



City of
Ipswich

- **14.1 Suspected Councillor Conduct Breach - Matter C/24/00786**
Attachment 1 Councillor Investigation Report.....3

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Complaint Investigation

Ipswich City Council

February 2025

Reference number: C/24/00786

Date received from Council: 17 December 2024



Table of Contents

1. Introduction.....	2
2. The Complaints.....	2
3. The Complainant.....	3
4. The Subject Councillor.....	3
5. Conflict of interest considerations.....	3
6. Summary of the investigation process.....	4
6.1 Scope of the investigation.....	4
6.2 Interviews conducted.....	4
6.3 Documents examined	5
6.4 Standard of Proof.....	6
6.5 Natural justice afforded to the Councillor	6
6.6 Summary of relevant previous disciplinary history	7
6.7 Summary of facts identified	8
6.8 Category of the conduct breach	8
7. Investigation Report	9
7.1 Date of report	9
7.2 Allegation 1 for consideration.....	9
7.2.1 Facts established by the investigation	9
7.2.2 Relevant standards in the Code of Conduct for Queensland Councillors	10
7.2.3 Summary of the evidence	11
7.2.4 Application of the facts and evidence to the conduct breach	12
7.2.5 Summary of the findings re Allegation 1.....	13
7.3 Allegation 2 for consideration.....	13
7.3.1 Facts established by the investigation	13
7.3.2 Relevant standards in the Code of Conduct for Queensland Councillors	14
7.3.3 Summary of the evidence	14
7.3.4 Application of the facts and evidence to the conduct breach	16
7.3.5 Summary of the findings re Allegation 2.....	17
7.4 Record of the investigation costs.....	17
8. Recommendation to Council.....	17

1. Introduction

This investigation involves two allegations against Councillor Andrew Antoniolli (the Councillor) of Ipswich City Council (the Council) that relate to an article published in the Ipswich Tribune on 2 October 2024, and an e-mail exchange between the Councillor and the CEO of the Council, Ms Sonia Cooper (the CEO) on 2 October 2024.

The first allegation alleges that Councillor Antoniolli breached behavioural standards 2.1 and 3.3 of the code of conduct for councillors in Queensland, by his comments published by The Ipswich Tribune on 2 October 2024.

The second allegation alleges that the Councillor responded in a disrespectful manner towards the CEO and the 'administration' of the Council in an e-mail response to the CEO regarding the Councillor's comments in the Ipswich Tribune on 2 October 2024.

The article titled 'Food vans bite into CBD café takings' reported on concerns raised by Ipswich CBD restaurant owners about their loss of potential profits as a result of 'food trucks parked up' in the area during 'one of the busiest times of year'.

2. The Complaints

Allegation 1:

It is alleged that Councillor Antoniolli engaged in a conduct breach pursuant to section 150K(1)(a) of the Local Government Act 2009 (Qld) [the Act], on the basis of a breach of behavioural standards 2.1 and 3.3 of the Code of Conduct for Councillors in Queensland. These breaches are said to arise as a result of comments the Councillor made, and that were published by the Ipswich Tribune on 2 October 2024, that were considered both derogatory to Council staff and diminished Council's standing, authority or dignity.

Allegation 2:

It is alleged that on 2 October 2024, in response to an e-mail from the CEO Ms Sonia Cooper to Councillor Antoniolli, advising him about staff who were distressed as a result of his comments in the press and that the matter would be referred to the OIA, the Councillor responded in a disrespectful manner towards the CEO and Council 'administration'.

Background to the allegations

Some of the comments by business owners reported in the Ipswich Tribune article on 2 October 2024 included, "...it was as if the council didn't want us involved."; "They aren't taking care of us"; "They ignore my concerns and tell me the trucks are offering different food options than my restaurant".

The Councillor, in agreeing with the traders, commented as follows:

“What a slap in the face this is for our traders...”

“Council continues to overpromise and under deliver. We must devise a better strategy because the existing approach of using food vans is not helping traders who have signed leases and then must pay exorbitant rents to be there”.

“The vans get pole position and the lion’s share of dollars spent, and that is not right”. “Plus, they block the view to the restaurants and cafes, so most people wouldn’t have known there were other food options.”

“Why would we even offer the traders a lease in the first place?”

“We have filled them with false hope and rolled out the red carpet, but then pulled the rug out from beneath them.”

“I am left scratching my head and wondering if anybody knows how to promote the Precinct; it’s like knocking your head against the brick wall.”

