

INTERNAL ARBITRATION PROCESS – Knox City Council

In the matter of an Application by Councillor Lisa Cooper concerning
Councillor Peter Lockwood
(IAP 2025-17)

In the matter of an Application by Councillors Lisa Cooper, Glen Attwell, Meagan
Baker and Parisa Considine concerning Councillor Peter Lockwood
(IAP 2025-18)

Note: Applications IAP 2025-17 and IAP 2025-18 were forwarded to the Arbiter pursuant to section 144A(1)(a) of the *Local Government Act 2020* as related applications to Application IAP 2025-15.

Applications IAP 2025-17 and IAP 2025-18 were joined to Application IAP 2025-15 by the Arbiter, with the agreement of the parties, at the Directions Hearing on 21 August 2025. Application IAP 2025-15 was subsequently withdrawn on 13 February 2026 and consequently, is not covered in this Determination.

**HEARING PURSUANT TO DIVISION 5 OF PART 6 OF THE
LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 2020**

Application IAP 2025-17

Applicant: Cr Lisa Cooper
Respondent: Cr Peter Lockwood

Application IAP 2025-18

Applicant: Cr Lisa Cooper (appointed representative), Cr Glen Attwell, Cr Meagan Baker and Cr Parisa Considine
Respondent: Cr Peter Lockwood
Arbiter: Jo-Anne Mazzeo

DETERMINATION

Pursuant to section 147(1) of the *Local Government Act 2020* (the Act) the Arbiter makes a finding of misconduct against Cr Peter Lockwood.

SANCTION

Pursuant to section 147(2)(b) of the Act, Cr Lockwood is suspended from the office of Councillor for a period of one calendar month commencing the day after this decision is tabled at the Council Meeting to be held on 10 March 2026 in accordance with section 147(4)(a) of the Act.

STATEMENT OF REASONS FOR DECISION

The Applications

1. Application IAP 2025-17 dated 18 August 2025 seeks a finding of misconduct against the respondent relating to alleged breaches of the following clauses of the Model Councillor Code of Conduct:
 - a. Standard 1(e): Performing the role of a Councillor, specifically acknowledging and supporting the Mayor in the performance of the role of the Mayor.
 - b. Standard 2(1)(a), 2(1)(b), 2(1)(c) and 2(2): specifically treating others (including other Councillors, members of Council staff and members of the public) with fairness, dignity, objectivity, courtesy and respect. This includes not engaging in demeaning, abusive, obscene or threatening behaviour (including where the behaviour is of a sexual nature), not engaging in behaviour that intentionally causes or perpetuates stigma, stereotyping, prejudice or aggression against a person or class of persons. Furthermore, this Standard also outlines the requirement to not engage in discrimination or vilification and to take reasonable care for their own health and safety and take reasonable care that their acts or omissions do not adversely affect the health and safety of others.
 - c. Standard 3(b)(i) relating to good governance and Councillor conduct in Council meetings or meetings of delegated committees.
 - d. Standard 4(1)(a) regarding integrity and taking reasonable steps to avoid any action which may diminish the public's trust and confidence in the integrity of local government by acting in a way that secures and promotes public confidence in the integrity of local government by ensuring that their behaviour does not bring discredit upon the Council.
2. The specific allegations are as follows:
 - a. That the respondent's behaviour at the Council Meeting of 15 July 2025 was very disruptive, with inappropriate remarks made towards the Deputy Mayor Cr Glen Atwell and Cr Chris Duncan which compromised the public perception of Council's integrity;
 - b. On 25 July 2025 the respondent "liked" a post on the social media page of Council Watch which the applicant alleges had sections in it that were both untrue and defamatory towards Council as a whole, mocked and criticised individual Councillors, made personal attacks on Council officers and accused Council of cultural bias.

