

# No council bullying, says mayor

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The rumour was that a pink shirt marking International Anti-Bullying Day was to be given to Mayor Stan Semenoff when the Whangarei District Council met yesterday.

But that didn't happen. Everybody present stood when Mr Semenoff swept into the council chambers wearing his red mayoral robe.

After the mayor had invited everyone to sit, Warren Slater — who intends having a second bid for the mayoralty in the local government elections in October — and others entered the chambers' public gallery wearing pink shirts.

Mr Semenoff welcomed them, but urged an earlier arrival in future so they didn't hold up the meeting.

The council then held its monthly meeting, which lasted about 10 minutes.

Cr Sue Glen joined the pink shirts for a personal stand against any form of bullying when the *Northern Advocate* photographed them inside the chambers.

Outside, Mr Slater said he and the others opposed what he called "the bullying governance of the

council". But the mayor says no bullying goes on within the council.

"All we want as members of the community is to have our views heard by our council, but the mayor doesn't want to listen. He has publicly called us 'whingers, whiners and wafflers,'" Mr Slater said.

Also in a pink shirt, Wayne Deeming said major issues now being "resolved behind closed doors" should be debated in public.

"Take today's meeting — the council dealt with nothing substantial and it was all over in a couple of minutes," he said.

Jeremy Busck said the Local Government Act stated council business should be open and transparent.

"We asked Whangarei District Council for a public forum and were told there wasn't a chance of getting it," he said.

"If you want to see a council representing its community you have to go to Northland Regional Council meetings."

Asked for comment on the pink shirts, Mr Semenoff said he was proud to say he stood up to bullies, "including the sorts of bullies who are abusive to elected officials and

who want to waste ratepayers' money".

"There is no bullying in this council and it has a proud record of listening to the public," he said.

Mr Semenoff said there were no examples of the council needlessly conducting business confidentially and no councillors had raised concerns with him about the way the process worked.

"It is impossible to please all of the people all of the time, but we strive to rise above the naysayers and achieve for the benefit of our ratepayers," he said.



**PINK PROTEST:** Marking International Anti-bullying Day after the Whangarei District Council meeting yesterday are Warren Slater (front left), Lorraine Craig, Avis Taylor, Pat Slater, Clare Swinney, Paul Berks; back, Brian Craig, Wayne Deeming, Gavin and Barbara Williams, Cr Sue Glen, Jeremy Busck.

PICTURE / JOHN STONE