“The definition of insanity is doing the same thing repeatedly and expecting a different result: do our leasing arm and our events teams talk to one another because clearly we’re not getting it right”.

3. The Complainant

The complainant is the Chief Executive Officer of Ipswich City Council. This complaint does not relate to a public interest disclosure.

4. The Subject Councillor

The Subject Councillor is Councillor Andrew Antonioli, Councillor for Division 3 Ipswich City Council.

Cr Antonioli has been a Councillor for 18 years commencing in 2000, serving as Ipswich Mayor from 2017-2018. Cr Antonioli was re-elected to Council at the Council Elections held in May 2024.

At interview, the CEO of Council advised that Cr Antonioli had been referred to the Office of the Independent Assessor to her knowledge at least six times as far as Council is aware, and she had referred Councillor Antonioli on three of these occasions, since he had taken office in 2024.

There are two previous referral matters that are of relevance to this investigation (see Section 6.6 on page 6 for the details)

5. Conflict of interest considerations

The investigator has no conflict of interest in undertaking this investigation.

6. Summary of the investigation process

6.1 Scope of the investigation

The scope of the investigation is as follows:

- To undertake a review of the evidence provided by Ipswich City and investigate the complaint as per the adopted Investigation Policy and applicable legislation
- Interview any witnesses
- Review documents or other evidence obtained
- Prepare a statement of the relevant facts ascertained
- Ensure subject councillor has been provided with an opportunity to respond to the complaint and the evidence compiled
- Prepare a report with the investigation findings:
 - the investigation process
 - any witnesses interviewed
 - documents or other evidence obtained
 - a statement of the relevant facts ascertained
 - confirmation that the subject councillor has been provided with an opportunity to respond to the complaint and the evidence compiled
 - the investigation findings
 - a statement of any relevant previous disciplinary history
 - any recommendations about dealing with the conduct
 - a record of the investigation costs.
- Prepare a Summary Report (public) with:
 - the name of the councillor whose conduct has been investigated; and
 - a description of the alleged conduct; and
 - a statement of the facts established by the investigation; and
 - a description of how natural justice was afforded to the councillor during the conduct of the investigation; and
 - a summary of the findings of the investigation; and
 - any recommendations made by the investigator who investigated the conduct.
- Prepare a summary of the investigation costs.
- Make recommendations about dealing with the conduct

6.2 Interviews conducted

Interviewee / Date of Interview	Transcript Attachment number
Tuesday 7 January 2025	
Ms Sonia Cooper CEO Council - Complainant	"1"
Wednesday 15 January 2025	
Witness "A"	"2"

Wednesday 22 January 2025	
Councillor Andrew Antoniolli - Respondent	"3"
Thursday 30 January 2025	
Ms Sonia Cooper CEO Council - Complainant	"16"
Wednesday 5 February 2025	
Councillor Andrew Antoniolli - Respondent	"17"

6.3 Documents examined

As part of the investigation other relevant documentation was provided to the investigator and considered as follows:

Document/Date	Document Attachment number
Request for Investigation Quote - 5 December 2024	"4"
Local Government Act 2009 (Section 150) – relevant excerpts	"5"
Code of Conduct for Queensland Councillors - 22 February 2024	"6"
Ipswich Tribune copy page 1 & 3, main story 2 October 2024	"7"
Letter to Council from OIA - Referral of breach of conduct - 29 October 2024	"8"
Complaint lodged by complainant – 3 October 2024	"9"
E-mail trail - Complainant to Respondent and back – 2 October 2025	"10"
City of Ipswich Investigation Policy - 28 November 2024	"11"
OIA Request for information - 16 October 2024	"12"
ICC Councillor Register of Complaints	"13"
Letter to CEO Ms Cooper from the OIA - Notice of dismissal and recommendation - C2400593	"14"
20240731 - ASSESS - LTR - COMP - Notice of Dismissal - 150SD - C24 00548	"15"
Guideline Inappropriate conduct: disciplinary action guideline 28 February 2024	"18"
Late reports agenda ICC Council meeting 270820	"19"
Minute from attachments of ICC ordinary Meeting 270820	"20"
Investigation Summary confirmed Council Minutes 27 August 2020	"21"
Investigation Report to Council Meeting 27 August 2020	"22"

6.4 Standard of Proof

As with any administrative investigation, the standard of proof applied to the assessment of the evidence is the “balance of probabilities” but the approach referred to as the *Briginshaw* sliding scale is also applicable (Anderson v Blashki [1993] 2 VR 89 at 96 per Gobbo J).