- c. At the Council Meeting of 28 July 2025, the respondent's behaviour was again disruptive, making inappropriate comments which compromised the public perception of Council's integrity;
 - d. On 29 July 2025 the respondent and two fellow Councillors spoke with the media (channel 10 News to be specific) speaking against an endorsed position of Council;
 - e. On 29 July 2025 the respondent "liked" a comment posted by a community member responding to a post on his own Facebook page which was disrespectful towards fellow Councillors. The applicant alleges that this action was disrespectful to other Councillors and brought the Council into disrepute; On 30 July 2025 at 7:13pm the respondent sent an email to the applicant copying in all Councillors titled "Christmas Comments" denying that his recent comments and actions on social media denigrated anyone.
3. Application IAP 2025-18 also dated 18 August 2025 seeks a finding of misconduct against the respondent relating to alleged breaches of the following clauses of the model Councillor Code of Conduct:
- a. Standard 1(e): Performing the role of a Councillor, specifically acknowledging and supporting the Mayor in the performance of the role of the Mayor.
 - b. Standard 2(1)(a), 2(1)(b), 2(1)(c) and 2(2): specifically treating others (including other Councillors, members of Council staff and members of the public) with fairness, dignity, objectivity, courtesy and respect. This includes not engaging in demeaning, abusive, obscene or threatening behaviour (including where the behaviour is of a sexual nature), not engaging in behaviour that intentionally causes or perpetuates stigma, stereotyping, prejudice or aggression against a person or class of persons. Furthermore, this Standard also outlines the requirement to not engage in discrimination or vilification and to take reasonable care for their own health and safety and take reasonable care that their acts or omissions do not adversely affect the health and safety of others.
 - c. Standard 3(b)(i) relating to compliance with Council Policies and Procedures required for the delivery of good governance for the benefit and wellbeing of the municipal community.
 - d. Standard 4(1)(a) and 4(1)(c) in relation to acting with integrity and ensuring their behaviour does not bring discredit upon the Council and not making Council information publicly available where public availability of the information would be contrary to public interest.
4. The specific allegation is that on 31 July 2025 the respondent published an excerpt of an internal Council email he received from the Mayor (an applicant in this matter) on his public social media page. In his post, the respondent:

- a. Wrote "After our vote on Christmas decorations, we had a chat or two with media orgs, including Ch10 (the only one I was on). [A fellow Councillor] then invited all to a chat about what we might expect of our year 2 mayor. This was the response from the mayor." The respondent then invited users to comment on the Mayor's internal correspondence. The respondent shared a portion of the Mayor's email (on his Public Facebook Page), specifically the section about Councillor behaviour, whilst leaving out the rest of the email, which directly answered the original request from a fellow Councillor. The selective disclosure intentionally misrepresented the Mayor's intent and painted a skewed picture of the exchange.
- b. The respondent also tagged external individuals and a Facebook Page titled "Council Watch". Within an hour of this action, Council Watch published a critical and personally targeted post about the Mayor.

Evidence provided

5. A virtual Directions Hearing was listed and heard on 21 August 2025 in relation to Application IAP 2025-15 (which has been withdrawn), and the above applications (IAP 2025-17 and IAP 2025-18).

Applications IAP 2025-17 and IAP 2025-18 were joined to Application IAP 2025-15 by the Arbiter, with the agreement of the parties, at the Directions Hearing on 21 August 2025.

On 26 August 2025 the Councillor Conduct Officer for Knox City Council sent a lengthy email to the parties providing them with written Directions prepared by the Arbiter reflecting the Directions given orally at the Directions Hearing on 21 August 2025.

6. The Council's Councillor Conduct Officer was in regular email contact with the parties regarding the Arbitration process and next steps. For example, on both 12 and 15 September 2025 the Councillor Conduct Officer emailed the respondent with the applicant's evidence attached and reminded him of his obligation to provide his own documents and a list of the witnesses he intended to call.
7. On 5 October 2025 the respondent emailed the Councillor Conduct Officer asking for clarification regarding the practicalities of the Arbitration process despite the Arbiter having explained the process in detail and at length to the parties at the Directions Hearing on 21 August 2025. On 6 October 2025 the Councillor Conduct Officer responded to the email providing a detailed outline of the process and clarification on administrative matters such as whether an oath or affirmation was required for all witnesses, how to address the Arbiter during the hearing and the process for being able to cross examine the witnesses who had been called in support of the Application.

