Final Investigation Report

Code of Conduct for Council Members

Adelaide City Council
Subject Member: Councillor Jessy Khera

Level 10 Grenfell Centre 25 Grenfell Street Adelaide SA 5000 Australia DX 131 Adelaide T +61 8 8233 5555 F +61 8 8233 5556 minterellison.com

MinterEllison

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Executive summary

This Code of Conduct Investigation concerns a complaint made against Councillor Jessy Khera, concerning his conduct following the 16 November 2021 Special Meeting of Council and a related series of emails circulated on 17 November 2021 among elected members.

Councillor Anne Moran lodged a Code of Conduct complaint in relation to this conduct,

after the Special Meeting of Council. Councillor Moran
also alleged that the series of emails demonstrated abuse and bullying committed by Cr Khera.

Our finding is that Cr Khera has breached the Code of Conduct for Council Members.

Our findings of fact in relation to the corridor interaction do not demonstrate that Cr Khera's conduct fell short of the obligations imposed by the Code.

However in relation to the email exchange, certain comments made by Cr Khera were not reasonable or respectful, and did not demonstrate that Cr Khera endeavoured to maintain a respectful relationship with all Council members. Further, as these unreasonable comments were repeated and persistent, they fall within the definitions of 'bullying' and/or 'harassment'. As a result, Cr Khera has breached clauses 2.3, 2.9 and 2.10 of the Code

We consider these breaches minor, and we recommend that Council take no further action.

Susie Inat

Special Counsel

T +61 8 8233 5692 M +61 407 710 255

susie.inat@minterellison.com

Ryan Feuerherdt

Lawyer

T +61 8 8233 5573

ryan.feuerherdt@minterellison.com

Report

COMPLAINT

By emails dated 18 and 19 November 2021, the Adelaide City Council's (**Council**) Chief Executive Officer, Clare Mockler received a complaint against Councillor Jessy Khera (the **Complaint**) from Councillor Anne Moran (**Complainant**).

1.1 Allegations

The Complaint relates to the conduct of Councillor Khera in interacting with the Complainant in the corridor outside the Colonel Light Room, after a Special Council Meeting had concluded. T

The Complaint also relates

to a series of emails circulated between councillors on 17 November 2021. The Complaint alleges that Cr Khera's comments within these emails were abusive and bullying, firstly towards Cr Phil Martin and then toward the Complainant.

The Complaint alleged a breach of clauses 2.2, 2.3, 2.4, 2.6, 2.9 and 2.10 of the Code of Conduct for Council Members (**Code**).

Cr Moran subsequently supplemented and supported her complaint with additional details and assertions by way of interview. These are outlined in more detail below.

The Complaint requires an investigation as to whether Cr Khera's conduct was in contravention of clauses 2.2, 2.3, 2.4, 2.6, 2.9 and 2.10 of the Code, being as follows:

- 2.2 Act in a way that generates community trust and confidence in the Council.
- 2.3 Act in a reasonable, just, respectful and non-discriminatory way when dealing with people.
- 2.4 Show respect for others if making comments publicly.
- 2.6 Comply with all Council policies, codes and resolutions.
- 2.9 Endeavour to establish and maintain a respectful relationship with all Council members, regardless of differences of views and opinions.
- 2.10 Not bully or harass other Council members.

A copy of the Complaint is attached as **Annexure A** to this report.

1.2 Identity of Complainant

Council's Standing Orders, Chapter 3 Part 3 contain the Complaint Handling Procedure under the Code of Conduct for Council Members (**Procedure**), which governs the investigation of the Complaint as well as the disclosure of the Complainant's identity. Specifically, clauses 28.6, 29, 34 and 36 each require strict confidentiality to be observed in undertaking the preliminary enquiry and investigation. Clause 34 explains that the CEO may make available to the subject councillor a copy of the complaint and details of the complainant, subject to the *Public Interest Disclosure Act 2018* (SA).

The *Public Interest Disclosure Act 2018* (SA) (**PID Act**) applies to information that raises a potential issue of misconduct (which includes contravention of a code of conduct by a public officer).

As the Complaint asserts a contravention of the Code, the PID Act confidentiality regime applies and renders the Complainant an 'informant' for the purposes of that Act. Section 8 of the PID Act requires that any person to whom a disclosure under the PID Act has been made, or who otherwise knows that such a disclosure has been made, must not knowingly divulge the identity of an informant, except so far as may be necessary to ensure the matters are investigated, or otherwise with the consent of the informant. The parties were advised of their confidentiality obligations pursuant to the Procedure and PID Act, and the Complainant authorised their identity to be divulged for the purpose of this investigation and report.

In accordance with clause 34 of the Procedure, Cr Khera was provided with a copy of the Complaint, and (in light of the authorisation given by the Complainant), details of the identity of the Complainant.

PROCESS FOR REVIEW AND METHODOLOGY

2.1 Framework

This investigation of the Complaint is governed by Council's Procedure.

A preliminary enquiry of the Complaint was carried out by the CEO in accordance with the Procedure. The CEO determined that the Complaint warranted referral to an independent legal counsel, or other appropriate authority, for a formal investigation and report to Council (in accordance with Standing Order 32.7). The CEO advised the Complainant and Cr Khera of this determination on approximately 19 April 2022.¹

The Complaint was referred to for investigation in accordance with Standing Order 35. MinterEllison was appointed as independent investigator in relation to the Complaint on 19 April 2022.

2.2 Process

Council's Procedure requires MinterEllison as independent investigator to provide to Council's CEO a written report which summarises:

- the allegations made in the Complaint;
- the evidence to which the investigation had regard;
- factual findings
- · conclusions; and
- recommendations arising from the report.

Notably, the Procedure does not expressly provide for a procedure whereby a councillor will have an opportunity to review a draft or initial report, and make further comments and representations to the investigator in preparing a final report. Nonetheless, MinterEllison afforded Cr Moran and Cr Khera an opportunity to do so, in the interests of procedural fairness.

Both Cr Moran and Cr Khera were invited to provide responses and submissions in relation to the content of an Initial Investigation Report. Comments were received from both councillors, which were considered for the purposes of making final findings and recommendations.

Further, as a breach of the Code has been found, the Procedure allows for Cr Khera to make submissions to the Council meeting at which this Final Investigation Report is considered.

Whilst not strictly relevant to this investigation, we consider it is appropriate to report that during the course of our investigation, Cr Khera contacted Cr Moran, suggesting that Cr Moran 'withdraw' the

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¹ We acknowledge that some time passed between the date the Complaint was made and the issuing of the preliminary enquiry determination, and therefore the commencement of the investigation.

complaint, in return for Cr Khera providing a written apology to all councillors and other relevant individuals.

Councillor Khera provided the same proposal to Council administration requesting that it be put to Cr Moran.

It was subsequently explained to Cr Khera (by Council Administration and later by the investigator) that neither the Code nor Council's Procedure facilitated grounds for the withdrawal of a complaint and cessation of an investigation in the manner proposed. Additionally, it was explained to Cr Khera that it is inappropriate for such contact to be made between councillors in relation to an ongoing (confidential) investigation. Councillor Khera submitted that he introduced his proposal in light of there being 'no opportunity to mediate', prior to the investigation commencing, which he understood 'was supposed to be standard procedure'. It was explained to Cr Khera that any 'mediation' would be initiated at the preliminary assessment stage of a Code complaint, pursuant to the Standing Orders. Councillor Khera subsequently acknowledged his error and acceptance for the current process. This has not impacted our findings.

