



## DECISION NOTICE

### INVESTIGATION RELATING TO COUNCILLOR BARBARA SIDNELL

Reference: 2/2011

#### 1. BACKGROUND

At the beginning of June 2011, it came to the attention of the Council's Monitoring Officer that Councillor Sidnell may have been claiming dependent carers allowance ("the Allowance") in respect of a child who was above the age in respect of which such claims could be made. When the matter was put to Councillor Sidnell, she accepted that this was the case and referred the matter to the Standards Committee to investigate.

Subsequent to her referring the matter to the Committee, but before the meeting of the Initial Assessment Committee, further concerns were raised about whether the meetings in respect of which the Allowance was claimed had been attended by Councillor Sidnell. The Initial Assessment Sub-Committee agreed to look into both these allegations

On 14 July 2011, the Standards Committee met to consider the investigation report.

#### 2. DECISION

The Committee reached the following conclusions.

- 2.1 Councillor Sidnell had not acted dishonestly in relation to any of her claims and therefore had not brought the Council into disrepute.
- 2.2 However, in failing to take sufficient care in relation to her claims for the Allowance Councillor Sidnell brought the office of councillor into disrepute in breach of paragraph 5 of the Code of Conduct for Members (The Code)..
- 2.3 In light of the importance to be attached to the proper stewardship of public resources Councillor Sidnell should be censured for her breach of the Code.
- 2.4 It would be inappropriate to impose any further sanction in the light of the mitigating circumstances set out below.
  - The mistakes made were not deliberate – but were the result of some carelessness and lack of awareness;
  - Councillor Sidnell offered and arranged immediate repayment when the error concerning the maximum age at which a child could be included in a claim was pointed out;
  - The approval regime operating within Council was not very stringent which did not help Councillor Sidnell in fulfilling her responsibilities in respect of her claims; in particular, nowhere on the form are councillors required to specify the age of the child in respect of whom claims are being made.
- 2.5 The form provided to councillors and the process for claiming the Allowance should be reviewed by the Monitoring Officer.
- 2.6 Consideration should be given to what additional support and/or training and guidance could be given to councillors about good record keeping more generally.

Signed .....Godfrey Stadlen.....

Dated.....

Godfrey Stadlen, Chair of the Standards Committee

Members of the Standards Committee present:

Jane McNeill and Godfrey Stadlen  
Councillors George Allan and Kate Groucutt