

CASE E

HOOK PARISH COUNCIL - COUNCILLOR DR JON ROUSE

Summary

It was alleged that Councillor Rouse, the chairman of the parish council, accompanied by the vice-chairman, visited a member of the public at home. Here he made allegations that a group of seven parish councillors, including the complainant, would be pressing for an injunction to prevent the member of the public, a parishioner, speaking at meetings. The parishioner then wrote to each of the seven councillors repeating this allegation and another allegation that he had orchestrated a public protest against the siting of a youth shelter. He enclosed a stamped envelope for them to reply and asked for them to let him know whether the allegations were true or false. He said that if they did not reply he would assume that the claim was true. In this case, he asked them to go ahead and seek the injunction.

The complainant was one of two councillors who replied direct to the parishioner, to say that she was not aware of the actions he referred to being taken, or of a group of seven working in co-operation on the council, and that the allegations were false. The clerk also wrote to the member of the public to say that six of the councillors (one was away) had asked him to reply to say that the allegations were false. The parishioner was not satisfied, wrote to the councillors again to say that the two who had replied personally had not asked the clerk to write on their behalf, and that he would regard the remaining five as having taken the actions originally alleged unless he heard from them by a given deadline.

It is alleged that on 18 April 2005 during public questions, a member of the public made a statement concerning a pre-arranged visit to his house by two senior councillors. The complainant wrote to Councillor Rouse on 20 April asking him:

- If he knew the identity of the two councillors who allegedly paid the visit.
- To name the two councillors allegedly involved and to ask them to explain why they used her name without her knowledge.
- To clear her of any complicity in the alleged actions.
- If he was unable to clear her good name, then to assure her that the exercise was designed simply as character assassination.

The complainant states that she received no response to the letter, and that she put down questions in council on 16 May 2005. She wrote to Councillor Rouse again on 20 May 2005 to convey her disappointment with his handling of her questions. The minutes of the meeting state:

“The Chairman said he had received letters from two Councillors concerning alleged actions of Councillors at an informal meeting. As these letters did not relate to discuss them with individuals outside the meeting.”

On 23 May Councillor Rouse wrote to the complainant to say he regarded the matter as closed. The complainant reports that the member of the public has now told her that Councillor Rouse was one of the two councillors who visited him.

complaint form

RU

10 AUG 2005



RECEIVED

If you have any questions or difficulties filling this form in, for example, if English is not your first language or you have a disability, please contact the Referrals Unit on 0800 107 2001.

You can also e-mail them at referrals@standardsboard.co.uk

Please note

- > we can only accept complaints in writing;
- > one of our officers may contact you personally to go through the details of your complaint;
- > we are unlikely to be able to keep your identity confidential if you make a complaint.

RECEIVED
10 AUG 2005

ABOUT YOU

title Mr Ms Mrs Miss Councillor other (please specify)

first name JEAN surname BLAKE TODD

address FAIRYTALE COTTAGE, SEA LANE, HOOK,
BARWELL postcode BW4 2PQ

daytime telephone 56

evening telephone 56

e-mail

Please consider the complaint I have described below and in the evidence attached. I understand and accept that the details will normally be disclosed to the member, particularly if the matter goes through to investigation.

signature

A. R. Blake Todd

date 8 AUG 05

YOUR COMPLAINT

Who are you complaining about?

Please give the name of the councillor/s, member/s or co-opted member/s you consider has broken the Code of Conduct and the name of their authority/ies.

name of the individual/s

CH. DR. J. ROUSE

name of their authority/ies

HOOK PARISH COUNCIL

Please tick here if you work for the authority/ies shown above

Please tick here if you are a member of the authority/ies shown above



the
Standards Board
for England

complaint form

WHAT ARE YOU COMPLAINING ABOUT?

Please provide us with as much information as you can about your complaint to help us decide whether or not it should be investigated. Include the **date** and **details** of the alleged misconduct, and any information that supports the complaint. We can only investigate complaints that a member has broken the Code of Conduct (see section 3 of the information leaflet 'How to make a complaint about a councillor'). Continue on a separate sheet if there is not enough space on this form.

See Attached letter

Series of horizontal dashed lines for writing the complaint details.

EVIDENCE (if this applies)

Please attach to this form copies of correspondence, documents, names and details of witnesses, and any other evidence that you feel is relevant to your complaint. Please avoid sending us large amounts of background information that only relate indirectly to your complaint.

