

LOCAL GOVERNMENT STANDARDS PANEL

Established under section 5.122 of the *Local Government Act 1995* (WA)

Complaint Number	SP 8 of 2015 DLG 20150050
Legislation	<i>Local Government Act 1995</i> (WA)
Complainant	Leon Walker
Subject of complaint	Councillor David Griffiths
Local Government	City of Gosnells
Regulation	Regulation 11 (2) of the <i>Local Government (Rules of Conduct) Regulations 2007</i>
Panel Members	Mr B Jolly (Presiding Member) Councillor P Kelly (Member) Mr P Doherty (Member)
Heard	16 October 2015 (Determined on the documents)
Outcome	Public Apology Ordered

SANCTIONS DECISION AND REASONS FOR DECISION

DEFAMATION CAUTION

The general law of defamation, as modified by the *Defamation Act 2005*, applies to the further release or publication of all or part of this document or its contents. Accordingly, appropriate caution should be exercised when considering the further dissemination and the method of retention of this document and its contents.

1. Summary of Breach Findings

- 1.1 At its meeting on 3 September 2015 the Panel made a finding that Cr David Griffiths, a member of the Council of the City of Gosnells committed breaches of regulation 11(2) of the *Local Government (Rules of Conduct) Regulations 2007* (**Regulations**) by failing to declare an interest when voting on applications for leaves of absence made by his son, Cr Peter Griffiths in relation to Ordinary Meetings of the Council held on 22 October 2013, 12 November 2013, 11 November 2014 and 16 December 2014 (**Minor Breaches**).

2. Summary of Decision

- 2.1 The Panel considered how the Minor Breaches are to be dealt with under section 5.110(6) of the *Local Government Act 1995* (**Act**) and concluded, for the following reasons, that Cr Griffiths should be ordered to make a public apology to the Councillors of the City in terms of Attachment “A” hereto.

3. Notice of the Minor Breaches

- 3.1 By letter dated 8 September 2015, the Panel gave to Cr Griffiths:
- (a) notice of the Minor Breaches;
 - (b) a copy of its Findings and Reasons for Finding dated 3 September 2015 (**Findings**); and
 - (c) an opportunity for him to make submissions about how the Minor Breaches should be dealt with under section 5.110(6) of the *Act*.

4. Cr Griffiths’ response and submissions

- 4.1 Cr Griffiths responded to the Panel by letter dated 22 September 2015 in which he:
- (a) accepted that it is not open to the Panel to review its Findings of Minor Breaches;
 - (b) contended that the Panel’s Findings were incorrect;
 - (c) contended that he has “made no secret that Cr Peter Griffiths is [his] son”; and
 - (d) submitted that the Complaint should be dismissed.
- 4.2 Cr Griffiths also submitted that neither an order for a public censure nor an order for a public apology is appropriate, but that an order that he attend further training “could possibly be viewed as appropriate” although he has already “considered all Departmental guidelines, advice notes and other information on this subject and can find no statement which clearly explains that Regulation 11(2) specifically applies to administrative decisions such as applications for leaves of absence” and that it is “difficult to identify how training could be an appropriate sanction”.


5. Panel’s views

- 5.1 Section 5.110(6) of the *Act* specifies the sanctions that may be imposed by the Panel for a Minor Breach. The Panel may:
- (a) dismiss the Complaint;

