

# Case Summary - North Tyneside Council

**Case no.** SBE04480  
**Member(s):** Councillor Glynis Barrie

## **Allegation:**

The member brought their office or authority into disrepute.

## **Standards Board outcome:**

The ethical standards officer found that no further action was necessary.

The complainants alleged that Councillor Glynis Barrie, a member of North Tyneside Council, invited a member of the public to a meeting on council premises when she knew that person had been barred from attending council meetings on the grounds of staff health and safety. The complainants alleged that Councillor Barrie exposed council staff to the risk of abuse, undermined the authority of officers responsible for protecting staff, and brought her office into disrepute.

Councillor Barrie is the convenor of an overview and scrutiny members' study group. The group wanted to interview a member of the public.

Councillor Barrie accepted that she asked that member of the public to attend a group meeting on council premises in November 2008. She also accepted that the council's monitoring officer had confirmed to her that this person had been banned from attending council meetings from 10 October 2008. Councillor Barrie also knew that council officers considered the member of the public posed a health and safety risk to staff. However, her study group had doubts about the legal effectiveness of the ban and were sceptical about whether a risk really existed.

As a compromise, Councillor Barrie attempted to find an alternative venue for the meeting. At short notice, the member of the public refused to attend unless the meeting was on council premises. Councillor Barrie stated that, under considerable competing pressure from officers, fellow members and the member of the public, she decided to go ahead and invite the member of the public onto council premises. She acknowledged in hindsight that she might have made the wrong decision, but stated that she did not intend to put staff at risk or undermine officers' authority.

The ethical standards officer concluded that Councillor Barrie was acting in her official capacity when she invited the member of the public on to council premises, in breach of the ban on his attendance at council meetings. The council had exercised its general power as an occupier to revoke his licence to enter council premises for meetings, and this power was exercised further to the council's duty to protect its staff from abuse or threats. Councillor Barrie knew why this ban was in place, and no steps had been taken to challenge it. After the meeting the member of the public wrote to the council claiming that Councillor Barrie's invitation had proved the ban worthless and that he intended to defy it again in future.

The ethical standards officer considered that councillors have a strong ethical requirement to uphold council decisions relating to significant employer responsibilities. The council has a duty to protect staff, and the decisions it takes to do so are part of its good reputation as an employer. Councillor Barrie's decision to invite the member of the public on to council premises in these circumstances would be viewed by an objective observer as undermining this reputation.

The ethical standards officer considered that Councillor Barrie's conduct would diminish public confidence in her ability to carry out her role as a councillor in supporting the council's employment responsibilities. Councillor Barrie's conduct had therefore brought her office into disrepute.

The ethical standards officer noted that there was no evidence that the member of the public had abused, threatened or harmed any member of staff when he attended the November 2008 meeting. The ethical standards officer took into account that Councillor Barrie was motivated by her desire to carry out the scrutiny work of the study group, which had been delayed. She had attempted to find a compromise, although she had been unable to do so, and had not been seeking a confrontation with officers. The ethical standards officer also noted that Councillor Barrie has been genuinely distressed by events, and has acknowledged that she may have made the wrong decision. Consequently the ethical standards officer concluded that Councillor Barrie failed to comply with the Code of Conduct, but that no further action is necessary.

## **Relevant paragraphs of the Code of Conduct**

The allegation in this case relates to paragraph 5 of the Code of Conduct.

Paragraph 5 states that members must not "bring their office or authority into disrepute".