Please tick this box if you would like us to return the evidence to you

Please send this form to:

The Standards Board for England
First Floor
Cottons Centre
Cottons Lane
London SE1 2QG

The *Race Relations Act 2000* requires us to monitor ethnic or national origin to ensure that we do not inadvertently discriminate against members of a particular group. It would, therefore, be helpful if you would complete the ethnic monitoring section of the form, although this is not compulsory.

Your answers will be removed and kept entirely separate from your complaint and will be completely confidential. They will be used for statistical purposes only, in which individuals will not be identified.

8th August 2005

Cllr. Jean Blake Todd, Fairytale Cottage,
Sea Lane, Hook

Complaints against Cllr. Dr. J. Rouse for bringing the parish council into disrepute by their false accusations against seven parish councillors.

On 3rd April 2005 I received a letter from a member of public claiming that I, among others [all named Councillors of Hook Parish Council] was pressing for an injunction to prevent him attending or speaking at Parish Meetings. He claimed to have been informed of the facts verbally by two Parish Councillors, one of them confirming it in writing [e-mail].

Item 1 Letter from Richard Ogle

I replied to him stating that the allegations were false as far as I was concerned

Item 2 Reply to Richard Ogle

The Parish Clerk was asked to respond to the letter on behalf of the Councillors by the Vice-Chairman

Item 3 Clerk's response and his letter informing Councillors' of his actions

Richard Ogle [the member of the public] wrote to all seven councillors again repeating his request for answers to his allegations

Item 4 R. Ogle letter of 12 April 05

At the Council Meeting held on the 18th April 2005 during public questions time, Richard Ogle made a lengthy statement concerning the allegations made during a pre-arranged visit to his house by two senior Councillors.

I sent a letter to the Chairman of Council, Jim R. , who refused to reply to my letter or speak to me

Item 5 Letter to Cllr. Rouse

I sent a written question to the Chairman for the Council Meeting of the 16th May 2005 – his response was as detailed in my letter to him of 20th May 2005.

Item 6 Letter to Cllr. Rouse

and as minuted at 022.05c.

Item 7 Copy of the Minutes dated 16th May 2005

Dr. Rouse sent a letter to me on 23rd May saying that he considered the matter closed.

Item 8 Letter from Cllr. Rouse

He has steadfastly refused to discuss this matter with me and will certainly not apologise to me for the false allegations he has put out into the public arena.

Richard Ogle has now told me that the two senior Councillors who visited him, at his house, by appointment, were the Chairman of Council Dr. Rouse and the Vice Chairman Mrs Carol W

Cllr. Mrs J. Ogle was in the house at the time and could I am sure verify that the meeting took place. She also informed me that she had seen the email sent to their home from Dr. Rouse

8th August 2005

Cllr. Jean Blake Todd Fairytale Cottage
Sea Lane
Hook

Names of witnesses

Cllr. Tom W Earlesmere
Hook Fold

Cllr. Brian D Todd Fairytale Cottage
Sea Lane
Hook

Item 1

**Richard D Ogle
The Old Rectory
Hook
Barwell
BW4 6HT**

2 April 2005

To: Parish Councillors Mrs. S , Mrs M , Mrs. H , Mr.
De Mrs F Mr. W and Mrs H

Dear Councillors

I am have been informed, verbally by two and in writing also by one Hook Parish Councillor, that you seven Members have been and still are making vigorous representation, pressing for application to be made in the Courts for an Injunction to be taken out against me in order to prevent me from attending and speaking at Parish Council meetings.

I am further advised that some of you claim that I "orchestrated" the public who protested against the placing of a Youth Shelter in the Park.

I have to say that I am not convinced that these allegations are true and that, specifically, I doubt if seven Members have acted as claimed. However, since that is my information from what I should be able to accept as an impeccable source, I have to ask you all if this is true or false and I shall be pleased to hear from you as soon as you care to reply, using the stamped envelope enclosed. *If you do not reply then I will feel disposed to accept that the claim is true.*

In such circumstance then I ask you all, quite simply, to make an appointment in the High Court Barwell at which I will appear and claim costs and damages against you all, personally, for you have no grounds whatever, in my view, for attempting to exclude me from public meetings. Such an application would be frivolous/ vexatious and/or malicious, in my view and that would be put to the Learned Judge. I look forward to hearing from you, please, with 7 days.

~~Yours~~ faithfully

Richard Ogle

Copy to the Clerk, Parish Council for information.

Item 2

Mrs J.

7th April 2005

Dear Richard,

I am not aware of any of the actions you refer to being taken or indeed of a group of seven councillors working in co-operation on this Council. Therefore the allegations to which you refer are false.

