

Investigations: Tackling complex cases

Case example 1

Councillor Bones of Speedwell Borough Council was a member of the majority party for 15 years and has recently become an independent member.

The Chief Executive of Speedwell Borough Council has received a number of complaints from officers about Councillor Bones' conduct over the last two years and has spoken to Councillor Bones about each of these as they occurred. He kept a file of papers relating to the complaints including copies of numerous emails sent by Councillor Bones to council staff. The Head of Housing, Jane Miller, has today complained that Councillor Bones has taken no notice of earlier interventions and has again sent her an abusive and disrespectful email. She says something must be done to stop this.

Last week, the Chief Executive received two more complaints – this time about how Councillor Bones had behaved at a meeting of the Area 1 Development Control Committee:

- Councillor Roberts, leader of the opposition group, alleged that Councillor Bones failed to declare an interest in applications for planning permission to erect two dwellings on land adjacent to the football ground used by the club. Councillor Bones is the chair of the club and the land is also only 250 meters from the house of a friend of his. When one of the planning applicants said to the chair that Councillor Bones had an interest and should leave the room, Councillor Bones, shouted and swore at him, calling him a *“bloody fool who knows nothing”*. Councillor Roberts further alleged that a couple of hours later, in the pub, Councillor Bones was heard talking about what had happened at the meeting and was again rude and disrespectful towards the planning applicant who had raised the objections. Councillor Roberts points out that the next day Councillor Bones had failed again to declare his interest at a public meeting called to discuss the future of leisure facilities and the availability of open space following the disposal of school playing fields.
- Mr Ryder, a member of the public, has written expressing his outrage at Councillor Bones's conduct at the Area 1 Development Control Committee meeting. He says that Councillor Bones should not be allowed to talk to people in the way he did at the meeting. Mr Ryder said that he had been on the receiving end of Councillor Bones's anger in the past when he had raised objections to the plans of a major developer to build on land which backed onto his own garden. He said that Councillor Bones, who had been the portfolio member for planning at the time, had met with the developer and the Head of Planning and advised the developer on the planning application. Mr Ryder had complained to the Council and

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to the ombudsman and the ombudsman had at last decided to investigate. Mr Ryder mentioned that this was typical of Councillor Bones, who had also not declared an interest in the football club of which he was chair when the council was deciding whether or not to make a grant available to the club to buy extra land for additional pitch space.

The Chief Executive has decided it is time that the allegations are investigated and has referred all the complaints about Councillor Bones to the Monitoring Officer to deal with. He has included all the letters and a bundle of documents. He tells the Monitoring Officer that he considers that the recent complaint from the Head of Housing together with the bundle of documents – 150 emails and file notes of conversations with Councillor Bones – indicate that Councillor Bones has failed to treat people with respect by his rudeness and his bullying and overbearing conduct, particularly towards Jane Miller, the Head of Housing, but also other officers. He points in particular to:

- an email to Jane Miller about a seminar on the proposed merger of two housing associations saying *“I am sick of getting the run around by you”*
- an email to the portfolio member for housing saying *“I am disgusted with the head of housing who knew how bad it was at the housing association and stood by and did nothing, really she should be sacked for her incompetence and neglect”*
- a file note of a BBC interview in which Councillor Bones was alleged to have said that nothing had been done for tenants of the housing association, giving Jane Miller’s name and saying that she was incompetent and disinterested and should be sacked
- a fax to a private sector housing manager at the council stating *“I have spoken to other councils and they are absolutely appalled by your department’s behaviour.”*

The Chief Executive tells the Monitoring Officer that the bundle of emails provides many more examples of similar conduct towards other officers.