The following principles, as set down in the seminal case of *Briginshaw v Briginshaw* (1938) 60 CLR 336, have been taken into consideration when making findings in this investigation:

“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 references.”

“When in a Civil proceeding, a question arises whether a crime has been committed, the standard of persuasion is, according to the better opinion, the same as upon other Civil issues...but, consistently with this opinion, weight is to be given to the presumption of innocence and exactness of proof is expected...”

Furthermore, it has long been held by Senior High Court Justices in this country that decision makers must consider personal reputation with sensitivity in fulfilling their statutory duty. In *Anderson v Blashki* [1993] 2 VR 89 at 96 J Gobbo stated the following:

“Brennan J. referred to Lord Diplock’s judgment in the Privy Council decision of Mahon v. Air New Zealand Ltd. [1984] A.C. 808, at p.820, where Lord Diplock said that he who contemplates making an unfavourable finding “must listen fairly to any relevant evidence conflicting with the finding and any rational argument against the finding that a person represented at the inquiry, whose interests (including in that term career or reputation) may be adversely affected by it...”

6.5 Natural justice afforded to the Councillor

Cr Antonioli was advised by letter dated 16 January 2025, that he would be required to attend an interview with the investigator at an agreed time. The Councillor was advised of the two allegations and requested to have with him at the interview any relevant meeting documents or workplace records of information relevant to the investigation. The Councillor was advised that he was entitled to a support person.

The Councillor was interviewed on 22 January 2025.

A copy of the transcript of the interview was provided to Cr Antonioli on 5 February 2025.

The Councillor was advised of the need for a second interview, and was interviewed a second time on 5 February 2025. A copy of the transcript of the second interview was provided to the Councillor on 10 February 2025.

In accordance with the Ipswich City Council Investigation Policy dated 28 November 2024, Cr Antonioli was provided with a copy of a Preliminary Statement of Findings on 14 February 2025 prior to the final report being lodged with Council. He was provided with an opportunity to respond in writing. The Councillor requested until close of business on Monday 24 February 2025.

He was contacted by phone to see if he was going to respond on two occasions. On Thursday 27 February 2025, the Councillor was advised that as no response had been received, the Investigation Report and the Summary Investigation Report would be finalised and submitted to Council.

6.6 Summary of relevant previous disciplinary history

Two previous referral matters are of relevance to this investigation:

1. On 20 July 2024, the Office of the Independent Assessor (OIA) received notification of the conduct of Cr Antonioli. It was an alleged breach of the code of conduct by the way Cr Antonioli engaged with the CEO via e-mails that were copied into Council managers and Council junior staff. The exchange referred to envelope design for the 'We Can't Wait Advocacy Campaign'.

On 31 July 2024 the OIA recommended:

That Councillor Antonioli reviews and re-familiarises himself with the provisions of the Code of Conduct for Councillors in Queensland and his obligations as a councillor to adhere to those provisions, in particular the following standards of behaviour:

Standard 2 'Treat people in a reasonable, just, respectful and non-discriminatory way.'

Standard 2.1 'Treat fellow councillors, local government employees and members of the public with courtesy, honesty and fairness'

Standard 2.3 'Have proper regard for other people's rights, obligations, cultural differences, safety, health and welfare.'

And that Councillor Antonioli turn his mind to the recipients of correspondence he sends to avoid unfairly undermining the position of CEO going forward.

2. On 8 August 2024, the OIA received a complaint in relation to the conduct of Cr Antonioli. The complaint alleged that Councillor Antonioli's quotes, in the 24 July 2024 Ipswich Tribune article titled 'Antonioli slams "self-serving, amateur" campaign', breached the Code of Conduct for Councillors in Queensland.

On 23 August 2024 the OIA recommended:

That Councillor Antonioli review and pay particular attention to the following standard of behaviour from the Code of Conduct for Councillors in Queensland, which also applies to the alleged conduct outlined in this complaint:

3.3 At all times strive to maintain and strengthen the public's trust and confidence in the integrity of the local government and avoid any action which may diminish its standing, authority or dignity.

A further part of the recommendation is, if Councillor Antonioli has not already done so, to complete the mandatory on-line training provided by the Department of Housing, Local Government, Planning and Public Works through LG Central.

