

Local filter: In detail

Case G: Scawthorpe Borough Council, Councillor Lee Kreuz

Summary

The complainant is the clerk to Nith parish council. He refers to a meeting of the council on 19 September 2006 where members discussed financial irregularities arising from the alleged misconduct of the council's groundsmen. It is reported that Councillor Kreuz, the local member of the borough council, attended the open part of the meeting but left with the public before the closed part where this matter was discussed.

It is alleged that a member of the parish council gave Councillor Kreuz a confidential note, which he then showed to the groundsmen two days later. It is also alleged that he told them that they had been the main topic of discussion at the meeting, giving them the impression that he had been present, the matter had been discussed in public, and that the clerk had accused them of stealing money.

It is reported that the note had the top of the page folded over, which one member of staff believed was to conceal a fax number. It is also alleged that he doctored a note headed "To all Parish Council Staff", cutting off the heading to make it look as if it only applied to the staff at the park.

The complainant adds that it is common knowledge that Councillor Kreuz intends to stand for the parish council.

Contents

The complaint comprises a letter from the clerk to Nith parish council (copy attached).

Enclosed with the letter were the following appendices (copies of which have not been attached for this session):

1. Summary of staffing issue not handed to councillors at the 19 September meeting until after the public had left.
2. The proposed notice to be handed to all staff if the council meeting approved it.
3. Minute of the council meeting – confidential section from 19 September meeting.
4. Notes written out by the groundsmen the following morning detailing events and their feelings.
5. Copy of the summary note given to one of the groundsmen by Councillor Kreuz with the header removed.

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6. Copy of the proposed notice to staff handed over by Mr Kreuz, again doctored.
7. The clerk's own note written later that afternoon.

Nith Parish Council
Millennium Hall Main Street
Nith-upon-Brierley Moor
Scawthorpe SP10 5AW

16 November 2006

The Standards Board for England
1st Floor, Cottons Centre
Cottons Lane
London SE1 2QG

Dear Sirs

New Referral

Councillor Lee Kreuz, Scawthorpe Borough Councillor

I write to complain about the behaviour of Scawthorpe Borough Councillor Kreuz for the reasons given below. He was given confidential Nith Parish Council information (by a Nith Parish Councillor) and used it to try to put myself, the Clerk and line manager of these staff in a bad light and to damage the working relationship I have with my staff, thus failing to show me respect and putting me at a disadvantage.

He also failed to show my groundsmen, WG and TL proper respect and, in putting to them a completely false version of events, looked to cause them unfounded personal concern about their reputations and job security. It is little secret that Borough Councillor Kreuz intends to stand for Parish Council next May and the false information he gave, plus the possibility that this man may have been one of their "bosses" next year was calculated to upset them.

In doing what he did in such a premeditated way he has also brought his Borough Council into disrepute.

Councillor – Nith Parish Council

The information which Councillor Kreuz possessed can only have been supplied to him by a Parish Councillor. If in the course of this investigation Mr Kreuz reveals who gave it to him then I would ask that that Councillor be subject to the process as well. Twice already this year, two Strictly Private and Confidential letters to the Council from its auditors have found their way into the press; on the second occasion a letter was quoted verbatim by the Vice Chairman of the Residents and Tenants Association, Mr Green. The Chairman of that Association is former Councillor DW, whose wife is a serving Councillor on Nith Parish Council.

During the period that these confidential matters have been leaked, Nith Parish Council has been the subject of a Standards Board Direction meant to address its problems via the media of training, counselling and mentoring. It seems some Councillors have treated this period as “open season” on Nith Parish Council and its staff, in an attempt to secure an advantage for themselves.