2.3 Evidence

In conducting our investigation into the Complaint we have had regard to and relied upon the Complaint, evidence adduced at interview and other submissions received by email.

In accordance with Council's Procedure, the Complainant and Cr Khera were invited to make submissions regarding the Complaint, or attend an interview with the independent investigators by telephone or teleconference.

An interview was held with the Complainant. Cr Khera made written submissions by email and also attended an interview. See a summary of these submissions (for which regard has been had) below.

The standard of proof we have applied when assessing and accepting evidence in this investigation and report is on the balance of probabilities. However, in determining whether that standard has been met, in accordance with the High Court's decision in *Briginshaw v Briginshaw* (1938) 60 CLR 336, we have considered the nature of the assertions made and the consequences if they were to be upheld.

We are aware that our reliance on case law precedent, including High Court decisions, has been the subject of discussion and grounds for not adopting Reports and in turn recommendations by Council. We reiterate the appropriateness of independent investigators relying on persuasive precedent. The Ombudsman's investigation reports rely on precedent in the same manner, and this has informed our reliance on the above High Court decision (and which is discussed further in this Report).

NATURE OF CONDUCT

3.1 Background

88 O'Connell Street

The Council purchased the site at 88 O'Connell Street, North Adelaide, in 2018. Commercial & General was selected in 2020 to develop the site.²

Through its entity '88 OCONNELL PTY LTD', Commercial & General lodged development application number 020/A198/21 over the site on 15 March 2021, for:

Construction of a mixed use building comprising 3 residential towers (2 x 13 storeys and 1 x 15 storeys), retail and commercial tenancies on the ground, first and second floors, 2.5 levels of basement carparking with loading and servicing areas and publicly accessible outdoor terrace on the second floor.³

At its meeting on 23 January 2021, the State Commission Assessment Panel (SCAP) resolved to grant Development Plan Consent for this application.⁴

On 19 March 2021, the *Planning, Development and Infrastructure Act 2016* (SA) came into force in metropolitan areas. This represented the introduction of a new planning scheme in South Australia, with the former Development Plans being replaced by the Planning and Design Code.

On 2 November 2021, 88 OCONNELL PTY LTD lodged development application 21033028 over the site, pursuant to the *Planning, Development and Infrastructure Act 2016* (SA), for:

Construction of a mixed-use building with podium, terraces and three towers (1 x 16 levels and 2 x 14 levels all with basement levels) comprising dwellings, offices, shops, restaurants, consulting rooms, personal or domestic services establishments, indoor recreation facilities, swimming pools, terraces and associated amenities, basement car parking, loading and servicing facilities⁵

It was reported at the time that 'the new application, lodged under the new planning and design code introduced in March, was identical to the existing application under the previous planning system', and was intended to 'mitigate risks' from an Environment, Resources and Development Court challenge to the first approval.⁶

It was observed at the time that the description of the development indicated an additional level on each tower.

Commercial & General advised The Advertiser that this description included lift shafts, but the height of the buildings would be the same.

Both Cr Moran and Cr Khera submitted this background to be highly relevant to the context of the complaint and submissions in response respectively.

Special Meeting of Council

On 16 November 2021, a Special Meeting of Council was held, in the Colonel Light Room. The sole item considered was a motion introduced by Councillor Phil Martin on the following terms:

That Council:

1. Requests the Lord Mayor asks the Administration to provide this meeting of elected members with a detailed briefing, setting out the nature of changes proposed for the joint project at 88 O'Connell Street

² https://www.cityofadelaide.com.au/development/city-infrastructure/eighty-eight-oconnell/current-status/

https://plan.sa.gov.au/development_application_register#view-6026-LUA

⁴ https://www.saplanningcommission.sa.gov.au/ data/assets/pdf file/0009/847656/Public Minutes.pdf

https://plan.sa.gov.au/development_application_register#view-21033028-DAP

⁶ The Advertiser, 88 O'Connell: Ex Le Cornu tower development height concerns (9 November 2021).

(including architect drawings), any impacts on Council's financial liability or income, any other relevant information and that also allows questions from members.⁷

Following the motion being moved (Cr Martin) and seconded (Cr Moran) the chamber commenced debate on the item, and Cr Alex Hyde asked if the Council administration could provide any comment or insight into the development. Tom McCready of the Council administration explained that the developer is able to re-lodge for the SCAP approval at any time under the Land Facilitation Agreement (at its cost). Mr McCready noted that the new application contains no changes to the height of the scheme, and it remains a 15 storey development (with the two smaller towers as 13 storeys). It was explained that if there was a substantial change to the scheme which would be at variance to the concept plan, it would be brought back to the Council.

Following this explanation, Cr Hyde moved (a formal motion) that the motion be put.⁸ Councillor Abrahimzadeh seconded the formal motion. The formal motion was voted on and carried.

The (original) motion was put and was lost. The Lord Mayor then closed the meeting.9

Corridor Interaction

There were a number of members of the public in the gallery during this meeting. Due to COVID-19 restrictions, the Queen Adelaide Room was opened to accommodate additional members of the public joining the gallery. The meeting was telecast to the Queen Adelaide Room. Following closure of the meeting, members of the public (as well as various councillors) exited the Colonel Light Room and entered the adjacent corridor. Members of the public exited the Queen Adelaide Room into the same corridor.

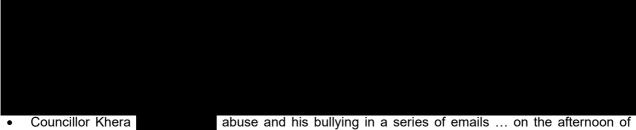
Councillors Moran and Khera were two of the councillors that entered the corridor from the Colonel Light Room. It is agreed by all parties that a brief interaction then took place. It is this interaction which is the subject of the complaint. The true nature of the interaction, and the role of each person, is disputed. This is discussed at Part 4 below.

Emails

The following evening, (some) councillors engaged in an email discussion. The relevant emails (as provided by the Complainant) are reproduced in full in Annexure A. Relevant comments of interest (and which are the subject of scrutiny of this investigation per the Complaint and allegations) are set out in Part 3.5 of this Report.

3.2 Allegations - Corridor and emails

The key allegations set out in the Complaint, are as follows:



- November 17th following an email to all Councillors from Councillor Martin that included a link to a video of the meeting.
- In a response to the email, Councillor Khera then levelled against Councillor Martin accusations

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https://meetings.cityofadelaide.com.au/Data/Council/202111161700/Agenda/Council%20Special%20Meeting%20-%20Agenda%20-%2016%20November%202021.pdf

⁸ Local Government (Procedures at Meetings) Regulations 2013 (SA).

⁹ https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7A-OTfYzqh8

- Councillor Khera was clearly saying the action of an elected member asking for a Special Meeting of Council was improper...
- The allegation of misogyny was grossly offensive to Councillor Martin.
- In response to a request to withdraw the 'misogyny' allegation and comment, it is alleged Cr Khera replied 'Woo I'm so scared"¹⁰.
- Councillor Khera then began to assert he was the victim in this disgraceful episode by accusing me of racism "against a man of colour".
- He ceased his abuse and bullying only after I informed him his behaviour was affecting my mental health.
- ... I have never been the subject of such an attempt to intimidate me by email.

During an interview with the investigator on 2 May 2022, the Complainant made further assertions in support of the allegations, as follows.

