

Local filter: In detail

Summary of local filter pilot cases

Case A: Hilton Borough Council, Councillor Peter Citrine

Summary

It was alleged that Councillor Peter Citrine published a political leaflet on behalf of the local Liberal Democrats suggesting that people should boycott the shops in the high street belonging to Councillor Leo Hall, the Conservative council leader. This was in response to the council's decision to introduce car-parking charges in the town centre, which the Liberal Democrats were campaigning against. The complainant is an employee of Councillor Hall. She works in a pet shop and alleges that Councillor Citrine is jeopardising her livelihood by effectively encouraging people to patronise another pet shop 200 yards away.

Case B: Borough of Selchester, Councillor Julia Harty

Summary

It is alleged that Councillor Harty lied at council meetings about her decision to require LEA appointed school governors to pay the £36 cost of their own Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) checks, a process which she had approved while cabinet member for education. The complainant, who is the opposition chief whip, said that Labour councillors received complaints during August 2006 that new governors would have to have a CRB check at their own expense, and there were letters in the press criticising the policy. It is alleged that at this stage Councillor Harty suggested a bursary scheme for those who could not afford to pay. A newspaper article quoted the council as saying that the fee may be waived by those not able to pay. It is alleged that at a scrutiny committee on 12 September 2006, Councillor Harty, replying to a question, said that it had always been the policy to reimburse governors their CRB expenses, which is not what she had in fact agreed.

The opposition put down a motion in council on 20 September 2006 on the matter, and it is reported that Councillor Harty again claimed that it was always the policy to reimburse governors for CRB expenses.

Case C: Marnham District Council, Councillor Davies

Summary

The complainant is the leader of the council. It is alleged that Councillor Davies has sent a number of disparaging emails to the council's IT staff, criticising their work and mocking their capabilities and copied them to third parties; that he has sent unfair and derogatory emails about the chief executive, the council's solicitor and the complainant, copying them in to third

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parties, as well as inappropriate emails to other councillors; that he became involved in support of a local IT company in a dispute with the council, and was confrontational when officers reminded him about possible conflicts of interest; and that he was hectoring and overbearing towards technical officers in the presence of the chief executive and two other members at a meeting held on 23 April 2005. The chief executive asked the junior officers to leave after 20 minutes on account of Councillor Davies' behaviour, and because they were upset at the untimely death of a close colleague the previous Saturday. It is reported that when Councillor Davies was told of this, he retorted, "I suppose you're going to blame him!" It is alleged that Councillor Davies has been warned about his conduct, including formal warnings, but that it has continued.

Case D: Coketown District Council, Councillors Yeo, Bailey and Malecka

Summary

The complainants refer to the proposed development of a council-owned allotment site at Coketown, for 217 dwellings and associated infrastructure, considered by the planning committee on 21 September 2006. It is reported that Councillor Yeo, the executive member for land and property, had been involved in discussion with the developers, and council decisions over the sale of the site, the proceeds of which would be used by the council to pay for a new leisure centre at elsewhere in the borough. Having declared a personal interest in the matter at the planning committee, it is alleged that he failed to declare a prejudicial interest and withdraw from the meeting.

It is alleged that Councillor Bailey, the chairman, did not ensure that the meeting was conducted impartially due to confusion of members' and officers' roles, and that the planning officer, as an employee of the council, was not able to give the committee the impartial advice they needed.

It is also alleged that Councillor Bailey refused to allow a local member to speak until the very last moment, and then cut him short before hastily moving to the vote.

It is alleged that by allowing the planning officer to warn members that refusal of the application could lead to an expensive appeal, and that Councillor Bailey thereby allowed undue influence to be put on the committee.

It is alleged that when the chairman and the planning officer were asked by another member if the terms of the development brief had been complied with, the member was given an affirmative answer. The complainants dispute this and say there were breaches of the development brief.

It is alleged that when Councillor Malecka asked the chairman and the planning officer if the terms of the development brief had been complied with, the member was given an affirmative answer. The complainants dispute this and say there were breaches of the development brief.

The complainants also object to aspects of the proposed development, the granting of planning permission, and the way the meeting was minuted.