- (b) order that —
 - (i) the person against whom the Complaint was made be publicly censured as specified in the order;
 - (ii) the person against whom the Complaint was made apologise publicly as specified in the order; or
 - (iii) the person against whom the Complaint was made undertake training as specified in the order;
 or
 - (c) order 2 or more of the sanctions described in paragraph (b).
- 5.2 Pursuant to clause 8(6) of Schedule 5.1 to the *Act*, each of the Panel's members is to have regard to the general interests of local government in the State.
- 5.3 In considering an appropriate sanction or sanctions for the present breach the Panel notes that Cr Griffiths has not previously been found to have breached the *Regulations*.
- 5.4 The Panel does not consider that dismissal of the Complaint is appropriate as this would effectively condone Cr Griffiths' conduct in failing to declare an interest when voting on applications for leaves of absence made by his son, Cr Peter Griffiths in relation to Ordinary Meetings of the Council held on 22 October 2013, 12 November 2013, 11 November 2014 and 16 December 2014.
- 5.5 Nor, given the matters set out in paragraph 4.2 above does the Panel consider that ordering Cr Griffiths to undergo further training is appropriate.
- 5.6 Because of this, the only options available to the Panel are to order the publication of a Notice of Public Censure or to order Cr Griffiths to make a Public Apology (or both).
- 5.7 When the Panel makes an order that a Notice of Public Censure be published, that Notice is published by the local government's CEO at the expense of the local government and such expense is significant where the Notice is to be published in a newspaper or newspapers.
- 5.8 In the present case, on the evidence available to the Panel and the matters set out in paragraphs 5.6 and 5.7 above, the Panel does not consider that it should order a public censure for the Minor Breaches.
- 5.9 In the circumstances of the matter, the Panel considers that Cr Griffiths should be ordered to make a public apology to the Councillors of the City in terms of Attachment "A" hereto.
- 5.10 This is a significant sanction, as it serves as a reprimand aimed at the reformation of Cr Griffiths and the prevention of further offending acts and also as a measure in support of the institution of local government and those council members who properly observe the standards of conduct expected of them.

6. Panel decision

- 6.1 Having regard to the Findings, the matters set out in paragraphs 4 and 5 above, and the general interests of local government in Western Australia, the Panel's decision on how the Minor Breaches are to be dealt with under section 5.110(6) of the *Act*, is that pursuant to subsection (b)(ii) of that section, Cr Griffiths should be ordered to publicly apologise to the Councillors of the City as set out in Attachment "A" hereto.



Brad Jolly (Presiding Member)

Paul Kelly (Member)

Peter Doherty (Member)

NOTICE TO THE PARTIES TO THE COMPLAINT

RIGHT TO HAVE PANEL DECISION REVIEWED BY THE STATE ADMINISTRATIVE TRIBUNAL

The Local Government Standards Panel (**Panel**) hereby gives notice that:

- (1) Under section 5.125 of the *Local Government Act 1995* **the person making a complaint and the person complained about each have the right to apply to the State Administrative Tribunal (the SAT) for a review of the Panel's decision in this matter.** *In this context, the term "decision" means a decision to dismiss the complaint or to make an order.*
- (2) By rule 9(a) of the *State Administrative Tribunal Rules 2004*, subject to those rules **an application to the SAT under its review jurisdiction must be made within 28 days of the day on which the Panel (as the decision-maker) gives a notice** [see the Note below] **under the State Administrative Tribunal Act 2004 (SAT Act), section 20(1).**
- (3) **The Panel's Breach Findings and these Findings and Reasons for Finding – Sanctions, constitute the Panel's notice (i.e. the decision-maker's notice) given under the SAT Act, section 20(1).**

Note:

- (1) This document may be given to a person in any of the ways provided for by sections 75 and 76 of the *Interpretation Act 1984*. [see s. 9.50 of the *Local Government Act 1995*]
- (2) Subsections 75(1) and (2) of the *Interpretation Act 1984* read:
 - "(1) Where a written law authorises or requires a document to be served by post, whether the word "serve" or any of the words "give", "deliver", or "send" or any other similar word or expression is used, **service shall be deemed to be effected by properly addressing and posting (by pre-paid post) the document as a letter to the last known address of the person to be served, and, unless the contrary is proved, to have been effected at the time when the letter would have been delivered in the ordinary course of post.** [Bold emphases added]
 - (2) Where a written law authorises or requires a document to be served by registered post, whether the word "serve" or any of the words "give", "deliver", or "send" or any other similar word or expression is used, then, if the document is eligible and acceptable for transmission as certified mail, the service of the document may be effected either by registered post or by certified mail."
- (3) Section 76 of the *Interpretation Act 1984* reads:

"Where a written law authorises or requires a document to be served, whether the word "serve" or any of the words "give", "deliver", or "send" or any other similar word or expression is used, without directing it to be served in a particular manner, service of that document may be effected on the person to be served —

 - (a) by delivering the document to him personally; or
 - (b) by post in accordance with section 75(1); or
 - (c) by leaving it for him at his usual or last known place of abode, or if he is a principal of a business, at his usual or last known place of business; or
 - (d) in the case of a corporation or of an association of persons (whether incorporated or not), by delivering or leaving the document or posting it as a letter, addressed in each case to the corporation or association, at its principal place of business or principal office in the State."

Attachment “A”

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Regulation	Regulation 11(2) of the <i>Local Government (Rules of Conduct) Regulations 2007</i>
Panel Members	Mr B Jolly (Presiding Member) Councillor P Kelly (Member) Mr P Doherty (Member)
Heard	16 October 2015

ORDER

THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT STANDARDS PANEL ORDERS THAT:

1. David Griffiths, a member of the Council of the City of Gosnells, apologise publicly to the Councillors of the City, as specified in paragraph 2 or paragraph 3 below, as the case requires.
2. At the next City of Gosnells Ordinary Council Meeting immediately following the expiration of 28 days from the date of service of this Order on David Griffiths:
 - (a) David Griffiths shall request the presiding person for his/her permission to address the meeting immediately following Public Question Time or during the Announcements part of the meeting or at such time during the meeting when it is open to the public as the

presiding member thinks fit, for the purpose of David Griffiths making a public apology to Complainant; and

- b) David Griffiths shall verbally address the Council as follows, without making any introductory words prior to the address, and without making any comment or statement after the address:

“I advise this meeting that:

- (1) A Complaint has been made to the Local Government Standards Panel, in which it was alleged that I contravened regulation 11(2) of the Local Government (Rules of Conduct) Regulations 2007 by failing to declare an interest when voting on applications for leaves of absence made by my son, Cr Peter Griffiths, in relation to Ordinary Meetings of the Council held on 22 October 2013, 12 November 2013, 11 November 2014 and 16 December 2014.*
- (2) The Local Government Standards Panel has considered the Complaint, and has made findings of minor breaches of regulations 11 (2) of the Local Government (Rules of Conduct) Regulations 2007 against me in relation to my failure to declare an interest during each of those Council meetings.*
- (3) I accept that on each occasion I ought to have declared an interest and apologise to my fellow Councillors for failing to do so.”*

3. If David Griffiths fails or is unable to comply with the requirements of paragraph 2 above within 14 days after the next City of Gosnells Ordinary Council Meeting immediately following the expiration of 28 days from the the date of service of this Order on him, David Griffiths shall cause the following Notice of Public Apology to be published, in no less than 10 point print, as a one-column or a two-column display advertisement in the first 20 pages of the Comment News newspaper.

PUBLIC APOLOGY

- (1) *A Complaint has been made to the Local Government Standards Panel, in which it was alleged that I contravened regulation 11(2) of the Local Government (Rules of Conduct) Regulations 2007 by failing to declare an interest when voting on applications for leaves of absence made by my son, Cr Peter Griffiths, in relation to Ordinary Meetings of the Council held on 22 October 2013, 12 November 2013, 11 November 2013 and 16 December 2014.*
- (2) *The Local Government Standards Panel has considered the Complaint, and has made findings of minor breaches of regulations 11 (2) of the Local Government (Rules of Conduct) Regulations 2007 against me in relation to my failure to declare an interest during each of those Council meetings.*
- (3) *I accept that on each occasion I ought to have declared an interest and apologise to my fellow Councillors for failing to do so.”*

David Griffiths