The OIA acknowledges Councillor Antonioli's quotes may not have reflected the context in which they were provided; however, he should refine his commentary to focus on the matter of debate instead of criticising individual/s or council unit/s involved in a matter going forward. This should ensure that robust discussions on matters lead to constructive outcomes and that his contributions can withstand public scrutiny as a representative of the local government.

6.7 Summary of facts identified

The following is a summary of the facts identified:

1. On 2 October 2024 the Ipswich Tribune published quotes allegedly from Councillor Antonioli in relation to alleged concerns from CBD restaurant owners regarding loss of trade due to the existence of mobile food trucks during the dinosaur display school holidays. The quotes specifically mention Council's leasing and events teams.
2. [REDACTED] staff were upset, and in some cases distressed at the quoted comments.
3. There had been no consultation by the Councillor with any staff in Council prior to publication of the quotes in the Ipswich Tribune on 2 October 2024.
4. The CEO advised Councillor Antonioli by e-mail on 2 October 2024 that she was required by legislation to refer the Councillor's comments to the Office of the Independent Assessor (OIA) for assessment against the Queensland Councillor Code of Conduct, and that she had spent considerable time speaking with and consoling distressed staff members across two branches of the council team who had their work heavily criticised by the Councillor.
5. Cr Antonioli replied to the CEO's e-mail on 2 October 2024 expressing his disappointment at the referral.
6. Since Cr Antonioli was elected and joined Council in May 2024, there have been other referrals to the OIA by the CEO and the Mayor. On two previous occasions, 31 July 2024 and 23 August 2024, the OIA has made recommendations for Cr Antonioli to review and re-familiarise himself with the provisions of the Code of Conduct for Councillors in Queensland and his obligations as a Councillor to adhere to those provisions.

6.8 Category of the conduct breach

Assessment of the behaviour complained about in this matter indicates the alleged behaviour, if proven, would be considered a "Conduct Breach" (pursuant to section 150k of the Act) on the basis that the behaviour breaches a behavioural standard within the Code of Conduct for Councillors in Queensland.

7. Investigation Report

7.1 Date of report

28 February 2025

7.2 Allegation 1 for consideration

Allegation 1:

It is alleged that Councillor Antonioli engaged in a conduct breach pursuant to section 150K(1)(a) of the Local Government Act 2009 (Qld) [the Act], on the basis of a breach of behavioural standards 2.1 and 3.3 of the Code of Conduct for Councillors in Queensland. These breaches are said to arise as a result of comments the Councillor made, and that were published by the Ipswich Tribune on 2 October 2024, that were considered both derogatory to council staff and diminished council's standing, authority or dignity.

7.2.1 Facts established by the investigation

1. On 2 October 2024 the Ipswich Tribune published quotes allegedly from Councillor Antonioli in relation to alleged concerns from CBD restaurant owners regarding loss of trade due to the existence of mobile food trucks during the dinosaur display school holidays. Cr Antonioli is quoted as saying, amongst other quotes ... *"What a slap in the face this is for our traders..."*

"Council continues to overpromise and under deliver. We must devise a better strategy because the existing approach of using food vans is not helping traders who have signed leases and then must pay exorbitant rents to be there"

"The vans get pole position and the lion's share of dollars spent, and that is not right". "Plus, they block the view to the restaurants and cafes, so most people wouldn't have known there were other food options."

"Why would we even offer the traders a lease in the first place?"

"We have filled them with false hope and rolled out the red carpet, but then pulled the rug out from beneath them."

"I am left scratching my head and wondering if anybody knows how to promote the Precinct; it's like knocking your head against the brick wall."

"The definition of insanity is doing the same thing repeatedly and expecting a different result: do our leasing arm and our events teams talk to one another because clearly we're not getting it right"

2. [REDACTED] staff in Council areas that were mentioned in the quotes attributed to Cr Antonioli were upset, and in some cases distressed from the quotes.
3. The CEO was approached by [REDACTED] in the events and activation teams and leasing teams, expressing their disappointment in the comments.

