Dear Mr Bryant

Thank you for meeting me and discussing your concerns about the local government standards regime. I apologize for the length of time it has taken to follow up.

Following our conversations, I discussed this issue with the Minister for Local Government, Marcus Jones, as well as making formal written representations. I have now received a response and I enclose a copy for your information and reference.

As you can see from the reply, the changes made in the Localism Act 2011 were needed to help prevent politically motivated attacks and it is now down to each local authority to decide what is in the code of conduct.

I hope that the information enclosed helps to clarify some of the thinking behind the changes and as you will note, the Localism Act is due to be reviewed this year. Should I be returned at the next election I will be sure to feed in your views during this process.

Thank you again for taking the time to make me aware of your concerns.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Rebecca Pow'.

Rebecca Pow
Member of Parliament for Taunton Deane



Department for
Communities and
Local Government

Rebecca Pow MP
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Marcus Jones MP
Minister for Local Government

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Our Ref: 3272387

19 APR 2017

Dear Rebecca,

Thank you for your letter of 22 March in which you relay the concerns Taunton Deane Borough Council has about the standards regime introduced by the Localism Act 2011.

The previous standards regime consisted of a model code governing local authority members' conduct and was enforced through local authority standards committees, regulated in turn by the Standards Board for England. Unfortunately, it became a vehicle for petty, malicious and politically-motivated complaints.

Under the current arrangements, every local authority is required to adopt a code of conduct for local authority members. It is for each local authority to determine the contents of their code, although it must conform to the seven 'Nolan' principles of standards in public life: selflessness, integrity, objectivity, accountability, openness, honesty and leadership. We have not sought to define these principles - such definitions already exist and are freely available, for instance on the web site of the Committee for Standards in Public Life.

The current set-up also requires local authorities to put in place arrangements to investigate and decide on allegations of breaching the code. We do not, however, dictate to local authorities what those arrangements might be. This is for local authorities to determine for themselves.

The new regime does allow a council to take action against any councillors it considers have breached its code of conduct. These include removing a councillor from a committee or formally censuring them. Of course the ultimate judgement of a councillor's conduct comes at the ballot box. I consider these arrangements to be appropriate.

I note that Taunton and Deane Borough Council also raises concerns about the introduction of strict rules on the registration and disclosure of certain pecuniary interests. I feel it is absolutely vital that the electorate can assure themselves that local authority members are not putting their own interests ahead of those of the public and that is why the current sanctions include a criminal offence.

You might be interested to know that the Government gave a commitment to review the Localism Act within five years of the coming into force of the changes it introduced, and so we intend to conduct that review later this year.

Your
Marcus

MARCUS JONES MP
