# Decision Notice

| | |
|---|---|
| **Date of Determination:** | 16th October 2026 |
| **Complainant:** | Essex Police |
| **Councillor:** | Councillor Mark Ault |
| **Investigating Officer:** | Shahin Ismail |

**Summary of Complaint:**

On 4 July 2025 the Council received a complaint from Essex Police regarding a “whatsapp” message received by a Police Officer from Councillor Ault. The message formed part of ongoing communications with Essex Police, relating to matters being raised by residents in Wethersfield. The complaint expressed concern that the language used within the message was very negative and divisive and was considered to contain several phrases and sentiments that could be seen as inflammatory, stating that as a local representative for Braintree District Council, this was inappropriate and not in keeping with duties and responsibility to all members of our community.

**Code of Conduct**

The Complaint was considered against the following provisions set out within the Braintree District Council Code of Conduct:

a. I treat […] representatives of partner organisation […] with respect and respect the role they play;
b. I do not bring my role or local authority into disrepute; and
c. I promote equalities and do not discriminate unlawfully against any person.

**Standards Hearing Findings:**

On 16 October 2026, the Standards Sub-Committee having regard to the views of the Independent Person and the information contained within the investigation report, and having had an opportunity to hear from the investigator and Councillor Ault directly, determined that Councillor Ault’s conduct did breach the following obligations under the Councils Code of Conduct:

a. I treat […] representatives of partner organisation […] with respect and respect the role they play; and
b. I do not bring my role or local authority into disrepute

The Standards Sub-Committee considered that whilst a Councillor is able to robustly present issues raised by residents within their ward, it was important that those issues were raised in a constructive and professional manner. Use of inappropriate or offensive language, and language that could be viewed as divisive, whilst demonstrating a degree of frustration over the situation, did not portray the professionalism necessary for those holding public office. The use of such language showed a degree of disrespect to the Police Officer concerned and for the role they held in addressing matters being brought to their attention.

The Standards Sub-Committee, having regard to the information before it find that Councillor Ault had not breached the third obligation.

**Sanctions**

The Standards Sub-Committee in reaching its decision has imposed the following sanctions:

a. Councillor Ault is required to issue an apology directly to the Police Officer who received the original message. The words of that apology must be agreed with the Monitoring Officer. Such apology must acknowledge that the language used was inappropriate and that it failed to meet the standards expected of a Councillor;
b. Councillor Ault is required to undergo training as identified by the Monitoring Officer to better understand the role of a Councillor and the standards expected in that role. Such training is to be undertaken within 4 months of the hearing.

**Kim Mayo**

**Head of Governance and Monitoring Officer**