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## **LETTER TO AUDIT AND STANDARDS COMMITTEE**

Dear Will,

I am submitting the following letter under Council Procedure Rule 23.3 to be included on the agenda for the Audit and Standards Committee scheduled for January 30<sup>th</sup>.

I would like to raise some important concerns about the standards of behaviour shown by some councillors at full council and in committees.

In Brighton & Hove we have a long standing agreement that we discuss matters of policy but refrain from making this acutely personal. This is an important principle, with respect and civil debate ingrained in our own councillor code of conduct and the Nolan Principles of public life.

I have been dismayed then to observe a decline in behaviour that strays far from our code of conduct. At the last full council personal remarks about members were made and the chair did not attempt to stop this - for example a member called another member a disgusting woman. The code of conduct states that members should be respectful.

The council also has a rule about speaking through the chair - not personally abusing another member. If this behaviour continues without being stopped it has grave implications for our democracy. It will put people off becoming councillors.

I am always prepared to engage in robust debate and ensure accountability of elected members but much of this behaviour is delivered in such a way that it is not debate it is bullying and harassment. I recently complained about my own experience in a committee where I was told by another member that I (personally) was "appalling." I was told this complaint did not make the threshold despite other people present (not councillors) and who watched it online, relaying to me that the behaviour was awful and telling me so. I would like this known to the committee: people are watching, and this can affect our reputation as a council. I've also witnessed shouting, finger pointing and barracking while members speak in Council and other committees that I understand some members of the public find quite shocking.

Given we have recently received a report into tackling the toxic bullying culture at one of our own departments – CityClean – I do feel we can do better and set a positive example.

I would like to propose a review of how we are dealing with complaints about member behaviour. I would also like a review of how Chairs - including of full council - are empowered and supported to intervene. I would also propose that we do this work proactively; in collaboration where necessary with the Jo Cox Foundation, the LGA, and others committed to upholding standards in public life. I note that Cornwall Council has recently made national news [[Cornwall Council votes for greater protection from abuse for members - BBC News](#)] for introducing a notice of motion that encourages better behaviour from members and stronger protection for councillors against abuse. The article quotes, *"The debate comes after a survey by the Local Government Association (LGA) last year found the number of local councillors in England and Wales who reported feeling at risk in their role due to rising levels of abuse and intimidation had increased to a ["new high"](#)".*

I would urge the committee to show they are concerned about this topic and back the proposed review, with a report brought back to this committee detailing how we can more deeply embed the principles of the code of conduct into our council and committee meetings.

Yours Sincerely,

Councillor Sue Shanks