



2022-23 Investigation Fisher

Sector	Local Government
Respondent level	Designated Public Officer
Principal allegations	Improper use of information and conflicts of interest arising from association with member of public

Description

Own-motion investigation Fisher considered possible misconduct committed by Paul Belcher, then a councillor with Derwent Valley Council (Council), or other council officers, in relation to their contact with a property developer. This arose from information received from the Office of Local Government about then Councillor Belcher's conduct. The Board extended the scope of investigation to consider Mr Belcher allegedly sharing confidential Council information with a local journalist.

The investigation found that Mr Belcher failed to disclose or manage a conflict of interest arising from his association with the developer. Mr Belcher had a personal and financial association with the developer, yet he agitated for the developer's interests and pressured Council employees on their behalf. Mr Belcher also received \$5,000 from the developer when Mr Belcher was running for Council, and he used at least part of this gift for his campaign.

The investigation found that Mr Belcher had provided confidential Council information to the developer and the local journalist, and that there was no legitimate reason for doing so. The information was shared with the Office of Local Government, and Mr Belcher subsequently pleaded guilty to 2 breaches of the Local Government Act 1993 (LG Act).

We found no evidence that any other public officers engaged in misconduct relating to contact with the developer.

The systemic issues identified in this investigation were covered in an accompanying research report. The research was undertaken to: highlight the issues for public discussion; examine approaches in other jurisdictions; and identify potential reforms.

The Board made recommendations to amend the LG Act to better manage disclosures of interests by councillors, and to extend campaign funding disclosure requirements to all local government candidates

Outcome

Referred to the Principal Officer for action