

## Message received? Managing communications

### Scenario

You have received two separate complaints about Councillor X.

The **first** complaint is from a member of the public, Mrs Y, and relates to an alleged incident at a social function, attended by Councillor X. The member of the public has alleged that Councillor X, while drunk, swore and threw a drink at her.

The **second** complaint, also from a member of the public, Mr Z, relates to Councillor X's alleged failure to declare an interest in a planning application to develop a site 500 yards from his house.

**No referral decision has yet been made on the first complaint.**

**The second complaint has been referred for investigation.**

1. You receive this call from your local paper:

**"We've had a call from a lady who says she's reported Councillor X to you for some sort of incident at a charity function a couple of weeks ago. Apparently he threw a drink at her or something and although she's had a letter from you to say you've received the complaint, she's still waiting to hear if you're going to investigate. Her name's Mrs Y – she's not very happy that the decision's taking so long."**

The journalist then asks you the following questions:

- **Why haven't you done anything about it yet?**
- **Can you confirm what complaints you've had about Councillor X?**
- **Have you got any comment to make about the fact that Councillor X has been campaigning against binge-drinking and antisocial behaviour in the high street when the pubs close, but has been getting drunk and throwing things at people at parties?**
- **Do you think you will investigate? It will look a bit bad if you don't take this seriously.**

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What's the first thing that you would do if you received this call?

Now put yourself in your press officer's position and think about how, if you were dealing with the call, you would go about answering the journalist's questions. Tackle them one by one.

The only complaint you are able to confirm is clearly not the one the journalist is talking about. How do you explain this?

What sort of response would be appropriate initially?

2. It's now been made clear to the journalist that you can't confirm the complaint he is asking about. His next questions are:

- OK – would someone be able to phone me if you do get a complaint about Councillor X, please?
- I realise you're not confirming this particular complaint, but in a case like this, where someone's insulted and potentially assaulted a member of the public, what would normally happen to them?
- If it were to turn out that he had done it, what sort of sanction might he get?

Again, put yourself in your press officer's position. If you were in the press office, how would you go about informing the journalist when you are able to confirm the complaint?

How would you answer the journalist's next questions? Again, tackle them one by one.