

Sacking of W'bool City Council chief under investigation



The four Warrnambool City Councillors who orchestrated the sacking of WCC CEO Peter Schneider and instalment of Vicki King as acting CEO. Images: WCC.

Exclusive

Carol Altmann – The Terrier

The Local Government Inspectorate has launched an official investigation into the sacking of former Warrnambool City Council chief executive officer Peter Schneider.

Acting Chief Municipal Inspector Dr John Lynch confirmed the investigation this afternoon in response to questions from *The Terrier*.

"The Local Government Inspectorate is investigating matters relating to the recent termination of a CEO contract at Warrnambool City Council," he said.

The LGI is Victoria's top, independent watchdog over local government and has [powers to investigate, audit and prosecute](#) breaches of the Local Government Act.

Dr Lynch said he was unable to provide any detail on the scope of the investigation while it is underway.

"The Inspectorate deals with complaints or requests for investigation in strict confidence and does not provide information that may compromise current investigations.

(It) will be able to provide further comment when the investigation is completed," he said.

While the depth and breadth of the LGI's investigation is confidential, there [has been mounting speculation](#) and public unrest around the circumstances that [led to the sudden dumping](#) of Mr Schneider on 13 July.

Mr Schneider, who had relocated from Perth to take up the position in February 2019, was sacked after just 18 months in the job.

The dismissal happened behind closed doors, with four councillors – Crs Michael Neoh, Kylie Gaston, David Owen and Sue Cassidy – voting as one and using a "no reason" clause in Mr Schneider's contract to dump him.

The council's Community Development Manager Vikki King was [then immediately appointed acting CEO](#) for up to 12 months. Ms King now holds both positions.

Confirmation of the investigation comes as Cr Sue Cassidy today announced she would run again in the October election.

Former mayors Crs Neoh and Gaston have already declared they

will run again.

Cr Owen is yet to make an announcement.

Mayor Tony Herbert, Cr Robert Anderson and Cr Peter Sycopoulis all voted against Mr Schneider's sacking and [have remained vocal in their support](#) for the former CEO.

While it's [still not known why Mr Schneider was sacked](#), it is known is that rumblings of discontent among the four councillors behind the coup started as early as February.

Despite this, Mr Schneider went on to pass his performance review and received a pay rise as a result.

The discontent reignited in June, with Cr Neoh demanding the release of key findings of the latest WCC staff survey results – something he had never done in his previous 16 years on council – [telling the Standard](#) on 28 June he held “grave concerns” about the results.

That same month, on 22 June, the annual [community satisfaction survey showed](#) the WCC had hit an all time low.

Mr Schneider was sacked just three weeks later. He is now pursuing [his own legal action](#) against the four councillors involved.

The four councillors have refused to disclose how much the coup will cost ratepayers, but it's expected to run into hundreds of thousands of dollars.

The LGI investigation is the second major investigation into the council as it limps toward the October election, with the Victorian Ombudsman still to release her report [into the misuse of council credit cards](#).

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