

Eastern Daily Press

SERVING THE COMMUNITY
SINCE 1870

Holding meeting in public is in the best interests of all involved

On Friday, seven county councillors – five Conservatives, a Green and a Liberal Democrat – will make a decision which could forever alter the political landscape of Norfolk.

There are many questions which will be asked at a standards hearing into the conduct of former county council leader Derrick Murphy, but one of the most pertinent ahead of that committee convening is whether the public and the press will be present to hear them. A report by Jenni Richards, QC, who investigated the sending of an email by Mr Murphy's political assistant which appeared to undermine another council leader, could have, in the words of Victoria McNeill, the county council's head of law, "significant detrimental consequences for Mr Murphy if this information is released".

We already know, from a summary of the report, that Mr Murphy is said to have asked his political assistant to claim it was not the former council leader who asked him to send the email and that, according to the investigator, when quizzed on the email by the council's chief executive, Mr Murphy's responses were "misleading, evasive and lacked candour".

Those are serious allegations, and it is no wonder that Mr Murphy stepped down as leader to focus on the case. The committee will not decide whether the full report should be considered in public until Friday, and could choose not to allow the public in. It would be a huge mistake to hold that meeting behind closed doors. The electorate has a right to know what happened here, the complainants have a right to know and Mr Murphy has the right to an open hearing, which, if he is exonerated as he believes he will be, can leave nobody claiming there has been a cover-up.

Drinking responsibly

While most people in the UK drink responsibly, alcohol is to blame for a huge number of problems in our society.

The scale of the challenge was illustrated by figures which today show that in England and Wales in 2011 there were 8,748 alcohol-related deaths.

Any number of people dying such a death is too many. But perhaps the one comforting thing for us among the grim figures is that there were fewer alcohol related deaths in the East of England than anywhere in the country.

Of every 100,000 men in the East, 11.8 died due to alcohol consumption and 5.6 women; that's 388 men and 198 women, half the amount in some other areas.

If there are lessons to be learned for the rest of the country from the services or culture that exist in the East, then ministers must ensure they are learned quickly.

Government action so far to curb irresponsible alcohol consumption is welcome. We will only have ourselves to blame if these figures rise from here on in.

Let's do our bit for birds

In East Anglia we are more aware than most of the symbiosis we must find with our natural surroundings. The countryside and its wildlife gives us the most beautiful place to live in England and in return we can do our bit by ensuring our actions don't cause damage and, when needed, acting to preserve it.

Just such an opportunity is about to arrive with the RSPB warning that birds in search of food during the cold snap will start coming to our gardens to look for a meal.

The RSPB advises filling garden feeders with high-energy, calorie-rich foods like fatballs, sunflower seed and peanuts. Leftovers and kitchen scraps can also be used. The time has come to do our bit.

WORDS FOR LIFE

God saw all that He had made and it was very good.
Genesis 1:31



READER'S PICTURE OF THE DAY



MALLORY BUSH

COASTAL TREASURE: The striking layered cliffs at Hunstanton. If you would like to submit a picture for this feature, visit www.iwitness24.co.uk

Confusion created over 'me' and 'myself'

PETER TRUDGHILL

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Last year, two interesting linguistic things happened in the EDP on the very same day.

David Harrison wrote a letter asking what had happened to the word 'me' – he reckoned people are saying 'myself' instead.

And one of the EDP columnists wrote in their column that "it is not good form for we linguistically lazy Brits to criticise".

I agreed with David – you can hear footballers avoiding the word 'me' every Saturday about 5pm: 'myself and Holty worked very well together'. And I also wholeheartedly agreed about linguistic laziness.

But I couldn't help observing that Norfolk speakers know it isn't good grammar to say 'it's not good form for we'. Obviously it should be 'for us'.

Fascinatingly, these two things are linked. David gave a clue as to how.

People "with less grammar" than the Queen, he wrote, say 'me and my husband'. But, actually, while it may not be polite to put yourself first, "me and my husband" is perfectly good grammar.

Natural English uses 'I' and 'me' only as the single subject of a verb: 'I like it, we like it'. Otherwise, we use 'me' and 'us': John likes me, He likes John and me, He likes us, John and me went, Us Norwich fans are a rum lot.

And in answer to the question: "Who's there?" we say "Me!". French is the same.



GOOD GRAMMAR: The Queen may use the phrase 'my husband and I', but it would also be correct for her to say 'me and my husband', says Peter Trudghill.

You can't say 'je' in answer to the question "Qui est là" – it has to be 'moi'.

Sadly, the English language has been plagued by generations of self-appointed "experts" with an inferiority complex about Latin who think English ought to have "nominative" (subject) and "accusative" cases.

It's "wrong", they pontificate, to say 'John and me went' because 'me' is "accusative" (it isn't).

This clash between the grammar of natural English and the pseudo-Latin grammar of the "experts" has got people confused. So sometimes they "hypercorrect"

– they try and speak "correctly" and overdo it, using 'we' when 'us' would be correct, as in "for we Brits", as the columnist did. And sometimes people are so uncertain about what to say that they develop clever escape strategies. If you don't know whether to say 'I' or 'me', well, you can just say 'myself' instead, and avoid the problem.

If only the self-appointed "experts" had let people feel comfortable about using the natural grammar of their own native English dialects, there would never have been a problem in the first place!

■ What do you think? Email EDPletters@archant.co.uk