

Conducting an effective investigation

Case scenario

You are the monitoring officer at your local council.

Councillor Green is the chair of the council's licensing committee, whose party assumed control of the council at the recent election. He is an experienced magistrate and has taken to his new role as committee chair with great enthusiasm.

Last month he chaired a committee hearing which considered an application for an off licence by an Asian grocer. The applicant appeared reluctant to speak, and let his brother do all the talking. During the course of questions from members, Councillor Green asked the grocer if he could speak and read English.

Councillor Jones, of the recently deposed majority party, took exception to the question. He complained to the Standards Board for England that Councillor Green had contravened the council's Code of Conduct by adopting a racist approach, and had therefore brought his office into disrepute.

Your deputy, Miss Smith, the only other legally qualified member of your department, attended the meeting as legal adviser. Five other councillors and the committee clerk were also in attendance, together with the applicant, his brother and the licensing officer of the local police.

The Standards Board has now referred the complaint to you as monitoring officer for local investigation.

Councillor Green has left a message with your secretary that he needs to see you urgently. He did not give any reason for his request.

Question

How do you respond to these developments? Consider what might be involved at each stage of the investigation.