4. The CEO advised Councillor Antonioli by e-mail on 2 October 2024 that she was required by legislation to refer the Councillors comments to the Office of the Independent Assessor (OIA) for assessment against the Queensland Councillor Code of Conduct, and that she had spent considerable time speaking with and consoling distressed staff members across two branches of the council team who had their work heavily criticised by the Councillor.
5. Cr Antonioli replied to the CEO's e-mail on 2 October 2024 expressing his disappointment at the referral and stating that the "comments were not aimed at staff members but at the administration." The e-mail further stated, "If only your concerns were for the mum and dad businesses that are suffering."
6. The CEO met with [REDACTED] in the impacted areas and apologised for the conduct of the Councillor and counselled the staff.
7. One of the [REDACTED] directly impacted telephoned Cr Antonioli on 3 October 2024 and subsequently met with Cr Antonioli on 3 October 2024 to express disappointment at the quoted comments.
8. On 7 November 2024 at 11.45am, the CEO and [REDACTED] met with Councillor Antonioli to discuss the approach to the use of food vans.
9. On 29 November 2024 at 10am the CEO had a telephone conversation with Councillor Antonioli regarding the Councillor's reflections on his actions in relation to the food vans and the article in the Ipswich Tribune on 2 October 2024.
10. Since his election and joining Council in May 2024, Cr Antonioli has been referred to the OIA on at least six occasions as far as Council is aware. On two previous occasions 31 July 2024 and 23 August 2024, the OIA has made recommendations (relevant to this investigation) for Cr Antonioli to review and re-familiarise himself with the provisions of the Code of Conduct for Councillors in Queensland and his obligations as a Councillor to adhere to those provisions.

7.2.2 Relevant standards in the Code of Conduct for Queensland Councillors

Standard re Allegation 1

The relevant standards in the Code of Conduct for Queensland Councillors (2024), for Allegation 1 are standards 2.1 and 3.3 which state:

Standard 2. Treat people in a reasonable, just, RESPECTFUL and non-discriminatory way. For example, councillors will, at a minimum, act in the following ways:

- 2.1. Treat fellow councillors, local government employees and members of the public with courtesy, honesty and fairness.

Standard 3. Ensure conduct does not reflect adversely on the REPUTATION of the local government. For example, councillors will, at a minimum, conduct themselves in the following manner:

- 3.3. At all times strive to maintain and strengthen the public's trust and confidence in the integrity of the local government and avoid any action which may diminish its standing, authority or dignity.

7.2.3 Summary of the evidence

On 2 October 2024 the Ipswich Tribune published an article on p1 and p3 of the newspaper, with quotes allegedly from Councillor Antonioli, in relation to alleged concerns from CBD restaurant owners regarding loss of trade due to the existence of mobile food trucks during the dinosaur display school holidays.

The quotes are critical of two specific areas of Council involved with the organisation of the event and the leasing of properties in the precinct, namely the [REDACTED].

At interview, on 22 January 2025 Cr Antonioli acknowledges that the quotes in the Ipswich Tribune article on 2 October 2024 are... "fairly close resemblance to what I said so I'm not walking back on my words or saying that they're not accurate... They are relatively accurate to what I said... So, they may have been cut from three or four different discussion points."

At interview, the CEO indicated that following the publishing of the article on 2 October 2024, she was approached by [REDACTED] who advised that [REDACTED] staff in the areas were upset, and in some cases distressed, gutted and devastated by the article. The CEO met with the staff impacted by the article and apologised to them for the conduct of the Councillor and the impact on them, and said that the behaviour was clearly not acceptable. The CEO offered her support and expressed her appreciation for the work they had done.

The CEO advised Councillor Antonioli by e-mail on 2 October 2024, that she was required by legislation to refer the Councillor's comments to the Office of the Independent Assessor (OIA) for assessment against the Queensland Councillor Code of Conduct, and that she had spent considerable time speaking with and consoling distressed staff members across two branches of the council team who had their work heavily criticised by the Councillor.

At interview on 30 January 2025, the CEO said that on 7 November 2024 at 11.45am, she and [REDACTED] met with Councillor Antonioli to discuss the approach to the use of food vans. The CEO explained to the Councillor the reasons that the Council uses food vans, to ensure that there's sufficient food offerings for the thousands of people that attend the event. The CEO said they worked through the issues and the Councillor asked questions. The CEO said the Councillor seemed genuinely understanding and accepting of the answers, acknowledging the challenges that Council grapples with in deciding which food vans, and how many, and the locations.

The CEO said the meeting came up with some practical suggestions on how they could move forward including trying different approaches to the food vans. The CEO said they explained those approaches to the Councillor, and he thought they sounded reasonable. The CEO said that at the meeting, the Councillor acknowledged that the meeting was professional and constructive.

At interview on 5 February 2025, Councillor Antonioli said that the meeting with the CEO and [REDACTED] on 7 November 2024 at 11.45am was very professional and constructive with concessions on the part of the officers to do more for the traders, and also an offer from the Councillor to work with the officers to assist with improved communication with the traders.

