

PERSONAL EXPLANATION: CR JACKIE WATTS

Response in relation to:

The recent allegations by two female Councillors and media reports have served to remind me of my own experience six years ago when I made a complaint against Robert Doyle for bullying. Common causal factors within the workplace culture gave rise to these allegations. I find this distressing.

Statement

Recent research is unequivocal – significant costs arise from workplace harassment. Consider the immense costs associated with current allegations – personal, professional, legal, lost productivity, and reputational damage. Regardless of the outcome of the Freckelton investigation, unless underlying causal factors are faced, the problems at my workplace Town Hall will persist.

To quote journalist Tracey Spicer *"A culture wide, generations long, epidemic of workplace sexual harassment and assault doesn't persist without a broad network of complicity, composed of individuals with varying degrees of knowledge and culpability."*

The City of Melbourne Act is itself a causal factor; spawning a Council culture of entitlement, elitism and impunity shaped by those playing political games and those with economic influence, leaving local constituent concerns at the margins. A gerrymander designed to prioritise 'the big end of town' above residents and small businesspeople.

In my opinion, led by Robert Doyle over three terms the workplace culture resembles the political milieu of Spring Street; characterised by 'risk management', 'confidentiality', media optics, unanimity and expediency rather than optimal transparency and disclosure and service to constituents.

Consider the flow-on effect of Team Doyle Cabinet-style caucus meetings which are inherently exclusive; an absence of robust Council-wide debate; and an extraordinarily pattern of unanimity in bloc voting, compounded this term an absolute majority.

We are aware of what has divided the Doyle Council but, given that ALL Councillors sign the ostensibly binding Councillor Conduct Code, I am deeply dismayed to reflect that if any Councillor, aware of this alleged misconduct, had promptly fulfilled their obligations under the Local Government Act, the OH&S Act, and the Councillor Code, then the current miserable situation for all concerned and the damage to our City may well have been averted. I gather that the scope of the Freckelton investigation may not reveal whether or not any Councillors stood idly by, over the months during which Tessa Sullivan's distress grew.

Turning now to the Administration's role in shaping workplace culture.

I am personally and professionally aghast that six years after my bullying complaints, processes remain seriously deficient.

Consider the absurdity of the reporting processes faced by Tessa Sullivan:

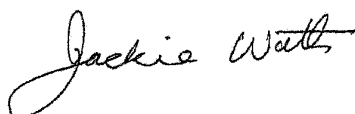
- Initially a formal complaint had to be made to the CEO, who was then required to immediately inform the Lord Mayor.
- Under Councillor Code of Conduct, any complaint against the Lord Mayor must first be reported to the Deputy Lord Mayor (member of Team Doyle) who must then meet with the complainant and the Lord Mayor to resolve the complaint.

Protection for alleged victims, where those with power are involved, is as inadequate today as it was six years ago. Distressed councillors can opt to endure, face a daunting and costly complaints process, or ultimately, as in Tessa Sullivan's case, resign.

It is heartening that the Administration is now set to tackle deficiencies in relevant Acts and Code. Yet, it persists with a defensive and political stance that it already models best practices in transparency and disclosure, and in workplace harassment which are inappropriate in the current context.

Changes within Council may be more problematic. The status quo has served the Team Doyle well until now. Entrenched allegiances, established routines and retaining a large voting bloc remain. Time will tell – but my hope this appalling episode at least triggers change – greater collegiality and trust, genuine debate and a proper balance between the conduct of this Local Council and its role as State capital.

Signed:



Cr Watts

Date: 6 February 2018

Councillor Code of Conduct: section 8

<https://www.melbourne.vic.gov.au/sitecollectiondocuments/councillor-code-of-conduct-2016.pdf>

Local Government Act: section 105(a)(i)

[http://www.legislation.vic.gov.au/domino/web_notes/ldms/ltoject_store/ltojbst6.nsf/dde300b846eed9c7ca257616000a3571/32807739dafb424aca2578db001b8014/\\$file/89-11aa109a%20authorised.pdf](http://www.legislation.vic.gov.au/domino/web_notes/ldms/ltoject_store/ltojbst6.nsf/dde300b846eed9c7ca257616000a3571/32807739dafb424aca2578db001b8014/$file/89-11aa109a%20authorised.pdf)

Melbourne City Council Act:

http://www8.austlii.edu.au/cgi-bin/viewdb/au/legis/vic/consol_act/coma2001189/