

Agenda Item 2

For decision - Vote of no-confidence in our MP for Somerton and Frome, David Warburton.

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Summary

The Town Council very rarely comments on national matters, or even issues outside of Frome but we have grown increasingly concerned about the lack of representation from our MP, David Warburton. We have therefore decided to make this exception.

The role of an MP is to represent the interests and concerns of their constituents in the House of Commons. Somerton and Frome's current MP, David Warburton, has not voted in parliament for over 10 months and has not spoken in parliament for over 12 months.

In April last year allegations of drug-taking and sexual misconduct were made against him, and an investigation into these is ongoing. In addition, he is now facing further allegations of financial misconduct.

The people of Frome deserve and need, especially during the current cost-of-living crisis, effective, committed and transparent representation in parliament in line with the Nolan Principles.

Allegations of drug-taking and sexual misconduct

In April last year allegations of drug-taking and sexual misconduct were published by The Sunday Times. David Warburton lost the Conservative whip as a result of these allegations, and the House Of Commons Independent Complaints and Grievances Scheme is still investigating the complaint made against him. He has denied these allegations.

He has not voted in parliament since 28 March 2022, and not spoken in parliament since 11 January 2022. In addition, as far as we can tell he has not held a single surgery in Frome nor attended a public event all of last year. He also recently declined the opportunity to come and speak to the Town Council.

Allegations of financial misconduct

David Warburton has previously been found guilty by the Parliamentary Watchdog of failing to register a six-figure loan from a Russian banker.

On 12 February this year, The Sunday Times printed new allegations of financial misconduct.

These include:

- Falsifying a document to support his application for a seven-figure loan.
- Failing to declare a £25,000 donation towards his re-election during the regulated period where all donations over £50 must be declared and eclipsing his legally binding spending limit for the election (The Sunday Times estimate this to be around £16,000).
- Concealing his interests in a property company operating in Somerset through the use of a nominee agreement - despite using his position as an MP to repeatedly lobby on issues relating to property.

David Warburton denies any wrongdoing on all of these claims.

The Nolan Principles

All holders of public office are required to abide by the seven principles of public life. This includes everyone from Parish and Town Councillors right up to MPs, Cabinet Members and the Prime Minister. They are fundamental to our democracy and public life and are intended to ensure that decision-making is transparent and public resources are well taken care of.

These are:

1.1 Selflessness

Holders of public office should act solely in terms of the public interest.

1.2 Integrity

Holders of public office must avoid placing themselves under any obligation to people or organisations that might try inappropriately to influence them in their work. They should not act or take decisions in order to gain financial or other material benefits for themselves, their family, or their friends. They must declare and resolve any interests and relationships.

1.3 Objectivity

Holders of public office must act and take decisions impartially, fairly and on merit, using the best evidence and without discrimination or bias.

1.4 Accountability

Holders of public office are accountable to the public for their decisions and actions and must submit themselves to the scrutiny necessary to ensure this.

1.5 Openness

Holders of public office should act and take decisions in an open and transparent manner. Information should not be withheld from the public unless there are clear and lawful reasons for so doing.

1.6 Honesty

Holders of public office should be truthful.

1.7 Leadership

Holders of public office should exhibit these principles in their own behaviour and treat others with respect. They should actively promote and robustly support the principles and challenge poor behaviour wherever it occurs.

Conclusion

To be clear this report is not a judgement on Warburton's politics. He was elected in 2019 with 55.8% of the vote, and a majority of 19,213. We respect his mandate, even if he now stands as an independent having been elected as a conservative. Nor is it in our remit to comment or judge him on the allegations currently made against him.

However, as a Town Council, and the closest layer of government to our community, we are committed to making sure that the people of Frome are represented effectively, in a timely manner and with integrity.

Recommendations

1. That Frome Town Council considers that the lack of proper MP representation has existed for far too long, it has no confidence in our MP David Warburton and accordingly it requests that he resigns to allow a By Election to take place.
2. That this report be forwarded to all other parishes in the constituency for their information