At interview on 15 January 2025 and 30 January 2025, the CEO advised that on 29 November 2024 at 10am she had a phone conversation with Councillor Antonioli, and during that call, the Councillor said he was sorry for what he did (the quotes in the Tribune on 2 October 2024), and it wasn't the right thing to do, and he wouldn't do it again. The CEO said in that conversation that she suggested that the Councillor talk to her first if he feels frustrated over a matter rather than talking to a media outlet.

When this conversation was put to Councillor Antonioli at interview on 5 February 2025, The Councillor said he probably would have said to the CEO, he would be a bit more circumspect and ...perhaps he could handle that a little better next time.

At interview on 15 January 2025, Witness A said that the Activation and City Events teams were really disappointed and offended by the quotes in the article. Witness A said they called Councillor Antonioli and subsequently met with him on 3 October 2024. Witness A said that Councillor Antonioli was less apologetic on the phone and more defensive, however when they met straight after the phone call, the Councillor was more conciliatory. Witness A said that at the meeting, the Councillor was sorry that the people who were most offended in the events and activation teams are the people he does think a lot of and are well regarded.

At interview on 22 January 2025, Councillor Antonioli said the conversation with Witness A at their meeting on 3 October 2024 was conciliatory and he didn't think he was angry. He said, at the meeting he was open to discussion and he felt he was somewhat apologetic for the fact that he didn't mean to upset [REDACTED] staff. Councillor Antonioli said the conversation with Witness A was cordial and respectful at all times, but he can be emotional, and he was frustrated for the "mums and dads" who own businesses.

Councillor Antonioli has previously been referred to the OIA on at least six occasions as far as Council is aware, and specifically on 20 July 2024 and 8 August 2024 for behaviour of a similar nature to the allegations in this investigation. The OIA made recommendations on these referrals (See Section 6.6 on page 7).

7.2.4 Application of the facts and evidence to the conduct breach

Allegation 1:

The quotes that were printed in the Ipswich Tribune on 2 October 2024, which are critical of the leasing and events teams at Council, are not in dispute. Councillor Antonioli confirmed that they are relatively accurate to what he said, having been cut from three or four different discussion points in his interview with the Ipswich Tribune journalist.

There was no forewarning to Council officers that the article would appear in the Ipswich Tribune on 2 October 2024. Councillor Antonioli confirms that he did not speak with anyone in Council about the article prior to its publication.

Staff in the areas specifically quoted in the article were upset, distressed and offended by the quotes in the article.

The Councillor has expressed regret at the approach he took, especially the staff impacted in the teams quoted in the article, who he respects and are well regarded.

The Councillor has been referred to the OIA on two previous occasions for behaviour of a similar nature. The OIA on those occasions recommended that the Councillor re-familiarise himself with the Standards 2 and 3 of the Code of Conduct for Councillors in Queensland.

The Councillor should have been aware of the standards and that his behaviour in relation to his comments made to a journalist and subsequently published in the Ipswich Tribune on 2 October 2024 could breach the relevant standards.

7.2.5 Summary of the findings re Allegation 1

Allegation 1, that Councillor Antonioli engaged in a conduct breach pursuant to section 150K(1)(a) of the Local Government Act 2009 (Qld) [the Act], on the basis of a breach of behavioural standards 2.1 and 3.3 of the code of conduct for Councillors in Queensland. These breaches are said to arise as a result of comments the Councillor made, and that were published by the Ipswich Tribune on 2 October 2024, that were considered both derogatory to council staff and diminished council's standing, authority or dignity,

is substantiated.

7.3 Allegation 2 for consideration

Allegation 2:

It is alleged that on 2 October 2024, in response to an e-mail from the CEO Ms Sonia Cooper to Councillor Antonioli advising him about staff who were distressed as a result of his comments in the press and that the matter would be referred to the OIA, the Councillor responded in a disrespectful manner towards the CEO and council 'administration'.

