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14 September 2012

Dear Richard

RE: My complaint about Councillor Coleman

I am writing to express grave concern about the behaviour of Councillor Brian Coleman at the Full Council meeting on Tuesday 11 September 2012. I perceived his attack as a deliberate attempt to attack me personally and undermine industrial relations within the Council at a critical time in the One Barnet Programme.

I think that I have made every attempt to have a meaningful conversation with you and your Cabinet colleagues in relation to the One Barnet Programme. It is perfectly reasonable that I and my union continue to seek discussions with you and your Cabinet colleagues and I will continue to do so. I had hoped you understood that my position is not one of ideology but one of genuine concern. I watch and listen at every Council committee and I fear that councillors are really not aware of the risks attached to One Barnet Programme.

What happened on Tuesday need not to have happened. I have spoken to many people that when you became Leader there was a noticeable change in responses to residents for the better. However, on Tuesday we saw a return to everything that undermines local democracy in that it reinforces negative stereotypes of politicians.

Furthermore I noted with dismay that both you and members of the Cabinet appeared to be amused by his rant (the evidence is there for all to see). When I was named I had hoped that common sense would prevail and that he would be made to publicly apologise not only to me but members of the public gallery.

Both Alison Moore & Jack Cohen quickly recognised that he had crossed the line and demanded that the Mayor insist on a public apology. It was a shock and disappointment that he chose not to do so. Yet another opportunity to rescue a public relations disaster was spurned.

What I do not understand is why Brian was given the role to support you on the one Barnet motion. That decision has to reside with you and it is this decision that both baffles me and disappoints me.

I have heard some say that it does not matter how many complaints go in nothing ever changes. I do not subscribe to that view. If Council officers were to speak to members of the public in that way they would quickly find themselves in a disciplinary process.

I have put in a formal complaint using the Council's procedures about what happened last Tuesday. Judging by the outcomes of previous Standard Board decisions I do not have any confidence that my complaint will be listen to and addressed. However, you are the Leader and I am asking you to respond to my offer of a resolution.

My resolution is

1. Councillor Coleman makes a public apology
2. You as Leader of the Council make a public statement that the language he used in no way reflects the views of your administration or this Council and there is a zero tolerance to discriminatory language.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'JDB' followed by a checkmark-like flourish.

John Burgess
Branch Secretary
Barnet UNISON

Cc: Linda Perks, UNISON Regional Secretary, Alison Moore, Leader Labour Group;
Jack Cohen, Leader Lib Dem Group.