Case E: Hook Parish Council, Councillor Dr Jon Rouse

Summary

It was alleged that Councillor Rouse, the chairman of the parish council, accompanied by the vice-chairman, visited a member of the public at home and made allegations that a group of seven parish councillors, including the complainant, would be pressing for an injunction to prevent the member of the public, a parishioner, speaking at meetings. The parishioner then wrote to each of the seven councillors repeating this allegation and another allegation that he had orchestrated a public protest against the siting of a youth shelter. He enclosed a stamped envelope for them to reply and let him know whether the allegations were true or false, and that if they did not reply he would assume that the claim was true. In this case, he asked them to go ahead and seek the injunction.

The complainant was one of two councillors who replied direct to the parishioner, to say that she was not aware of the actions he referred to being taken, or of a group of seven working in co-operation on the council, and that the allegations were false. The clerk also wrote to the member of the public to say that six of the councillors (one was away) had asked him to reply to say that the allegations were false. The parishioner was not satisfied, wrote to the councillors again to say that the two who had replied personally had not asked the clerk to write on their behalf, and that he would regard the remaining five as having taken the actions originally alleged unless he heard from them by a given deadline.

It is alleged that on 18 April 2005 during public questions, a member of the public made a statement concerning a pre-arranged visit to his house by two senior councillors. The complainant wrote to Councillor Rouse on 20 April asking him:

- if he knew the identity of the two councillors who allegedly paid the visit
- to name the two councillors allegedly involved and to ask them to explain why they used her name without her knowledge
- to clear her of any complicity in the alleged actions

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- if he was unable to clear her good name, then to assure her that the exercise was designed simply as character assassination

The complainant states that she received no response to the letter, and that she put down questions in council on 16 May 2005. She wrote to Councillor Rouse again on 20 May 2005 to convey her disappointment with his handling of her questions. The minutes of the meeting state:

“The Chairman said he had received letters from two councillors concerning alleged actions of councillors at an informal meeting. As these letters did not relate, to discuss them with individuals outside the meeting.”

On 23 May, Councillor Rouse wrote to the complainant to say he regarded the matter as closed. The complainant reports that the member of the public has now told her that Councillor Rouse was one of the two councillors who visited him.

Case F: London Borough of Walford, Councillor Pat Rix

Summary

The complainant alleges that Councillor Rix has subjected her to less favourable treatment on the grounds of religion and race, bullying, victimisation and racial harassment.

It is reported that Councillor Rix was on the interview panel which appointed her, but did not want her for the job and preferred a white woman who did not perform as well as the complainant. It is alleged that Councillor Rix called her a liar when she advised her that a community film had a racist remark in it which would offend and embarrass the complainant. It is reported that Councillor Rix has micromanaged her and set her unrealistic targets to make her look like a failure, that she has been publicly humiliated at meetings and verbally abused. She reports that her position as a manager has been undermined, that she has had a meeting with her staff and managers and been excluded from the meetings.

It is reported that Councillor Rix was unhappy when managers asked the complainant to work on assignments including a petition by the Punjabi Sikh community for a community centre. It is alleged that Councillor Rix tried to stop her being involved in this work, told her that she did not want Pakistanis or Muslims asking for a community centre and made derogatory comments about the various ethnic groups within the Muslim community. The complainant found these remarks offensive as a Pakistani Muslim herself.

The complainant says that her managers failed to manage the situation or to protect her, and that she was unfairly and wrongly dismissed. It is alleged that Councillor Rix has referred to the protocol for officer and member relations as “bollocks” and failed to respond to a questionnaire sent to her under the Race Relations Act.

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.

Case H: Wessex Council, Councillor Douglas

Summary

The East Wessex Community Area Forum covers three wards of the borough: Whapton, Box and Friary. The complainant is a Progressive councillor for Whapton and he and two other Progressives won the ward from Labour in 2004. The council is Labour-run: Councillor Douglas is deputy leader and also chairman of the area forum, which has the power to spend the Housing Investment Programme (HIP) monies allocated to it. Part of the allocation is budgeted to replace old wooden doors on council houses with PVCu doors.

