

# Unley Councillor Jennie Boisvert forced to apologise for five code of conduct breaches

Dummy spits, walkouts, defamation allegations, a legal investigation and five breaches of the code of conduct — it is all happening at a council covering Adelaide's wealthiest suburbs.

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Unley councillor Jennie Boisvert will make a public apology after breaching the council's code of conduct.

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A legal investigation that cost ratepayers more than \$5000 has found an experienced elected member breached Unley Council's code of conduct five times.

Jennie Boisvert, a councillor over 25 years and five terms, will be forced to make a public apology to former Unley mayor, and current deputy mayor, Peter Hughes.

The Marryatville High School teacher wasn't in the chamber last week when council accepted a report from Minter Ellison Lawyers into an email exchange that Cr Hughes claimed defamed him.

Upholding five of six complaints, the report found Cr Boisvert had failed to “maintain a standard of good public administration”, “behave responsibly”, “act reasonably” and “maintain respectful relationships”.

The council passed a motion she should apologise publicly to Cr Hughes.



Unley Councillor Jennie Boisvert.



Unley Deputy Mayor Peter Hughes.

During debate, Cr Mike Hudson stormed from the chamber after Unley Mayor Michael Hewitson refused his request to ask a question.

“To hell with democracy... I want to know why the councillor isn’t here,” he yelled at the Mayor before slamming the door.

“This should not be held in her absence if her absence is unavoidable. That is common British justice which you are trashing and you ought to be ashamed of yourself.”

Responding to the “storm-out”, Mr Hewitson said he found Cr Hudson’s behaviour “unacceptable”.

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Mr Hewitson told *The Messenger* he had done all he could to mediate in the matter between the councillors and that it would have been best if Cr Boisvert had “heeded advice from the beginning”.

He said it was “more than unfortunate” matters had progressed to an investigation that cost ratepayers \$5004.

“It’s disappointing but in a way it’s a worthwhile spend as long as we only do it once and with a whole lot of new members (seven) it’s a good lesson learned,” he said.

“You should be able to sort these things out internally without resorting to legal advice.”



Unley Mayor Michael Hewitson. Picture: Roy Vandervegt/AAP

In February Cr Hughes took exception to an email circulated by Cr Boisvert to all council members about an appointment to the paid board position on the Centennial Park Cemetery Authority.

Cr Hughes had been the subject of strong endorsement from Luke Smolucha, a former Unley councillor who recommended his further appointment on the basis it would enable “continuity” of the CPCA board.

*The Messenger* understands Unley has considered selling its share in the cemetery in recent years due to mounting costs.

Cr Hughes said Cr Boisvert’s email strongly implied he had instigated the intervention by Mr Smolucha.

In a letter to council administration, Cr Hughes claimed he had not requested or lobbied for the endorsement in any way and that his name had been “smeared” in front of elected members.

“The inference I had solicited the email was unfounded and inaccurate,” he wrote.

“This (email) is defamatory.”

Cr Hughes said he believed the email was sufficient for some members to vote against his reappointment.

Subsequently he was not appointed during a process where council elected Cr Jane Russo and Cr Michael Rabbitt to the board.

Unley councillor and general manager of the Sturt Football Club Sue Dewing was dragged into the investigation for supporting the initial email by Cr Boisvert by responding “I agree with Jennie’s concerns.”

She told the council meeting she was “cross” with how the incident was “handled” and that she didn’t wish to “publicly humiliate” Cr Boisvert any further.

“I’m sure she will have learned from this,” Cr Dewing said.

In its report, Minter Ellison found Cr Boisvert’s actions were at the “lower end of the scale”.

Cr Boisvert, who is currently on leave and has not responded to phone calls, posted a message to her personal web page that claimed Cr Hughes “did not tell me, talk to me or make contact with me to ascertain my intent”.

“This is exactly the type of complaints that are destroying the working relationships between councillors on a number of councils,” she wrote.

“What could have been resolved with a conversation has cost council thousands of dollars we could have spent on something else.

“The worst that can happen in the above situation is that I may have to apologise.”

Cr Boisvert will be expected to apologise at the next Unley Council meeting she attends.