In relation to the Special Council Meeting:

- At the Special Council Meeting, there was some annoyance from elected members due to the calling of the meeting.
- It was not an aggressive meeting, but was an unhappy meeting on a political level. They (those in support of the 88 O'Connell Street development) were anxious about the approvals and didn't want to debate the topic in public.
- There was a certain amount of aggravation from the public gallery, but in the Complainant's opinion, the gallery behaved quite well – but they were unhappy with the Council.



In relation to the emails:

- The public gallery was comprised of interested residents. The Special Council Meeting was advertised in the paper and the radio. Councillor Moran did not 'ring around' or 'rent-a-crowd'.
- In relation to Cr Moran's comment toward Cr Khera: 'I wouldn't show your face in this neck of the woods for a while',
 - Cr Moran explained that she was trying to tell Cr Khera how unpopular he is in North Adelaide, as lots of people saw the meeting and heard about his behaviour. This refers to the 'litmus test' of residents in the supermarket and the coffee shop – people were talking about Cr Khera's abuse of North Adelaide residents, and saying his behaviour was totally unacceptable.
- In relation to Cr Khera's comment: 'Intimidating a person of colour?',
 - Cr Moran advised that she does not know what Cr Khera was intimating. Councillor Moran submitted that Cr Khera was effectively calling her a racist, which is a low blow, a form of bullying, and couldn't be further from the truth.

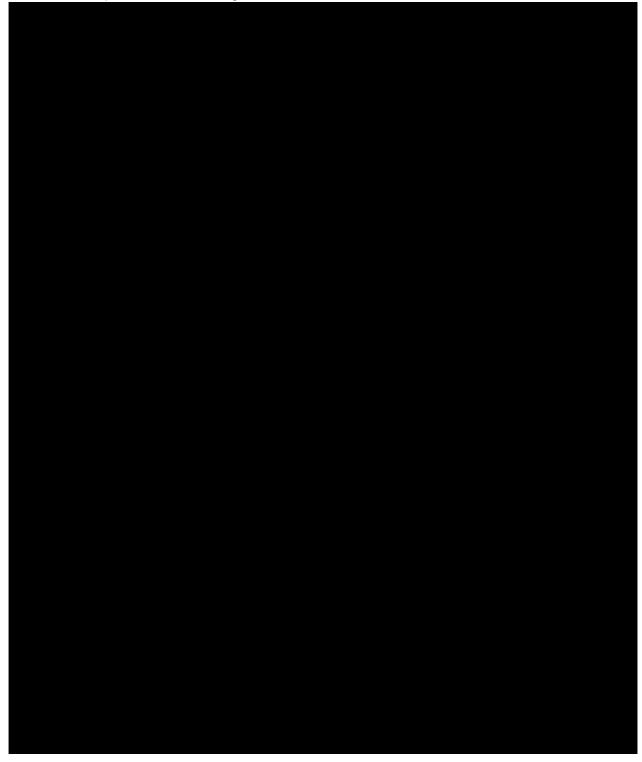
¹⁰ This comment by Cr Khera was not produced in evidence and so this allegation has been disregarded.

- In relation to Cr Khera's comment: 'I shan't be blocking you Anne. I like to keep tabs',
 - Cr Moran explained that Cr Khera often objects to her emails and responds in a negative way. Councillor Moran submitted that this comment was threatening and disrespectful.

3.3 Submissions in response to Complaint and allegations – corridor and emails

A teleconference was held with Cr Khera and the investigator on 11 May 2022, during which Cr Khera made oral submissions in response to the Complaint and allegations and the further assertions made in support of the allegations as follows.

In relation to the Special Council Meeting:





- In relation to Cr Khera's comment regarding 'opportunistic stunts fomenting yelling and misogyny against the Lord Mayor', Cr Khera submitted:
 - this referenced Cr Snape's earlier conduct, and also . Cr Khera was very upset by the incident, as it was inappropriate and aggressive.
 - o It was Cr Khera's genuine view that it was misogynistic conduct.
 - Cr Khera acknowledged they are councillors in an adversarial environment, but his genuine intention was to convey that the behaviour is not on, and was manipulative.
- In relation to Cr Moran's comment toward Cr Khera: 'I wouldn't show your face in this neck of the woods for a while', Cr Khera submitted
 - this response is abusive and indicates a level of aggression that was becoming from the 'other side'.

Councillor Khera made further written and oral submissions throughout the course of the investigation (including in response to the allegations and the further assertions made by the Complainant in support of the allegations) as follows:

By email on 9 May 2022, Cr Khera submitted:



- In relation to the emails, Cr Khera did not instigate the interaction, but responded to an email from Cr Martin which was said to be 'goading'.
- Cr Khera's emails were genuine responses at the incidents of yelling at the Lord Mayor. It is submitted there was no intent towards disrespect or bullying.
 but Cr Khera submitted that is the nature of politics.

By telephone call on 25 May 2022 (and in response to certain witness accounts which were put to Cr Khera), Cr Khera submitted:

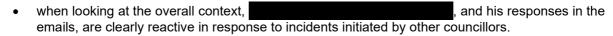


By email on 21 June 2022, Cr Khera submitted:

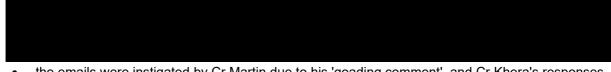


By telephone call on 23 June 2022, Cr Khera submitted:

•



By email on 1 June 2022, Cr Khera submitted:



 the emails were instigated by Cr Martin due to his 'goading comment', and Cr Khera's responses reflected his genuine views. Cr Khera submits this also falls within the 'robust exchange' provisions.

3.4 Corridor interaction

(a) Special Council Meeting recording

As is standard practice, the Special Council Meeting was livestreamed and recorded on YouTube. 11 A review of that YouTube recording shows:

- The meeting commenced at 5.01pm
- All councillors, with the exception of Cr Khera, were present in the meeting at this time.
- Cr Khera entered the Colonel Light Room (and the meeting) at 5.03pm.
- Other than voting (on both the formal motion and original motion), Cr Khera made no contribution to the debate.
- The meeting closed at 5:09pm.
- Cr Khera immediately stood up and proceeded to leave the Colonel Light Room, with the meeting recording ending at this point.
- The meeting recording does not reveal any evidence (audio or visual) of the public gallery yelling or shouting.

(b) Witnesses

As part of this investigation, we contacted a number of persons said to be witnesses (or possible witnesses) to the incident in the corridor.

Some witnesses were suggested by Cr Khera, some were suggested by Cr Moran, and others were approached on our own initiative having regard to the CCTV footage.

We contacted 9 people (excluding Cr Khera and Cr Moran), of which we received 3 written accounts, and held 5 phone calls/teleconferences.

Some witnesses were of the view that:

Some withesses were of the view that.
Other witnesses recalled that:

¹¹ https://www.youtube.com/watch?app=desktop&v=7A-OTfYzqh8



From the above witness accounts, there is an obvious lack of agreement regarding:

- the instigator of the interaction between Cr Moran and Cr Khera;
- the words spoken by each councillor;
- · the relevant conduct of each councillor during the interaction.

We consider that the varying recollections may be due in part to the length of time that has passed, the fleeting nature of the incident, the nature of the relationship between the councillors (as referenced by the councillors themselves) and the presence of memory bias and witness contamination.

In making our findings, we have independently assessed the reliability of each witness account (as it relates to the corridor interaction), and cross-referenced each recollection against other witness accounts and the CCTV footage (set out below).