8. A single, in person Full Hearing date was set for Saturday, 11 October 2025 for the three related Applications to expedite the hearing, minimise the cost to Council, and to accommodate other commitments both parties flagged that they had during normal business hours. This date was vacated due to the illness of both the parties in the days leading up to the hearing. A further virtual Directions Hearing was set for 20 October 2025, and an in person Full Hearing date of 5 November 2025 was agreed to by both parties.
9. On the morning of the Full Hearing, the Arbiter experienced a family emergency and elected to conduct the Full Hearing via Microsoft Teams, so as to ensure the matter would still proceed given the prior delays that had occurred. All other parties attended in person.
10. This Statement of Reasons does not summarise all of the information submitted to the Arbiter but refers to the information relied on by the Arbiter to make her decision.

The jurisdiction of the Arbiter in relation to this Application

11. Section 143 of the *Local Government Act 2020* provides that an Arbiter may hear an Application that alleges misconduct by a Councillor.
12. Pursuant to section 147 of the Act an Arbiter may determine whether or not a Councillor has engaged in misconduct.
13. "Misconduct" is defined in section 3 of the Act and is defined as follows:
 "... any breach by a Councillor of the Model Councillor Code of Conduct."
14. The standards of conduct are set out in Schedule 1 to the Local Government (Governance and Integrity) Regulations 2020.

Evidence of the Applicants

15. The applicants alleged that the conduct of the respondent has fallen short of that expected of a councillor and required by the prescribed standards of conduct.
16. The applicants submitted photographic evidence of the social media posts subject of the Application, along with the Council Watch article/social media post and the emails referred to in the Application.
17. The applicants submitted that the respondent's conduct in formal meetings, within the public domain and across social media platforms has had a detrimental impact on the function, reputation and psychological safety of Council and particular Councillors. Furthermore, the applicants contended that the repeated behaviour of the respondent has eroded public confidence in Council and the cumulative effect of the behaviour has undermined the

community perception of Council as a cohesive and respectful governing body.

18. Cr Atwell, Cr Baker and Cr Considine provided witness statements and attended the hearing to give more fulsome evidence and answer questions.
19. When giving evidence at the Full Hearing, Cr Atwell said that he had directly observed Cr Lockwood conducting himself in a manner that breaches the Model Councillor Code of Conduct (the Model Code), including at times when Cr Atwell was chairing meetings in the absence of the Mayor. This included behaviour as a Councillor at Council Meetings, in internal correspondence with Councillors, in the mainstream media, and on social media platforms. Cr Atwell said there was a pattern of inappropriate and inflammatory emails that caused great distress amongst the majority of Councillors.
20. Cr Atwell made specific reference to the Council Meeting of 15 July 2025 where he as Deputy Mayor was targeted by the respondent as potentially being "part of a clique" of Councillors.
21. Regarding the Council Meeting of 28 July 2025, Cr Atwell told the Arbiter of the fictitious names the respondent had attributed to him and other Councillors and found it deeply offensive. He also confirmed that he was one of the Councillors that the respondent had referred to as "a pack of grinches" and that he "had no heart".
22. Regarding the use of social media on 29 July 2025, Cr Atwell gave evidence that an inappropriate comment was posted by the respondent on his Facebook page, which read as follows:

"Council's official position is that we will not have decorations. The grinches won. Should we decorate for Christmas? And other festivals? Lunar New Year? Diwali?"
23. Cr Robert Williams responded to this comment with a picture and the phrase "Christmas Story. Except in this narrative the Knox City", which was then "liked" by the respondent. The respondent then went on to "share" the post and provide additional commentary himself.
24. Cr Baker gave evidence also submitting that the conduct of the respondent at both of the July 2025 Council Meetings was disruptive, inappropriate, unprofessional and compromised the community perception of Council integrity. She too gave specific time stamped recordings of the specific behaviour for the Arbiter to review in person via the visual recording of the Council Meeting.
25. Cr Baker agreed with the evidence of Cr Cooper and Cr Atwell that the respondent's actions on social media were inappropriate, at times defamatory, disrespectful and showed a clear division in Council, rather than a cohesive group working together for their constituents.