The Progressive councillors for Whapton asked repeatedly for HIP funding for their ward, to be told each time that it had already been committed for new doors in Councillor Douglas's ward (Box), and the vice-chairman's ward (Friary) with nothing for Whapton, even though there was a street there where doors were in urgent need of replacement (June Avenue). The complainant discovered that the chairman and vice-chairman of the forum have private business meetings in advance of the public forum and that Councillor Douglas had allegedly arranged matters so that all the spend on the new doors went to his ward.

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It is alleged that at such a business meeting on 24 June 2005, Councillor Douglas and the vice-chairman privately approved the allocation of £14,404 to June Avenue. One of the defeated Whapton Labour councillors, who, the complainant says, plans to stand again in 2006, a friend of Councillor Douglas, then organised a petition along June Avenue asking the council to consider installing new doors. This was presented to the council by a resident on 29 June 2005 and then received by Councillor Douglas at a press call in advance of the formal meeting of the forum. The complainant believes that Labour has orchestrated the petition in the knowledge that the money had already been agreed and that Councillor Douglas has used and abused his position as chairman of the forum, deputy leader, and as a member of the standards committee to manipulate the allocation of funding to his political advantage. The former Whapton councillor subsequently wrote to the newspaper to take credit for the decision and to criticise the Progressive councillors in Whapton Ward.

Case I: Great Norton Parish Council, Councillor Jameson

Summary

The complainant refers to a meeting of the parish council on 16 November 2006. It is alleged that when the chairman asked if there was any other business, Councillor Jameson said, "I've got some!", swung round in his chair, directly facing the complainant, and launched into a loud and aggressive verbal attack. It is alleged that he accused the complainant of calling the chairman "undemocratic" at a previous meeting and demanded that she apologise. The complainant subsequently explained in writing that she was accusing the council of being undemocratic, not the chairman, and has apologised to him for the misunderstanding. She also wrote to the chairman of the parish council to complain about Councillor Jameson's alleged treatment of her at the meeting.

It is reported that the next meeting of the parish council, advertised for 21 December 2006 at the village hall, was brought forward to 20 December 2006 at the Lions Club, which precluded the public, including the complainant, from attending. It is alleged that the meeting went into confidential session to discuss the complaint against Councillor Jameson, but that he failed to declare a prejudicial interest in the matter and remained in the meeting that considered a matter affecting him.

The chairman then wrote to the complainant to say that the parish council had found that, "as the alleged incident took place after the parish council meeting had closed, they found that Councillor Jameson was not in breach of any form of misconduct. It was unanimously agreed that no action be taken regarding Councillor Jameson and the matter to be considered closed." They also agreed to ban the public from speaking at future meetings.

Case J: Nettington Town Council, Councillor Gold

Summary

The complainant refers to the town hall at Nettington, which belongs to the town council, and where it is reported that the county registration service rents offices and Town Councillor Gold is employed as a registrar. It is reported that at the council meeting on 24 May 2004, Councillor Gold declared an interest in an agenda item regarding the town hall. It is further reported that in 2005, it was agreed in principle to hand the town hall over to a charitable trust, make a grant to the trust, seek legal advice; and that Councillor Gold be one of three councillors to be on a joint working group with the trust.

Following legal advice, on 27 February 2006 the council “reaffirmed” earlier resolutions concerning the trust, with Councillor Gold voting in favour. It is also reported that after she became town mayor in May 2006, she put herself forward as the council representative on the trust. The complainant refers to a meeting between councillors and the trust which took place on 3 July 2006: she says she has asked for the minutes but been told that it was an informal meeting, which was not the impression created beforehand.

The complainant has also provided a report of the “Nettington Town Hall Joint Working Group”, which includes Councillor Gold. It states that she had had final sight of the draft briefing for the solicitor who would be drawing up the draft lease for the town hall, which refers to the “need to agree continuing office space for the town clerk and use of the council chamber for meetings at a favourable rent and for the Registrar at the rent negotiated with the county council...” The complainant has also provided a covering memo from the town clerk that states that that the brief will be discussed with Councillor Gold and other members.

It is thereby alleged that Councillor Gold has a conflict of interest between the town council and her employer, which rents her place of work from the council in the building whose future is under consideration, and that having previously acknowledged this, has subsequently become more closely involved in the issue without declaring an interest.