7.3.1 Facts established by the investigation

1. On 2 October 2024 the Ipswich Tribune published quotes allegedly from Councillor Antonioli in relation to alleged concerns from CBD restaurant owners regarding loss of trade due to the existence of mobile food trucks during the dinosaur display school holidays. The quotes specifically mention the leasing arm and events teams in Council.
2. [REDACTED] staff were upset, and in some cases distressed at the quoted comments.
3. There had been no consultation by the Councillor with any staff in the Council prior to publication of the quotes in the Ipswich Tribune on 2 October 2024.
4. The CEO advised Councillor Antonioli by e-mail on 2 October 2024 that she was required by legislation to refer the Councillor's comments to the OIA for assessment against the Queensland Councillor Code of Conduct, and that she had spent considerable time speaking with and consoling distressed staff members across two branches of the council team who had their work heavily criticised by the Councillor.

5. The e-mail reads:

"Good afternoon Councillor Antonioli

I note the front page and page 3 story in the Ipswich Tribune today in which you are quoted as having made comment in your role as a Division 3 Ipswich City Councillor.

I am writing just as a courtesy to let you know that I am required by legislation to refer your reported comments to the Office of the Independent Assessor for assessment against the Queensland Councillor Code of Conduct.

I have spent considerable time today speaking with and consoling distressed staff members across two branches of the council team who have had their work heavily criticised in public by an elected representative of the council that they serve and work for.

As you know, I am accountable for a physically and psychosocially safe workplace and the wellbeing of a number of staff members has been negatively impacted by your commentary that has been published to the community at large.

Regards, Sonia"

6. Cr Antonioli replied to the CEO's e-mail on 2 October 2024 expressing his disappointment at the referral. The e-mail reads:

"Sonia

That is disappointing as comments were not aimed at staff members but the administration. If only your concerns were for the mum and dad businesses that are suffering."

7. Since Cr Antonioli was elected and joined Council in May 2024, there have been other referrals to the OIA by the CEO and the Mayor. On two previous occasions 31 July 2024 and 23 August 2024, the OIA has made recommendations for Cr Antonioli to review and re-familiarise himself with the provisions of the Code of Conduct for Councillors in Queensland and his obligations as a Councillor to adhere to those provisions.

7.3.2 Relevant standards in the Code of Conduct for Queensland Councillors

Allegation 2

The relevant standard in the Code of Conduct for Queensland Councillors (2024), for Allegation 2 is standard 2.1 which states:

Standard 2. Treat people in a reasonable, just, RESPECTFUL and non-discriminatory way. For example, councillors will, at a minimum, act in the following ways:

- 2.1. Treat fellow councillors, local government employees and members of the public with courtesy, honesty and fairness.

7.3.3 Summary of the evidence

On 2 October 2024 the Ipswich Tribune published an article on p1 and p3 of the newspaper with quotes allegedly from Councillor Antonioli in relation to alleged concerns from CBD restaurant owners regarding loss of trade due to the existence of mobile food trucks during the dinosaur display school holidays.



The quotes are critical of two specific areas of Council involved with the organisation of the event and the leasing of properties in the precinct, namely the [REDACTED].

At interview, on 22 January 2025 Cr Antonioli acknowledges that the quotes have are ... "fairly close resemblance to what I said so I'm not walking back on my words or saying that they're not accurate...They are relatively accurate to what I said... So, they may have been cut from three or four different discussion points."

At interview, the CEO indicated that following the publishing of the article on 2 October 2024, she was approached by [REDACTED] who advised that [REDACTED] staff in the areas were upset, and in some cases distressed, gutted and devastated by the article. The CEO met with the staff impacted by the article and apologised to them for the conduct of the Councillor and the impact on them and said that the behaviour was clearly not acceptable. The CEO offered her support and expressed her appreciation for the work they had done.

The CEO advised Councillor Antonioli by e-mail on 2 October 2024 that she was required by legislation to refer the Councillor's comments to the OIA for assessment against the Queensland Councillor Code of Conduct, and that she had spent considerable time speaking with and consoling distressed staff members across two branches of the council team who had their work heavily criticised by the Councillor.

Cr Antonioli replied to the CEO's e-mail on 2 October 2024 expressing his disappointment at the referral.

There are three aspects of the e-mail from Cr Antonioli dated 2 October 2024 which are relevant to this investigation, as follows:

1. The statement, "the comments were not aimed at staff members".
2. The statement, "but the 'administration'."
3. The statement, "if only your concerns were for the mum and dad businesses that are suffering."

The Councillor's quotes in the Ipswich Tribune on 2 October 2024 are clearly critical of the staff members of the 'leasing arm' and the 'events team',

... "I am left scratching my head and wondering if anybody knows how to promote the Precinct; it's like knocking your head against the brick wall."

