

## Review of a Complaint

- The Breakfast Show is broadcast on BBC Radio Coventry & Warwickshire between 6-9 am daily. Councillor Mutton, acting in his official capacity, was interviewed “live” on 13 February 2018 during this programme. I do not know at what time the interview was broadcast.
- I did not hear the interview so do not know what “tone” was used by Councillor Mutton at any time during the interview.
- I have read a transcript of the full interview.
- Councillor Williams tweeted about the interview at 08:51 that day, which was before the Breakfast Show ended.
- BBC iPlayer Radio does not release its local radio programmes until some hours after they have aired so unless Councillor Williams recorded the interview and played it back before tweeting, which is possible, he is most likely to have tweeted either during the interview or after it had ended, having heard it only once.
- The interviewer took a somewhat confrontational approach with Councillor Mutton, which is probably understandable on a local news and current affairs programme when discussing such a controversial topic as a Council Tax increase with a local councillor. She implied that all homes would be subject to an increase of £90. Councillor Mutton clarified that the £90 rise applied to Band D properties whereas a £50 rise would apply to Band A and B properties.
- His tone of voice may have become more assertive in managing the exchange with the interviewer but that would not have been unusual for someone standing their ground in a bid to get the facts across to the listeners and to avoid misleading them.
- As I did not hear the interview, I do not know what Councillor Mutton’s tone sounded like when he referred to Band D homeowners. He did not state that “they must be wealthy”. I therefore conclude that Councillor Williams assumed that this was Councillor Mutton’s view of Band D homeowners and based his tweet on this assumption.
- Councillor Mutton stuck to the facts during his interview. From the written transcript I see that he acknowledged the increase would be more affordable for some households than for others. He was realistic when stating that some pensioners are better off than other pensioners. It is a fact that some pensioners are better off than others. He provided the facts about benefits being available for those who might find themselves in financial difficulty.
- Councillor Mutton did not refer to any members of the community in terms of their “class” and he did not use that word during the interview.
- Councillor Mutton provided the facts when he could and when he could not he said so. He did not demonstrate to me by anything that he said that he was either ignorant of the facts about there being mixed income level/rateable value households in Coventry or that he was biased towards any of them.

- Councillor Mutton’s explanation about the cause of the increases was one that could have been given by any local councillor, regardless of their political preferences, when explaining a local authority’s need to increase Council Tax resulting in part from central government cutbacks. This did not come across to me as being a politically-motivated statement but as he is a Labour councillor it could be taken that he was criticising the policy of a Conservative Government. However, that was not an aspect of the interview referenced in the tweet by Councillor Williams.
- In his tweet, Councillor Williams used terms that can often be associated with ‘left-wing’ thinking where “class” and “wealth” are terms used to indicate divisions in society where unfairness results. Councillor Williams does not define in his tweet what he means by those terms. Councillor Mutton did not use those terms during the interview.
- I do not agree with the proposal that this matter is resolved without further action. Instead, I suggest an investigation is held as this would help to establish whether in his tweet Councillor Williams did misrepresent Councillor Mutton. For example, he referred to Councillor Mutton having “class envy” but does not explain what he means by that term and does not explain what it was that Councillor Mutton said that made this a logical interpretation and whether Councillor Williams had any factual evidence to support this claim. An investigation would also help to establish whether Councillor Williams misrepresented Councillor Mutton when he referred to him as “ignorant” and what evidence he had to support such a statement.
- An investigation would establish whether Councillor Williams had established the facts about Councillor Mutton’s beliefs and values as much as his knowledge before deciding to tweet.
- Given the way in which Councillor Williams worded the tweet, an investigation would also help to establish whether he did act deliberately if he did misrepresent Councillor Mutton, whether or not his comments were justified in any way or were malicious, or whether the tone and content of the tweet were inappropriate when one councillor is speaking publicly about another.
- Councillor Williams says that he has read the interview transcript several times and maintains his position. An investigation would determine whether he heard the interview only once when it was broadcast and then he responded to it. It is that action that should be investigated and judged here.
- I believe an investigation would help to establish whether this was a matter of someone being misinformed or more a matter of misconduct and, if the latter, whether the City Council will wish to be seen to tolerate behaviour of this type. Overall, I consider that this is a potential breach of the Codes of Conduct that is serious enough to warrant a full investigation. .

**Ann Barton**  
**Independent Person to Coventry City Council**

10 May 2018