Yours sincerely

J.R. Blaine Todd



Hook Parish Council

Hook Parish Offices Cardingmill Lane Hook
Barwell BW5 1PL Tel 467876

Chairman Cllr Dr Jon Rouse Clerk Luca Franchi

Minutes of the **229th MEETING of the PARISH COUNCIL**

Held on **Monday 18th April 2005 at 19.00 hours**
in the **Hook** Parish Offices.

Those present: Cllr Dr J C Rouse (Chairman), Cllr Mrs C W (Vice Chairman),
Cllr Mrs J P O , Cllr Mrs J B , Cllr Mr B D , Cllr Dr G A P ,
Cllr Mrs J Blake Todd , Cllr Mr T W

In attendance: - County Cllr Mr M C , District Cllr Mrs J M
- The Clerk and 3 members of the public.

302.04c The meeting opened at 19.02 hours.

Apologies for Absence had been received from:

- CCllr/DCllr Mr R Brown; DCllrs Mrs F C and Mrs G
- Cllrs Mrs M M , Mrs J F , Mrs M H and Mrs G S
- The Assistant Clerk and RFO (Mr J G)

303.04c **Declarations of Personal or Prejudicial Interest**
There were none

304.04c **To Approve the Minutes of the Ordinary Council Meeting held on 21 March 2005**
282.04c It was agreed to add the following sentence after the sentence ending in
.. private event. "It was established that Cllr Mrs Ogle had done all the work
and supplied all the materials regarding this event in 2005"
Acceptance of the amended minutes was proposed by Cllr P and seconded by Cllr
Mrs W . All who had been present were in favour.
Resolved

305.04c **There were no matters arising from the Minutes of the Parish Council Meeting held
on 21 March 2005**

306.04c **To consider any urgent matters that the Chairman may wish to bring to the
Council for resolution**
There were none.

307.04c **To consider recommendations from the Amenities and Planning Committees**
➤ That up to £60 be set aside to purchase rechargeable batteries and a 64MB XD
memory card for the new Council camera (Amenities 133.04a)
This proposal by Cllr W was seconded by Cllr Mrs B and carried.

.....
Chairman

.....
Date

308.04c **To Receive, Consider and Resolve the Minutes and Recommendations from Committees**

- a) Planning Dated: 29th March and 11th April 2005
- b) Amenities Dated: 29th March 2005

These minutes were read. Cllr D said that he had informed the County Council that the Beach Café were using footpath 3039 to display items for sale.

Cllr P proposed that these minutes be accepted. This was seconded by Cllr W and agreed by all.

309.04c **To consider reports from District and County Councillors**

DCllr Mrs M said that the new rubbish collection system was settling down with fewer problems being experienced week on week. She said that the plan was to distribute all recycling bins by the end of August. In answer to a question, she said that the setting up of a separate Committee to consider Tree Planning Applications had been approved at the last meeting of the District Council.

310.04c The Chairman adjourned the meeting to receive **questions from Members of the Public**. The following questions were asked:

What can be done to make residents (including neighbours) more aware of Planning Applications that affected them?	Cllr P agreed this was an issue that needed to be addressed and asked that it be included on the agenda of the Planning Committee meeting on 9 th May.
Would the Chairman please comment on rumours that 7 members of the Council were seeking an injunction to stop a certain member of the public attending Council and Committee meetings?	Cllr Rouse said that the Council had not discussed this and, having just returned from 2 weeks holiday that morning, he had not had the opportunity to see the relevant correspondence but would look into it.

311.04c **Reports from the Responsible Financial Officer**

The following reports were tabled on behalf of the RFO and these are included at:

- Attachment 1a: Bank Balances, Receipts and Notes
- Attachment 1b: Revised Unaudited Management Accounts for 2004/5

A number of questions were raised, but because of the absence of the RFO, no satisfactory answers could be given. Cllr D said that more information was available within the computer-based accounting package. Cllr W said that Councillors should define their information requirements and ask the RFO to provide in the requested format. The Clerk was asked to set up a meeting with the RFO to pursue this suggestion to implement in the financial year 2005/6.

Cllr W proposed that these reports be accepted. This was seconded by Cllr R and carried.

.....
Chairman

.....
Date



Hook Parish Council

Hook Parish Offices Cardingmill Lane Hook
Barwell BW5 1PL Tel 467876

Chairman Cllr Dr Jon Rouse Clerk Luca Franchi

Ref:

To: Cllrs-Mrs S , Mrs M , Mrs H , Mr W and Mrs H
CC: Cllrs Mrs F , and Mr D

12 April 2005

Dear Councillor,

I wrote the following to Mr Ogle yesterday in response to his letter to you dated 2nd April.

