



Friends and neighbours

The story

Kate, a planning officer responsible for receiving and processing development applications and objections, has a close friend – Linda – who has submitted a development application to extend the front porch of her home.

Linda explains that her neighbour is being very difficult and has told her that he will complain to council if she goes ahead with the development.

She asks Kate if she could ‘turn a blind eye’ if such a complaint is received, as it might prevent or delay the building work. Linda explains that she has already spent a considerable amount of money on the materials for the front porch and a builder is booked in to commence the work.

The day before objections close, an objection form about the porch extension arrives at council. Kate purposely fails to date stamp the form until the following day. It is out of time and therefore not considered.

Questions

1. What are the ethical issues or risks in this situation?
2. What part of the ethical framework failed?
3. What strategies could be implemented to prevent this in the future?

The information used in this scenario is not factual – we created it for education and discussion. Any likeness to actual persons or events is coincidental.



The Commission can help

We are available to provide support and assistance with identifying, reporting, investigating, managing and preventing misconduct: prevention@integrity.tas.gov.au or 1300 720 289. For more Misconduct Prevention resources go to www.integrity.tas.gov.au/resources

Questions – Facilitator copy

1. What are the ethical issues or risks in this situation?

- ▽ Conflict of interest – allowing a personal relationship to influence work practices.
- ▽ Inappropriate use of power – tampering with public documents and processes.
- ▽ Lack of honesty / integrity.
- ▽ Failure to follow procedure in relation to development applications.
- ▽ A lack of accountability.

2. What part of the ethical framework failed?

- ▽ The public officer did not declare a conflict of interest, therefore it could not be effectively managed.
- ▽ Apparent lack of knowledge of the council's conflict of interest policy and/or code of conduct.

3. What strategies could be implemented to prevent this in the future?

- ▽ Reinforce the code of conduct and the importance of disclosing conflicts of interest with all staff members.
- ▽ Disclose and record all conflicts of interest – actual, potential and perceived.
- ▽ Have clear processes for managing conflicts of interest. In this case the file could be allocated to another officer.
- ▽ Regularly audit the disclosure register.
- ▽ Provide training in conflict of interest policies, including disclosures.
- ▽ Ensure all staff are adequately trained in development application processes.
- ▽ Rotate employees through various regulatory roles.
- ▽ Ensure that processes for applications and objections / appeals are well publicised.