26. Cr Considine also provided a written statement and attended the Full Hearing in person. She told the Arbiter that the social media posts the respondent was involved in caused significant disturbance to her and her children, who were still grieving the loss of her husband and their father. She said the manner in which the respondent behaved and interacted at Council meetings further exacerbated her stress and anxiety, and that it had been going on for so long that he needed to be held to account, formally managed, and acknowledge the behaviour was unacceptable and impacting on the ability for all Councillors to act in an environment of respect and collaboration.
27. The applicants do not accept the respondent's explanation for the conduct in question and relied on the content of the Applications (as outlined above), the oral evidence presented at the Full Hearing and the evidence of the witnesses. The Applicants seek a finding of misconduct. Regarding sanction in the event of a finding of misconduct, the applicants submitted that the respondent should be required to apologise to all Councillors and Council Officers and serve a three month suspension period given the severity and repeated nature of his conduct.

Evidence of the Respondent

28. The respondent provided both oral evidence at the hearing and supplemented it with written evidence submitted to the Arbiter. He also called witnesses who gave evidence in support of his response to the allegations made. The witnesses were:
 - a. Cr Robert Williams; and
 - b. Cr Susan Pearce.
29. The respondent confirmed the authenticity of the social media posts and agreed that there was no factual dispute regarding whether it was the respondent who authored the comments and liked the posts provided to the Arbiter.
30. The respondent submitted that the complaints made by the applicants in the Applications were trivial in nature, personalised, derogatory and trying to paint him in the worst possible light.
31. Regarding the Council Meeting that took place on 15 July 2025, the respondent submitted that all the remarks made by him were made in the context of a meeting that was below the usual standard of the Council. He told the Arbiter he still sees no problem with his actions and the acting chair of the meeting (Cr Atwell) was usually much more capable than he was on the night of that meeting.
32. Regarding the Council Meeting on 28 July 2025, the respondent submitted that his remarks were "wilfully misinterpreted". He submitted that his

comment to "POQ" did not reference the colloquial saying "piss off quickly", instead meaning "pass out quietly", which is not offensive or an acronym for another saying. The respondent told the Arbiter he had no intention of being offensive, and regarding the Officer's report tabled at the meeting, he submitted that it was problematic and so he criticised the report, not the person.

33. Also, regarding the 28 July Council Meeting, the respondent submitted that he had every right to comment on a time extension and saw the approach as hypocrisy and called it out as such.
34. When asked about his statement about other Councillors being "grinches" and "lacking heart", the respondent submitted that these comments were said in the heat of the moment and then picked up by the media. The respondent did concede that the use of the terms in the media "may have been unsettling" but as insults go, he had "heard worse during my high school debates".
35. When discussing the Channel Ten media coverage, the respondent submitted that he did not frame anything as excessive and merely stated an idea on potential money saving. When asked about this further the respondent said no one was disrespected because no one individual was mentioned.
36. In his closing statement, the respondent acknowledged that his social media activity (specifically liking the comments and posting the comments as outlined above) was inappropriate, it has been his grandchildren teaching him the context of social media that helped him realise his actions in this regard were inappropriate. He did not make a comment regarding the internal email shared to his social media page.
37. The respondent was comfortable enough to have a social media page titled "Cr Peter Lockwood" making it open to interpretation that anything posted on this page was posted by the author in his capacity as a Councillor. He did not make it clear that the opinions and activity on this page were his own personal view and should be closely moderated by him.
38. The respondent also apologised in his written closing submissions for the use of the terms "grinches" (in his Facebook post of 29 July 2025) and that other Councillors "lack heart" but said the remainder of the allegations against him were merely trivialising the deliberations of Council.