"YOUR LETTER TO 7 COUNCILLORS

I acknowledge receipt of a copy of a letter dated 2 April you sent to 7 Parish Councillors.

You state that you are not convinced that these allegations are true. I have discussed this with all Councillors except Mrs H (who has not yet returned from an Easter break) and those 6 Councillors have asked me to reply to you that these allegations are indeed false."

Mr Ogle has contacted me today and stated that he wishes each Councillor to write to him individually (as requested in his letter). Cllrs Mrs and Mr have already done this.

So I apologise in trying to help, but I must ask you to ignore the fact that I have written to Mr O and I leave you to take whatever individual action you see fit.

Yours sincerely

Clerk to the Council

Hook Parish Council operates an open file policy. Any correspondence with the Council may become public.

For the Purposes of the Data Protection Act Hook Parish Council is the Data Controller



Item 4

Richard D Ogle
The Old Rectory
Hook
Barwell
BW4 6HT

12 April 2005

To: Parish Councillors Mrs. S , Mrs M , Mrs. H , Mr.
D , Mrs F , Mr. W and Mrs H

Dear Councillors

I received a letter from the Clerk to the Council dated the 11th April and handed to me by him at 7.30pm today in the Parish Chamber. I had already received a personal reply from Cllr. Brian Todd and Cllr. Mrs. Blake Todd telling me that, so far as they were concerned, the allegations were false. The allegations which I set out, I have to stress, were put to me with the objective of preventing me speaking at Parish meetings. I was asked not to attend the Amenities Committee at all. As I told you, I was not convinced that the allegations against the 'Hook Seven' were true and I decided that the only proper course of action for me was to ask each one of you the questions for the alternative is to carry on thinking that you are each one of the seven!

However, the Clerk's reply says that 6 Councillors have asked him to reply to me. Cllr. Todd and Cllr. Mrs. Blake Todd assure me that they did not ask the Clerk to do so because they had already replied to me and they told him so. This highlights the fact that a hearsay report from the Clerk serves no useful purpose at all – except, at this stage, wrongly to report that two Members asked him to write to me when they did not. A misunderstanding occurred, apparently. This could happen in relaying anything from you so, at a later date, you simply say "No I never said that – the Clerk must have been mistaken". It is not fair on the Clerk, in my view! Nor do you answer the question I put to you.

I cannot require any Member to write to me and you may not wish to do so. In that case then I can but assume that you were a party to what I was told was an insurrection by seven Councillors demanding that an Injunction be taken out preventing me from speaking at Council meetings – supposed 'Public Meetings'! So, when a Chairman asks if any Member of the Public would like to speak then that would mean everyone present except Richard Ogle – that would look good in the Barwell Observer! But you run Hook Parish Council and not I! And Hook Parish Council actually consulted a Solicitor about this, on your behalf, as you undoubtedly are aware!

Should I not hear from you by Saturday next then I assume that you are one of FIVE.

Yours faithfully

Copy to the Clerk, Parish Council for information.

Item 5

Jean Blake Todd
Fairytale Cottage
Sea Lane
Hook
Barwell
BW4 2PQ

20th April 2005

Dear Jon,

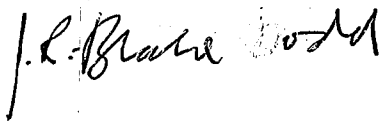
Following the statement by a member of the public at the Council meeting on Monday I feel that things are now much clearer and I think that you owe us all an explanation concerning the events that have been unfolding in the last two weeks. I would like answers to the following questions:-

1. Does the Chairman know the identity of the two Councillors who visited a member of the public, giving him false information, resulting in that person sending letters to seven named Councillors accusing them of "making vigorous representation, pressing for an injunction to prevent him attending or speaking at Council Meetings".
2. Will the Chairman name the two Councillors involved and ask them to explain why they decided to use my name in this complicity without my knowledge.
3. Will the Chairman clear me of any complicity in any action that has been dreamt up and ask the Council to write to me declaring that I was not a party to any such actions.
4. If you are unable to clear my good name and assure me that this whole exercise was not designed simply as a character assassination, I will wish to be given access to the Council's Solicitor at the expense of the Council to act on my behalf to clear my good name.

Allegations using my name – background information

I received a letter dated 2nd April alleging that I am part of a plot to seek an injunction against a member of the public. I had nothing to hide and replied to the letter stating that I knew nothing about the allegations and that I was certainly not part of any conspiracy or indeed of a group of seven.