The facts:

- On 19 September 2006, Nith Parish Council discussed two confidential items after a resolution to exclude the public and press.
- The first of these related to a staffing matter, details of which are covered in the attached minute of the meeting.
- Two days later, Scawthorpe Borough Councillor Lee Kreuz was in possession of the confidential note to Parish Councillors and showed part of it to two of the Parish Council staff (Mr WG and Mr TL), saying that:

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1. the matter concerned had been discussed in the presence of the public;
 2. he had been there when the issue had been discussed;
 3. during the discussion, the Clerk to the Parish Council (myself) had accused both staff members of fraud and theft.
- When he showed them his “evidence” (the copy of the note that had been handed to Councillors of the Parish Council at the meeting) he had the top of the page folded over and would not let it go when he showed it to them. Mr WG believed that the page was a ‘fax’ copy and that the page was folded over to hide the senders fax number. The photocopy he subsequently supplied gave this impression. Perhaps his own fax records could be checked. Certainly a comparison of the original notes to those handed to the staff give a strong impression of emanating from a fax.
 - Mr Kreuz said that he could not let them keep the paper he had, but promised to return later that day with a photocopy. It was the next day that he returned and handed over a copy of the note, which had been doctored, in that the heading “To all Parish Council Staff” had been cut off to make as though the note concerned only the staff at our Park (the Russell Playing Fields) and not all staff as the original note shows.

The two men remain very upset at the interference from Mr Kreuz.

When the receipts discussed in the note to Council went missing both staff offered to put their hands in their pockets to cover the shortfall. I told them this was not required and that I would ask Council to ratify the situation, but that, having told them on more occasions than enough that their practice of

taking tennis money for fuel for the mowers and submitting net takings plus a receipt was not acceptable, that any further occurrences would be the subject of disciplinary action. This they accepted as reasonable.

Mr Kreuz intervention therefore gave rise to a belief in their minds that I had said one thing to them and another to Councillors; it is suggested to them that the alleged accusations were in a wider domain than just the Council Chamber, and therefore undermined a good working relationship that exists in the Parish Council between Clerk and staff and gave them feelings that perhaps they could not trust their line manager.

I have personally invested much time in working with staff at the Parish Council since I became Clerk, to the benefit of the Parish in many ways. To have my work challenged in this way by a Borough Councillor is disappointing to me yet manageable; I am degree educated, I have held senior Posts in major organisations and have had to live with this sort of harassment in Nith for some time.

However, my staff are typical working men, not on the highest salaries and both in their late fifties. They work as hard as they are able for the Council. To be dragged into a battle not of their making, and given the impression that they have been called thieves by their own line manager is disgraceful. They do not deserve to be abused by Parish and Borough Councillors in this way, in pursuit of selfish political aspirations and a vendetta against the Clerk to the Council.

I would mention that when I was told about Mr Kreuz on 21 September I asked for both groundsmen to come to my office to give them assurances that what they had been told was not the case. I asked them to go through what had been said.

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The Regional Adviser to the Society of Local Council Clerks and our internal auditor were present that day and will confirm what was said at the time.

Mr Kreuz was obviously given the confidential papers by a Parish Councillor; he clearly had time to think about what he was going to say to the Parish Council staff before he did it and in travelling to the Playing Fields, he also had time to reflect on what he was going to do and why he was going to do it.

He knew he was going to lie, for whilst he had been at the meeting at which the staffing item was later discussed, he had left immediately the resolution to exclude the public and press was passed. To tell them it was discussed in public was also a lie. Having been previously found guilty of bringing his office as Councillor of Scawthorpe Borough Council into disrepute and failing to treat others with respect, he is well aware of the Code of Conduct which governs the standards of behaviour expected of him.

I ask that the Standards Board investigate the actions of Councillor Kreuz. He has behaved disreputably and in a premeditated manner and also brought Scawthorpe Borough Council into disrepute. Arguably he has tarnished Nith Parish Council by giving two of its staff the impression that the Council's Chief Officer, was accusing his staff publicly of theft.

I should also ask the Standards Board to investigate whichever Parish Councillor leaked the confidential memo to Mr Kreuz. If this man is serious about his Council role he should answer truthfully the question and the Parish Councillor he names should be subject to their Code also.

Yours faithfully

Frank Law
Clerk to the Council