(c) CCTV

As part of the investigation, we sought (and obtained) CCTV footage of the relevant evening. This CCTV footage was recorded from two different locations, each showing a different end of the corridor which extends between the Colonel Light Room and the Queen Adelaide Room.



Notably, the CCTV footage does not show the interaction between Cr Moran and Cr Khera.

For ease of reference, we refer the reader to Part 3.6 of this report for our findings in relation to the corridor interaction.

3.5 Email exchange

As stated above, the email discussion the subject of the Complaint is reproduced in full in Annexure A. However, we have set out the relevant comments of interest and raised by the Complainant as giving rise to an alleged breach of the Code as follows:

- Cr Khera stating 'Rest assured all of North Adelaide will be aware of manipulative, opportunistic stunts fomenting yelling and misogyny against the Lord Mayor.
- Cr Moran stating 'You were the one yelling at me ...'
- Cr Khera stating 'You checking the by-laws on that Keiran? Or are you going to revert to yelling at the LM again?'
- Cr Martin stating '... the very serious allegation of misogyny against the Lord Mayor is untrue and offensive and I ask you to withdraw it immediately.'
- Cr Khera stating 'Your faction have fomented yelling at the LM, and your faction member has
 directly yelled at the LM during a committee meeting, in a manner absolutely unprecedented.'
- Cr Moran stating 'You need to stop abusing people Jessy. Everyone saw what you were like last night. I wouldn't show your face in this neck of the woods for a while'
- Cr Khera stating 'You've just written "I wouldn't show your face in this neck of the woods for a while" What's that? Intimidating a person of colour?'
- Cr Moran stating 'Jessy could you please stop your insane ranting. And accusing me of racism is
 ridiculous. What you did last night in front of North Adelaide business owners and residents has
 made you unpopular ... Please block me and I will block you just to be sure.'
- Cr Khera stating 'I shan't be blocking you Anne. I like to keep tabs.

Neither party disputed the contents of the email exchange. As set out above, both Cr Moran and Cr Khera offered explanations (by way of additional assertions or else submissions in response) as to the context (including background) of their contributions in the discussion. Our findings in relation to conduct of Cr Khera as against the alleged breaches of the Code are set out in Part 4 of this report.

3.6 Findings of fact – corridor interaction

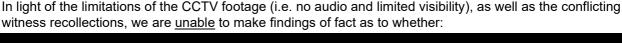
Whilst not strictly relevant, to ensure the allegations and submissions as they relate to the corridor interaction are **not** confused as facts it is useful to set out our findings of fact.

It goes without saying that we adopt the content of the CCTV footage as being objective fact. As a result of that, we agree with the following:



In a similar manner, in light of the CCTV footage and meeting recording, we disagree with the following:







In Briginshaw v Briginshaw (1938) 60 CLR 336 (referenced in part 2.3 above), Dixon J observed at 342:

No doubt an opinion that a state of facts exists may be held according to indefinite gradations of certainty; and this has led to attempts to define exactly the certainty required by the law for various purposes. Fortunately, however, at common law no third standard of persuasion was definitely developed. Except upon criminal issues to be proved by the prosecution, it is enough that the affirmative of an allegation is made out to the reasonable satisfaction of the tribunal. But reasonable satisfaction is not a state of mind that is attained or established independently of the nature and consequence of the fact or facts to be proved. The seriousness of an allegation made, the inherent unlikelihood of an occurrence of a given description, or the gravity of the consequences flowing from a particular finding are considerations which must affect the answer to the question whether the issue has been proved to the reasonable satisfaction of the tribunal. In such matters "reasonable satisfaction" should not be produced by inexact proofs, indefinite testimony, or indirect inferences.

This case is cited in all SA Ombudsman investigation reports and this particular passage was quoted and applied in the Ombudman's investigation into the Health and Community Services Commissioner ([2018] SAOmbRp 5 [53]). We similarly apply it to our investigation.

We are required to hold a reasonable satisfaction of the allegations in order to find a breach of the Code. As stated by Dixon J, reasonable satisfaction 'should not be produced by inexact proofs, indefinite testimony, or indirect references.'

As the allegations contained within the Complaint are serious, we accept that a higher level of satisfaction is required in order to make the relevant factual findings. In weighing up the balance of probabilities, we are required to form our 'reasonable satisfaction' on the basis of evidence which is not inexact, indefinite or indirect. This is consistent with the 'Briginshaw principle' espoused in *Briginshaw v Briginshaw* (1938) 60 CLR 336.

In this investigation we are confronted with a relatively significant number of witnesses, with each of them espousing remarkably varying recollections of the incident. Further, most (if not all) of those witnesses expressing a strong view on the matter are unable to have their recollections verified by reference to the CCTV footage. In one case a witness's recollection and statements was entirely contradicted by the CCTV.

With the exception of one witness, we do not hold a reasonable satisfaction that any of the witness statements should be wholly discounted or disregarded. Similarly we do not hold a reasonable satisfaction that any of the witness statements should be wholly adopted.

As a result, we have not reached the requisite standard of persuasion so as to make a finding of fact in relation to

Similarly, we are unable to make a finding of fact in relation to the purpose for which

An investigator of Code complaints is in a position where witnesses are not under oath, and there is no compulsion of evidence. All witnesses in this instance had varying (and significantly conflicting) recollections of the incident, but for the most part, witnesses appeared to be genuine and truthful.

Importantly we note that the presence of contradicting witness statements was not solely determinative in making our findings of fact. We have placed particular weight on the content of the CCTV footage as

against certain witness statements. It should not be inferred that the presence of conflicting witness statements has resulted in an inability to make findings of fact.

In the following Part 4 we consider each (relevant) clause of the Code in turn, and make determinations as to whether Cr Khera's conduct (in the corridor interaction) breaches any of those clauses. These determinations are informed by the findings of fact set out above.

4. CONSIDERATION OF COMPLAINT

The Complaint alleges breaches of clauses 2.2, 2.3, 2.4, 2.6, 2.9 and 2.10 of the Code. We have investigated these alleged breaches, and consider each clause in turn below.

4.1 Clause 2.2 – Act in a way that generates community trust and confidence in the Council

It has been asserted that Cr Khera's remarks (and by extension his conduct) in the corridor and by email breached clause 2.2 of the Code.

Corridor interaction



As a result of the above we do not consider that Cr Khera's actions (or remarks) failed to generate community trust and confidence in the Council.



Email exchange

Councillor Khera's comments within the emails are critical of Cr Moran, Cr Martin and Cr Snape. However his comments are not directed toward the Council as a whole, nor were his comments made available to the public. As a result we consider that Cr Khera's comments did not relate to the Council in such a manner which could impact community trust and confidence.

¹² Also, by email, Cr Moran states "I wouldn't show your face in this neck of the woods for a while' and explained that this refers to Cr Khera's conduct following the Special Council Meeting. We accept this explanation, however we do not find this supports Cr Khera's actions failed to generate community trust and confidence in Council. Rather it alleges a sentiment of lack of community trust and confidence in Cr Khera.

We do not consider that Cr Khera's remarks within the emails failed to generate community trust and confidence in the Council.

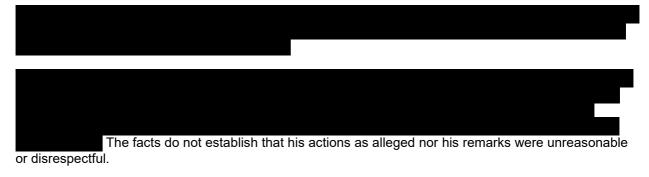
Findings

Clause 2.2 requires councillors to act in a way that generates community trust and confidence in the Council. We do not find that Cr Khera breached clause 2.2 of the Code.

