

QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE COUNCIL
Wednesday 13 July 2022

1. QUESTION FROM COUNCILLOR BAILEY

Re: Multi-Agency Meetings regarding John Humphreys

Following my question to Cllr Leadbetter on 26th May 2022 about former Conservative East Devon District Councillor John Humphreys (who was jailed for 21 years in August 2021) Cllr Leadbetter admitted that Devon County Council had been made aware of allegations in 2014 but had failed to initiate the appropriate multi agency meeting at the time. Cllr Leadbetter said that Devon County Council would set up an independent investigation.

Please can the Leader of the Council acknowledge the seriousness and urgency of the situation, and please can the Leader confirm that the independent investigation will address the following (inter alia)

- a) Why did Devon County Council not hold a multi-agency meeting in relation to Conservative District Councillor John Humphreys in 2014?
- b) Who at Devon County Council (member and officers) was involved in the decision not to hold the multi-agency meeting following the NSPCC referral in 2014?
- c) The Chief Executive of East Devon District Council has stated that there were three multi agency meetings between the LADO and an officer at EDDC in March, April and November 2016. No mention of these meetings was made by the Portfolio Holder on 16th June in his response to me. Why?
- d) The Chief Executive of East Devon District Council also states that a further meeting was organised for January 2017 but was postponed a number of times and then cancelled. Please can the review explain why the meeting organised for January 2017 was postponed and then cancelled, given there was a live criminal investigation. Whose decision was this (member and officer)?
- e) The Chief Executive of EDDC advised that the "LADO meetings are held in the strictest confidence. Furthermore, the police also give clear instructions on what can or can't be said so as to avoid potentially jeopardising any investigation". Was it LADO's decision or was it East Devon District Council's decision that this matter remained confidential - meaning John Humphreys went on to be awarded an honour of Alderman in December 2019 despite the live criminal investigation?

- f) What safeguarding actions did DCC take to protect children between 2014 and the conviction of John Humphreys in August 2021 bearing in mind he remained an East Devon District Councillor until May 2019, an Exmouth Town Councillor until August 2020 and participated in numerous election campaigns during this seven year period.
- g) Whether there is evidence of other cases of errors following referrals made within the LADO service including failures to hold multi agency meetings.

REPLY BY COUNCILLOR HART

All of the very detailed questions raised here will be covered by the independent review that is currently being commissioned. It is right and proper to undertake a full independent investigation to understand what happened and why.

2. QUESTION FROM COUNCILLOR BAILEY Re: Independent Investigation Personnel

Please can the Leader advise who will be commissioned to carry out the independent investigation and which officer and member will be leading on this matter.

REPLY BY COUNCILLOR HART

The details regarding the reviewer(s) and the proposed time frame will be shared in due course.

3. QUESTION FROM COUNCILLOR BAILEY Re: Awareness of Allegations and Actions Taken

Please can each member of the cabinet including the Leader individually confirm:

- (a) when they first became aware of the allegations or rumours of allegations about John Humphreys
- (b) what action they took and who they told
- (c) whether they ever discussed the allegations with John Humphreys

REPLY BY COUNCILLOR HART

I am not able to speak for other Members of the Cabinet, but I understand that that Members' knowledge of events at the time may also need to form part of the review.

4. QUESTION FROM COUNCILLOR BAILEY
Re: Review of Safeguarding

In the eleven months since John Humphrey's conviction, did the Leader, Portfolio Holder or other cabinet member or any Devon County Council officer either (a) consider it was important to review the safeguarding approach taken by Devon County Council in the case of John Humphreys, discover the error and then remain silent on its error(s) or (b) not consider it was important to review safeguarding response despite the many red flags?

REPLY BY COUNCILLOR HART

As per my response to question 1 and also the email recently sent by Councillor Leadbetter, I can only reiterate that a full independent investigation is required to understand what happened and why and of course any learning arising from the recommendations that may come out of this.

5. QUESTION FROM COUNCILLOR BAILEY
Re: Connections with Schools and / or Voluntary Organisations

Please can the Leader confirm which schools and voluntary organisations John Humphreys had connections with and what the nature of those connections and the date of those connections?

REPLY BY COUNCILLOR HART

This question will be covered by the independent review.

6. QUESTION FROM COUNCILLOR BAILEY
Re: NSPCC Referral

Given John Humphreys was an East Devon district councillor in 2014 at the time of the NSPCC referral did Devon County Council notify anyone at East Devon District Council (either member or officer) in 2014 about the NSPCC referral? If so, who was notified and when?

REPLY BY COUNCILLOR HART

We have already advised that the Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) received a referral via the NSPCC in 2014 and the police were subsequently involved. In the absence of a multi-agency meeting at that time, which with hindsight should have been undertaken, we are undertaking an independent review of the decision making and process and will be implementing any recommendations that arise including appropriate referrals and notifications.

7. QUESTION FROM COUNCILLOR BAILEY
Re: Informing the Conservative Party

Given John Humphreys was a member of the Conservative Party what actions did Devon County Council take in 2014 or any time since to inform the Conservative Party of the allegations about John Humphreys.

REPLY BY COUNCILLOR HART

I am not clear whether Councillor Bailey is referring to the local Conservative Party or the national party. In any event, John Humphreys was not a Devon County Councillor, but a District Councillor, so I would not have any role in informing or advising the Conservative Party.