Findings and Determinations of the Arbiter

39. Section 147 of the Act provides that if after completing the internal arbitration process the arbiter determines a Councillor has failed to comply with the Model Code, the arbiter may make a finding of misconduct.
40. As detailed above, I find that:

- a. At the Council Meetings of both 15 and 28 July 2025, the respondent's conduct (as directly observed by the Arbiter watching video footage) contravened Standard 2(1) and Standard 4(1) of the Model Code;
 - b. On 29 July 2025 the respondent's comments in mainstream television media contravened Standard 2(1) and 4(1) of the Model Code. His social media activity on that same day also breached Standard 2(1) and 4(1) of the Model Code;
 - c. On 31 July 2025 the respondent made a Facebook post that shared an internal email sent from the applicant in her capacity as mayor that was dated 30 July 2025 and added his own editorial comments, including abbreviations for profanities. The Arbiter has seen these extracts firsthand and finds his social media activity on that day breached Standard 2 of the Model Code
41. Having made these findings of misconduct, s147(2) provides that I may impose any one or more of a number of sanctions, which are:
- a. direct the Councillor to make an apology in a form or manner specified by the arbiter;
 - b. suspend the Councillor from the office of Councillor for a period specified by the arbiter not exceeding 3 months;
 - c. direct that the Councillor be removed from any position where the Councillor represents the Council for the period determined by the arbiter;
 - d. direct that the Councillor is removed from being the chair of a delegated committee for the period determined by the arbiter;
 - e. direct a Councillor to attend or undergo training or counselling specified by the arbiter;
 - f. direct that the Councillor is not to attend or participate in a Council meeting specified by the arbiter that occurs after the meeting at which the decision and statement of reasons are tabled under subsection (4); and/or
 - g. direct that the Councillor is ineligible to hold the office of Mayor or Deputy Mayor for a period specified by the arbiter not exceeding 12 months.

Reasons for the Arbiter's Decision

42. In relation to the social media posts subject to this Application, the Arbiter accepts the submission of the applicants that the respondent's behaviour on social media fell below the standard of conduct expected of a Councillor. The

posts clearly demonstrate a failure to treat other Councillors with dignity, fairness, objectivity and respect and the Arbiter was unable to conclude that the posts could be read or interpreted as anything other than disrespectful towards other Councillors.

43. The Arbiter accepts the submission of the applicants that the respondent committed multiple breaches of the Model Code, primarily related to a Facebook post and associated online activity such as "liking" posts made by other individuals which explicitly targeted Councillors who voted a particular way on a divisive issue at Council (regarding Christmas decorations) undermining their integrity, fostering community division, and inciting hostility.
44. Standard 4(1) provides that Councillors have a duty to exercise reasonable care to avoid actions which may diminish the public's trust and confidence in the integrity of local government. This includes ensuring that their behaviour does not bring discredit upon the Council.
45. The conduct of the respondent both on social media and at the two July Council Meetings did not fall into the realm of "robust political debate". It was unwarranted and inappropriate. His conduct fell well short of what is reasonably expected of a Councillor. The respondent failed to exercise reasonable care not to diminish public trust and confidence in the Council and brought discredit upon the Council.
46. Regarding the conduct alleged by the applicant regarding the Council Meetings of both 15 and 28 July 2025, the arbiter viewed the video recordings and is satisfied that the behaviour of the respondent fell below the standard expected of a Councillor.
47. I have not directed the respondent to undergo any training in respect of the Model Code. Cr Lockwood is an experienced Councillor and does not lack an understanding of the Model Code but appears to have chosen to disregard it when making the ill-considered public comments/behaviour at Council Meetings and social media interactions he engaged in.
48. Further, general and specific deterrence are important considerations. It is necessary to convey to all local Councillors that conduct of this type is not acceptable and, if engaged in, will result in appropriate sanction. In addition, regard must be made to maintaining public confidence in Councillors, the system of local government and the arbitration process. This public confidence is best achieved when Councillors who breach the standards reasonably expected of them are properly held to account.
49. I find that given the nature and seriousness of the conduct and the harm that would be suffered if the respondent and other Councillors were not deterred from engaging in similar conduct, a period of suspension is required.

50. Accordingly, I have determined that the respondent is to serve a suspension of one calendar month commencing the day after this decision is tabled at the Council Meeting to be held on 10 March 2026

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Jo-Anne Mazzeo', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Jo-Anne Mazzeo

Arbiter

Date: 02 March 2026