4.2 Clause 2.3 – Act in a reasonable, just, respectful and non-discriminatory way when dealing with people.

It has been asserted that Cr Khera breached clause 2.3 of the Code.

Corridor interaction



Email exchange

We similarly consider that Cr Khera's comments within the emails (which formed part of a discussion between councillors) constitute 'dealing with people'.

Various comments made by Cr Khera are troubling.

The first comment of concern is Cr Khera impliedly alleging that Cr Moran and Cr Martin fomented 'misogyny against the Lord Mayor'. We acknowledge that Cr Khera genuinely holds this view, and we also do not purport to make a finding as to whether the Lord Mayor has in fact been the subject of misogyny.

Nonetheless if Cr Khera wished to properly act on his concern, raising the matter in an accusatory and threatening manner was not the appropriate avenue to do so. In relation to the 'threatening' component of this comment we refer to the statement: 'Rest assured all of North Adelaide will be aware ...'.

The second comment of concern is Cr Khera asserting: 'I shan't be blocking you Anne. I like to keep tabs'

In particular, we view the statement 'I like to keep tabs' to be somewhat intimidatory. This portion of the statement was certainly unnecessary. It appears to take an ominous tone, and we consider it was included by Cr Khera so as to serve as a warning to Cr Khera that he would be continually observing her behaviour.

As a result of the above, we find Cr Khera's two abovementioned statements were not reasonable and were not respectful.

Findings

Clause 2.3 requires councillors to act in a reasonable, just, respectful and non-discriminatory way when dealing with people. We find that Cr Khera breached clause 2.3 of the Code.

4.3 Clause 2.4 – Show respect for others if making comments publicly

Corridor interaction

It has been asserted that Cr Khera breached clause 2.4 of the Code.

owever as stated above, the facts do not establish that these discussions were disrespectful in nature.

Email exchange

Whilst Cr Khera's email comments were circulated to an audience of all Council elected members, there is no evidence that the emails were circulated more broadly (i.e. to members of the public).

In respect to the word 'publicly', the Ombudsman's investigation of the conduct of Cr Lance Bagster ([2018] SAOmbRp 24), considers clause 2.4 as follows:

- 569. The word 'publicly' and the phrase 'comment publicly' are not defined in the Code.
- 570. The *Macquarie Dictionary* defines the word 'publicly' as follows:
 - 1. in a public or open manner. 2. by the public. 3. in the name of the community. 4. by public action or consent
- 571. In my view, the plain and ordinary meaning of 'comment publicly' is to make remarks in a public manner. I do not consider this resolves the question to be determined in the present case.
- 572. The meaning of the phrase as it appears within clause 2.4 should be considered in light of the specific objects of the Local Government Act, which include:
 - providing a legislative framework for an effective, efficient and accountable system of local government in South Australia
 - o ensuring the accountability of councils to the community
 - defining the powers of local government and the roles of council members.
- 573. The phrase should also be read in light of the higher principles identified in Part 1 of the Code, which include the principle that elected members should act in a manner that, *inter alia*, 'foster[s] community confidence and trust in Local Government.'
- 574. It is also appropriate to have regard to the preamble to Part 2 of the Code, which provides that:
 - the behavioural code is intended for the management of conduct that does not meet the reasonable community expectations of the conduct of council members
 - robust debate within councils that is conducted in a respectful manner is not a breach of the behavioural code.
- It is helpful to consider clause 2.4 in light of the context in which it appears within Part 2 of the Code. It is situated under the heading 'General behaviour'. It follows the requirements that elected members '[a]ct in a way that generates community trust and confidence in the Council' and '[a]ct in a reasonable, just, respectful and non-discriminatory way when dealing with people.' It differs from clause 2.3 insofar as its application is expressly limited to comments with a public quality.
- 576. I consider that the purpose underpinning the provision, when considered in context, is to ensure that elected members do not engage in disrespectful discourse that is capable of bringing the council into disrepute. Whether clause 2.4 is to be given a narrow or expansive construction may be said to rest on the extent to which the provision goes in seeking to achieve that purpose.

Investigation Report

Minter Ellison | Ref: SMI 1394593 Page 18

- 577. In my view, it is desirable to give clause 2.4 an expansive reading so as to apply to all comments made or distributed to members of the public. There are difficulties in adopting the alternative construction. For the Code to function as intended there needs to be a degree of certainty as to what constitutes a comment made publicly. There is also the need to recognise that a communication that is sent to a person external to the council may then be circulated more widely by the recipient.
- 578. All told, I consider that the expansive reading is more consistent with ensuring community confidence and trust in the system of local government. I recognise, however, that it may be necessary to consider the size and nature of the audience when assessing the gravity of a breach of clause 2.4.
- 579. In this case, I accept that Cr Bagster circulated the remarks at issue to a relatively limited audience. This is a mitigating factor. On the other hand, I note the degree of disrespect towards council officers manifested in the remarks.
- 580. I am satisfied that Cr Bagster has contravened clause 2.4 of Part 2 of the Code by failing to show respect for others when making comments publicly.

The remarks made by Cr Bagster to which the Ombudsman refers are contained within emails sent by Cr Bagster firstly to a singular resident, and secondly to that resident, in addition to the Mayor and three of the council's administration staff. As demonstrated by the above extract, the Ombudsman in that instance considered that Cr Bagster's comments were sufficiently public to invoke clause 2.4.

The Ombudsman interpreted clause 2.4 as applying to all comments made or distributed to members of the public. As Cr Khera's comments were not distributed publicly, we do not consider that they were sufficiently public to invoke clause 2.4.

Accordingly clause 2.4 does not apply to Cr Khera's comments and there is no need to consider whether the comments showed respect.

Findings

Clause 2.4 requires councillors to show respect for others if making comments publicly. We do not find that Cr Khera breached clause 2.4 of the Code.

4.4 Clause 2.6 – Comply with all Council policies, codes and resolutions

It has been asserted that Cr Khera breached clause 2.6 of the Code.

We have not been provided with submissions or evidence tending to establish a breach of clause 2.6. To the extent that the Complaint is referencing the Code itself, we note that the Code is not a Council document and is not captured by clause 2.6. Councillor Khera will not be in breach of clause 2.6 by virtue of being in breach of other clauses of the Code.

Findings

Clause 2.6 requires councillors to comply with all Council policies, codes and resolutions. We do not find that Cr Khera breached clause 2.6 of the Code.

4.5 Clause 2.9 – Endeavour to establish and maintain a respectful relationship with all Council members, regardless of differences of views and opinions

It has been asserted that Cr Khera breached clause 2.9 of the Code.

Corridor interaction

As stated above, in the context of the corridor interaction, the facts do not establish that the discussions between Cr Khera and Cr Moran were disrespectful in nature. This being the case, we know there was an interaction, but we do not find that Cr Khera failed to establish and maintain respectful relations during the alleged interaction.

Email exchange

Part 4.2 of this Report outlines our concerns with two components of Cr Khera's email comments.

We reiterate our earlier discussion which concluded that Cr Khera's comments were not sufficiently respectful. As previously established, Cr Khera's comments were accusatory, and somewhat threatening and intimidatory.

Councillor Khera made a further remark that is troublesome in context of clause 2.9. Councillor Khera commented that he was 'more than happy to litigate this in court and the media'. Again, this takes the nature of a threatening comment which seeks to intimidate the other councillors, and/or serve as a warning.

