

## **Scrutiny – People Oct 2018**

### Statement in response to comments and the publication of comments in regard to my attendance

I would like to begin by asking everyone here today: who has never missed a meeting whether it is any Scrutiny, Council or other meeting, associated with their work as a Councillor?

How many have never missed two meetings?

How many of you have been berated for that or have not had your apologies accepted?

I have been a Councillor for nearly 15 years and Cabinet Member 6 years. I have an exemplary record for attendance and am known to be a conscientious and hardworking member of this Authority.

Everyone can find themselves in a position that can result in them being unable to attend a meeting eg: through illness, family and personal issues or a clash in their diary that cannot be avoided. I once had to miss a planning appeal meeting because I was in a car accident when someone drove out of a junction and into my car.

I believe the Chair missed a meeting of this Scrutiny in March and there have been few meetings of this Scrutiny which have had 100% attendance. Looking at other Committees, such as the Audit Committee, will also show less than 100% attendance.

Records are also kept in regard to attendance at briefings and planned visits to educational establishments. In fact it was a member of this Scrutiny who asked for a visit to the PRU to be specially arranged and on the day did not visit. These things happen.

In regard to the comments published in the Minutes that you have all just agreed I wish to make the following points:

It is stated I have not attended 2 Scrutiny Meetings.

The first meeting I did not attend was due to the fact that I was on holiday. The holiday with my family was booked prior to me having any knowledge of the date of the Scrutiny meeting. In addition it was in the school holidays. The school holidays are not only when my family take their holidays with my grandchildren but are also the best time for me to take leave as the schools are closed.

This was accepted at the time, as far as I am aware, and yet was dragged up at the last Scrutiny meeting as unacceptable. Why? It was then, and still is, written into the Minutes. Why? Who agreed the wording?

I was informed of the second Scrutiny date **after** I had arranged a public event which the Mayor and Leader were attending.

The date, 10 July, is the 81<sup>st</sup> anniversary of the arrival and welcoming of 57 Basque child refugees aged 5-15 years, in Caerleon. They had been evacuated from the terrors of the Spanish Civil War.

So the date was already set and it had to be that date. I was organising the whole event from start to finish, not just attending, because I am central to this important historical event, being the published author of the original paper on the Basque Children in Caerleon and deeply involved in supporting the Basque children's history across the UK.

When I was informed of the Scrutiny date, some two months before the event, I emailed the appropriate officer stating that, given I was organising the event, I would have to leave Scrutiny at the latest by 10.30am. This made it clear that,

given the meeting was due to start at 10am, I would not have sufficient time.

I received an email back saying the officer would contact the Chair and request a 9.30 start. I received no further correspondence. Meanwhile, there was full knowledge about my commitment on the day. In fact the time I actually needed to be in Cross Street Caerleon on the day was just after 10.30 and had I known I was expected at Scrutiny at 9.30 I would still have had to send my apologies.

As it was I did ask Sarah Morgan, who attended the meeting, to reiterate my apologies for not being able to attend.

To clarify what organisation was required on 10 July prior to the actual start of the event at 12.00 was:

- The road closure before 11am ( Streetscene staff were very efficient and arrived not long after 10.30), including the parking space available for the Mayor and Leader's cars
- Welcoming the combined schools' choir of fifty six 5-15 year olds, and positioning them safely
- Ensuring the cover for the plaque was properly positioned for the unveiling
- Ensuring the positioning of information boards
- Ensuring the refreshments at Curro's were prepared
- Welcoming the Mayor, Leader , VIPs and 100 guests

So, the Minutes you have just agreed are inaccurate because I was not due to attend the unveiling at 12 midday, that was the time it was due to commence and that was known. At no time was I planning to just turn up at 12 midday.

Following that Scrutiny meeting I was informed that there was shock and concern by the tone of the comments made by some Scrutiny Members in

regard to my absence.

In the nearly 15 years I have been attending meetings in this Council I have never heard of any Member being treated in such a way, without seeking any review into the circumstances, without me being given any opportunity for redress, or even being informed, and demanding that the unsubstantiated criticism must be published in public.

I am aware that the Chair subsequently agreed to 'tone down' the original Minutes, which in itself, makes clear they were unacceptable. As I have pointed out I believe the present Minutes are inaccurate.

I remain concerned by the way this matter has been handled and would hope that anybody who is unable to attend a meeting in future will be treated with fairness and with consideration and not criticised in their absence without gathering the facts.

This is particularly important when putting such comments on public documents.

I request that this statement is published in the Minutes of this meeting.

Meanwhile, I believe a review needs to be undertaken to ensure everyone in future is treated in a fair and considered manner.