"The definition of insanity is doing the same thing repeatedly and expecting a different result: do our leasing arm and our events teams talk to one another because clearly we're not getting it right"

At interview on 7 January 2025, the CEO recalls that on some previous occasions, when the Councillor is referring to the 'administration', he has meant the Councillors rather than the staff members of Council.

When put to Cr Antonioli at interview on 22 January 2025, he clarified that what he meant by the term 'administration' was, he wasn't critical of the staff that were at the bottom end of this delivery... it's the guidance they get from above and particularly through [REDACTED] and the CEO.

When interviewed on 5 February 2025 regarding clarification of the term administration, Cr Antonioli confirmed that by administration he meant the officers at the pointy end of the organisation...the CEO and the [REDACTED].

At interview on 7 January 2025, in relation to the Councillor's e-mail regarding mum and dad businesses, the CEO said, "of course I care about the businesses, the traders that are our lessees. I care about all of them".

At interview on 30 January 2025, when asked how the comment regarding not caring for the mum and dad businesses made her feel, the CEO said she felt that the comment was generally disrespectful. She said that she was more concerned for the Councillor's emotional state at the time, because she thought to disregard what she had said in the email, about the distress of staff, and to dismiss that and suggest that she didn't care about the businesses, was disrespectful. The CEO was concerned at the Councillor's perspective on the matter. The CEO said she took mild offence that the Councillor would suggest that she did not care about the businesses, which are Council's lessees.

7.3.4 Application of the facts and evidence to the conduct breach

Allegation 2:

As discussed above allegation 2 hinges on three elements in the Councillor's e-mail to the CEO dated 2 October 2024, 1) the statement, "the comments were not aimed at staff members", 2) the meaning of the term "administration", and 3) the impact on the CEO of the comment in the same e-mail, "if only your concerns were for the mum and dad businesses that are suffering."

The quotes from the Councillor in the Ipswich Tribune article of 2 October 2024 are disrespectful to the Council "*leasing arm*" and "*events teams*".

Although at interview the Cr Antonioli says that he has previously used the term with the previous Council to mean Councillors and not staff, he clarifies that in this instance, he was referring to the CEO and [REDACTED] in Council.

The CEO has confirmed that she took mild offence that the Councillor would suggest that she did not care about the businesses, which are Council's lessees, and she was concerned at the Councillor's perspective which was critical of her and that he did not show concern in that e-mail of 2 October 2024 over the impact of his actions on the staff involved. The CEO also confirmed that she found the comments in the e-mail to her dated 2 October 2024, generally disrespectful.

7.3.5 Summary of the findings re Allegation 2

Allegation 2, that on 2 October 2024, in response to an e-mail from the CEO Ms Sonia Cooper to Councillor Antonioli advising him about staff who were distressed as a result of his comments in the press and that the matter would be referred to the OIA, the Councillor responded in a disrespectful manner towards the CEO and council 'administration'

is substantiated.

7.4 Record of the investigation costs

The total fee for the investigation including GST and the costs of transcribing the five interviews, is \$18975.

8. Recommendation to Council

It is recommended that:

a) This report be submitted to the Ipswich City Council for consideration, pursuant to section 150AG of the Act, as to whether or not the Councillor has engaged in a conduct breach; and if they are found to have so engaged, what action the local government will take to discipline the Councillor pursuant to section 150AH of the Act;

b) Having analysed the material from this investigation, the findings are that **the two allegations are substantiated.**

1. If Ipswich City Council finds the Councillor has engaged in a conduct breach, the Council should take into account that the Councillor has spoken with the CEO and advised that, "he would be a bit more circumspect and ...perhaps he could handle that a little better next time."
2. The Councillor has also had meaningful and professional conversations with the CEO and [REDACTED] impacted by the quotes in the Tribune that have contributed to a better understanding of the issues and some positive changes to the use of food vans for events.
3. The Councillor has been referred to the OIA on previous occasions for similar behaviour with recommendations made that *Cr Antonioli reviews and re-familiarises himself with the provisions of the Code of Conduct for Councillors in Queensland and his obligations as a councillor to adhere to those provisions.*
4. If Council finds the Councillor has engaged in a conduct breach, the following disciplinary action under section 150AH LGA is recommended:
 - a) An order that the Councillor attend training or counselling addressing the Councillor's conduct including at the Councillor's expense
 - b) An order that if the Councillor engages in the same type of conduct again, it may be treated as misconduct



Peter Mathews
Director
Workplace Edge