These comments of Cr Khera do not evidence an intention to establish and maintain a respectful relationship with all Council members.

Importantly we do note that Cr Khera's comments were consistent with the nature of the entire email chain. We discuss this in more detail in Part 5 below.

Findings

Clause 2.9 requires councillors to endeavour to establish and maintain a respectful relationship with all Council members, regardless of differences of views and opinions. We find that Cr Khera breached clause 2.9 of the Code.

4.6 Clause 2.10 – Not bully or harass other Council members

It has been asserted that Cr Khera breached clause 2.10 of the Code.

In order to determine whether Cr Khera's conduct amounts to 'bullying' or 'harassment' and hence a breach of clause 2.10, it must first be established what sorts of conduct amount to bullying and harassment.

The Ombudsman has previously considered the term 'bullying' and harassment in the context of the Code (in the investigation of Cr Bagster [2018] SAOmbRp 24):

- 437. Based on the foregoing, I have adopted the following definition of bullying for the purposes of the present investigation:
 - the council member has engaged in repeated unreasonable behaviour directed towards a relevant person (especially by repeated threats, intimidation or demeaning behaviour); and
 - the behaviour creates a risk to health and safety (including a risk to mental health).
- 438. Similarly, and in the absence of any particular legislative definition to draw from, I have adopted the following definition of harassment for the purposes of the present investigation, drawn from the dictionary definition:
 - the council member has persistently and unreasonably disturbed a relevant person; and
 - the behaviour could reasonably be expected to trouble or stress that person.

Corridor interaction

In relation to the corridor incident, we are unable to identify any evidence of repeated unreasonable behaviour or persistent disturbance. The material provided to us as part of this Complaint establish a singular incidence and we do not consider it falls within the definitions of bullying or harassing.

Email exchange

We have found that Cr Khera's comments are unreasonable. We have also explained that there are multiple comments of concern which have evidenced disrespect toward Cr Moran.

Consistent with these findings, we observe that Cr Khera has:

- engaged in repeated unreasonable behaviour directed toward Cr Moran (and which can be categorised as threatening, intimidating and/or demeaning, as previously discussed); and/or
- persistently and unreasonably disturbed Cr Moran.

The Complaint alleges that Cr Khera's comments in the emails constitute bullying. The Complainant also expressly stated (within the emails): '...you are affecting my well being and mental health'. We accept the Complainant's assertions and note that Cr Khera's comments could be (objectively) considered to create a risk to mental health and/or to cause trouble or stress the Complainant.

In light of these facts we find that Cr Khera's remarks toward Cr Moran constitute bullying and/or harassment as those terms are used in clause 2.10 of the Code.

Findings

Clause 2.10 requires councillors to not bully or harass other Council members. We find that Cr Khera breached clause 2.10 of the Code.

FINDINGS

We find that Cr Khera has breached the Code.

Our findings of fact in relation to the corridor interaction do not demonstrate that Cr Khera's conduct fell short of the obligations imposed by the Code.

However, in relation to the email exchange, certain comments made by Cr Khera were not respectful or reasonable, and did not demonstrate that Cr Khera endeavoured to maintain a respectful relationship with all Council members. Further, as these unreasonable comments were repeated and persistent, they fall within the definitions of 'bullying' and/or 'harassment'. As a result, Cr Khera has breached clauses 2.3, 2.9 and 2.10 of the Code.

We make the following observations in relation to the email exchange.

- we were tasked with assessing Cr Khera's role in the email exchange, and were unable to assess
 the contributions of other councillors. It should not be inferred that this Report has found the
 comments of other councillors to be reasonable or acceptable (or otherwise consistent with the
 Code)
- and further, we accept that Cr Khera's comments were consistent with the nature of the entire
 email interaction.
- we understand that this email exchange is one small component of a broader relationship breakdown between certain councillors. Witnesses have directed us to the Cultural Investigation Report which discussed these cultural matters further. We acknowledge that Cr Khera's comments were made against a lengthy history of dysfunction and a significantly deteriorated relationship. However, to reiterate, we have been tasked with assessing the singular conduct of Cr Khera as alleged in the Complaint.
- we accept that the breach of clause 2.3 and 2.9 are minor. In the context of the broader culture of the Council, we also acknowledge that the comments of Cr Khera may even be trivial and immaterial. Nonetheless, the Code imposes obligations and standards on all councillors which must be upheld.

6. RECOMMENDATIONS

We recommend that Council, as part of its consideration of this matter, resolve to adopt the findings in this Report.

We recommend that Council take no further action in respect of this finding. We do not consider an apology (to either Cr Moran or Cr Martin) to be warranted at this time.



Annexure - A

Complaint

Annexure to Investigation Report

Dear Clare,

I am lodging a Code of Conduct Complaint against Councillor Jessy Khera in relation to an incident following the Special Meeting of Council on November 16th and a series of emails circulated among Councillors on November 17th.

I was a signatory to the request, under the provisions of the Local Government Act, for a Special Meeting of Council for the purposes of receiving a briefing which ratepayers in North Adelaide and I believed would provide further details in relation to a newspaper report that Council's Development Partner, C & G, have lodged a fresh planning application for 88 O'Connell Street. This meeting occurred in the Colonel Light Room, with members of the public watching from the public gallery and from the Queen Adelaide Room, but concluded unsatisfactorily as far as I and attending ratepayers were concerned.



Councillor Khera continued his abuse and his bullying in a series of emails (I will forward separately) on the afternoon of November 17th following an email to all Councillors from Councillor Martin that included a link to a video of the meeting. Councillor Martin asserted that the link and the video had gone viral in North Adelaide and that it was "good to see people taking such an interest in our meetings".

In a response to the email, Councillor Khera then levelled against Councillor Martin accusations; "Rest assured all of North Adelaide will be aware of manipulative, opportunistic stunts fomenting yelling and misogyny against the Lord Mayor." Councillor Khera was clearly saying the action of an elected member asking for a Special Meeting of Council was improper which I know is disputed. The allegation of misogyny was grossly offensive to Councillor Martin.

Councillor Martin requested the withdrawal of Councillor Khera's allegation of "misogyny" to which Councillor Khera replied "Woo I'm so scared".

Councillor Khera then began to assert he was the victim in this disgraceful episode by accusing me of racism "against a man of colour".

He ceased his abuse and bullying only after I informed him his behaviour was affecting my mental health.

In more than two decades in local government I have never been the subject of such an attempt to intimidate me by email. I believe some of the ratepayers who witnessed the incident at Town Hall on November 16th made notes of the exchange. I understand there is a willingness to provide evidence to any investigation.

There was no misogyny or fomenting of trouble, which I believe any viewing of the recording will disclose.

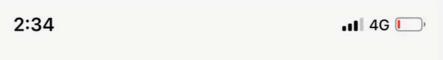
I argue Councillor Khera's remarks to me in the corridor and by email breached the following sections of Part 2 of the Code.

- 2.2 Act in a way that generates community trust and confidence in the Council.
- 2.3 Act in a reasonable, just, respectful and non-discriminatory way when dealing with people.
- 2.4 Show respect for others if making comments publicly.
- 2.6 Comply with all Council policies, codes and resolutions.
- 2.9 Endeavour to establish and maintain a respectful relationship with all Council members, regardless of differences of views and opinions.
- 2.10 Not bully or harass other Council members.

I further argue Councillor Khera's remarks to Councillor Martin breached 2.3, 2.6, 2.9 and 2.10 of Part 2 of the Code.

