

CUSU Elections Committee

Sunday 1st March 2020

1. Welcome and apologies

* Present: Edward Parker Humphreys (EPH), Aisha Sobey (AS), Emily Barker-Gibbs (EBG), Joe Foye (JF), Alex Roberts (AR)

1. Approval of minutes

* AR: minutes of meeting 29/02/20 to be approved by circulation

1. Discussion of hustings complaint after informal meeting with candidate

* EPH: Don’t believe it crosses boundary to abusive behaviour
* AS: Regardless of whether he believes it’s a smear campaign, the candidate has to reach a certain standard. Correct response should be informal warning.
* AR: Yesterday we agreed to put out a general statement on conduct at hustings. We should make sure we do this.
* EBG: This is a good response to complaint, as complainant wants to ensure it doesn’t happen again
* EPH: The way the candidate acted was not appropriate, but doesn’t cross line to abusive.
* JF: It could plausibly cross the line into abuse, because it amounts to an allegation
* EBG: If we issue a statement, we should make clear that what happened wasn’t in spirit of hustings.
* EPH: It’s not a question of whether the candidate dealt with it in the best way possible. Their response was strong, but it wasn’t shouting, screaming or swearing. Abusive behaviour would suggest something more aggressive and threatening.
* AS: Statement would have right effect.
* JF: The response wasn’t in line with overarching election guidance, but borderline whether it crosses the line in to abuse. Should standing by comment be significant?
* AS: Focus should be on stopping it happening again.
* Elections Committee discussed the question of whether the accusation of being part of a smear campaign. Agreed that it was borderline. Unanimous agreement that the behaviour was inappropriate. Not absolutely clear that the behaviour was sufficiently abusive to contravene code of conduct in standing orders. Decision to issue informal warning and make statement about informal warnings.
* JF leaves meeting
* EPH: Happy to draft text for informal warning and statement for EC to approve by circulation

1. Suspicious message received by left-leaning Facebook pages re endorsement

* AR: EC made aware of messages to Cambridge Zero Carbon and other pages actively discouraging endorsement of a candidate
* EPH: account looks fake, no friends, created 2017
* EPH : seeks clarification over response to compliant times
* AR: respond in 24 hours with an acknowledgment - but no time frame as to ruling
* EPH: reply to the email and suggest we want to further investigate, so will discuss in our meeting on Monday 2/3/20
* AR: drafts response to complainant

1. Potential conflict of interest - executive members and endorsement

* AR: screenshots sent of comments by a member of the CUSU executive that may be seen as expressing preference for a candidate on a post by Cambridge University Labour Club (CULC) announcing their endorsements for the upcoming elections, need more context, but couldn’t find post
* EPH: should be on CULC Facebook page, locates the post and wider comments
* EBG: notes previous executive endorsement by the member of the executive in question for the candidate
* EPH: he comment in question seems to be deleted, other comments from the member of the executive on the thread don’t seem to specifically related to the candidate - general conversation about disabled issues and engagement of disabled students with CULC
* EPH: if we were to take action would have to be via the member of the executive as executive members cannot be campaigners (under SO G.4.iii - “Executive Officers, current Student Officers and CUSU staff members are not to be seen to support any candidate in an election in any preferential way unless they themselves are running for office”), will send screenshots of the comments to EC as they don’t appear visible to other members
* AR: to respond to the email and say we will issue an internal statement to members of the executive
* EPH: the reminder should state that even if not explicitly campaigning for one candidate, they should refrain from commenting on the elections
* EBG: agree with EPH regarding the more general nature of executive members not commenting on the election, should reference SO G.4.v (“Any Executive Officer who is found to be interfering in the elections in any way which is not deemed appropriate by the Returning Officer will be referred to the discipline of Members and Executive Officers in Article J (*Member and Executive Officer Disciplinary Procedure*).”) in this regard.