



Former Cr Cassidy on WCC chief: “what does he do all day?”

Description



Former W'bool City Councillor Sue Cassidy. Image: WCC

Carol Altmann – The Terrier

Former Warrnambool City Councillor Sue Cassidy has lodged an affidavit defending her decision to sack CEO Peter Schneider, including – at one point – asking the Mayor what the former CEO “did all day”.

Ms Cassidy’s 10-page affidavit was lodged in the Supreme Court earlier today in response to Mr Schneider’s civil action against the council, in which he claims he was denied natural justice when he was sacked on the vote of four councillors on 13 July this year.

Ms Cassidy’s evidence reaffirms [many of the claims made by former Cr David Owen in his affidavit which I wrote about earlier today](#), but contains detail of other allegations, including that all councillors (other than Cr Peter Hulin who had resigned) met with Mr Schneider on 21 February and raised a number of concerns about his performance.

These included:

complaints made by staff about bullying;

concerns of staff about the lack of action in filling vacancies;

lack of positive engagement with the media;

stopping work on the Queens Rd fishing pontoon without a Council resolution;

a failure to fill staff vacancies including the Governance Manager; and

the overly close relationship between Mr Schneider and the then Mayor Tony Herbert.

Ms Cassidy said after Mr Schneider left the meeting, the Mayor was told to inform the former CEO that he had one month to improve.

Ms Cassidy alleges that two days after this meeting, on 23 February, she attended a meeting at Mr Schneider's private home organised by Mr Herbert and "we informed Mr Schneider that he had a month to address the concerns. Mr Schneider assured us that he would take steps to address those problems".

It was because of this assurance, Ms Cassidy says, that she agreed to the recommendation (from an independent member of the CEO employment committee) that Mr Schneider receive his CPI pay rise in March.

Ms Cassidy says the councillors continued to raise their concerns regularly with Mr Schneider during briefings, but her evidence suggests he continued to fail to meet their expectations.

"Whenever I asked the Mayor, 'what does he do all day' he replied that he did not know what Mr Schneider did," the affidavit says.

"It was not until the last week of Mr Schneider's employment that the Mayor attempted to explain to the councillors what Mr Schneider did."

Ms Cassidy also claims that the former CEO failed to act on claims of bullying, despite showing an early willingness to do so, including allowing staff who had been subject to bullying to contact him on his private mobile.

When Ms Cassidy followed up these claims with Mr Schneider in May, he allegedly told her that "there were no bullies at the council and that it was just their personalities and staff had to learn how to deal with these personalities".

"It was then I realised that Mr Schneider was not capable of improving the culture at the Council," the affidavit says.

Ms Cassidy's affidavit also raised concerns about the uncertainty around the outcome of the staff review and fears that staff would continue to leave, jeopardising the future of projects including the Reid Oval redevelopment.

Intriguingly, Ms Cassidy's evidence also provides more detail of Mr Schneider's psychometric test that was leaked to her in the mail.

According to Ms Cassidy, she received an anonymous envelope in her letterbox on 23 December last year which contained a sheet of paper with the names of all the applicants who had applied for the position of CEO, together with their psychometric test results.

Ms Cassidy said she was surprised to receive the document and didn't know what to do with it, but as it was Christmas, she put the information aside.

It was only in the new year that Ms Cassidy showed the information to the chair of the Audit and Risk Committee, Rob Wallis, who advised her not to do anything with it, then Mr Schneider, who was "shocked" that she had the information, and also to Cr Peter Hulin at a breakfast meeting in January.

In April, former Cr Robert Anderson asked for an investigation into the leak: "At the time of swearing this affidavit, I had not been informed of the outcome of that investigation".

Ms Cassidy's evidence gives further insight into the mood of the 13 July meeting where Mr Schneider was sacked and where, allegedly on legal advice, the four councillors behind the sacking declined to answer questions from the other three councillors.

Ms Cassidy claims former Cr Peter Sycopoulis used language that "was intended to bully and intimidate" the four councillors including words to the effect of:

"we would lose our houses and anything else we had because of what we were going to do" and "he would not want to be in our shoes" and "we were going to fuck the city he loved".

The case is due to go before the Supreme Court on 1 February.

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Author

carol