

Query over CEO

Councillors to ask conduct questions

By staff reporters

The Whangarei District Council is looking into whether chief executive Mark Simpson breached the council's Employee Code of Conduct when he confronted a newspaper columnist at her workplace.

The council has confirmed a committee of councillors arranged a meeting to discuss the incident.

Responding to correspondence from concerned ratepayers, Councillor Warwick Syers said council staff were bound by an Employee Code of Conduct and if breaches were purported to have occurred they would be dealt with in accordance with that code.

"This is an employment issue and will be dealt with accordingly," Mr Syers said.

It will be addressed at a meeting with the CEO and the Mayor (Morris Cutforth), Deputy Mayor (Phil Halse) and committee chairmen (Mr Syers, Shelley Deeming, Greg Martin) in the next fortnight. As this is an employment issue and is being dealt with as such, no further comment on it will be forthcoming.

After the meeting between councillors and the CEO was arranged, a letter of complaint



MARK SIMPSON

signed by a number of ratepayers calling for an independent review of the incident, was also received by the council.

News the council is to look

into whether Mr Simpson breached the council's code of conduct comes after Mayor

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CEO under scrutiny

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Cutforth said he had talked to Mr Simpson about the incident, but would not be taking any disciplinary action. On June 15, Mr Cutforth, who is chairman of the council's CEO review subcommittee, said he was not aware of any similar incidents involving Mr Simpson.

"I think he's a man of integrity and I think that he would rather that this sort of thing did not happen, but it did," he said.

Mr Simpson issued an apology last month after he confronted Northern Advocate columnist Nickie Muir at her workplace over a column she wrote on June 6 that criticised him.

Mr Simpson then confronted Ms Muir at her cafe workplace and she said she felt

intimidated by the visit and the tenor of some of Mr Simpson's comments. She wrote of the visit in her next column.

Mr Simpson later said he was sorry if Ms Muir had felt intimidated by the visit.

"My intention was always to understand where she was coming from, and it was certainly not to bully her," he said.

Ms Muir said she did not ask the council to look into the matter, but it was important in a democracy that people could make their views known.

"As a member of the public I have a right to raise issues that I feel are relevant. I've been really pleased at the response the columns have had, because it shows there are a lot of intelligent people who understand the democratic process and aren't intimidated by it," she said.