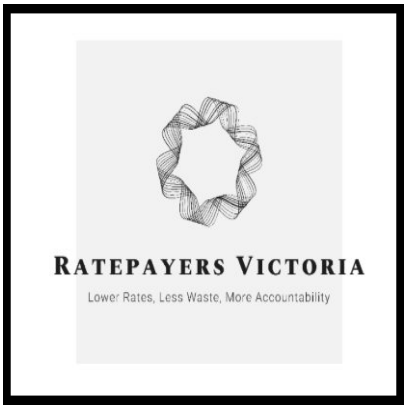

Ratepayers Victoria calls for urgent investigation into WCC

Description

Carol Altmann – The Terrier

The Warrnambool City Council may be wishing the whole credit card mess would just dissolve into the background, but that is not going to happen.

Ratepayers Victoria has today sent a powerful letter to the Local Government Minister, urging him to intervene.

The letter, a copy of which has been sent to local media, pulls no punches as it describes the need for an “urgent investigation” into the serious allegations around misconduct and inappropriate use of public money.

Ratepayers Victoria is the peak body representing ratepayers across the state.

The WCC may be clinging to the days of keeping its messy secrets tucked behind closed doors, but outsiders are determined to fling up the windows.

Local MP Roma Britnell has already flagged her intention to raise the issue in Parliament after it resumes on August 14 – a move which saw WCC chief Peter Schneider and Mayor Tony Herbert race to cut her off at the pass by trying to get to the Minister first. This letter reveals that they met with his chief of staff.

Importantly, the letter also raises concerns about the long-term financial viability of the council, saying it is unsustainable to have 86% of rate revenue spent on staffing costs.

I will let this letter speak for itself and run it in full below:

A letter from Ratepayers Victoria to Local Government Minister The Hon Adem

Somyurek:

We write in reference to some serious allegations circulating in the media in relation to WCC and alleged misconduct.

Several local councillors have made media commentary that we would consider to be contrary of the Local Government Act and the Code of Conduct of Councillors.

There is already evidence of at least one staff member misusing their senior position and corporate credit card resulting in the repayment of thousands of dollars of public money.

It is now being reported that there are current staff holding other external senior positions whilst remaining the incumbent in senior WCC roles.

Media coverage indicates a potential dysfunctional relationship between councillors and conflicting statements by several parties to the events.

I am also aware that the Local Member, Roma Britnell, has been looking into this matter.

I have personally spoken to the Mayor and whilst I found him open to discussion, I was alarmed at the indifference he displayed to my questioning over the sheer number of credit cards held by staff for a regional council.

As you may be aware the Mayor went on local radio (3YB FM) on Friday 2/8/19 and conducted an interview making statements such as “I’m putting my neck out and it gets cut off all the time”, “What in the hell am I putting myself and my family through” and “The CEO has seen the local government minister”.

We do not believe these statements are consistent with the best interests of the community. We believe that the CEO has not met with you personally, rather with your chief of staff and it is misleading of the mayor to say such things on local radio.

This council has recently sought and been successful at gaining an increase in rates above the 2.5% cap.

Approximately 86% of rates are allocated to employee costs in WCC’s 2019/2020 budget. This is commercially unsustainable and must be benchmarked and reviewed immediately. (See attached for your reference)

We believe that WCC is in peril and that failing intervention, an administrator may need to be appointed which is a disastrous outcome for the city and ratepayers.

Ratepayers Victoria formally asks you as the governing Minister to urgently intervene and investigate these serious allegations including councillor and executive conduct and the inappropriate use of public funds.

We urge you to formally ask the Auditor General to review all council staff credit card expenditure to ensure confidence can be maintained in Council and its spending of public monies.

Lastly, we ask you to consider investigating whether the “alleged reporting by the CEO” of credit card misuse met the legal requirements of same.

We look forward to your response.

Yours sincerely,

Dean Hurlston

President- Ratepayers Victoria

Category

1. Opinion

Tags

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2. credit card
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9. Warrnambool City Council

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