



ST. HELENA

REPORT BY THE DEPUTY SPEAKER ON HER
INVESTIGATION OF A COMPLAINT MADE BY
MR TREVOR GRAHAM DIRECTOR OF ENVIRONMENT
& NATURAL RESOURCES DIRECTORATE



The Castle
Jamestown

Report of the Deputy Speaker into the complaint laid against Cllr Olsson by Mr Trevor Graham, Director of the Environment & Natural Resources Directorate in his letter of 04 Dec 2015.

The Hon Speaker appointed me to investigate the above complaint by letter dated 23 Jan 2016. In accordance with Code of Conduct Section 4.6 Procedure for Complaints I undertook to investigate and report to the Hon Speaker.

I advised Cllr Olsson that I had been appointed to investigate the complaint and invited her to meet with on 28 Jan 2016. I handed her copy of the letter of complaint. She advised me that the Hon Speaker had read the letter to her at an earlier date. She met with me at 10.00am on 28 Jan 2016 and expressed her willingness to cooperate with the investigation and did so. She met with me again on 29 Jan 2016 after I had given further consideration to the complaint.

Regarding the incident on 16 Nov 2015: *Councillor Bernice Olsson entered the housing office at Essex House in an aggressive and argumentative manner, accusing the Housing Management Officer of not doing anything to help an applicant on the housing register and accusing her quite abruptly of not caring for anyone.*

Cllr Olsson acknowledged that her behaviour towards Ms Thomas (the Housing Management Officer) was inappropriate and expressed her regret about the incident outlined in the complaint against her.

Regarding the incident on 23 Nov 2015: *Councillor Olsson approached the new Head of Property & Housing and made claims that the Housing Management Officer had been lying about the availability of housing for one of her constituents and accused her of doing nothing to assist.*

Cllr Olsson accepts she was out of order and behaved inappropriately. She again expressed regret.

It appears that the procedure for allocating Government Landlord Housing is complex and that Cllr Olsson did not fully understand it; Cllr Olsson accepted that this was not an excuse for inappropriate behaviour and unfounded allegations.

Regarding the incidents outside the Housing Management Officer's place of work:....*whilst the Housing Management Officer was on lunch break and in a shop on the 26 Nov 2015, Mrs Olsson questioned her again regarding the above matter...*

Cllr Olsson acknowledged that to discuss constituents' affairs in a shop or other public place, was inappropriate and said that she will in future seek to meet officers in their workplace. She again expressed regret at her inappropriate behaviour.

Regarding the allegation about Cllr Olsson's comment *"one of our Saints" should be in the role of Housing Management Officer.* (no date was given for this incident)

If I take an objective view of the context in which she made the comment, I can see that a member of the community could take the comment as a racist, discriminatory comment and as such, one that could bring not only the Member herself, but the Whole Council into disrepute. However, I don't believe it was her intention to be racist – Cllr Olsson is a passionate advocate for her constituents with a particular care for vulnerable people; it is my considered view that she didn't give sufficient thought to what she was saying but was rather acting in an emotionally charged manner. To what extent such behaviour can be excused is not for me to judge but it is clear to me that she must endeavour to moderate her behaviour. She wishes to apologise for any hurt caused by her comment.

I find that Cllr Olsson is guilty of misconduct under Section 4.2 of the Code of Conduct

"Members should at all times conduct themselves in a manner which will maintain and strengthen the public's trust and confidence in the integrity of the Council. They should endeavour, in the course of their public and private conduct , not to act in a manner which would bring the Council or its Members into disrepute.

Members should at all times treat other Members, officers of the Public Service and members of the public with respect and courtesy and without malice, notwithstanding the disagreements on issues and policy which are a normal part of the political process."

She has failed to uphold the standards of behaviour required of a Member of Legislative Council and thereby brought the Council into disrepute. She has further failed to treat members of the Public Service , in this case the Housing Management Officer and the Head of Property and Housing, with respect and courtesy.

Recommendations:

I recommend that Cllr Olsson should tender her apologies to the Housing Management Officer and the Head of Property & Housing in person and in writing. She clearly regrets her actions and acknowledges the hurt and upset caused by them. She should also tender her apologies to the Whole Council for bringing them into disrepute by her behaviour.

I further recommend that a meeting should be set up for Cllr Olsson to meet with the Housing Management Officer and Head of Property & Housing with the Deputy Speaker or, if preferred, the Hon Speaker in attendance, to learn more about the policy and procedure for the allocation of Government Landlord Housing.

I further recommend that Cllr Olsson should refrain from discussing constituents' concerns with Public Service officers in public places and instead seek to discuss them in the officers' workplaces.

In accordance with Section 4.6 Code of Conduct, a copy of this report will be laid on the Table as a Sessional Paper at the next formal meeting of the Legislative Council.



Mrs M A C Hopkins, Deputy Speaker.

01 Feb 2016