Yours sincerely



Item 6

Councillor Jean Blake Todd

**Fairytale Cottage
Sea Lane
Hook
Barwell
BW4 2PQ**

20 May 2005

Dear Cllr. *Rouse*

I was disappointed with your handling of my written questions to you as Chairman of Council [sent on 20th April 2005]. I do not feel that a response to a serious attack on my character of "I have received written questions but I will not be answering the questions submitted" is acceptable.

You had three weeks to acknowledge my letter and write a response or give me a reasonable explanation for your actions at the Council Meeting on 16th May 2005.

I believe that you and your Vice-Chairman visited Mr & Mrs *Ogle* and made false allegations about me, which you also confirmed to him in writing. At no time did you attempt to contact me in any way for an explanation although you have had endless opportunities to do so.

Mr. *Ogle* advised me that I am one of an alleged group of seven members making vigorous representation for an application to the Courts for an injunction to be taken out against him to prevent him speaking at *Hook* Parish Meetings. My understanding is that you and your Vice-Chairman were the ones seeking legal advice about taking out injunctions. Had you bothered to speak to me I could have advised you of the correct procedure to achieve what you were patently trying to do.

I now require a public retraction for your allegations and a written apology from you for the unwarranted harassment by Mr. *Ogle* that your false allegations have caused me.

I require a reply to this letter within seven days or I will proceed further with this matter, which I take very seriously.

Yours sincerely,

J.B.T.

Item 7

Hook Parish Council

Hook Parish Offices Cardingmill Lane Hook
Barwell BW5 1PL Tel 467876

Chairman Cllr Dr Jon Rouse Clerk Luca Franchi

(Minute Extract)

Cllr Mrs H proposed that the current internal auditors – Cllrs Rouse and Todd – should continue. This was seconded by Cllr W and carried.

018.05c Appointment of Solicitors to the Council

The Chairman proposed that T E continues as the solicitors. This was seconded by Cllr Mrs W and carried.

019.05c Reports from the Responsible Financial Officer and Approval of Cheques

A report showing Bank Balances, Receipts and Notes was tabled by the RFO - see Appendix 4. Following a query from Cllr Todd the Chairman proposed that a statement be included in future reports to the effect that "this includes £X ring-fenced money for the allotments". This was seconded by Cllr Mrs Blake Todd and carried.

The RFO presented the list of cheques to be approved – see Appendix 5. Cllr P asked for a key to the Expense Codes. This and other matters would be discussed at the meeting on 23rd May. The Clerk was instructed to obtain booking fees from BDC (in hand) and Hook Preservation Society for using the Chamber.

Cllr Mrs H proposed that the report and payments be accepted. This was seconded by Cllr Mrs W and carried.

020.05c To approve the 2005/6 Discretionary Grant Application Form and agree the closing date

The Clerk presented a draft form. Changes were agreed and these are included in the amended form at Appendix 6. The Clerk was instructed to advertise the availability of Grant Forms on the parish notice boards.

021.05c To approve the summer / autumn meeting schedule

The Clerk presented a draft form. Changes were agreed and these are included in the amended form at Appendix 7.

022.05c Questions to the Chairman or Clerk previously submitted in writing

The Chairman said that he had received letters from 2 Councillors concerning alleged actions of Councillors at an informal meeting. As these letters did not relate to business or decisions taken at Council meetings he would discuss them with the individuals outside this meeting.

.....
Chairman

.....
Date

Item 8

23 May 2005

Cllr Mrs Jean Blake Todd
Fairytale Cottage
Hook

Dear Jean,

Thank you for your letters of 14 April and 20 May.

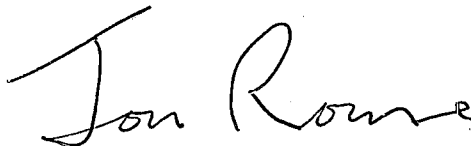
I will not comment on private discussions that may or may not have taken place between Councillors in private, and I am sure that you would not wish to have to disclose all conversations that have taken place between yourself and other Councillors. The same rules must apply to all Councillors without distinction.

The agenda item 'Questions to the Chairman/Clerk' is intended for the dissemination of information about Council Business. There is no such business involved in your letter other than the incorrect implication that I sought legal advice [either on my own or on behalf of the Council] on some matter. I have already made this clear when the accusation was first levelled by the said Mr O and I hereby affirm it again.

I fail to see how making this statement publicly again will assist our electors.

I consider the matter closed.

Yours sincerely,



Dr Jon Rouse

Cc Clerk, Cllr T W.