I request that you begin an immediate investigation.

Yours sincerely.



Done 2 of 2



Commenting on the story: '<u>Drivers' month' councillor says car use input key to city bikeway</u> plan

Jessy Khera has a very strange perception on promoting cycling infrastructure.

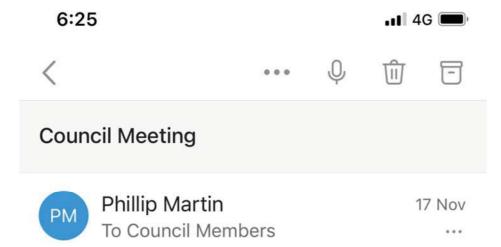
If he were in the council in the 1970s we would likely be driving down Rundle Street west at 35 miles per hour – there would be no Rundle Mall and metric would be something seen in most developed countries.



Change is not always suitable for every person, but the studies undertaken around the world prove that if more people are on bikes or public transport, then less people are on cars. This is not telling people to get out of their cars and onto bikes, it is creating a healthy and safe environment that encourages active transport. — Roger Coats

Commenting on the story: Chapman has failed the pub test and must resign: Brindal



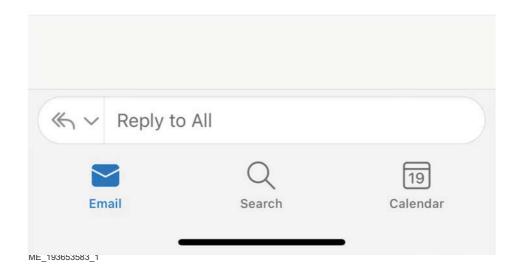


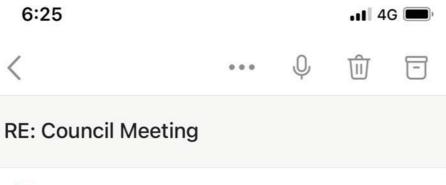
This has gone viral in North Adelaide asking everyone to view <u>15.28 to 23.40</u>.

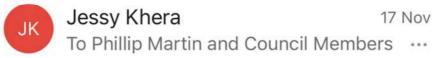
Good to see people taking such an interest in our meetings!

https://www.youtube.com/watch? v=7A-OTfYzqh8

Get Outlook for iOS







Rest assured all of North Adelaide will be aware of manipulative, opportunistic stunts fomenting yelling and misogyny against the Lord Mayor.

From: Phillip Martin

< P.Martin@cityofadelaide.com.au>

Sent: Wednesday, 17 November 2021 5:11 PM

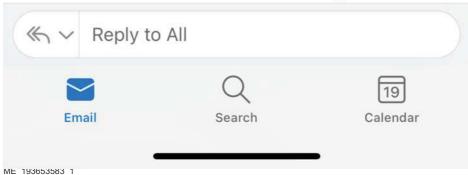
To: Council Members

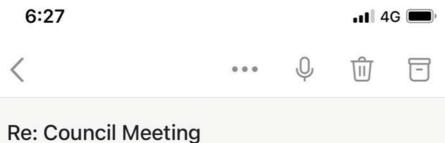
< CouncilMembers 2@cityofadelaide.com.au >

Subject: Council Meeting

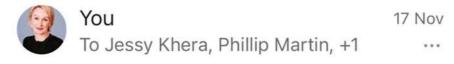
This has gone viral in North Adelaide asking everyone to view <u>15.28 to 23.40</u>.

Good to see people taking such an interest in our meetings!









You were the one yelling at me and the use of the word misogyny is very legally dangerous Khera. Get of your phone and grow up

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From: Jessy Khera

<J.Khera@cityofadelaide.com.au>

Sent: Wednesday, November 17, 2021 5:25:39 PM

To: Phillip Martin

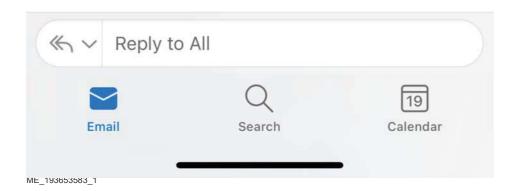
< P.Martin@cityofadelaide.com.au >; Council

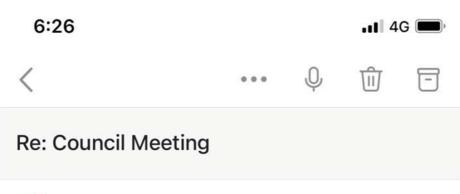
Members

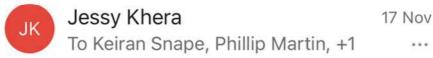
<CouncilMembers2@cityofadelaide.com.au>

Subject: RE: Council Meeting

Rest assured all of North Adelaide will be aware of manipulative, opportunistic stunts fomenting yelling and misogyny against the Lord Mayor.







You checking the by-laws on that Keiran?

Or are you going to revert to yelling at the LM again?

Good look.

From: Keiran Snape

< K. Snape@cityofadelaide.com.au >

Sent: Wednesday, November 17, 2021 5:30 pm

To: Jessy Khera; Phillip Martin; Council

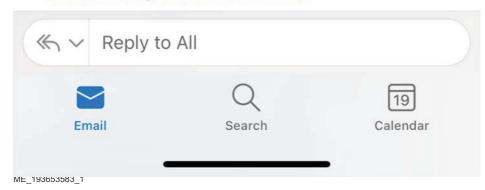
Members

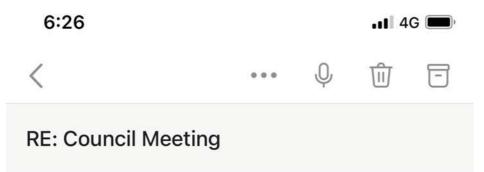
Subject: Re: Council Meeting

Are you for real?

From: Jessy Khera

<<u>J.Khera@cityofadelaide.com.au</u>>







Jessy I've heard of your accusations. They are false. A briefing was all that was requested. However, the very serious allegation of misogyny against the Lord Mayor is untrue and offensive and I ask you to withdraw it immediately.

From: Jessy Khera

<J.Khera@cityofadelaide.com.au>

Sent: Wednesday, 17 November 2021 5:33 PM

To: Keiran Snape

< K.Snape@cityofadelaide.com.au >; Phillip Martin

< P.Martin@cityofadelaide.com.au >; Council

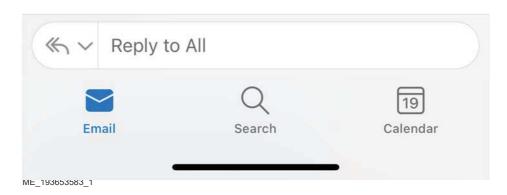
Members

< CouncilMembers 2@cityofadelaide.com.au >

Subject: Re: Council Meeting

You checking the by-laws on that Keiran?

Or are you going to revert to yelling at the LM again?





You need to stop abusing people Jessy.

