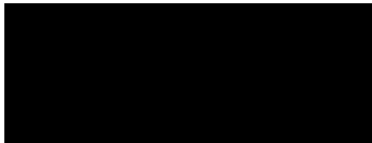


Statement

- COUNCILLOR DAVID LEVETT



21st December 2015

1. My name is Mr David Levett and I am a District Councillor for Letchworth South East Ward and Executive Member for Planning and Enterprise for North Hertfordshire District Council.
2. I have known Cllr Leal-Bennett since he became a Councillor 4 years ago.
3. In my dealings with Cllr Leal-Bennett I have found him to be someone who passionately believes in his duties and responsibilities as a District Councillor. He pays a great deal of attention to detail and is extremely diligent in reading and wishing to understand the full implications of any reports presented to Councillors in the course of their duties. He may at times appear to be brusque and demanding but this I believe often stems from the fact that the public sector presents information in a different way to which he is used to in business and often leads to frustration in getting the full picture. I can fully understand this as I often ask for clarification myself on similar issues. A lot of the perception some people appear to have that Cllr Leal-Bennett is demanding and persistent when asking questions stems from the fact that he has in the past held positions in which his professional integrity depends on getting those answers.
4. Cllr Leal-Bennett advised me of an incident that occurred on 4th July 2014 when he attempted to take up his seat as member of the Churchgate Project Team to attend a Churchgate Project Board meeting in the Council Chamber. I have become aware of allegations made against Cllr Leal-Bennett that he is alleged to have assaulted a then member of staff. I believe that the incident referred to could not have resulted in any deliberate or indeed any inadvertent assault in the circumstances as I recall them.
5. I recall that I was sat in the Council Chamber and I clearly remember Katie White was in the room in the area by the water cooler. I recall Mrs. Atlay entering the

chamber followed by Cllr Leal-Bennett. Mrs Atlay passed me and said to me words to the effect "Watch this space".

6. When Cllr Leal-Bennett attempted to take a seat on the Churchgate Project Board, to which he believed he was entitled as Hitchin Area Chairman, he sat to the right of the room (as you enter it) and could not be seen clearly by the Chair Cllr Needham. The Chair of the meeting asked the other project board members to leave the room as the meeting could not go ahead in those circumstances. A number of us left the room but several of us stood just outside the Council Chamber doors as Cllr Leal-Bennett was still in the room with one other member Cllr Hone.

7. When I became aware of the alleged assault I was concerned and later raised this with Mrs Atlay during the course of routine meeting, as nothing had been said at the time and if indeed had there been an assault by an elected Member on a Member of staff this was a very serious matter. My brief conversation with Mrs Atlay on the subject led me to believe that the situation was something that may have been misread and no actual assault had taken place.

I am therefore somewhat surprised that this incident is now being raised through the Standards Committee. If a physical assault had taken place then surely the police would have been involved and at the very least I would have expected Mrs White would have mentioned that I was present at the time and I would have been asked for my version of events.

D Levett

21 December 2015

