Chairman's Statement:

Since being appointed Chairman of this Council, I have always aimed to treat all members fairly and encourage open discussion within our meetings. However, upon reflection, it is clear that my chairmanship style has been far too relaxed. Unfortunately, this has contributed to a steady decline in the standard of our meetings, culminating in the poor conduct we witnessed last week.

This cannot continue, and it must change.

Members of the public have already raised concerns with me regarding the behaviour they have observed ranging from a clear lack of respect during debates to an appearance of total disinterest from some members. As elected and co-opted representatives, we all have a duty to conduct Council business professionally and in strict accordance with our Standing Orders and Code of Conduct.

Following last week’s meeting, I discussed these issues with the Locum Clerk. She agrees that firm action must be taken and has suggested that she and I meet upon her return from holiday to establish a clear plan for moving forward. Going forward, Standing Orders and the rules of debate will be strictly enforced so that we restore order, mutual respect, and proper governance to this Council.

My involvement in meetings has also been challenged, so I have taken formal advice on this point.

In England and Wales, a town council chairman does not have to remain silent or refrain from participating in debates. Because a chairman is an appointed councillor rather than a neutral, non-voting speaker as in Parliament they retain the exact same legal rights as any other councillor to express their views, propose motions, participate in discussions, and vote. However, in line with good chairmanship practice, I always invite other members to speak first before offering my own contribution.

At our last meeting, several proposals were also incorrectly presented and considered, resulting in a breach of both our Standing Orders and local government law.

Specifically, I presented a motion relating to the possible Freedom of Entry in order to ensure budget funding for next year.

That proposal required a straightforward "Yes" or "No" decision from the Council.

However, my proposal was not seconded and was not debated.

Immediately, a member stated they were proposing an "amendment." In reality, this was not an amendment at all.

An amendment may only make a minor modification to a motion, such as adding, deleting, or substituting words, and cannot negate or completely change the substance of the original proposal.

The member introduced a completely new and different proposal that had not been published on the agenda.

As the proposer and because the original paper had not been seconded I indicated that I was withdrawing my paper. This was ignored, and members proceeded to vote on the entirely new proposal.

By allowing an "amendment" to a motion that was never seconded, and by accepting a completely new proposal rather than requiring members to simply vote "Yes" or "No" on the advertised item, the Council acted outside its Standing Orders.

Furthermore, under Schedule 12 of the Local Government Act 1972, a council cannot lawfully transact business or make binding decisions on matters that were not specified on the published agenda with three clear days' public notice.

Because my original motion fell for want of a seconder and the Council voted on unadvertised alternatives, the outcomes of those votes are unlawful and therefore void as are the other items that were altered in the same manner.

I have also taken advice regarding the discussion of past employment issues at our last meeting. While I allowed the member to speak at the time in order to keep the peace, those remarks raise serious governance issues that must be addressed properly outside of this chamber.

Every councillor has signed a Code of Conduct requiring them to treat others with respect and not bring the Council into disrepute.

Publicly disparaging the Council as an employer during a formal meeting especially without following internal grievance channels is a breach of that Code.

Moreover, Council staffing matters are strictly confidential and must only ever be discussed in a closed, confidential session with the press and public excluded.

Airing personal employment grievances in a public meeting exposes the Council to serious legal risks, including constructive dismissal or defamation claims if current officers or fellow councillors can be identified by implication.

Furthermore, when a former employee raises a personal grievance under the guise of a general policy motion, that constitutes a personal interest that should have been properly declared and managed so that a public meeting is not used as a personal platform.

Finally, it has been brought to my attention on more than one occasion by members that certain members may be plotting to remove me as Chairman.

May I respectfully point out that, if this is true, those members would be far better off putting their energy into serving the residents of our town rather than pursuing something that is not going to happen. Under the Local Government Act 1972, I was elected to serve a full term as Chairman, and I intend to remain in post until the official handover following the next elections in late May next year.

Please can we all work together as a team for the good of Oakham.

Cllr Martin Brookes 18th November 2026