Everyone saw what you were like last night. I wouldn't show your face in this neck of the woods for a while

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From: Jessy Khera

<J.Khera@cityofadelaide.com.au>

Sent: Wednesday, November 17, 2021 5:40:22 PM

To: Phillip Martin

< P.Martin@cityofadelaide.com.au >; Keiran Snape

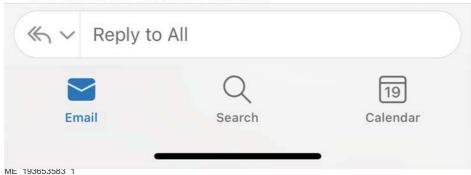
< K. Snape@cityofadelaide.com.au>; Council

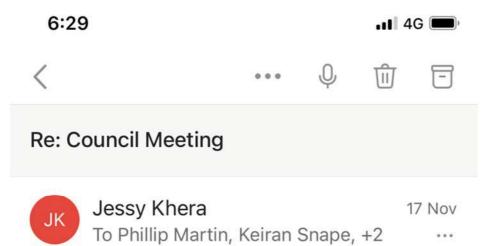
Members

<CouncilMembers2@cityofadelaide.com.au>

Subject: Re: Council Meeting

Your faction have fomented yelling at the LM, and your faction member has directly yelled at the LM during a committee meeting, in a manner absolutely unprecedented. I shall withdraw nothing. More than happy to litigate this in court and the media.





Yes Anne.

You've just written "I wouldn't show your face in this neck of the woods for a while"

What's that? Intimidating a person of colour?

From: Anne Moran

< A.Moran@cityofadelaide.com.au >

Sent: Wednesday, November 17, 2021 5:52:12 PM

To: Jessy Khera

<<u>J.Khera@cityofadelaide.com.au</u>>; Phillip Martin

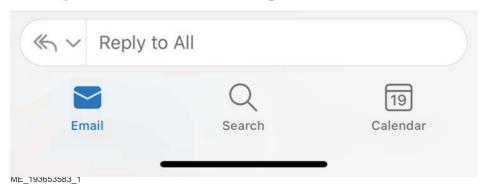
< P.Martin@cityofadelaide.com.au >; Keiran Snape

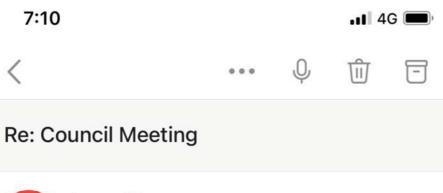
< K.Snape@cityofadelaide.com.au>; Council

Members

< CouncilMembers 2@cityofadelaide.com.au >

Subject: Re: Council Meeting







Yes Anne.

You've just written "I wouldn't show your face in this neck of the woods for a while"

What's that? Intimidating a person of colour?

From: Anne Moran

< A.Moran@cityofadelaide.com.au >

Sent: Wednesday, November 17, 2021 5:52:12 PM

To: Jessy Khera

<<u>J.Khera@cityofadelaide.com.au</u>>; Phillip Martin

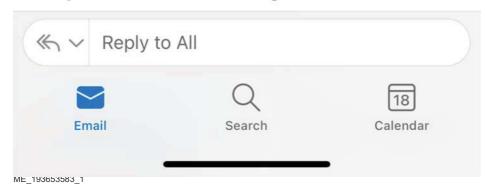
< P.Martin@cityofadelaide.com.au >; Keiran Snape

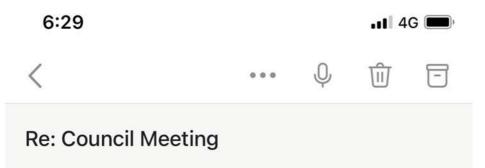
< K.Snape@cityofadelaide.com.au>; Council

Members

< CouncilMembers 2@cityofadelaide.com.au >

Subject: Re: Council Meeting







Whaaaat ???? Jessy could you please stop your insane ranting. And accusing me of racism is ridiculous. What you did last night in front of North Adelaide business owners and residents has made you unpopular. I know you think they are a minority group but they are not. Please block me and I will block you just to be sure. Anne

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From: Jessy Khera

<J.Khera@cityofadelaide.com.au>

Sent: Wednesday, November 17, 2021 5:54:00 PM

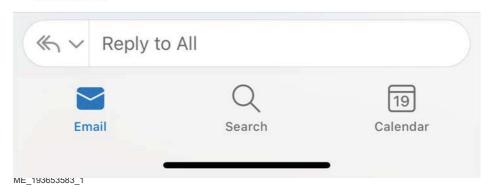
To: Anne Moran

< A.Moran@cityofadelaide.com.au >; Phillip Martin

< P.Martin@cityofadelaide.com.au >; Keiran Snape

< K.Snape@cityofadelaide.com.au>; Council

Members



6:29 ... 4G



< A.Moran@cityofadelaide.com.au >; Phillip Martin

< P.Martin@cityofadelaide.com.au >; Keiran Snape

< K. Snape@cityofadelaide.com.au >; Council

Members

<CouncilMembers2@cityofadelaide.com.au>

Subject: Re: Council Meeting

I shan't be blocking you Anne.

I like to keep tabs

From: Anne Moran

<<u>A.Moran@cityofadelaide.com.au</u>>

Sent: Wednesday, November 17, 2021 6:12:19 PM

To: Jessy Khera

<J.Khera@cityofadelaide.com.au>; Phillip Martin

< P.Martin@cityofadelaide.com.au >; Keiran Snape

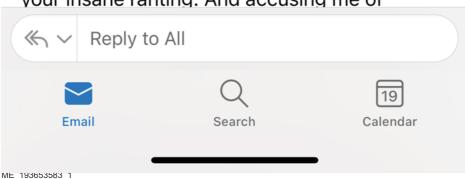
< K.Snape@cityofadelaide.com.au>; Council

Members

< CouncilMembers 2@cityofadelaide.com.au>

Subject: Re: Council Meeting

Whaaaat ???? Jessy could you please stop vour insane ranting. And accusing me of



6:29 ... 4G



Members

< CouncilMembers 2@cityofadelaide.com.au>

Subject: Re: Council Meeting

Well you are affecting my well being and mental health. I will be blocking you.

Get Outlook for iOS

From: Jessy Khera

<J.Khera@cityofadelaide.com.au>

Sent: Wednesday, November 17, 2021 6:19:11 PM

To: Anne Moran

< A.Moran@cityofadelaide.com.au >; Phillip Martin

< P.Martin@cityofadelaide.com.au>; Keiran Snape

< K.Snape@cityofadelaide.com.au>; Council

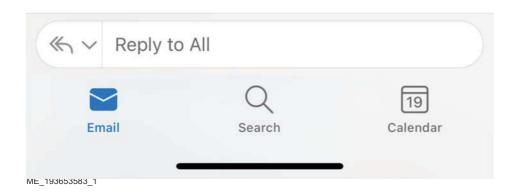
Members

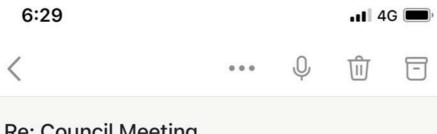
<CouncilMembers2@cityofadelaide.com.au>

Subject: Re: Council Meeting

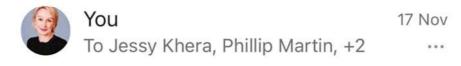
I shan't be blocking you Anne.

I like to keep tabs





Re: Council Meeting



Well you are affecting my well being and mental health. I will be blocking you.

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From: Jessy Khera

<J.Khera@cityofadelaide.com.au>

Sent: Wednesday, November 17, 2021 6:19:11 PM

To: Anne Moran

< A.Moran@cityofadelaide.com.au >; Phillip Martin

< P.Martin@cityofadelaide.com.au >; Keiran Snape

< K.Snape@cityofadelaide.com.au >; Council

Members

<CouncilMembers2@cityofadelaide.com.au>

Subject: Re: Council Meeting

I shan't be blocking you Anne.

I like to keep tabs

